
As an undergraduate back in 1985 I had the good fortune to start my research career at the research laboratory of Standard Telephone and Cable (STC) in the UK; the lab that invented the fibre optic cable. My project for the year was to improve the performance of high speed transistors. A few years later the department was closed down!

A while ago, a colleague of mine at Wintec was expressing concern that the research that was being done in our department was of no use to him. He had the view that as he had a full teaching load, it was the duty of the researchers in the department to provide input into his teaching – as pay back so to speak. From time to time, this theme is taken up by senior management who make sounds about how research time should be used for a common goal – presumably one set for the good of the institute.

I hear that the European Community is making increasingly louder noises about funding research 'winners' in an attempt to fight back against the coming dominance of science and engineering by the Chinese, Indians and others.

This all makes me ask the question – Is our research useful? From the purely economic point of view, I am coming to the conclusion, that the value of the actual results, for the majority of research that is done in ITP 's is not useful. I suspect that not many of the ideas in BACIT and JACIT actually increase New Zealand 's GDP.

Yet I fiercely defend the notion that I continue to be given time to do research in any area of IT that takes my fancy. During the recent mid semester break, while on annual leave, I kept sneaking off to the computer to work on my current research problem – I was having fun! FUN working in IT, writing code, putting into practice what I teach – maybe even creating something useful, I dream!

The obvious area, in which ITP research does well, is the trial and implementation of new teaching technologies and practices. For example, in this issue of BACIT, Dr. Albert van Aardt describes his experiences of using OpenOffice as a tool for teaching Database Administration. Then, Stephen Corich describes his experiences of migrating an online course from Blackboard to Moodle (two popular technologies for online learning). Stephen found that some tools available in Moodle are not quite up to the job just yet – worth knowing before you try a similar undertaking. These two papers could save hours of Tutor/Lecturer time at other institutions. But I believe the most important outcome is the increased knowledge and enthusiasm that the authors have gained through the research process and being 'useful' is actually of secondary importance. If my experience is anything to go by, it will be hard for all the authors of BACIT not to let their enthusiasm spill over into their current or future careers.

Ah, I've just spotted Dimitry Gakhovich's paper on moving from Visual Basic 6, to Visual Basic .Net – I've been meaning to do that for some time now – sorry I'll have to stop there – I've got some reading to do......