Building on the foundations: Revisiting *AJET*'s second decade (1995–2004) and its enduring legacy

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This editorial reflects on the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*'s (*AJET*) second decade (1995–2004), a foundational decade in which educational technology research in Australasia matured conceptually, methodologically, and internationally. We examine how *AJET* captured the transition from early multimedia innovations to the emergence of online and distance education, set against national reforms and global policy discourses emphasising flexibility, quality, and equity in higher education. Through bibliometric analysis, we highlight the journal's predominantly Australian university authorship in that period while noting contributions from diverse sectors and an expanding international presence, culminating in the journal's 2004 renaming to reflect a broader Australasian and Asia-Pacific reach. Seven interrelated themes are revisited: the design and pedagogical effectiveness of interactive multimedia, online and distance education, evaluation and usability of educational technologies, professional development and teacher learning, collaborative and constructivist learning environments, the use of cognitive tools to enhance learning, and students' perceptions and societal implications of technology. Across these themes, authors grappled with enduring questions of pedagogy, cognition, equity, and human-technology interaction, concerns that resonate with contemporary debates on artificial intelligence in education. By tracing continuities between past and present, we situate *AJET*'s early scholarship as foundational to ongoing discussions about the role of digital technologies in teaching, learning, and educational innovation.

Keywords: Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, *AJET*, history, legacy, educational technology, editorial

Introduction

When the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* (*AJET*) entered its second decade in 1995, educational technology itself was undergoing a remarkable transition. Personal computers had moved from laboratories to classrooms, the CD-ROM promised interactive multimedia and the Internet was accessed through a dial-up modem. Looking back in 2025, *AJET*'s second decade represents a pivotal era: when researchers and practitioners began to articulate not just *how* to use technology, but *why* and *to what end*.

By the mid-1990s, Australian higher education was navigating waves of reform that profoundly affected technology use and educational practice. The legacy of the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s had consolidated universities and emphasised efficiency and participation. The Higher Education Council's *Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy* (commonly known as the "West Review") (Department

of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998) highlighted the need for Australia's universities to become more flexible, responsive, and technologically prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing knowledge economy. It was argued that existing funding and policy frameworks were inadequate for addressing the challenges of digital transformation, growing international competition, and the evolving relationship between higher education, research, and industry. Building on this foundation, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) released *Backing Australia's ability: An innovation action plan for the future* (DETYA, 2001), which committed nearly A$3 billion over five years to strengthen national research capacity, science and information and communication technologies (ICT) skills development, and university infrastructure. Together, these initiatives positioned higher education as a central driver of Australian national innovation, linking teaching, research, and technological advancement to broader economic and social objectives.

The government's *Flexible Learning for the Information Economy* initiative, launched by the Australian National Training Authority in 2000, further reinforced the idea that ICTs were essential to a globally competitive knowledge economy (Australian National Training Authority, 2000). During this period, Australian universities were expanding their online and distance learning capacities, motivated partly by equity goals for regional and remote students and partly by the economic promise of transnational education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002; Ling et al., 2001). Policy documents such as the *Strategic Framework for Flexible Learning* in the VET sector 2000–2005 (Australian National Training Authority, 1999), and the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2002, formalised expectations that technology would enhance quality, flexibility, and institutional accountability in higher education (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2002).

During the decade from 1995 to 2004, international policy discourses around educational technology were also rapidly evolving. In the United Kingdom, the "open learning" movement gained renewed momentum through government initiatives promoting lifelong learning and widening participation. The influential *Dearing Report* (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) and policies such as *Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) positioned open and flexible learning as central to a modernised higher education system, highlighting the potential of technology to increase access and responsiveness in a knowledge-based economy. The United States witnessed what became known as the "no significant difference" debates, sparked by a series of comparative studies that questioned whether online learning outcomes differed substantially from those of traditional classroom instruction. Thomas Russell's (1999) *The no significant difference phenomenon* compiled decades of evidence that suggested technology-mediated learning could achieve outcomes equivalent to face-to-face modes, thereby legitimising the growing field of online and distance education. At the same time, global organisations such as UNESCO were articulating a broader humanistic vision of ICT-enabled education as a vehicle for equity and inclusion. The *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* (UNESCO, 1998) and subsequent guidelines – *Information and Communication Technologies in Teacher Education* (UNESCO, 2002) urged nations to harness digital technologies to democratise knowledge and expand educational opportunity worldwide. Within this dynamic, *AJET* continued to occupy a distinctive space: a journal rooted in Australasia, but internationally engaged. The 1995–2004 issues of *AJET* capture how educators responded to these pressures and opportunities.

Bibliometrics of the *AJET* between 1995 - 2004

From the first issue in 1995 to the final issue of 2004, AJET published 10 volumes comprising 26 issues and a total of 166 articles. Between Volumes 11 and 14, the journal released two issues per year, which increased to three issues annually from Volume 15 onward. In contrast to the earlier decade (1985–1994), where conceptual and commentary articles were more common (52.0%, Corrin et al., 2025), the majority of articles published during the second decade were empirical studies (76.5%), with the remainder consisting of review papers and theoretical or conceptual contributions.

The studies published during this period were not confined to post-secondary contexts. A considerable number of investigations focused on K–12 school students and teachers. For example, Inamdar (2004) employed a quasi-experimental design to compare the development of computer skills among three groups of Indian eighth-grade students. Parr (1995) evaluated the year-long implementation of the computer-assisted learning program *Successmaker* with approximately 400 secondary students in New Zealand. Huffaker (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of e-learning pedagogy and its implementation in U.S. public high schools, examining practices both within and beyond the classroom. Focusing on teachers, Ping (2001) demonstrated how school objectives constrained educators' capacity to experiment creatively with ICT in the United Kingdom. Similarly, using a survey design, Robertson et al. (2004) found that the "computer climate", including access to technology and broader school culture, strongly influenced whether ICT use among 427 Year 3, 5, and 7 teachers was superficial or transformative.

Although the journal retained the title *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* until its renaming to the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* in 2004, reflecting an expanded scope and geographical reach (Atkinson & McLoughlin, 2004), its authorship during this period already extended well beyond Oceania (e.g., Australia, New Zealand), with contributors from Asia (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India), Europe (e.g., Sweden, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland), Africa (e.g., South Africa), North America (e.g., the United States, Canada), and South America (e.g., Argentina).

More than twenty institutions had three or more articles published in *AJET* between 1995 and 2004 (Table 1). The publication base was strongly concentrated in Australian universities, with Edith Cowan University (14), University of Wollongong (14), Monash University (13), and Deakin University (12) emerging as leading contributors, while mid-level contributors included University of Technology Sydney (9), Southern Cross University (7), University of Melbourne (7), University of Sydney (6), James Cook University (6), and University of Western Sydney (6). Although universities dominated, a notable proportion of contributions also originated from non-university organisations, including technical and further education institutes (e.g., Barton Institute of TAFE), industry partners (e.g., Digital Equipment Corporation, Craftsmen Products Pty Ltd, NIIT Ltd., Ord Minnett Group Ltd.), and governmental or public research bodies (e.g., Ministry of Education, Singapore; Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria). A small but growing international presence was also evident, particularly Nanyang Technological University (Singapore) and Multimedia University (Malaysia). This diversity underscores *AJET*'s early engagement with cross-sector collaboration and the practical applications of educational technology across professional, industrial, and policy contexts. It also highlights *AJET*'s regional internationalisation and expanding influence within the Asia-Pacific educational technology community, a development symbolically and practically reflected in the journal's 2004 name change from *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* to *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* in 2004 (Vol. 20, No. 1, Atkinson & McLoughlin, 2004).

Table 1
Affiliations of authors with three or more articles published in *AJET* between 1995 - 2004

Affiliation	Count
Edith Cowan University, University of Wollongong	14
Monash University	13
Deakin University	12
University of Technology Sydney	9
Southern Cross University	7
University of Melbourne	7
University of Sydney	6
James Cook University	6
University of Western Sydney	6
Central Queensland University	5
Nanyang Technical University (Singapore)	4
University of Southern Queensland	4
Multimedia University (Malaysia)	3

Curtin University of Technology	3
Griffith University	3
University of New England	3
University of New South Wales	3
Murdoch University	3
Australian Catholic University	3

Theoretical themes of the *AJET* between 1995 - 2004

As noted, in this editorial, we revisit seven interrelated themes that shaped *AJET*'s second decade (1995–2004): (1) the design and pedagogical effectiveness of interactive multimedia, (2) the rapid expansion of online and distance education, (3) evaluation frameworks and usability studies of emerging technologies, (4) professional learning and teacher development for technology integration, (5) the growth of collaborative and constructivist learning environments, (6) the use of cognitive tools to enhance learning processes, and (7) investigations into students' perceptions, experiences, and the wider social implications of technological innovation. Together, these themes capture a pivotal period in which educational technology research matured conceptually and methodologically. We conclude by reflecting on how these foundational concerns continue to inform contemporary debates, particularly the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education.

The design and pedagogical effectiveness of interactive multimedia

In the mid-1990s many articles focused on interactive multimedia, and how students interacted with CD-ROMs. The CD-ROM, with its ability to integrate text, audio, video, and graphics, was the symbol of educational innovation. The broader Australian policy environment supported such educational innovation. Universities were funded through initiatives such as the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD) to produce shareable multimedia learning resources. *AJET*'s contributors quickly realised that technology's promise required more than technical sophistication; it demanded careful attention to learning design. In an influential article, Lance Richardson (1995) reminded readers that:

> ...developments in the understanding of teaching and learning methods that enhance and nurture cognitive skill acquisition are what underlies the potential contribution of interactive multimedia to improved learning effectiveness. …it is the underlying structure of the subject content, the overall curriculum design and the instructional design of the learning experience that results in effective learning rather than the medium used to deliver the message. (p. 1).

This pedagogical intentionality over technological novelty was repeatedly emphasised by *AJET* authors. For instance, Naidu (1995) framed instructional control on a continuum from learner-directed to program-directed approaches, underscoring the importance of aligning control mechanisms with pedagogical aims. Harper et al. (1995) designed science packages incorporating metacognitive scaffolds, which significantly enhanced problem-solving and reporting skills. Oliver and Herrington (1995) distilled design guidelines for hypermedia to better support student-centred learning, while they later demonstrated how situated learning models could foster highly motivating, reflective, and non-linear environments (Herrington & Oliver, 1997).

Attention also turned to authoring tools and theoretical underpinnings. Hedberg and Harper (2002) advanced constructivist design practices through their MediaPlant authoring tool, enabling teachers to create pedagogically aligned resources. Gordon (1996) connected interactive multimedia with metacognitive theory, stressing the need for designs that make learners more conscious of their thinking. Dalgarno and Harper's (2004) experimental research provided evidence that spatial learning is enhanced by features such as view control and object manipulation, but only if these are embedded within authentic tasks requiring such skills.

The emphasis on authentic, real-world learning contexts was reinforced by Bennett et al. (2002), who found that case-based learning activities could effectively bridge theory and practice. Pellone's (1995) literature review further synthesized best practices in interactive multimedia for vocational education, highlighting recurring principles of learner engagement, authenticity, and scaffolding. Together, this body of work established that interactive multimedia's success is not technologically determined, but hinges on pedagogically purposeful design.

The rapid expansion of online and distance education

As the Internet entered classrooms and homes, distance education underwent a profound transformation. Australia, with its vast geography and long tradition of correspondence education, was uniquely positioned to lead this shift. By 2004, a number of Australian universities had begun to offer fully online units, and a small number had fully online programs; meanwhile, many institutions remained in experimentation or blended learning or hybrid modes. *AJET* chronicled this evolution with remarkable depth.

In 1995, James Taylor proposed his influential "Four Generations of Distance Education" model, mapping the field's progression from print-based correspondence through broadcast media, interactive multimedia, and toward web-based delivery (Taylor, 1995). His framework provided both a conceptual lens and a policy roadmap for institutions navigating the digital transition.

Throughout the late 1990s, *AJET* published many case studies of early web-supported teaching. Freeman (1997) reported on business undergraduates' improvements in flexibility, interaction, and satisfaction from web-based platform *TopClass.* Oliver and Omari (1999) investigated online collaboration via problem-based tasks and found that while students valued peer interaction, they still depended heavily on teacher presence, regarding teacher input as essential. Motteram (2001) analysed synchronous and asynchronous learning modes, identifying how each supported different dimensions of community and cognition: while synchronous channels fostered community building, asynchronous forums better supported in-depth academic dialogue. His findings resonate today as educators grapple with balancing real-time engagement and self-paced technology-mediated personalised learning.

These early recognitions of the tension between technological efficiency and human connection foreshadowed many of today's discussions surrounding the use of AI in education. Questions about whether computer-based learning environments could truly replicate the nuance and adaptability of a human teaching mirror our current debates about AI-powered teaching assistants and automated feedback systems versus the irreplaceable complexity of human insight, interaction, and empathy. Just as educators of that era wrestled with balancing scalability and personalisation, we now confront similar dilemmas in the age of generative AI: how to harness algorithmic capabilities for responsiveness and immediacy while preserving the interpretive dimensions of pedagogy that define the human aspects of teaching and learning.

As universities adopted learning management systems such as WebCT and Blackboard, *AJET* authors began to explore how institutional infrastructures shaped pedagogy. Holt et al. (2003) documented emergent online learning communities, observing that while a core group of students contributed actively in a multi-modal psychology unit, peripheral participation allowed quieter students to learn through observation. Such findings broadened an understanding of how students engage in online spaces. Another key contribution was Stacey and Rice's (2002) exploration of the Community of Inquiry Model. Their articulation of cognitive, social, and teaching presence remains one of the most enduring frameworks in online pedagogy. Indeed, the triad of presences continues to inform how we conceptualise hybrid learning environments.

Globally, the period saw parallel developments: the Open University's shift to online courses, the emergence of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's OpenCourseWare (2001), and the popularisation and legitimisation of the term "e-learning", especially in the corporate sector (Rosenberg, 2001). *AJET*'s

regional focus, however, added distinct texture, capturing topics such as the pedagogical and interactional challenges in teleteaching (Tennant, 1999), an IT-supported model for rural Indigenous students (Grant, 1996), and multi-campus video conferencing as an alternative teaching/learning model (Andrews & Klease, 1998).

Evaluation frameworks and usability studies of emerging technologies

As the millennium approached, the field matured, and so did its evaluative frameworks. In Australia, the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency in 2002 marked a significant policy moment, introducing systematic institutional audits that included scrutiny of technology-enhanced learning and teaching. Authors in *AJET* engaged with these developments by proposing models that integrated educational technology evaluation into pedagogical effectiveness and broader institutional quality processes.

Conyer (1995) called for usability testing that included both expert analysis and end-user feedback to maximize chances of success, which was an early move toward participatory design and set a foundation for subsequent frameworks. This approach presaged what we now describe as design-based research, a methodology that integrates iterative development with real-world testing and theoretical refinement. By embedding practitioner perspectives alongside empirical analysis, Pham (1998) proposed a multi-dimensional evaluation model integrating cognitive outcomes, usability, and learner experience. McNaught et al. (2003) examined barriers to the reuse of educational technologies, identifying not just metadata or interoperability issues but also organisational and cultural constraints. Lyons and Milton (2002) drew on Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework to evaluate simulations in midwifery education, demonstrating that quality lies in iterative dialogue between teacher and learner. O'Reilly (2002) assessed interactive multimedia's role in supporting procedural knowledge and understanding in marine biology education, warning that interactivity could sometimes obscure critical thinking.

These works reflected a growing recognition that evaluation was not merely a technical or usability concern but a key component of pedagogical accountability, organisational learning, and institutional sustainability. *AJET* authors reminded us that evaluation was not about proving technology's worth but about understanding learning as a complex, situated activity.

Professional learning and teacher development for technology integration

In the early 2000s, technology integration had moved from the periphery to the mainstream of university teaching. *Flexible Learning for the Information Economy* emphasised workforce capability (Australian National Training Authority, 2000), while the Australian Universities Teaching Committee funded projects on staff development and learning design to help teachers create high-quality online learning experiences.

Recognising that teachers are pivotal to effective technology use, research into professional development moved beyond training to encompass deeper models of reflective practice and cultural change. *AJET*'s second decade vividly captured this cultural reorientation, covering the barriers and enablers for academic staff, the challenges of professional development, and innovative ideas for effective and sustainable professional development initiatives or programs.

Ellis and Phelps (2000) proposed a collaborative action learning model for professional development that empowered educators to learn together as co-designers of technology-enhanced curricula. Their findings underscored a recurrent theme: sustainable change does not come from isolated training but from social learning among colleagues. To avoid limiting professional development to technical training, Phelps et al. (2004) promoted a metacognitive and reflective approach, empowering educators to articulate personal goals and develop lifelong learning strategies. Their argument, that self-regulated learning applies equally to teachers as to students, anticipated today's frameworks of digital capability and AI literacy. Wilson and Stacey (2004) drew on Diffusion of Innovation theory to analyse adoption patterns of online teaching, highlighting the need to support the "mainstream majority" (p. 33) by focusing on online facilitation and communities of practice. Bennett et al. (1999) described a creative professional learning initiative in which

staff enrolled as students in online courses to experience technology from the learner's perspective. Such empathy-building strategies have since become staples of digital pedagogy programs.

These studies collectively reframed professional development as cultural adaptation. Teachers were not merely recipients of training; they were active participants in shaping pedagogical futures. This insight is particularly relevant in 2025, as educators once again face disruptive change with the rise of generative AI. Then, as now, the central challenge was not mastering tools but redefining professional identity in a digitally mediated world. In retrospect, *AJET*'s attention to teacher learning reminds us that technological revolutions are sustained not by software, but by communities of practice.

The growth of collaborative and constructivist learning environments

As online and blended learning matured, articles published in *AJET* during this period reflected a turn toward social constructivism, a belief that learning is co-created through dialogue, collaboration, and shared meaning-making. This was a decisive intellectual shift: from individual cognition supported by media to collective knowledge building supported by networks.

Oliver and Herrington (1995) and later Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) provided foundational work on designing and analysing interaction and communication in online learning environments. Their research, using a linguistic-acts model and discourse analysis in computer-mediated communication, helped define how we now understand "presence" and "community". At the same time, McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) issued an important challenge to dominant paradigms by calling for culturally inclusive learning design. They argued that many online systems, developed in Western contexts, overlooked cultural diversity and local pedagogical traditions. Their plea for localisation and cultural sensitivity remains relevant today: the use of AI models prompts concerns regarding bias, language fairness, and inclusivity across different regions.

Practice-based papers deepened this constructivist turn. Baskin (2001) showed how online groups could create authentic learning contexts, while Graham and Scarborough (1999) found positive student responses to CMC-based collaboration. Freeman and Capper (1999) explored web-based role simulations for business education, demonstrating how authenticity and collaboration enhanced learning outcomes. Nicholls and Philip (2001) explored the potential for online technologies to support drama teaching and learning, allowing for new kinds of interaction, collaboration, reflection and resource sharing in drama contexts, things that face-to-face alone could not easily support. Johnson et al. (2001) examined conferencing in teacher education, noting that asynchronous dialogue enabled deeper reflection than traditional discussion. *AJET* also published early discussions of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), exploring how technology-mediated communities could support both formal and informal learning.

These ideas aligned with emerging research internationally, such as the Open University's social constructivist models (Hiltz & Benbunan-Fich, 1997). The constructivist and cultural turn in *AJET*'s 1995–2004 volumes signalled a broader epistemological maturation. Technology was no longer simply an instructional aid; it was an environment for meaning-making. This insight paved the way for contemporary notions of learning design, social presence, and student agency, which also underpin current debates about AI-supported learning environments.

The use of cognitive tools to enhance learning processes

Long before today's discussions about AI in education, *AJET* authors were already grappling with the idea of technology as a cognitive partner. Inspired by scholars like Jonassen et al. (1998), they viewed educational technologies not merely as conveyors of information but as tools for thinking—"mindtools" (p. 24). This perspective shifted the research focus from *what* technology delivers to *how* it scaffolds, extends, and partners with human cognition.

A key theme was using technology to foster metacognition and self-regulation. Gordon (1996) argued that technology designers could operationalise theoretical views of learning by creating models that make

students more aware of their own thinking. This interest in the learner's internal process was mirrored in empirical work, such as Vincent and Hah's (1996) investigation into the specific cognitive strategies learners employed when using a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) program.

This work expanded to explore how tools could scaffold complex, higher-order reasoning. Harper et al. (1995), for instance, examined how multimedia reporting tools could support the complex cognitive processes of science problem-solving. Similarly, Ferry et al. (1999) designed specific cognitive tools to help learners interpret scientific graphs, demonstrating that well-crafted interfaces could scaffold this essential reasoning skill. The concept of the "tool" was often broadened to the "environment" where the entire context was designed to support cognition. Herrington and Oliver (1997) championed situated learning models, showing how multimedia environments that embedded authentic tasks could act as powerful cognitive scaffolds. This research on immersive, task-based learning was later extended by Dalgarno and Harper (2004), who provided evidence that features such as user control in 3D environments could enhance spatial learning.

Crucially, this drive for cognitive enhancement was balanced by a growing recognition of its constraints, particularly cognitive load. In a foundational contribution, Kalyuga (2000) refined multimedia learning principles by demonstrating that redundancy between text and audio could, in fact, overload working memory and hinder learning. This research underscored that an effective cognitive tool was not just about adding features, but about the precise and efficient design of information.

This body of work, from fostering metacognitive awareness (Gordon, 1996; Vincent & Hah, 1996) to scaffolding problem-solving (Harper et al., 1995; Ferry et al., 1999), and building immersive cognitive environments (Herrington & Oliver, 1997; Dalgarno & Harper, 2004), positioned computers as extensions of the mind. These studies, tempered by design principles from cognitive load theory (Kalyuga, 2000), highlighted a deliberate mission to support higher-order thinking and self-regulation. Although computationally simple by today's standards, these efforts to build intelligent collaborators anticipated the core aspirations and challenges of agency, cognition, and empowerment, which define our current discussions around generative AI.

Investigations into students' perceptions, experiences, and the wider social implications of technological innovation

Perhaps the most enduring feature of *AJET*'s 1995–2004 corpus is the attention given to the learner's perspective. Even amid the fascination with technology, researchers consistently foregrounded students' experiences, including their frustrations, motivations, and evolving identities as digital learners. Lyall and McNamara (2000) captured the human side of technology adoption with memorable humour: students likened a computer-assisted learning program to a "potplant stand" (p. 126) rather than an active study tool. Despite recognising its educational value, many avoided using it, revealing a persistent tension between the intended purpose of educational technology and its actual use. Their findings highlight that even effective tools can be abandoned when learners resist changes to familiar study habits.

Felix (2001) found that while students valued the flexibility of web-based learning, they missed the immediacy of face-to-face connection. Others noted similar ambivalences: Russell and Holmes (1996) described adolescents as "electronic nomads" (p. 130), while Meek (1995) and Ediger (1996) reflected on the philosophical tensions between technological progress and humanistic education. MacCann (1996) advocated for accessibility and inclusion, urging designers to consider learners with disabilities, an issue that foreshadows today's concerns about algorithmic bias and inclusive AI.

These early investigations brought a human perspective to the field, emphasising that technological innovation should be guided by and responsive to learners' varied needs and contexts, a principle that continues to underpin the ethical foundations of educational technology research.

Reflections and continuities: Then and now

What does *AJET*'s second decade reveal when viewed from a 2025 vantage point? The most striking pattern is continuity. While the technologies have changed, from CD-ROMs to cloud computing, from chatrooms to ChatGPT, the central questions have not.

- **Pedagogy over platform:** In 1995, Richardson reminded us that learning effectiveness depends on design, not delivery medium (Richardson, 1995). In 2025, as educators experiment with generative AI, the same principle holds: the value of technology lies in how we teach with it, and how students learn with it, rather than merely what we use.

- **Teacher agency and adaptation:** The professional development studies of Ellis, Phelps, and others (Ellis & Phelps, 2000; Phelps et al., 2004) emphasised the teacher as learner and designer. Today, amid concerns about AI automation, this ethos of agency is again paramount. Teachers are not being replaced by AI; they are being challenged to redefine expertise, ethics, and empathy in a new technological ecology.

- **Collaboration and community:** The constructivist turn of the early 2000s anticipated today's networked learning and social media pedagogies. As AI tools become embedded in collaborative environments, the insights of Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000), and McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) remind us that community remains the heart of learning.

- **Ethics and educational responsibility:** *AJET*'s attention to learners' voices and social contexts laid the groundwork for today's focus on digital ethics and AI fairness. The questions have deepened, but the spirit of inquiry remains the same: How do we design for justice, accessibility, and agency in technologically mediated education?

AJET at forty: Looking back to look forward

As *AJET* marks its 40th year, its scholarship reveals not a series of disconnected trends but a coherent story of continuity, adaptation, and purpose. From the optimism of interactive multimedia to the critical maturity of online learning research, the journal's second decade (1995–2004) built the foundations for today's networked, data-rich, and AI-enhanced educational landscape.

In 1995, multimedia was hailed as revolutionary; in 2025, generative AI carries that mantle. Both moments share a familiar blend of excitement and unease. Then, as now, educators asked: what becomes of creativity, authorship, and understanding when machines can generate representations of knowledge? Early multimedia designers grappled with questions of guidance and exploration, how much structure should learners be given? Today's educators face parallel dilemmas in prompt design, scaffolding, and cognitive transparency when using AI to support writing, learning, and problem-solving.

Just as the rise of online learning once provoked fears about the erosion of human contact, generative AI now challenges our notions of authenticity and originality. Yet, as *AJET*'s history shows, educational technology has always advanced through dialogue between innovation and critique. The same principle holds true: the value of technology lies not in what we use, but in how and why we teach with it, and what we envisage the outcomes to be.

Reflecting on 1995-2004, we see a community that was already grappling with many of the dilemmas that define our current moment: the balance between innovation and pedagogy, access and equity, automation and agency. The tools have changed dramatically, but the questions and the scholarly spirit remain. The scholars of *AJET*'s early years humanised the field, reminding us that technological innovation must serve the diverse needs and contexts of learners. Their work established a moral and pedagogical compass that continues to guide the discipline. The enduring lesson is clear: our task is not to make teaching easier or learning faster, but to expand what it means to understand, to connect, and to be

human in an increasingly digital and artificially intelligent world. That is the legacy *AJET* carries forward, and the challenge it continues to embrace.

Author contributions

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