

**Electronic Resources Trial
Terms 3 & 4 2000
Coordinated by the Educational Technologies Unit – ITD**

During Terms 3 & 4, 2000 the Educational Technologies Unit coordinated a trial of the Electric Library Australasia in four schools throughout NSW. Two secondary schools and two primary schools were targeted with the aim of providing an overview of the resource's relevance to the K-12 curriculum. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the relevance and application of the product to teaching and learning.

Electric Library Australasia

<http://www.elibrary.com/s/edumarkau>

Access

All schools were utilising the Departmental ISDN line with up to 15 machines accessing Electric Library Australasia and up to 30 other machines accessing other Internet sites simultaneously. Occasional login failures were reported when several machines were attempting to access the site at once. Intermittent delays in returning search results were also reported.

Relevance to K-12 Curriculum

The resource was trialed with Stages 2 – 5 for Computing Studies, Library Information Skills, Science, Maths and HSIE. Teachers involved with Stages 2 and 3 reported they did not find the resource useful for their purposes. It was found the material was not comprehensive as the students found it difficult to: access information relevant to their Australian based topics; comprehend the text as the level was too difficult without the help of subheadings, diagrams, pictures or labels. Teachers of the younger stages reported they would have to re-write articles for them to be of use to their students.

Teachers involved with older stages found the resource somewhat useful because:

- there is a facility to email articles
- publications are ordered by 'date received' although often repeated from different sources
- keywords were highlighted in the text

All users described search results as frequently questionable as to their relevance, requiring considerable effort to filter. However the ability to search by specific media eg. pictures, newspaper articles was reported as being helpful, at times in refining searches. When search results are returned, text articles have a reading level inserted beside them. This was seen as a very useful tool however, teachers reported the levels are not consistent with Australian reading levels and therefore misleading. Teachers reported that many of the resources found were not authoritative or of poor quality, particularly in reference to Australian content. Overall teachers found Electric Library more useful as a teacher resource for background material rather than a tool for use with students.

Navigating the Site

Generally users comment the site was easy to navigate. Electric Library provides the choice between natural language and Boolean operated searches. However students found it difficult to formulate a suitable question to generate the search results required. It was found the relevance of search results was listed at 100% when there may only be one mention of a particular word from the search criteria in the resource. Users with experience using Boolean operators experienced some success producing useful search results.

At the time of the trial no information was available regarding the subscription costs. It was mentioned that a special rate was being formulated for Australian schools. Therefore teachers were unable to comment on the value for money of this service.