

The Knowledge Tree: Edition 17 Youth learning the e-as-y way

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Editorial: Youth learning the e-as-y way

Welcome to Edition 17 of *The Knowledge Tree*. This is our second edition since we upgraded our layout and navigation. We trust you enjoy our new look and our continued focus on provoking, fostering and capturing in-depth knowledge and debate on e-learning issues and innovative practices through a range of articles, interviews, case studies and forums.

In this edition we look at how industry and RTOs are using e-learning to inspire young learners.

Some recurring questions that arise from these contributions:

- What features of e-learning engage young/Gen Y learners?
- Do educators make presumptions about the use of technologies with Gen Y learners?
- How can educators handle the 'innovation tension' between being innovative with Web 2.0 technologies engaging young people, and access and duty of care issues?

In the peer reviewed lead article, 'Everything I need to learn: Engaging youth in online learning', Bill Wade of Charles Darwin University, NT writes about the contrasts between the boxed content of bygone correspondence-based distance education and the computer-mediated learning engaging young people today. Bill examines a number of key questions, including, 'What technologies really deliver to young people?' and, 'How do we move beyond the next best toy and become authentic innovators?'. Amongst other academic sources, Bill draws upon Danah Boyd's popular and thought-provoking article, ['Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?'](#) from Edition 13 of *The Knowledge Tree*, and the [Horizon Report \(2008\)](#). He also incorporates observations from his involvement with the [Mobilizethis](#) series of youth and ICT-focused conferences.

Gary Sewell, Head Teacher of Baking, Hunter Institute in NSW, provides a case study on a successful partnership between Hunter Institute and the baking industry involving e-learning and the fast-tracking of apprentices. You can also view a presentation of Gary's on this partnership in a recording of ['Blended Baking'](#), a web conferencing (Elluminate) session that was part of the 'e-Exemplars' mini-online conference of June 2008.

We interview Andrew Williamson, CEO/Principal of Australian Technical College in Sunshine, Victoria. The Australian Technical Colleges are an initiative of the Australian Government that enable Year 11 and 12 students to study for their Year 12 Certificate and start an apprenticeship whilst still at school.

They are intended to raise the profile of vocational education and training (VET) in schools and to be centres of excellence in trade training. Andrew informs us of the progress towards these goals of the Australian Technical College Sunshine, including how the College uses mobile and PDA devices to creatively engage and assess students undergoing workplace training – and how virtual communities like Facebook and MySpace provide a seamless introduction to e-learning.

We also talk to Aaron Pont, Project Leader/Educational Designer with Flex:Ed at the Canberra Institute of Technology. Aaron oversees work on Edu-Versal Studios, a virtual world learning environment that allows students to 'visit' a nursing ward. He tells us about the development of Edu-Versal Studios, how such environments have the potential to engage young people, and the likely effect of virtual worlds on the future of education.

Finally, a dynamic panel discussion features the perspectives of Harriet Wakelam (WA), Georgina Nou (SA), Simon Du Bois (NSW) and Tim Davies (UK) on youth and e-learning. The discussion ranges from questions related to the 'how' of engaging young people through e-learning, to presumptions we can make about their learning, tensions between Web 2.0 'fun' learning and more formal learning, access and duty of care issues, and the potential of the use of online technologies beyond formal learning and training. As well as some valuable insights from the experienced Australian e-learning practitioners, Tim Davies, a Gen Y blogger and academic from Leicester, UK offers interesting perspectives on the use of social media technologies to empower young people as decision-makers and proponents of social change. The discussion concludes with ideas from the panellists about possible future developments in e-learning for young people.

We hope you enjoy Edition 17 of *The Knowledge Tree*!

Article – A New Recipe for Learning: Blended Mobile Learning for the Baking Trades

By Gary Sewell

Intro

The Hunter Institute provides training for students as far afield as Hornsby in Sydney's north to Murwillumbah on the far NSW North Coast. Gary Sewell is its Head Teacher (Baking). In this article he explains how the Institute recognised that the distance a majority of students had to travel to spend long periods on campus inhibited learning in its Bakery Trades course.

As a result, Hunter developed a project that implemented the use of wireless technologies for mobile learning in its Bakery Trades course, delivering training through mobile phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants). The use of these devices to deliver training in the workplace allows pedagogy practices that establish connectedness between theoretical applications and practical tasks, promoting a holistic learning environment.

The process of developing the training tool was driven by Bakers Delight. All content, specifications and processes were Bakers Delight-specific, as were the recipes. The Hunter Institute now offers its entire Certificate III course online using mobile technology. Students can complete the course in the workplace in one year, greatly alleviating the problem of skills shortages in the trade. The Hunter Institute now has a resource that can be delivered anywhere in the world and new markets have opened up for it as a result of moving into blended mobile learning.

The problem

To complete their studies, 44% of our baking students must each year twice leave their workplace, home and family and live at our campus for three weeks. In addition to the problems this presents, the baking/pastry industry has a high degree of variable work hours and a high level of casual employees, making it even more difficult for workers to access traditional institution-based training.

We needed new models of delivery to improve the quality of our training. As a result we investigated the use of mobile learning to allow students to complete their studies without having to attend our campus.



A delightful partnership

After some preliminary research, we decided to develop and trial mobile learning objects for Bakers Delight. We already had a strong partnership and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the company, offering training and assessment to approximately 680 Bakers Delight stores, but the new trial was unique in the baking industry.

Industry often states that TAFE does not deliver relevant and concise training. For that reason our initial proposal to Bakers Delight was met with some scepticism and concern. It became obvious to us that we needed to address these concerns in the most effective and appropriate ways, and our research into the Australian Flexible Learning Framework provided us with guidance on how to effectively implement e-learning solutions.

Below are the issues we discussed, both in-house and with industry, in the process of developing mobile learning objects:

- Student numbers in bakery training have increased considerably.
- Implementation of training packages and ongoing review leads to a reduction in ASCH per student.
- Attrition and completion rates require a managed process.
- Delivery mechanisms would be important to prevent excessive pressure on existing resources.
- Blended delivery options could mean increased student numbers with less reliance on 'TAFE premises'.
- There are increased demands on software, transport and technology updates.
- Skill level of teachers needed to improve to allow for flexible approaches to fit industry requirements.
- Strategic planning and constant review of data was essential to maintain a clear business focus.

Despite Bakers Delight's initial concerns, we demonstrated that we could develop a flexible mobile learning model with it, and that the training would be workplace-relevant, expedient, cost-effective and, most importantly, able to achieve a higher standard of outcome.

The process of developing the training tool was driven by Bakers Delight. Where possible all resources were developed by Bakers Delight because we did not want to deliver any generic content.

The content, specifications and processes were Bakers Delight-specific, as were the recipes.

Mixing ingredients: From tool to pilot

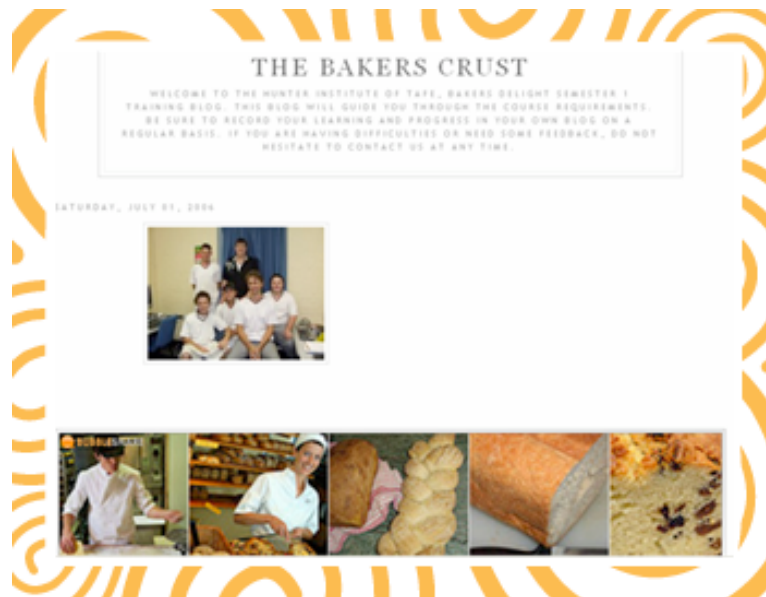
Before embarking on developing learning tools, we identified and compared the outcomes of traditional face to face delivery methods with other models. In the TAFE NSW Student Satisfaction Survey (2004), the most popular student reactions to the statement 'My program of study would better meet my needs through ...' were 'Finish my course in less time' and 'Less class time'. In this context, we saw that the Baking Trades needed to identify methods of more effectively integrating e-learning to meet the needs of industry.

It became our goal to accomplish the following:

- development of an online and mobile training tool that was accessible to all students and allowed training to occur in the workplace through interactive activities, utilising mobile technologies to document outcomes, thus providing flexible learning options
- an increase in the development of industry-specific training that met the needs of national customers who had forged strong partnerships for future business opportunities
- delivery of a 100% contextualised Certificate III course for Bakers Delight
- fast-tracking of the Baking Trades apprenticeship to address current skill shortages, namely by reducing the time-frame of the course to one year
- recognition of existing training that occurred in Bakers Delight workplaces
- improvement of Bakers Delight attrition rates to less than five percent
- improvement of the quality of training outcomes to ensure all content related to workplace requirements
- development of mobile training skills that were transferable to another context area.

In consultation with Bakers Delight, the first stage of the project was to review our current course, content and resources in order to identify gaps and potential training needs. This resulted in a detailed map that ensured all content met training package requirements and was AQTF compliant.

The second stage was to access learning materials from industry, including video footage, voice recording, new techniques in tempering, web links and information on equipment for baking specialists. From there we developed the online resource. It utilised Baker Delight's marketing and training materials and was delivered on a BLOG site (<http://www.bakerscrust.blogspot.com>) which students accessed either in the workplace or at home via computers, mobiles or PDAs.



The use of these devices to deliver training in the workplace allowed pedagogy practices that established connectedness between theoretical applications and a practical task, promoting a holistic learning environment. The BLOG has links to resources, videos, games and assessment events, and students record their learning in an online journal to form part of their evidence of competence (<http://nicktafe.blogspot.com/>). This allowed us to monitor participants' processes and provide feedback to Bakers Delight to ensure a quality outcome.

The third stage of the project was the pilot program. The development of our model had to take into account the following:

- most participants (63%) had a Year 10 or lower educational background
- all participants had access to either a computer or internet, but only 55% had an email address and a lower percentage (44) felt confident using it
- seventy-seven percent had a mobile telephone, all with SMS they could use
- the typical participant was male and aged between 15 and 19, with an apprenticeship. His workplace did not have online access nor did it support workplace training. He would also normally, as mentioned earlier, have to travel to our campus for a period of three weeks each semester.

After these were addressed, our tool was implemented and Telstra provided mobile devices (PDAs) for each student, funding connection and usage charges. They also provided initial training in the use of these devices for both students and teachers.

A team from the baking section at Hamilton campus managed the project in-house. Regular reviews were conducted with all stakeholders, including Hunter's bakery section teaching staff, Bakers Delight and Telstra. In addition, a regular reporting process back to the Institute's funding committee – Educational Resource Support Team (ERST) – was established.



Three classes of students were enrolled in the 9297 course. Students attended a two-day orientation program in which their BLOG were established. Training in taking digital photos and film and uploading to the student BLOG was conducted and students then returned to the workplace to commence their training.

Students worked through the class BLOG site and recorded their learning. They returned to the campus nine weeks later for a two-day training program for bread faults. Upon completion of these two days, the participants returned to the workplace for a further nine weeks to complete the first semester of training. They then returned for a one-day assessment event. This pattern was repeated for the second semester of training.

A new recipe for learning

We now offer our entire Certificate III course online using mobile technology. This means students can complete the course in the workplace in one year. All contact is contextualised to reflect the true requirements of the workplace and all Bakers Delight stores are offered this delivery option.

The mobile blended delivery model developed has allowed the faculty to offer real customisation to industry sectors. The delivery option has reduced training costs and improved outcomes for both learners and employers. We have recognised the need for training providers to work closely with industry to address training needs, but just as importantly, use technology to meet the needs of this generation of learners.

In 2008, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations recognised the potential of this project and has provided funding to continue the concept and investigate its potential to fast-track apprenticeships.

The development of this online learning tool has provided a twofold benefit for the bakery trades:

1. The resources developed for the project can be utilised to enhance student delivery that occurs in other formats, ie face to face classroom revision tools
2. It offered provision for industry experts to be represented in all learning environments.

The Hunter Institute now has a resource that can be delivered anywhere in the world. An entire new market has opened up for us; opportunities to form similar partnerships with other industry bodies have now surfaced. Once industry realises this model can reduce face to face hours, facilitate training by being workplace relevant – and can improve sales – they are usually keen to listen.

The project has demonstrated that outcomes are improved by forming partnerships with industry bodies to share and develop resources. I believe a formalised training culture needs to be introduced and that training that occurs in the workplace must be recognised. In addition, resources must be developed to reinforce that training; no longer can apprentices be viewed as 'cheap labour' and TAFE be considered a 'waste of time'. TAFE must lead by example by forming MOUs and partnerships with companies such as Bakers Delight.

Article – Everything I Need to Learn: Engaging Youth in Online Learning

By Bill Wade

Intro

Bill Wade of Charles Darwin University, NT, contrasts the boxed content of ‘everything I need to learn’ of bygone correspondence-based distance education with the computer-mediated learning engaging young people of today. He examines a number of key questions, including, ‘What technologies really deliver to young people?’ and ‘How do we move beyond the next best toy and become authentic innovators?’

The gap between students’ perception of technology and that of faculty continues to widen. Students and faculty continue to view and experience technology very differently. (The 2008 Horizon Report, p 7.)

I was 13 years old and ‘everything I needed to learn’ had just arrived in a big heavy cardboard box. I tugged away at the corner of my sneakers and tried to peel off the front toe guard while purposely ignoring the box and its contents. I thought Suzie was kind of cute and I wanted a motorbike. Mobiles and Facebook didn’t exist yet. I knew what was in the box ... Maths, Social Studies, Science, English ... my entire Year 8. Everything I needed to learn. It was hot and I looked out the window towards the sandy dunes and the roaring waves of the Caspian Sea. I couldn’t believe my parents had moved us from the cold Canadian prairies to the far reaches of the Iranian Middle East, a stone’s throw from the Russian border. It was 1975 and I had unknowingly embarked upon a new beginning as a correspondence-based distance education student, a role I would repeat in Year 11 and again, 30 years later, while completing a master’s degree of distance education. As I sat down to write this article, I closed my browser from last night where I had been logged onto a Final Cut Pro video tutorial and another site with a PDF version of Terry Anderson’s (2008) article ‘Is Videoconferencing the Killer App for K-12 Distance Education?’

Changes are inevitable and so is the evolution of technology used to mediate learning, and the likelihood that at some point each of us – and certainly our youth – will engage in the role of the online learner. My own experience of having studied by distance education and then later choosing to study the field of distance education has likely shaped the kinds of questions that I (and others) currently explore. These questions impact upon how I choose to engage youth in online learning and within the blended delivery courses that I facilitate. This article explores and discusses some of the questions that arise from that engagement:

1. **Off limits:** Are some youth spaces ‘off limits’? What is life like for them and how do they best want to be engaged? (see <http://mobilizethis.wikispaces.com> 2006 archive)
2. **Authentic innovation:** Will we ever truly emerge from packaging up big heavy boxes with ‘everything I need to learn’ in them? How do we move beyond the next best toy and become authentic innovators or, as Dana Boyd put it, ‘So, what’s an educator to do?’ (Boyd, 2007, *The Knowledge Tree*)
3. **Technologies that deliver:** There is a dazzling array of technology and software options (see <http://go2web20.net>) available to us, but do they deliver what they promise? (see <http://www.slideshare.net/billwadcdu>)
4. **The innovation tension:** What are the current challenges and barriers to engaging youth online, and how can we best challenge the ‘innovation tension?’ (see <http://aades2008.blogspot.com>)

Off limits

Are some youth spaces 'off limits'? What is life like for them and how do they best want to be engaged? (see <http://mobilizethis.wikispaces.com> 2006 archive)

For purposes of funding, and in most of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework projects with which I have been involved, 'youth' was defined as 15 to 19 years old. I also include in my definition students aged 20 to 25, to include the cohort of young people engaged in higher education study. This roughly matches the age group with which I have been involved in both my instructional duties in Canada (Aurora College/University of Saskatchewan – Teacher Education) and currently here in Australia (Charles Darwin University – New Media Design).

Like many professional educators, however, I have traversed a broad range of age groups, starting as a primary school teacher (K to 7). I remain amazed at the vast range of student interest, online ability and digital desire. While some researchers (Prensky, 2006) have chosen to categorise youth as digitally native and supply descriptive and prescriptive labels, I have not found it sound practice to make assumptions about individual skill level. It has been reported that 'younger learners are likely to favour a game approach that requires them to choose how they navigate, has high levels of interactivity and is "polyfocal", with scenarios that are relevant to their own experience. They want e-learning that is learner-directed rather than teacher-directed.' (ASCA Literature Review 2008.)

While there may be a kernel of truth to most stereotypes, youth are a complex mix and microcosm of the adult world. They complain about being labelled, and from my own studies and those of others (Maton and Bennett, 2007) it is clear that the situation facing online education is unclear and youth are as varied in opinion and preferred learning styles as are their adult counterparts. This points to the need for research and exploration to examine ways to apply differentiated instruction and an understanding of learning preferences within online learning targeted for youth.

In 2006, we (Wade and Dubois) conducted a targeted qualitative study of youth perceptions about their mobile phone (could they get by without it?) and produced a short videography through a small random sampling of youth in the Byron Bay, NSW region. This video was a lead up to the first Mobilizethis event held at Byron Youth Services where we (Wade, Hayes and Dubois, 2006) also conducted a youth panel inquiry literally asking a small panel of young people if some of their 'online spaces' were 'off limits' to teachers, youth workers or parents. Throughout the video and the panel interview, it was clear that opinions varied. Some would not want to do without their 'essential' mobile phones, others felt that having a mobile wasn't a necessity. Depending on whose opinion was expressed, their online spaces (primarily MySpace accounts) were either definitely 'off limits' or 'welcome to' adult participation, as long as adults obliged acceptable and appropriate online norms and behaviours. The particular youth group sampled, however, agreed on one thing: they cited the value of purpose-driven spaces such as Byron Youth Service's, Youth Activity Centre (YAC), which ran an adult-driven MySpace to keep local youth connected to available activities and events.

It is recognised that ours was a small and geographically specific sample, yet the results of varied opinion and varied technology uptake do seem consistent with that of other Australian researchers (Bennett, Maton and Kervin, forthcoming 2008). Furthermore, the use of Web 2.0 spaces within my own teaching (eg shared bookmarks in del.icio.us, instructor comment via blogs and posting visual exercises via Flickr) has suggested that while youth-created social spaces may be 'off limits', youth will engage positively with purpose-driven e-learning resources and spaces created for them, or preferably, by them.

If, for some youth, appropriate, relevant and purpose-driven participation by adults in youth online spaces is acceptable, the question remains, does that apply to education? As William (2008) puts it: 'How should we teach in an age of electronic and global multiliteracies?' In a recent *Knowledge Tree* article, Boyd (2007) echoes the same question, 'So, what's an educator to do?' Boyd suggests that 'it is critical for educators to understand how mediated publics are shifting the lives of youth.' These are important questions to ask and, as I suggest later in this article, should be addressed through a focused effort on educational action-based research. In keeping with the focus of this article, however, I prefer to ask, 'Do youth want to see their teachers in these spaces?' According to Milanda Rout's article, 'Research Shows Digital Desire Over-rated' (*The Australian*, 3 October 2007), the answer is no.

In the report on preliminary research conducted by Maton and Bennett (2007), one student stated that she 'would not want her lecturers communicating with her via SMS or on Facebook. I like things separate'. Maton and Bennett (2007) cautioned about the need to research proper uses of technology in an already underfunded educational sector. Leading up to the 2007 Mobilizethis event, we (Wade and Billany, 2007) used the Charles Darwin University (CDU) website to point to Rout's article and then polled visitors (N=52), asking them the following questions:

1. Do you agree or disagree that the 'digital desire' is 'over-rated'?
2. Are you a 'digital native' (born digital) or a 'digital immigrant' (adopted digital)?
3. Do you think teaching should change to more online technology to meet the needs of 'digital native and immigrant' students?

The results of our poll, previously published at <http://mobilizethis.wikispaces.com>, showed that respondents (by definition 64% digital immigrants, 17% digital natives) were close to equally split on the issue of digital desire: 43% disagreed, 45% agreed. Fifty-five percent felt that teaching needed to change, while 37% felt that no change was needed. It is interesting that while respondents were almost equally split in their opinion about the whole digital desire craze being over-rated, a significant majority felt that teaching should change to more online technology.

The technology gap within our educational institutions has long been established as lagging roughly 10 years behind the mainstream. It is becoming clear (and is now emerging as a political and economic imperative) that Australian educational systems need to close that gap. If this imperative results in a predictable investment in technology upgrading to meet the needs of youth, it will be equally important to heed the warnings of researchers on both sides of the big oceans. Alongside technology investment, funding will be needed for research and capacity building that promote a better understanding of how to use these emergent technologies in a strategic and blended mix to better engage and interact with our youth.

Authentic innovation

How do we move beyond the next best toy and become authentic innovators or as Dana Boyd put it, 'So, what's an educator to do?' (Boyd, 2007, *The Knowledge Tree*). Will we ever truly emerge from packaging up big heavy boxes with 'everything I need to learn' in it'?

At the recent 2008 Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES) Leadership Forum, we were able to explore the question of authentic innovation with nearly 100 of Australia's (and some from New Zealand) leading (K-12) distance educators. Through a keynote address, group discussion and individual interviews/podcasts, authentic innovation and a range of salient challenges and solutions were examined. We concluded that while investment in emerging technologies was important, we needed to move beyond the next best toy and explore what was needed to better engage with youth online. Exploring new pedagogies, conducting online learning trials, sharing best practices, dissecting the challenges, finding solutions and investing in teacher training and professional development all emerged as important ingredients towards discovering authentic innovation.

I showed the group a visual image of the big 'heavy cardboard box approach' to correspondence-based distance education that I experienced as a youth. We too often seek to replicate what we have experienced, hence the prevalence of a content-orientated, push-out mentality within distance delivery and online learning. For example, emergent video conferencing solutions run the risk of being misused to replicate, archive and push out teacher-orientated lectures and hence circumvent truly authentic innovation. When the field of distance education was going through a period of defining and redefining what good distance education was, Doug Shale (1988) stated that, 'I'll know it when I see it.' This was likely never truer than it is today, and I applied this statement to knowing how and when you are onto an authentic innovation that is really working. It is a form of face validity in online learning and is evidenced by:

- engaged and successful students
- excited, passionate and energetic teachers
- positive, supportive administrators.

The notion of 'knowing it when you see it' was verified throughout the three-day AADES Leadership Forum. Case study after case study was presented along with evidence of successful blended delivery solutions, ongoing investment in teachers through staff training, and efforts to better streamline the administrative and student support side of delivery. The stories told were mixed with both data and anecdotes and simply rang true. In her book, *Peripheral Vision: Learning Along the Way*, Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) effectively argues the need to pay attention to both the 'empirical and the intuitive' (p 57) and admonishes educators to revisit experiences and explore the power of narrative. Along this line of exploration, positive anecdotes emerged at AADES 2008 of remote community engagement in online learning with the recent implementation of the Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) return path video projects in the Northern Territory. It was not specifically that there was a new best toy being rolled out (eg the IDL), but rather that this was a catalyst for a community to re-value, 're-believe' and re-invest in the possibility of an educational opportunity for their youth. Students, teachers, administrators and parents from the community were engaged, excited and supportive. You knew it was innovative, because you could 'see it'.

When Tony Bates (1995) originally proposed his ACTIONS model as a decision-making tool to assist distance educators, he acknowledged the need for a critical framework to traverse the growing array of technologies that were emerging at that time. Bates's model is an acronym consisting of the following seven decision-making criteria:

- Access
- Costs
- Teaching and learning
- Interactivity and user-friendliness
- Organisational issues
- Novelty
- Speed.

One way of gauging authentic innovation is to ensure that you have selected the right blend of technologies to support the pedagogical approaches and interactions you need to facilitate. It's not always easy. For one organisation, cost and organisational issues may be the biggest factors to consider, while in another, teaching and learning, along with speed in being able to update and change content, might be the innovative solution. In my own experience facilitating online learning, once your technology choice is in place, I tend to agree with Boyd (2007) that conversation (not lecturing) is key. While Boyd (2007) was speaking within the context of conversations about and within social networking spaces, the broader concept of engaging and facilitating interactivity through guided and didactic conversations has been thoroughly explored ever since Bjorn Holmberg (1983) highlighted its importance back in the 1960s.

A key to authentic innovation, then, is finding that correct mix of interactions, conversations, guidance and discovery approaches that lead towards the intended learning outcomes. We know it when we see it. We know we are getting there as we begin to overcome transactional distance through dialogue (Moore, 1993). From Moore's theory of transactional distance, I would propose that we might gauge authentic innovation according to the degree of interactions that we make possible to connect the world of young learners to their online learning experience.

At the AADES Leadership Forum 2008, I suggested that we need to think about a wide array of possible interactions and connections, which may include but not be limited to the following:

- student to student
- student to teacher (these roles may be interchangeable)
- student to content (students may create content)
- teacher to teacher
- teacher to industry
- industry to student.

Significant others such as parents, volunteers, elders and relatives may also enter into this myriad of possible interactions, as shown in Figure 1.

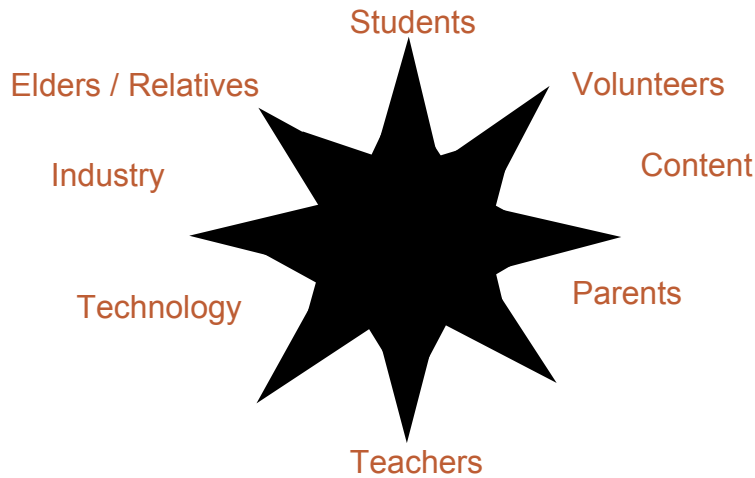


Figure 1: Proposed interactions to consider when promoting conversations and overcoming transactional distance

Technologies that deliver

There have never been more possible solutions for overcoming distance and promoting interactivity than there are today. And the list grows by the hour. Hence there is a dazzling array of technology and software options (see <http://go2web20.net>) available to us, but do they deliver what they promise?

In my experience, many simple technologies over-deliver, while other more ‘innovative’ technologies under-deliver due to the difficulty of navigating firewalls, censorship rules, and justified duty of care measures. Blogs and wikis continue to be among my favourite over-delivering tools to use with youth, and at the 2007 NT E-Learning Showcase in Darwin, I presented several cases and examples from my teaching practice that have been especially effective (see <http://www.slideshare.net/billwadecdu>). Students in my units explored the use of Blogger to develop, reflect upon and represent their learning along a continuum, which we likened to an e-portfolio. We used this tool to converse with each other about the learning experience. All of the right ingredients to engage youth were there: self-direction; self-management; asynchronous conversations; instructor and peer feedback; and 24/7 accessibility.

This year, we are officially piloting Blackboard’s e-portfolio and content management tools. It was interesting to note from a pre-implementation survey just how few of the students were actually familiar with e-portfolios. Yet the same students identified very clearly with the concepts of a ‘place to store their stuff’ and the ability to self-manage, self-direct and export the e-portfolio contents as a website. An added feature of the e-portfolio system that seemed important to them was the ability to link to existing online spaces, such as MySpace, Facebook and, to a more limited extent, personal websites that they had created. It will be interesting to monitor whether students do choose to link to these more personal social spaces, given the ability to choose who they want to invite into them via their e-portfolios.

When I was unable to navigate teaching duties to regularly visit a work-based apprentice, we turned again to Blogger to collect evidence for completion of a Cert III in Multimedia. Coincidentally, this happened right about the time Blogger enabled video embedding and uploading, once again 'over-delivering' for a relatively simple application. The student was literally able to self-publish and reflect upon 2D animations and video projects that were completed throughout the work-based apprenticeship. Del.icio.us and Flickr have also been useful tools to engage youth in my units, although I am consistently shown that young learners do not normally engage with these specific tools without being directed to them. Wikispaces continues to deliver as a tool for organising events and archiving learning (see <http://mobilizethis.wikispaces.com>).

In addition, virtual classroom spaces or a 'Live Class' as designated at our university have consistently delivered a level of interactivity necessary to achieve effective delivery of some of our external units. These virtual environments literally support the kinds of conversations necessary to enhance learning. In my view, these tools over-deliver because although they may seem to lack some of the novelty that gets associated with technical innovation or the 'next-best toy', when combined together they work to promote and facilitate a blend of both synchronous and asynchronous interactions that mitigate geographical or psychological distance in the online learning experience. Finding this right blend supports the recent recommendations of Anderson (2008) who came to a similar conclusion when asking if videoconferencing was the next killer application for K-12 distance education.

The innovation tension

But why do some technologies under-deliver? What are the current challenges and barriers to engaging youth online and how can we best challenge the 'innovation tension'? (see <http://aades2008.blogspot.com>)

Speaking about the potential learning power of technology (computers) today, career educator Bruce Hammonds (2008) noted that he was still not fully convinced 'of their value, except where teachers integrate them into realistic, or authentic, active learning situations.' His July 2008 blog posting, 'Digital technology: Over promised and Under-delivered?' represents a common view that many technologies do not deliver what they promise. The mitigating factors here seem to be how well teachers are trained to harness the potential of the technology and the robustness of the technology itself. At the AADES 2008 Leadership Forum, it was clear that distance education schools recognised this important link and each region appeared to have very targeted strategies for training teachers in the use of their specific suite of online learning tools. In addition, many reported using a blended delivery approach to circumvent potential technology failure. Other challenges remain consistent and repeat themselves time and time again:

- technology often fails
- bandwidth is insufficient
- more student support is needed for adoption and uptake
- questionable suitability for more socially dependent learners or youth with limited language proficiency
- difficulty in providing empirical and conclusive evidence that learning outcomes are improving.

One of the more pressing challenges, which I label as ‘the innovation tension’, is the tension that exists when we are prompted to be innovative educators and asked to make use of emerging technologies which later get deemed dangerous or too risky and are consequently blocked from our usage. Yet there is an understandable need to ensure ‘safe’ learning environments for our students. With young learners, duty of care remains a relevant concern. Whenever this issue is raised, there is no shortage of examples where educators have run into blocked technologies, or administrators (education and ICT) have had to navigate the tension. The key work around seems to be a built in mechanism to request that a site or application be ‘unblocked’ for educational purposes. Submit your form and wait for a response. Other approaches are to locate similar ‘unblocked’ resources as suggested recently by Kerrie Smith (2008) on the educationau site. (see <http://educationau.edu.au>) Other colleagues that I discuss this with often point to the validity of working from home and a need to argue the validity of the virtual office. Despite the challenges, having access to emerging applications and a freedom to explore them (Boyd, 2007; Levine, 2007) is important in order to keep relevant with today’s online youth. ‘Being there’ (Levine, 2007) or the willingness to engage and try out new and emerging applications continues to be the subtext and response to the innovation tension, which was a thematic focus at the recent Mobilizethis 2008 event.

The innovation tension is not going to simply go away. Educators will be tasked with exploring a new range of technologies and they will struggle to gain access to them. In my own recent trial of online collaborative video, requests to have the website unblocked and hurdles to get around firewalls at the university were significant factors in limiting the potential. In its Horizon Report (2008), The New Media Consortium (NMC) and the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) identified the following six areas of emerging technology that promise to have a significant impact over the next five years:

- Grassroots Video (a plethora of consumer-generated online video content made possible through inexpensive technology, software and distribution mechanisms)
- Collaboration Webs (systems and tools enabling ease of online collaboration)
- Mobile Broadband (staying networked on the go, through increasingly cost-effective mobile devices)
- Data Mashups (combining data from different sources to create unique applications and tools)
- Collective Intelligence (understanding that emerges from large groups of people)
- Social Operating Systems (organisation of social networks around people versus content).

The report also states that one of the key tensions is ‘the widening gap between student and faculty perceptions of technology’ (p 7). ‘What’s an Educator to Do?’ (Boyd, 2007) remains a relevant question. Over the next five years as we address the potential for emerging technologies to engage youth both online and in their broader range of learning experiences, solutions to the innovation tension will become increasingly necessary.

Conclusions

Within the limits of this article, I've explored four key questions related to engaging youth in online learning and as we've seen, the answers to these questions are quite varied. Youth themselves are quite varied and we would do well not to over categorise and conveniently label them. As educators navigate the complexities of youth engagement and work towards getting the right mix of online spaces, technology, conversation, flexibility and innovation, I believe we will see a growing return on our e-learning investments with youth. This will be especially true if we avoid the simple temptation to use emergent technologies in order to conveniently replicate ageing educational paradigms. We will also need to work closely together with colleagues tasked with implementing and maintaining safe and secure networks within our organisations to overcome the 'innovation tension.'

As teachers, youth workers, administrators and researchers, it will be important to maintain dialogue, tell our stories from the trenches, and to also explore, in a systematic way, some of the relationships between variables affecting successful online engagement with youth. I have suggested that a key area of inquiry needs to be into ways that differentiating instruction and the application of learning style preferences can better engage youth online. Is there a formula we can follow to find that right mix of variables? Unfortunately, no, there isn't. It requires us to be persistent, to contextualise blended solutions and to continue our exploration ('being there') and conversations. We must not grow tired of trying new approaches, embracing technologies as they emerge and holding conversations about engaging youth online, both with our students and with each other.

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Authentic e-learning: An interview with Andrew Williamson

Andrew Williamson is CEO/Principal of Australian Technical College (ATC) in Sunshine, Victoria, one of a number of federally funded schools that integrate VCE and VCAL studies with paid, on-the-job training. Andrew talked to *The Knowledge Tree* about ATC Sunshine's use of mobile and PDA devices in creatively engaging its students.

ATC Sunshine

Interviewer

What is the staff level?

Andrew Williamson

I've got 19 staff at the moment. You can imagine starting something from scratch, there is a lot of creative work that needs to be done. A lot of administrative work, the setup of policies and procedures. All of my teachers are on a reduced teaching load to give them time to develop curriculum.

We've got a great admin team who are building the admin processes from scratch. So there's a lot of that kind of background work that needs to be done just because we are new.

Interviewer

What are your feelings about how things have been running so far?

Andrew Williamson

One of my teachers last year called the delivery of curriculum 'corridor curriculum' because we were designing the curriculum moments before we went into classrooms. And it's taken us, it took us a good 12 months to actually really get to start to relax into our stride, I guess.

And we have revamped our curriculum a number of times and that's been a little bit disruptive for young people and for staff. But I think we have included young people in the process as we have made these changes and there is a reasonable degree of ownership now.

At first they really didn't understand us and what we were trying to achieve, but I think that they've got better at understanding us, as perhaps we've got better at understanding them. So I think that we are actually well on the way. I'm really excited about some of the initiatives that are coming out of this college at the moment. We are currently doing student satisfaction surveys and they are actually giving us a big tick.

We are not right for a lot of kids. And we know it. We try and go through a recruitment process that allows kids the opportunity to say, 'You're not right for me' and we try and push that if we think we aren't.

We offer a product that is more limited than a general school, but if it's the product you are looking for I can take you further, higher, quicker than a standard school, but I can't offer you the breadth of opportunity that say a general school can.

Interviewer

So what are the trade offerings you have?

Andrew Williamson

Our trade streams are determined by federal skill shortage areas. They are building and construction, engineering, electrotechnology, automotive industries and commercial cookery and as a chef by trade the last one there, commercial cookery, is my favourite.

The majority of our kids come in and say they want to be in building and construction. There are more job opportunities in engineering out here in the 'west' than there are in building and construction. So there is a little bit of a 'disconnect' there. But I have a team of industry field officers on staff who run around securing opportunities for those kids in industry.

Student profile

Interviewer

Can you give us a quick overview of the student population in terms of the ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic background? Is it all from the west as well?

Andrew Williamson

Kids come to us along the train lines. So although we are based in Sunshine we have kids who come from as far out as Kilmore in the north and Sunbury in the west. We get a lot of kids from Melton, Werribee in the south and that sort of seems to be about our boundary. Though we are not zoned in any way, it's as long as the young person can make it to us.

In terms of the demographic, this area is incredibly depressed as its socio-economic status, though for us if we compared ourselves to Sunshine College that we sit next door to, we have a higher socio-economic status amongst our kids their families than Sunshine College does. And we have pondered that and I wonder whether it's because to actually step out of your school at Year 10 and seek out another school to go in to is quite a commitment and quite a brave act.

I think that there is, perhaps at the higher end of socio-economic scale, people are quite discerning about education and quite demanding of opportunity for their children, so that's quite possible.

From where our kids come from, their cultural heritage, it's a real mixed bag. From out this way we've got a number of Vietnamese kids, we've got African kids, a lot of Eastern Europeans. Out this way, these are the kids that have grown up in this mix and they are completely at ease with it. In fact it's a really nice mix of young people to be part of, it's lovely.

Interviewer

Are the majority male or you have got an even split?

Andrew Williamson

Ah, nowhere near an even split unfortunately. The trade areas that we are addressing, and those are dictated federally, tend to be traditionally male trades. And although I would argue that for a lot of those trades women can do it just as well as males, of my 120 enrolments, 6 of them are women. That's not a balance at all and we would like to address that but we haven't been able to do that yet. The first one of our students to secure a school-based apprenticeship, a young woman, she is absolutely fantastic. She is a role model.

Using e-learning

Interviewer

How do you use e-learning in your subject offerings?

Andrew Williamson

When we first started we had to set up computers and computer networks and access and we've started that process and it's been quite a slow one until we worked out what the parameters were, what we really wanted to achieve. I've been quite keen to make sure the technology does not drive the curriculum, but curriculum drives the technology.

We secured a small grant at the start of this year to run a mobile employability skills project that allows us to assess young people out in the workplace. We have purchased a number of phones, different PDAs, phones, iPhones and other different brands as well. And we're building a set of tools that can sit on those mobile devices.

When a young person goes out into industry or out to TAFE they can capture evidence. They can use the microphone and record an interview. They can use the camera and capture images, be they stills or video. They can use some of the software we have got to produce a digi-story or a small teaching item that sits on a mobile phone.

There is a lot of creativity. And initially we gave every young person here a laptop and that proved to be, it proved to be a disaster! We had a number of laptops that disappeared. We had good students who felt like they were targets when they took public transport and had a laptop bag on them. We had a lot of kids who just said 'We are not taking a laptop onto the worksite'.

If they are a carpenter going out on to a commercial worksite, they don't want to take a laptop with them. However, every one of my students has a mobile phone, everyone would have that and they would take that everywhere they go and they would be able to hide it in their pocket and not feel like they were exposed because of having that. But what we are trying to do is move their perception of that mobile phone as a communication and a social networking device through to being a communication, learning and a networking device around teaching and learning.

We set up a little action learning framework around this pilot project; it's been very well received by young people to date. We've found a lot of hiccups. It's gone slower than we've expected, but I imagine that's true for a lot of projects of this sort.

We have had to integrate our Learner Management System, our Student Management System and the mobile devices and where they actually fit into the whole thing. Our new building is fully wireless. It will allow every student who walks in with a 3G phone to tap into the network, but at the moment at the buildings we are currently located in we don't have that capacity. So there is a lot of preparatory work for what we will settle into next year.

Interviewer

When we talk about the mobile side of things, there is also the fact that it's used so much for communication, social networking. Is there any resistance to that? The other part to that is virtual communities like Facebook and MySpace. Do you use technologies like that and tools like that?

Andrew Williamson

At the moment all of our English students, for an example, have produced their own MySpace page based around the book they are reading. Our Learner Management System works in a partnership with a 'Ning' that's been developed.

So it's kind of a community space. There is a lot of work that goes on in there. Students blog their work placement details. There is a lot sort of ways of doing things that I think are very comfortable to our learners, and therefore we need to get our heads around them because they will provide us with the evidence but we have to be willing to receive it in a format that they are comfortable with. And I think that it has been a bit of a challenge to long time established teaching practice, teaching and assessment practice. But, because we are starting from scratch, we don't have an extended culture that we have to derail or break down before we actually build something new. So there is an advantage for us in that.

We have not really settled on what our curriculum is going to look like. We have got an idea now and we are working towards it, but it's 'all systems go' to get to that point. Having mobile, electronic and a reasonably centralised system allows the flexibility for our students; each student has his/her unique sort of permutation. A unique timetable that includes going out to TAFE and receiving delivery there, learning in the workplace and spending time in here with us.

Any school would tell you that the timetabling is the hardest part of their year making sure everyone's timetables fit. We've decided that no one's timetable isn't going to fit. So curriculum has to provide for that and that has been our biggest challenge. That way we can allow our stakeholders, which are employers, young people and TAFE, we can allow them to operate we will facilitate the process around it.

Interviewer

So essentially you're not finding there's a resistance to those sorts of technologies amongst young people; it's a case of this is what I already do, this is the water I swim in, and therefore there's not a sense of being invaded by any of these technologies, it's seamless.

Andrew Williamson

Largely, yes. We had more resistance to the use of laptops in classes I think than we are to the use of mobile devices. In that, we gave kids laptops, which provides a cover. So that the teacher will sit at the front of the room, for example, and be able to see the backs of all of these laptops – and we've got students sitting online gaming. The idea for us was to produce, to create something that drew the kids in and engaged them in their world. What we tried to avoid is that whole 'John Howard going on Facebook idea', which just looks like a dorky old guy. And, I think there is resentment for that.

But involving students in the development of what things look like in a very authentic way. We need to develop it from scratch. Why would we develop it in isolation from our kids? I think, has aided us in that process. They are feeding us.

Interviewer

What else makes for really engaging e-learning for young people?

Andrew Williamson

I think it has to be authentic. I think simply putting a lesson on an internet site, for example, on a website and having the student download it, but it's still a screen on text doesn't engage or enthrall anyone. What we have endeavoured to do is look at the ways young people learn and I said before most of our learners are kinaesthetic learners, there needs to be doing. They need to be engaging with it. Not just asked to do something that's completely abstract. What we've heard from our students about their learning experiences in the past is that they are unhappy with abstract learning. They don't understand why they need to learn it.

And when it comes to the crunch and they are in a post-compulsory sphere they are not formally required to be at school anymore. A lot of them, if they were given the option to go out and earn money in an apprenticeship or stay in school and not earn money, they'd go the apprenticeship, they'd go out and we need to actually show them the relevance of their learning. We need to involve them in the generation of evidence not prescribe it. Though we have found that if you push that too far they turn back on you and say, 'Look, that's your job, you're the teacher'. So there's a fine line and sometimes you have to play that line a little bit.

Virtual revolution: An interview with Aaron Pont

Aaron Pont is Project Leader/Educational Designer with Flex:Ed at the Canberra Institute of Technology where he oversees work on Edu-Versal Studios, a virtual world learning environment that allows students to 'visit' a nursing ward. Aaron talks about the development of Edu-Versal Studios and the likely effect of virtual worlds on the future of education.

Interviewer

Aaron, could you tell us a bit about yourself and your role at Flex:Ed at the Canberra Institute of Technology?

Aaron Pont

Sure. Flex:Ed drives quality and excellence in flexible learning at Canberra Institute of Technology by helping teachers develop and implement innovative flexible learning solutions for their students. My role is to provide leadership and the implementation of practical, relevant and timely solutions to problems associated with education delivery. We are focused on implementing Web 2.0 technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience. I've been in the information technology industry since 1983 and have been an early adopter of innovative emerging technologies from the outset. In the recent years I have developed a keen interest in the technical and pedagogical issues surrounding virtual worlds with a keen interest in developing deeply immersive, highly engaging and fun virtual worlds. I also enjoy inspiring and leading other like-minded educationalists and selling the concept of virtual worlds to industry.

Interviewer

Many *Knowledge Tree* readers would be familiar with the online virtual world 'Second Life', but for those who may not be aware, what is a virtual world?

Aaron Pont

A virtual world is a computer program that recreates three dimensional objects, such as the ground, sky, water, buildings, trees, cars, animals and humans. These objects can move as they would in the real world. You can also talk to other people using voice communication or just using text. Your alternate self is called an avatar. Your avatar can engage with other objects like a car, turn the pages of a book, swim in the pool. Anything you want to emulate from the real world. As you say most people have heard probably of Second Life. A virtual world that is meant to represent the real world including its own financial system.

Interviewer

What is the concept behind Edu-Versal Studios? How does it apply virtual world technology for learning?

Aaron Pont

Virtual worlds like Edu-Versal Studios provide people with the time and space to engage in deeply immersive experiences with other people or with pre-programmed objects. The idea is to provide an experience that closely approximates the real world **not** replaces the real world. It is a space where people have the opportunity to replicate real world scenarios that would otherwise be too costly, dangerous or otherwise impractical in reality. It also provides a valuable interaction environment where communication skills, client interaction and team building exercises can be modelled and practised. For our project, we would be using a virtual world engine called 'Croquet'. We like this over and above any other because it has its genesis within an educational context. It was designed to be used for educational purposes and also has a huge range of in-built functions that make it superior over any other virtual world.

These functions include the ability for anyone to drag and drop images, objects, spreadsheets, documents and web browsers in world. This means that users can be working with a wide range of tools as part of the collaboration process with other users in world. You can also have a voice conversation, text chat and also teleport in between worlds. It is also a free and open source and a huge international team behind it are very keen to see Edu-Versal Studios launch as it will be one of the best examples of Croquet in production. There are other excellent examples of using Croquet such as the commercially available Qwaq (qwaq.com) and Edusim3D (edusim.com) which is designed for primary school children using interactive whiteboards. Virtual worlds are new and are a little confusing to a lot of people, so we see Edu-Versal Studios as a space for teachers and students to play, learn and develop.

By play we mean you will be invited to come to Edu-Versal Studios and just play with what is there. Press buttons, turn things on, learn how to move around, use the voice chat, play movies, browse the web and generally just get comfortable with working within an online environment and learning how to use it. Then with learn you will be invited to work with an educational designer and learn how a virtual world can be used in your particular teaching area. You will get the opportunity to work with someone who knows how a virtual world can be best be used. Then with develop you will get the opportunity to continue working with an educational designer as well as a team of programming developers who will make these objects, scripts, avatars and equipment and all the other objects in world for you to trial and evaluate. Part of the deal is that your creation stays in Edu-Versal Studios as an example to other teachers and developers to get them to get inspiration from. You get to copy out your space to your own environment if you want to.

Interviewer

Are there any limits to the use of virtual worlds in education and training?

Aaron Pont

No there are no limits and here are some more examples. A virtual job interview. Imagine having pre-programmed avatars in a meeting room interviewing you for a job. This gives you the opportunity to trial your responses to real or sample questions based on the selection criteria. The interviewers do not get to see your replies as it's only for the interviewees to practise and to calm themselves down before the real thing. Another one is virtual hallucination. Now this has been created already in Second Life and it is a space where you can experience what it is like to have a schizophrenic attack. This is an extreme example of how deeply immersive worlds can be very unsettling. Theoretically if you can think of it, it can be done in the virtual world.

Interviewer

How do virtual worlds advantage younger Gen Y learners?

Aaron Pont

Most students are not able to visit actual sites like hospitals wards, steel smelter or nuclear power station, they just wouldn't be able to get access to these places. Virtual worlds provide an insight into that workplace that is difficult for those learners to experience. For instance 'Nurse for a day' is an example of a generic nursing ward that provides young learners with the opportunity to engage with people, equipment and procedures and replications of a real world environment. There is an existing virtual world out there called 'America's Army' and you can go online to look it up (americasarmy.com) and it's a game developed between a gaming company and the US military as a tool for potential recruits to judge for themselves if the US military is for them. As the website states, it's a game to provide civilians with an insight into soldiering from the barracks to the battlefields and is used by the US military recruitment organisation to filter out people to whom it would not suit and to identify people who would be good in the armed forces. This program has been running since 2002, so it's certainly of great value to them for them to better maintain it for this long. Online worlds can provide valuable input into a person's decision-making process by providing people with near perfect reconstructions of real environments and experiences of life in the workplace and opportunities to explore the nature of an industry sector simply by being there. It's so much better than a brochure.

Interviewer

What features of the trial nursing ward in Edu-Versal Studios are likely to be especially engaging to better audiences including Gen Y learners?

Aaron Pont

One of my favourites is the condition cabinet. This will be a real cabinet within the ward. Inside that cabinet will be hundreds of little vials with conditions that patients can have such as pregnancy, typhoid, heart attack, recovering after a knee surgery, geriatric conditions, just about anything you would like. What you do is you grab one of those little vials, drink it and voilà your avatar takes on the condition. It also takes on the physical attributes of those conditions, you will also get a little popup window that tells you that you have a temperature, you have aches, dizziness, etc so whatever it is that relates to that condition so that you can tell other visiting nurses how you're feeling. Not only that your avatar body will take on all the symptoms, all the visual symptoms. So imagine getting that close to a condition that would be very exciting.

Interviewer

It is presumed that a majority of Gen Y learners are engaged by virtual world environments but is this true?

Aaron Pont

We do presume that younger people are more willing or interested and adept at using computers. This is not the case. In the uptake of the virtual worlds by Gen Y or more commonly known as Gen Whatever is about the same for all other age groups. There is probably a similar ratio of Gen Whatever to Gen X that use Web 2.0 technologies. So the uptake I would consider to be very similar and we do presume that there are more young people who are more willing to take this on than others which in my experience is not necessarily the case.

Interviewer

Is there a tension between the online environments young adults use for social interactions than those they are prepared to use for education?

Aaron Pont

Yes. There is a tension for those young learners who sometimes feel annoyed that us oldies are invading their territory. We have taken over Facebook and Flickr with annoying baby photos, trips to Europe and house renovations whereas they have been using it to because with each other and chat and share things, etc. Where it will get interesting is when young people are using the gaming environment for learning. Will they fall into the shoot them up mode and treat the world as a place space or will they take the skills developed using gaming environments and instead adapt them to positive and productive learning. This hasn't been fully explored but some positive research from Edusim3D points to Year 7 children fully engaged in learning exercises without distractions leading researchers to believe that the transition from entertainment to education will be understood and respected by young learners.

The interesting thing is that the average age of virtual world users is about 20 something to 30 something with very few younger people. I'm not so worried about the age issue so much as the gender and equity issues. I feel that girls and women will benefit from the use of virtual worlds because they don't have to compete with boys for attention, access to resources or making valid contributions to class exercises.

Interviewer

What are your thoughts about virtual worlds and educators duty of care to young learners?

Aaron Pont

This is of paramount importance in the education sector. If there is one student under the age of 18 then all of them are under 18. We will be implementing processes to block people who have not been invited to this space. Users of this space will not be allowed to have a handle and must use their full names. This gives the managers of the space who are employees of a VET sector organisation the opportunity to deal with issues that arise. Many teachers have asked me questions like what do you do when situation X arises? We advocate the same classroom management practices that are already in place. Just because it is a virtual world does not mean students or others can play up. Edu-Versal Studios is an excursion and students are expected to behave as they would in real life.

Interviewer

Do virtual worlds offer specific benefits in the Australian VET system context?

Aaron Pont

Yes. There is an immediate engagement and immersion. Following on from the trial conducted by GippsTAFE we are looking at deepening and extending the levels of engagement and immersion by developing rich learning experiences based on real world situations. GippsTAFE conducted a trial in Second Life using their own island. Students and teachers role-played a scenario where a group of people with special needs were taken on a day trip to the park. Each participant took on a role of a client or the coordinator. Each person nearly had to act out behaviours of their client. What they found was the incredible level of engagement of each of the participants. They all recorded exceptional levels of engagement, emotional attachment to their avatars and a great sense of achievement in experiencing the life of another person. It was so successful that they are conducting another one this year. The ability to combine visual learning settings provides the learner the opportunity to encounter many more learning experiences in one situation. To use the per squared metre analogy where the learning is exposed to tens of experiences per squared metre above what could happen in any other type of setting. For example, if class students were taken for a walk through a real nursing ward not much would happen except for the teacher pointing to things that equates to about two experiences per squared metre – not much.

However, in a virtual world exact replicas of situations, events, issues and procedures can be enacted not just for a class but for individuals as well. That equates to tens and potentially hundreds of experiences per squared metre. Role-play becomes more meaningful in the virtual world. In a classroom students and teachers are easily distracted by personalities, social interactions and the fact that the room may not replicate the environment at all. Not only that it takes a very good actor to take on a role of which there are not many. Normally shy people are more at ease in the virtual world and those that steal the limelight are subsumed by the huge range of interactions they can have. And for the serious educators and researchers out there virtual worlds are constructivists' theory heaven if you consider such things as emotional connection to content leads to better retention. Players often learn from collaboration with other more experienced players, etc.

The simple act of doing something rather than being lectured to enhances cognitive activity. Legitimate peripheral participation in authentic activities can be just as valuable as doing it yourself in the real world. This is also tied to Situated Learning.

Interviewer

What are some ways in which Edu-Versal Studios might be used in the RPL process?

Aaron Pont

We believe that a use of virtual world in conjunction with an E-portfolio could facilitate a richer medium in which people can demonstrate skills attitudes and knowledge as part of the RPL process.

Imagine the 'Nurse for a day' as a RPL process. Someone who has had experience in caring for people wants to test the idea of being a nurse. Through a rich experience in a world they can achieve elements of competencies by conducting selected assessment items. They could then be given opportunities to explore other avenues within the sector, they did or did not achieve certain outcomes. The possibilities are endless.

Interviewer

What are your future plans and directions for Edu-Versal Studios?

Aaron Pont

The Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) in Canberra is our developer partner in this project. We see the value in developing closer relationships with organisations like AIE as we are able to provide real benefits to students such as development projects like this. Not only that the education sector does not have to have IT skilled staff to develop and manage the environment. I would personally like to see a Diploma in Virtual Worlds Development that integrates CIT and AIE as we do already with other courses. Students will have the opportunity to work on live projects, work closely with industry and develop virtual worlds with each teaching section of CIT. After that, the world is our oyster.

Perspectives on youth and e-learning

This dynamic panel discussion features the perspectives of Harriet Wakelam (WA), Georgina Nou (SA), Simon Du Bois (NSW) and Tim Davies (UK) on youth and e-learning. Harriet Wakelam, Manager of Educational Technology at West Coast TAFE, Joondalup, uses a collection of Web 2.0 tools and social networking sites to communicate with, engage, and inspire her learners, including young learners. She especially offers her views on accessibility issues of internet-based technologies within TAFEs, and an educator's duty of care towards young learners.

Georgina Nou provides insights from her wealth of experience in using e-learning with Indigenous young people and remote learners from NT and SA. A couple of the fascinating projects with which she is currently involved include developing e-learning units for a Diploma of Interpreting course for speakers of Pitjantjatjara, and an Alice Springs digital tourism project which explores Second Life as a means of promoting Parks and Wildlife cultural and heritage sites, especially the Telegraph Station.

Simon Du Bois, Program Coordinator/Counsellor of the Byron Youth Service (NSW), has used e-learning in providing alternative educational pathways for disengaged youth and youth with mental health issues. And Tim Davies, from Leicester, UK, is a Gen Y blogger, academic and consultant on 'Practical Participation'. He offers interesting perspectives on informal learning and the use of social media technologies to empower young people as decision-makers and proponents of social change.

This panel discussion ranges from questions to do with the 'how' of engaging young people through e-learning, to presumptions we can make about their learning, tensions between Web 2.0 'fun' learning and more formal learning, access and duty of care issues, and the potential of the use of online technologies beyond formal learning and training. It concludes with ideas from the panellists about possible future developments in e-learning for young people.

Cathy Baxter

Welcome everyone to *The Knowledge Tree*. Today we have brought together a panel of educators and those involved in working with youths to discuss some perspectives in engaging Generation Y or young learners in e-learning. We can make a start by getting everyone on the panel to introduce themselves.

Harriet Wakelam

Hi, I'm Harriet Wakelam. I'm the Manager of Educational Technology at West Coast TAFE in WA. I work a lot with strategies to increase the use of technology with young learners. Previously I have worked with people like Telstra and a lot of work out in remote Pilbara.

Simon Du Bois

Hi, my name is Simon Du Bois. I'm in Byron Bay and work for a community-based organisation called Byron Youth Service. Principally we are an alternative education pathway for young people who have left the education system early.

Georgina Nou

I'm Georgina Nou and yes I have known Harriet because we both have had some contact with Indigenous education. I work predominantly online with people in central Australia specifically this year with Arnhem people in the north west of South Australia, the APY land. I work across a range of platforms like Moodle and Elluminate and Second Life and as well as that I have worked for several years with young people in Alice Springs in an internet café and again are very disengaged with schooling and any formal education.

Tim Davies

Hi, I'm Tim Davies. I'm based in Oxford, UK. I'm an independent researcher and consultant. My background is in young people's participation, getting young people involved in decision-making. The last year we have been doing a lot of work around how the government funded youth service here and informal education services can use technology and in particular use the technologies that are already out there to engage young people in learning and to empower young people to change things.

Cathy Baxter

Can each of you just tell us a little bit more about your current work including the young people that you have taught or worked with over the years?

Harriet Wakelam

Two things which I have done which has been education and now increasingly recently multimedia and technology have merged and much of the work I've done has been about finding new ways to encourage young people in particular disengaged people to engage with technology. I have run projects such as hip hop in the bush where we use video conferencing with hip hop trainers to encourage children in the communities to use video conferencing equipment that was out there. I suppose for me a lot of the strategies I use with the young people that we work with are a lot about linking them up to other generations instead of keeping them segregated. What we found is that technology is a great way to allow people to create personal learning networks that allows them to have contact with people they might not otherwise have because I think these days in education and in the workplace we are very segregated in terms of generation groups.

Simon Du Bois

One of the things I have mentioned about Byron Youth Service, about three maybe almost four years ago now that we introduced a computer lab to our organisation so we now have 10 access points for the young people to use computers and associate them with the internet. That has been very interesting because it encourages young people to come here and use that technology and they use it in ways that they really like particularly with social forums, YouTube and gaming and through that their self-initiated participation we have looked for ways that we can build on that and engage them in other forms, forms of learning that may support them in their personal development.

Georgina Nou

For quite some years I was working in the internet café much the same as Simon is talking about there where they've got a computer access point. We had 16 computers there. We had young people from the town camps in Alice Springs and people who had come visiting Alice Springs from many of the communities. We also had a tandem program called Youth Out Bush and they went to remote communities and did a lot of multimedia work with people taking videos going out bush, doing audios and podcasts of bands and things like that and put them up on the site 'Deadly mob'. More recently I have continued on with that work and now working on a range of projects in the APY lands, again with Indigenous people and a lot of them quite young.

I have been co-designing the Indigenous Diploma of Interpreting for online as well as face to face and a lot of the people who are doing that are looking at becoming interpreters because there is an enormous shortage in South Australia and so that in itself is quite a justice issue. A lot of people, things going wrong there.

As well I'm working on projects where we've got lecturers' assistants who are working with TAFE staff and just developing tools and introducing them to some Web 2.0 tools and things like that, that they can use doing Audacity, working with Photoshop and doing simple video editing, and we are working towards collecting a virtual library which is another project so that people out bush who now are having some access at least in the APY land, that's a big issue for us and will come up a bit later, that they can actually access material, engaging material that has been actually developed for Indigenous people in Australia, things like 'Deadly Bay: Open for Work', Overdrive that are very engaging hands-on activities for people to do out bush.

Tim Davies

In my workplace I don't often get to work long-term with groups of young people but I do get to work with small groups for maybe one-off sessions or for longer term getting young people to influence policy or decision-making so interestingly those groups can often be really diverse from young people who are excluded from school or involved in criminal justice systems to the young people who are on the gifted and talented programs trying to get those groups to work together on budgets or decide on things and really what we have been starting to explore is how in those sorts of projects can we keep a group in touch and keep them learning, keep them exploring, keep them in conversation and dialogue between maybe the two residential when they meet together in a project. And I'm also looking at how we can reach out to wider groups of young people who we may never get to meet face to face but to get their input into quite complex policies decisions where we really need to get people to learn about the issues and be informed before we ask for them to state definitive views but we need to make sure we're also not imposing a set of sort of obvious views on young people and really engaging them in that way so those the two settings I have been starting to explore.

Cathy Baxter

There are lots of different ways you all have indicated how you are engaging youth in e-learning but is there anything that has struck you as something that has been particularly successful in actually engaging young learners in e-learning, including disengaged and marginalised or disadvantaged young people. Is there one thing that you would just like to highlight in particular?

Georgina Nou

One of the things that I have used with a lot of Indigenous people and young Indigenous people who often are people who have not engaged with the mainstream education system at all and may be involved in petrol sniffing, a range of other things and also have that whole shame factor that people here who are living in Australia and have worked with Indigenous people know is an issue when Indigenous people come face to face sometimes. I just get people with something in their hands, get them working, have a camera and show them an application, show them a little bit and then leave them to work so having a lot of really engaging websites, being resourceful in that way has been really good but often start with cameras and get people to take photos, bring them in and then just slowly work.

A lot of these people have not had any access at all to computers so we go through all those basic things. One particular project that we worked on was called Deadly Soundscapes. I don't know whether it is similar to the one you were talking about Harriet but it was a project and you fed into it so that in fact the people worked in little groups, they wrote a song, they went into Carmel which is an Alice Springs media base where they could record, had a few musicians to kind of give them help, then worked on record covers so looked at Photoshop using images that they had made and constructed and really in the end then did a performance from beginning to end through probably six weeks, something like that, so that kind of project work where you are working towards something and with people is something I found really really helpful.

Simon Du Bois

Probably the most engaging platform we have used at Byron Youth Service with young people for several projects is actually MySpace. I think simply the reason why that has been so successful is because it is the most popular social forum networking tool that our young people use. We have used it for quite a number of things. We have run fashion design courses and young people have used their MySpace site as a business platform where they've uploaded images and so forth of their clothing and advertised it. The Byron Community Campus which is an alternative schooling opportunity for young people who are completing Year 10 through TAFE have used MySpace platform to upload work and obviously particularly in stuff they are doing in literature with poems and stories. Also they have used MySpace for events organising and events management. Obviously using it as a place to advertise the actual event but using it also for the young people who are organising the event to be in communication and work towards it so, MySpace has had a very central role in the education and encouraging young people to use a social platform in a very positive way because unfortunately it can be used in quite negative ways too.

Harriet Wakelam

I think that it is interesting that you are talking about MySpace as I put in a statistic in the side bar at the conference last week. I think that for me the main successes in engagement have been very much like Georgina said about people being allowed to be self-directed in the way they use technology given that there are so many different ways allowing people to actually use technology as a window to what they want to express so the access to information as a way of being able to tell new stories. We also run something we ripped off from Apple with the genius bar idea. You provide support to people with technology, particularly in the areas of technology, on a one on one basis so you build up relationships face to face with them that can then be carried on in the online space. For example, you might meet with them for an hour to help them do photography work and again like Georgina we find that we start a lot with photography and then to continue that relationship in an online space then we use a number of different tools for that depending on preferences. Some of it might be MSN, some of it might be MySpace, Facebook, bebo, those kinds of tools but I think that the biggest thing of all is allowing the young people that we are working with to be the expert and allow us to be sorts of small snippets of information to support them in the journey they take and it has been complicated applying that within a quite formalised education environment.

Tim Davies

I think that is the key and the one thing I have found always crucial is engaging young people in the design of whatever you are going to do so starting from where young people are which in many youth centres sections here its MySpace or bebo.com at the moment but it is rapidly moving so we've got to start each project by looking at which sites, which spaces, which tools are young people engaging with but also in the formal education start from the tools young people are using and maybe see what's the natural progression, what's the thing which gets them to then develop their skills further and build on the foundations they've got and better to try to always have that face to face first contact to move onto the online where that is possible because that really helps support the community building and a sense of working with other people in most cases.

Cathy Baxter

I'm wondering what your thoughts are to do with the fact that I mean do you think that there is a presumption that a majority of Generation Y learners will be engaged by internet-based technologies? What are your thoughts about this?

Harriet Wakelam

A flexible learning framework project last year to look at engaging young people with technology and there were a group of disengaged youth that we did the project with and we had a lovely trip where we had a whole bunch of different technologies that they were allowed to pick from to learn and we took a trip out where we were going to record some footage, some interviews. They had all of that information planned. They took a whole bunch of different footage and they were actually quite excited by the project and we got back to the college. The next day we came into work with the footage and there was chaos. There were people that had forgotten their USB sticks, they had forgotten which camera it was on or it was on their mum's camera and the memory card had been wiped, they had forgotten what it had been called and what it really highlighted for me was that there is a lack of those really core digital literacies in the classroom, and what we did we ended up laughing about it and we said well you know we've got a successful project here and they laughed and they said we think we have to be more organised. So it was both an example that they might be good at technology but they don't know how to use the technology to learn, and also the underpinning collective strategies that you need to be able to create good learning media, which is that you need to think about different file formats and places to store them and I think simple things like organising folders even people when they came to work the keyboard and they weren't great at typing and we looked at putting in some typing software for them and just some simple things that underpinned the creativity and allowed them to get on with the creativity without worrying about those core skills and I noticed even with my nine-year-old at school that they're starting to use technology, but they're not teaching those core literacies and they're not keyboard literate and often a lot of stress and disengagement with technology I think comes from students who feel that they are supposed to be good at something and they aren't.

Tim Davies

Something I have been seeing recently which is quite interesting when we look at internet-based technologies is from young people who just aren't interested because they've not seen the possibilities or the backlash we have seen in terms of safety and fears recently means some young people are being turned off by parents setting very strict rules that limit their use entirely particularly the young people I have seen that would be the case and this is mainly anecdotal at the moment and we haven't got the data yet but are young people from low income, more excluded backgrounds which is a real challenge to work with in that case.

Simon Du Bois

I'm finding this question difficult to answer I mean based on day-to-day observations at Byron Youth Service we are constantly dragging young people out of the computer lab because they're in a social forum or they're watching short video clips on YouTube or they're gaming and there should be somewhere else within the organisation they should be learning something else so I certainly presume that they want to do those sorts of things. Also one of the roles I have at Byron Youth Service is as a counsellor and often I'm talking to parents who are highly concerned about the amount of time that their kids are spending on the internet. So I don't know whether it is the majority but there is certainly many of the young people that in my sphere naturally gravitate towards those sorts of internet-based technologies. Our interest constantly is trying to apply that interest and getting those sorts of mediums into a broader education which might support them in a vocational way if not a more personal way as well.

Georgina Nou

I just wanted to say I guess for Indigenous people in the centre and in remote communities they have no access generally speaking to computers, certainly at home. This is going to be very different to the east coast and to people who live in the towns but the people I am working with and there is a large number of those people who have no access to the internet and have no access to computers so when they actually do get to a computer because it is such a wonderfully visual, audio, facial environment and especially when you start looking at programs like Second Life and things like that where you are looking at virtual worlds is just such a wonderful environment that they feel very comfortable and do very well in because spatially they remember. If I show someone how to get into Photoshop, how to do filters, they remember and so they just love that and I cannot really say in the hundreds of kids that I have worked with throughout those years that I have met maybe two or something that have not wanted to do something. I think it is a motivational thing too for the person who is working with them.

Tim Davies

This is just making me think that there's two factors in there. One is the draw of technology but also as we are exploring how we often train young people and support young people in technology, we really do give quite a one-to-one support or really showing people how to do things and partly just that valuing young people and giving them that attention in learning whatever the setting is, is really key to engaging them and making sure that they are engaged by that sort of technology is drawing young people's attention and certainly we see that across settings but also we tend to respond to it in the way we then support young people in different ways. It also has an impact on how engaged they can be.

Cathy Baxter

Simon I noticed that you said that young people you felt sort of naturally gravitated to some of the new technologies but the thing that educators such as yourself and youth workers are trying to do in many cases is to make sure that they are going into broader education pathways. I'm wondering and please feel free for everyone to answer this question, I'm wondering whether there is a bit of tension between Web 2.0 sort of fun learning and more formal online learning environments? I mean do you feel that there is a tension between what really young people are prepared to use for their social interactions and what they are actually prepared to use for learning and education?

Harriet Wakelam

I think that this is really interesting conversation that is going on a lot in blogs and at the moment I'm in the middle of the micro blogging tools exactly about these types of things and I think that the argument is that I think these students are looking for some. I think that the tools out there, until we actually integrate these tools and stop looking at one as learning and one as being fun, that we are able to fully use the potential of some of the e-learning work that we do. I think part of the whole benefit of it is that you can make something fun but we shouldn't be in the business anymore of teaching information, we should be about teaching students how to link, how to collect information and how to negotiate website information and if doing that is about using a video and following a link and following a chain of information through the web then I think fun starts to become learning and learning fun. I know this is absolutely a surface level statement but I would like to put it out to people that I think we have to change our own opinions as educators from the difference between fun and learning because I don't think it is one that Gen Y make for themselves.

Georgina Nou

Yes I agree Harriet and I think if learning is fun, I mean how often do you hear that, if learning is fun, it's going to be engaging, it's going to be motivating and people are going to remember those experiences and want to go back to them and want to build on them. As I said it is not an issue at all with what I'm doing. I think that in Second Life the whole experience is fun except for certain frustrations and you know because probably of the novelty value of it in the first instance but in fact if people who have the job of educating get in and find how that particular environment best support the learning that they want to see happen for the students and the things that students want to learn, then the whole thing works together and it's fun and very educational.

Tim Davies

I think that there definitely are two tensions that come up and I think one is about when we see Web 2.0 at spaces like the MySpaces, Facebooks, these large social spaces. I was at a conference on Friday where two young people inputting internet just stood up and said don't come near our Facebook, it's our space and it's not for you adults to get involved in, this is our space for our interactions with friends. Now that shouldn't be taken as a 'we shouldn't get involved there at all' but if these are very big spaces, spaces like a whole town or city where there may be a right space for education but we have also got to respect the voluntary principle in that space that young people can have their own spaces for friendships which is then that other tension which is that Web 2.0 tools aren't fun tools, they're social tools and that's what the bit which really engages young people and attracts adolescents at a period of real engagement with your peers where peers are really important, where you are discovering who you are in that social interaction and often what we've done in school settings and formal education settings for years is try and limit people's social interaction with their peers whilst they are learning.

In formal education always try to work with peer groups but it can often be a lot more challenging to take the energy of a peer group and move forward with that. So there are some real tensions there between where in those social spaces, where in those Web 2.0 spaces should we be as educators, as participation people, as informal educators and how do we deal with the fact that we are taking down the boundaries between the people who were in the classrooms, were in the educational settings and their whole social networks beyond and interact with those just with professional hats and maybe be charged with working in particular in geographical areas or with particular groups of young people.

Harriet Wakelam

I think there is a lot of things of issue there. I'm quite interested in the semantic web type technologies to filter out information that people are generally looking for. I was looking at a new browser the other day which works visually to represent connections between words and spaces and I think that tension to me seems to come down to again that difference between private and personal. I heard a quote once that was saying for anyone born supposedly in Gen Y everything was public and that they specifically made it private but whereas the generations before everything was private and unless they specifically made it public. So I think that we are working in spaces where that line between private and public is becoming thinner and as you say the challenge for us as educators is to work out not to crush people's spaces and not to try and go in jumping with our boots on but to be able to use some of the tools that this generation use comfortably, to be able to access lumps of information and to show them how to build networks. Most people do it instinctively in their social world but they don't know how to do it in their professional world. If we use Web 2.0 to show people how to build personal learning networks based on their areas of interest, their subject and to bring in a wider group than just their social friends then I think that's actually the power of this and then it just becomes not so much an issue of you're in my space or you're not in my space but more how can I use this for me, how can I make my own interpretation of what's out there.

Simon Du Bois

There have been lots of really good points made but I think there is only a tension between fun learning and boring formal online learning. I mean really this is where creativity is central to formal online learning. I don't know whether online learning stays formal once it has a creative element to it that allows people to engage in not only a personal way but in a way that has meaning for them and stirs something inside of you. I was kind of thinking about things that I have found and got young people to engage with online in relation to counselling and I was thinking of a website called Reach Out and they have a comedy behaviour program called Reach Out Central and I just thought this was really an e-learning engagement in terms of personal development particularly in terms of cognitive development. This is the perfect example of employing creativity to engage people through it, through an engaging platform to inspire self-reflection by doing personal improvement. I think it's those sorts of things that really melt away the sort of tension that we have been talking about.

Cathy Baxter

Just thinking about that idea of personal reflection and so on and creativity, I know Tim that you have been involved in using some of the technologies including the Web 2.0 sorts of sites and social networking and social media technologies to sort of give youth a voice, encouraging their creativity and particularly perhaps empowering their participation in society. Could you talk to us a little bit more about that line of work that you have been involved in?

Tim Davies

There is pretty much two elements to it. One is using technologies in physical settings with young people to give a platform to their voice so simple things we have been doing recently like handing out video cameras to groups who've not used them before with a question taped to the back, sending them off to interview their peers and bring that information back. So historically when we've done youth engagement it would normally be an adult asking the questions of young people because we needed to get the answers recorded in a space that set up a power differential because the adult was there with the clipboard. If you picture that sort of setting slightly exaggerated but by giving young people technology and getting them to interact with their peers and record young people's views far more authentically which we can then just work with some young people to record and write up or even use that video footage to show to

decision-makers later on. We are able to really get more authentic views from young people so that has been one thread and the other thread has been about sort of large online consultation with young people so not as deeply participative as we'd like it to be but looking at say a workforce development, a really dull issue for even the adults, certainly not the most engaging thing to look at with a group of 13 to 19-year-olds and also quite complex.

So what we wanted to look at was how can we give young people in five minutes or ten minutes of engagement we've got with people some resources to make a sensible decision in the consultation questions that we have been asked to ask so we developed a very very basic online game to select your dream team of managers for your youth centre with lots of information built into the game so people learn without realising we are putting those inputs in there so without it being the read long list of information about all these different settings. Unfortunately it is not online anymore as it was a really short-term project. I'm going to try to write it up again soon. So we have been exploring this but we are at the early stages of that and certainly I've already been picking up ideas from people this morning of things we should explore more.

Cathy Baxter

In relation to duty of care for young learners, first of all what sorts of policies would you advocate in relation to that duty of care and the other thought, and this is going back to thinking about Web 2.0 sites and their use, how do you think we can educate young learners about the risk and rewards of using the internet and especially those Web 2.0 types of sites?

Harriet Wakelam

This is something that fascinates me particularly as I'm involved in dealing with this on a daily basis. For me it's about, I heard someone and can't remember the person they were talking about, security and online security and the fact that they were saying that these days the risks are coming from so many different directions and the risks are so there we can't hope to have an organisational response to protecting people that what we can do as an organisation is to help people develop their own senses of responsibility. We have a project running currently here in WA with Christchurch Grammar and with ourselves.

And we are looking at blogging as a tool that we are using but we are looking at not having things blocked and we are looking at an integral part of the program is about constantly looking at who you as a writer, as a content creator and a consumer of content and the responsibilities that you have to behave responsibly in that environment that yes this is the joys and the wonders of what we can all do with this technology but to do that as individuals we need to learn that we have to make choices and that yes there are bad choices and good choices and I think that particular education centres have become very used to a bureaucratic type approach to security where we say 'it's off limits don't use it, don't go there' and to me that blanket decision is blocking off too much of the good stuff and I don't think it's working and I think that we can see with the Australian nanny protector that what was the record, 20 minutes I think it took a kid to break into that and to hack through it. And of course if you set up challenges and you invite people, to say that 'You can't go there' of course they are going to try harder to get in. If we open stuff up and teach people their individual responsibilities, it can work. And just quickly on that, we are experimenting with some core bandwidth. So a class gets an amount of bandwidth for a project. And if one person takes that bandwidth away and use it all themselves by downloading videos, personal videos, then the rest of the group suffers and they lose that until its renewed two weeks later. And that leads to a lot of peer pressure on people to do the right thing. I think there are constructive things that we can deal with security and duty of care without actually pulling the doors down.

Simon Du Bois

Yeah, look, in terms of that, Byron Youth Service probably follows a sort of philosophical and practical approach as you've just outlined. One of the bigger issues that we've had with social platforms particularly being in a smaller community is one associated with cyber bullying, which can jump out of cyberspace and end up as a very physical altercation. We almost had one here at the youth service today. Youth workers and people working in these sorts of environments being aware of these sorts of issues and being, I guess equipped to address those issues, we are able to move into a specific and I guess personalised space in which a moral and ethical discussion can happen with that young person or those young people. And that's really how educationally it occurs. It occurs in a real-world context and it occurs within the context of real life events. Certainly, it's not easy. But, I think it's actually encouraging young people and the people working with them to actually engage in a real way. And to actually think about these things in a critical and real way too. Moral and ethical issues are not 'cut and dried' they're not as cut and dried as having something that blocks particular things which can be overridden in a short period of time.

Georgina Nou

Yeah, we had a very similar thing when we work in an internet café or even out in communities, where you've got a range of people using the computers and there is a really strong social sense of responsibility towards family and young kids and things like that. And so again, we are of the opinion to try and encourage people to use that responsibility because other people are going to be using those computers. So acknowledging the fact there is that stuff there, you need to deal with it in a really responsible way.

Tim Davies

The work I've just been doing, just publishing a report on youth work and social networking and that we were making the argument that it's key for educators, for responsible professionals to be engaging in these spaces to make them safe, so that there are people for young people to talk to if they've got issues or challenges. So particularly looking at the MySpaces and Facebooks. Right now if the situation is young people are accessing that by circumventing the blocks, if they come up against anything which makes they are uncomfortable with which they need to talk about, they won't go to the youth centre staff right now because they were illegitimately accessing it. They feel they'll be the ones getting in trouble. Rather than if we can get over having everything limited and be able to, as Simon was certainly saying, talk with the young people about the issues as they come up, that's key. But also to have the workers and staff engaging in those online spaces themselves, so they are there understanding the spaces and young people can talk to them about issues they face or they can spot issues that need to be addressed by personal and social development support rather than technological fixes.

Georgina Nou

One of the things that is happened out in communities is that there's been computers there and even in some places internet access but computers have been put in back cupboards, because no one wants to do the monitoring. And in a lot of Aboriginal communities there have been issues at different times with dodgy sites and stuff like that and so I think that's true you know, the staff who are working need to have a 'hand-on' approach and be part of it. Much the same as if you were in a laboratory. You are not just going to leave people to play with the Bunsen burners and stuff. You've got to be part of that and just because the computer is often a person-to-computer activity, you need to have a sense of monitoring and being there and being part of the network circles as Tim is talking about.

Cathy Baxter

I'd like us to turn to our final point now. And this is to do with future developments in e-learning for young people. What do you see as some exciting possible future developments in using online technologies to engage young people, both for formal and informal learning.

Harriet Wakelam

I think the biggest problem is probably bandwidth and know this is a much bigger problem than the government is going to fix immediately but really until we have good, fast bandwidth, then the small experiments that we are running in virtual worlds, the types of video intensive things that we want to do are simply just not going to be possible. And to me as well, a different, then new approaches to security and to connectivity and the idea that, these are core skills for employability. I think it was the Framework again that published a report stating that it was the soft skills, that skills and information could be taught to anybody but it was the soft skills of being able to integrate, to connect, and to find information relevant to the workplace in this age of information overload, were core skills. So I think bandwidth followed by skills in the ability to build networks and to source information outside traditional school or education environment.

Tim Davies

I would love to say that the development we'll see will be the complete changing in the blocking regimes that most are faced with. I don't know how optimistic to be about that in the short term but I certainly think we need a lot more action to innovate there. To remove the blockages, both the bandwidth blockage and the filters that are set up at the moment so that we can enable a lot more e-learning, e-participation, e-engagement. The development I'm most interested in right now is the mobile phone and mobile platforms for young people, engaging how we're designing and using that. And also, pervasive computing. We are having rapid investment in youth centres in the UK and we are really hopeful that it's not going to be just large ITC labs, but actually that computing will be built in to the environment and the e-learning will be in the space as well as on the small screen, either on the mobile phone in the pocket or at home. So there's some real space there for exciting developments but what shape they take I'm not quite sure.

Simon Du Bois

Some exciting development I would certainly hope to see and talking about our local region we have two large high schools that look after Byron Shire and I think we are on the verge of seeing a generational shift in teachers at both of these schools.

The Steiner schools in our area are probably the more progressive when it comes to the implementation of digital and Web 2.0. So I think when we see a teaching generation that will open up the possibilities to the young learners that already have access to interesting capacities with these sorts of technologies we'll really see I guess a flourishing in what's possible in this area.

Georgina Nou

Yes, for the work that I'm doing in the centre, the connectivity is a huge issue, bandwidth and access to computers. In the particular area I'm working in now they've just opened up across the lands. So in fact there is a possibility now of actually doing e-learning as an integral part of the way you deliver courses or deliver learning or connect with people across the lands and people are really, really loving it. Through the Diploma of Interpreting that we have been doing there has been a lot of just familiarising people with, just showing them, that you can actually do this stuff. And it's like a glorified phone. And so you can see people just going, 'Wow, look at the possibilities'. And getting on G-Talk and when they do get on a computer, they can drop you a message and stuff. We are looking at one of the exciting things, is setting up a little radio station, which is again in our bush. It's quite a different situation from what you're in, Tim where people have always just loved communicating and getting on the phone and mobile phones too aren't something that can be used out there. So again that is not the option, but to get on a session room like this and be able to talk to people across the community and beyond is fantastic. And the other thing that I'm putting time into as I mentioned before is virtual worlds. For Indigenous people, they can come in and there is a certain distance and anonymity that people get being there and not being face to face that actually gives them quite a lot of freedom and opportunities again to practise life skills and to engage in environments and situations that they are not usually involved in and avoid because their skills aren't there so there is opportunities for them to really develop their skills, so looking to those kind of things for the future.

Cathy Baxter

Well certainly there are some exciting e-learning things for youth and others on the horizon. Thank you to all of you for a really fascinating discussion on youth and e-learning for *The Knowledge Tree*.

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