

# LEARNING MATTERS at LINGNAN

For internal circulation only

TEACHING  LEARNING CENTRE

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**From the Editor:**

*Learning Matters at Lingnan are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.*



## IT for Quality Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### *A Vision*

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, say on the morning of an April day in 2001, while strolling along in our beautiful campus I will meet students and colleagues clearly engaged in discussion and debate on themes and topics that they take very seriously and academically.

Thank God, the long feared scenario of a computer-controlled world where teaching and learning, like all other departments of life, should have receded into the computer lab or one's own home, has not come about! Quite the contrary, if anything students and staff alike these days tend to engage themselves ever more profoundly and painstakingly and almost with a sense of academic or theoretical mission, in the quest for knowledge and truth. Is this not the utopia we have been dreaming about, coming true, all brought about by a change of mind and empowered by information technology (IT)?

### *What is IT in Education?*

In a nutshell I would say that IT in education refers to all the computer-based and associated facilities applied for upgrading and enhancing teaching and learning as well as all the pedagogical and operational theories, methodologies and programmes specifically espoused, designed and implemented for bringing about betterment and

## ***Impact of IT on Acquisition of Knowledge***

## ***“State of the Art”***

change in education. It should also embrace the sum total of any and all activities directed towards the goal of achieving quality education by applying IT.

Advances in computer and related technologies, including global and local networking, have made it possible and feasible for universities, schools and other academic and professional institutions to avail themselves of the facilities and benefits thus provided to engender an ever-improving condition for quality education.

P.T.O ➡.

For one thing, as a result of the “IT revolution” that is taking place, the nature of knowledge particularly in the university or school context, has been undergoing a fundamental change. Knowledge has ceased to be the “business” of the teacher or the professor, who has thus ceased to be the “ultimate authority” or the “final court of appeal” in relation to a given subject. The Internet which has given birth to newsgroups and the like for specific subjects and themes, has become a most powerful and multifarious resource for information and even knowledge for students and professors alike.

Furthermore, knowledge as such is no longer absolute and static, but has become dynamic and tentative, to be constantly enriched, revised and modified, in the light of new findings reported instantaneously by experts or interest groups thousands of miles away, by IT means that travel at the speed of light, or very near it. Things are happening so fast and the amount of information and other data so unbelievably immense, that on the one hand it is extremely difficult not to be or at least not to feel overwhelmed, and on the other hand it is absolutely crucial to keep pace and stay open-minded about anything, bearing in mind that “the last word has not been uttered”!

As reported by Patricia Senn Breivik in her recent publication on the subject<sup>1</sup>, the current state of IT in higher education in the United States leaves much to be desired. She tells us that US universities and colleges still have a long way to go to reach the state in which all or most facilities and opportunities provided or made available by IT in education are optimally exploited and applied for enhancing teaching and learning.

It could be put this way: the set-up is there, ready for lift off, but the “users” are still procrastinating.

What is the situation like in Hong Kong? We really do not know for sure. The T&T Project Team supported by the T&T Advisory Committee on which representatives from all nine institutions of higher learning in Hong Kong sit, has designed an IT application survey questionnaire which is being administered to all HE colleagues in Hong Kong. We have already received some returns and other returns keep coming in everyday. It is very encouraging and we hope very soon we’ll be able to depict the current of state of IT culture and IT application in the local HE scene.

However, as far as we can make out, at the moment it is far from apparent that IT in education has already become a “household phenomenon”. It is not yet the case that IT in education is widespread and popular to such an extent that almost unconsciously we will apply it without ado. To be frank, there is still so much we need to do to overcome the rather annoying technicalities that crop up now and then, which frustrate even the converted.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Senn BREIVIK : *Student Learning in the Information Age*, 1998, The Oryx Press, Phoenix, Arizona, USA

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## *Action Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Despite descriptions to the contrary, the present century has been a century of horror and tension, and aptly should be designated the “nuclear age”, for we have been held hostages under the threat of thermal nuclear annihilation on a global scale. By all accounts the next century promises to be an “information age” and what is more appropriate than applying IT to bring about quality education?

We should take action right away, to prepare for a promising tomorrow. We should not let our ego prevent us from starting anew and from scratch, if need be, and take up familiarising ourselves with the computer to claim mastery and control over it to make it work for us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The T&T Project Team is also trying to contribute, be it so insignificantly, towards fostering an IT culture among HE colleagues in Hong Kong by designing and mounting IT workshops for the novice as well as the IT-creative practitioners.