The cyber project

Donna Gibbs and Kerri-Lee Krause, lecturers at the School of Education at Macquarie University, are conducting a study of the language of the internet, and are looking for help from ET readers.

Language which is used to refer to, and talk about, the internet is currently being created at a prodigious rate. Expressions, metaphors, phrases and individual words which were previously unfamiliar, or familiar from other contexts, are suddenly appearing in conversation or catching us unawares in the media. Many of these are not yet recorded in dictionaries and many will probably disappear or change in meaning before they are. But others are establishing themselves as the language you use when you want to talk about the internet.

The cyber project involves an examination of the language of the net and an exploration and analysis of the ways in which this language influences attitudes, perceptions and behaviour, particularly in an education setting.

We are interested in documenting where this is coming from, the values it carries with it, and whether it contributes to the the barriers between teachers and their use of technology. Researchers have begun to isolate some of the factors which account for many teachers' continued reluctance to use technology in the classroom. The language of the net is not often mentioned amongst these factors, but as "netspeak" multiplies and accumulates, it would seem to be a probable candidate.

We are requesting help from the readers of *ET* with our project, particularly with the term "cyberspace", a term which is in common usage in the press and educational and other writings, and which five years ago was comparatively rare. Barker claims that the term "cyberspace" was coined in 1984 by William Gibson in his science fiction novel *Neuromancer*, though we are not certain that this was the first example of its use. The term "cyber" has now taken on a life of its own and is frequently joined with other words (e.g. "cyberbabble", "cyberswill", "cybersurfing", "cybercafe", "cyberkids", "cybermall") to create a myriad of newly coined words.

Many dictionaries do not yet include the term "cyberspace" or its relatives. Whilst people acknowledge that they have heard of, and even use the term "cyberspace", few seem able to define it clearly. What does it mean? Was it used prior to 1984? What are its links with cybernetics or the cybermen of Dr Who? Is it common for the language of the net to be used with such imprecise understanding of its meanings?

We would be grateful for any comments on these, or related matters, which you are willing to contribute. Examples of netspeak which could be included in a list of common terms and expressions currently in use, or comments about their origins, and the values and attitudes which they suggest, would also be of interest to us.

Our address is School of Education, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia 2109. You could email us on cyber@ted.educ.mq.edu.au. Alternatively, you may wish to visit the School of Education homepage at http://www.mq/.edu.au/Educ/, click on Research, and post your comments in the appropriate place.

An international registry for EFL schools: a proposal

The following letter to various EFL organizations from two teachers in Turkey was copied by them to ET. We reproduce it below because we consider it to be of interest to English-language professionals at large.

Dear Sir/Madam: We are both teachers of English as a Foreign Language who are highly experienced and fully committed to the very highest personal and professional standards in language teaching. In our opinion, a successful teacher must be able to work effectively within a professional framework; in order to do this, a teacher has an overriding need for job satisfaction and security (probably the two most important factors in a teacher's personal and professional development). Conversely, the absence of these features will have a negative backwash effect, resulting in high staff turnover, insecurity and instability within an institution. Continuity of staff would benefit students, teachers and schools.

In Britain, ARELS FELCO oversees standards in British language schools, maintaining reputable institutions as centres of excellence and providing students with a yardstick as to the appropriacy and effectiveness of a school. In the current situation, teachers seeking and obtaining employment abroad face a situation not without its difficulties. They are generally required to invest in their professional development (eg Certificate or Diploma) and are then subject to the lottery of finding suitable employment abroad with no reliable way of verifying the appropriacy of a post or school.

Is it therefore not reasonable for teachers investing their own time, money and energy in this way to expect minimum standards of pay, benefits and accommodation?

For this reason, we are proposing the formation of an internationally recognized Registry to accredit language schools outside the UK; we believe that such a Registry would present a unique opportunity to improve international teaching standards to the benefit of students, teachers and schools. In order to join such a Registry, schools would be required to undergo annual or biannual inspections; such inspections would be carried out by professionals from the teaching fraternity, on a full- or part-time basis. We believe that the success of a Registry would depend on its co ordination by a respected and recognised organization such as yours.

The potential advantages of such a Registry would be as follows:

● Teachers would be able to follow up job advertisements in full confidence as to the bona fide nature of the post.
● Recognized schools would be able to advertise as being accredited by the Registry.
● Teachers would benefit from greater employment security and would thereby operate more effectively as professionals to the benefit of themselves, students and the schools.
● The Registry would provide a forum for comment, feedback and discussion; it would therefore be kept up-to-date.

We would both welcome the opportunity to play an active role in the development and establishment of a Registry.

Yours faithfully,
B. Wallace (RSA Dip TEFLA) and J. Mullarkey (RSA Dip TEFLA)

Yali Yolu Sokaği, OBA. Apt 47/10, Üst Bostanci, Istanbul, Turkey

20 January 1997