4 CHAPTER ONE

research practice. This book also discusses some of the perils of conducting Net-based research. While the Net provides many new opportunities to improve our research practices, it also introduces new problems and challenges.

WHAT DOES THE e IN e-RESEARCH MEAN?

We often joke that adding the letter ¢ in front of every noun we use is an unfortunate distinction of the early years of this Internet technology era. We struggled with the stigma of trendiness that will mark and date a text referring to e-research. In fact we fear a visit from the "Society for the Preservation of the Other 25 Letters" when they see the effusive use of the ¢ prefix used in this book! However, we think the term captures some of the excitement, breadth, and diversity offered by an ever-increasing and some- times bewildering set of new Net-based tools and techniques. Only a few years ago ¢ (as in email) meant a tool that was primarily text-based, operated on a relatively inse- cure communications link, and provided a wide variation in performance and quality of service. In education, ¢-applications focused on the lowest common denomina-tors so that students and faculty could access contents with even the slowest and most dated of hardware. Convergence of audio, video, and multimedia channels to a Net-based platform, which is continuing to fall in price and rise in power has resulted in an explo- sion of applications in almost every domain, This has also resulted in a change of our connotations of the Net or the e word. Gen-erally, the e prefix means that the activity or noun modified takes place on a high-speed, digital network that is available "any- time/anywhere." Today that network is the Internet.

WHAT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES DOES e-RESEARCH ENCOMPASS?

The Net now supports a wide variety of communication modes and information pro- cessing tools. As such, it is becoming easier to define the subset of behaviors that ean- not be researched on the Net as opposed to those that can be the subject of research. Not withstanding the dangers of missing novel ways of using the Net, we list below some of the most obvious manifestations of e-research,

- Distribution and retrieval of text-based surveys.l

- Open-ended or structured text-based interviews conducted via email or computer- mediated conferencing

- Focus groups using real-time Net-based video or audio conferencing.

- Analysis of Web logs and other tracking tools for measurement and syn-thesis of online activities.

- Net-based telephone interviews.

- Analysis of text transcripts of learning or social activities.

- Analysis of social behavior in virtual reality environments.

- Online assessment and/or evaluation of performance or knowledge.