

## Editorial Ramblings

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)

*In which your editor muses on a question of concern to many of us. Just who will be providing ICT support to schools by the middle of 2011?*

If you have not already done so you may wish to read the DCSF white paper “Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system -Timetable for action.” The proposals relating to the future role of local authorities (LAs) and the loss of their advisory services are potentially devastating, not only for the level and quality of ICT support and training available but also for support for innovation and experimentation in our schools. My interpretation and view, you may disagree.

Whilst the present ministerial incumbents may not be around to implement the proposals it would appear unlikely that any incoming government with privatisation and cost cutting on its agenda will do anything significantly differently. So, given other cost saving measures already mooted in the pre-election phony war we could, potentially, see the world of ICT support as we have known it for many years crumble around us.

Consider a possible scenario for the middle of next year. The National Strategies advisers have gone and the money that funded them lies in school coffers, BECTA may not exist or perhaps only as a shadow of its former self, several of the regional broadband consortia (RBCs) have closed down following the loss of Harnessing Technology funding and local authority ICT advisers and inspectors are rarer than hen’s teeth. Couldn’t happen? Austerity budgets for years to come and an approach that favours a self help approach via local school clusters, federations, trusts and the private sector over local authorities, reducing the latter role to mere brokers and managers of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) are a strong possibility. Yet how many SIPs have an effective understanding of the role and nature of good ICT in learning and teaching but may be supporting schools in commissioning support and advice. This does not bode well.

I’ll leave aside the issue of whether clusters of schools can work effectively when in most urban areas there is de facto competition between institutions. Unless of course they are taken over by private sector groups with their own vested interests - the academies option. What then for local democratic control of education. Working together to procure cost efficient and high quality ICT resources and services is more efficient if undertaken on a larger scale. A local authority procuring for 80 schools should obtain better economies of scale than a cluster of 8 schools. The RBCs have consistently demonstrated the success of that principle over the last decade in bringing down broadband costs. Or perhaps managed services will be imposed to ensure that centrally set ‘standards’ are met and imagination and innovative approaches stopped dead in their tracks. Freedom of choice - for schools and parents begins to have a

rather hollow ring.

What applies to procurement also applies equally to support, challenge and training. Agreed, LA staff may not be the cheapest, though it does no-one any good, least of all independent consultants if there is a race to the bottom as regards daily rates. But, there is a further and dramatic loss if LA advisers vanish as a breed. The strength of a good LA advisory service lies in the shared folk knowledge of its schools and of their strengths and weaknesses that comes from routine discussion between advisers, and also of the personalities involved in departments and thus of strategies for support appropriate to and tailored to the needs of a particular school. A consultant bought in from a large and impersonal consulting company will have none of this local knowledge and no personal interest in the school or the learners.

Thus we end up with large, impersonal, target driven schools or groups of schools, with advice and support treated as a commodity. If parents really do have choice following the election I wonder if these are the type of school they really want?

Many years ago I was introduced to the work of E F Schumacher and his seminal work "Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered" (1973) and the concept that "Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful." Since then I have always been uncomfortable with this particular form of corporatist approach that now appears common ground to both main political parties. And this is a very different form to the benign structures of the old LEAs, who in general had learner's interests at heart and were subject to the views of the local electorate. Schumacher also noted that "The most striking thing about modern industry is that it requires so much and accomplishes so little. Modern industry seems to be inefficient to a degree that surpasses one's ordinary powers of imagination. Its inefficiency therefore remains unnoticed." Change "modern industry" to modern education and the statement holds equally true. In particular, schools in category demand maximum resources but may still accomplish little until broken down into smaller, more efficient units responsive to their clientele.

Which brings me to the Small Schools Movement, one of the more thoughtful and intelligent concepts to emerge from recent American educational thinking. Yes, we need to be careful of cross-cultural comparisons but my own experience is that small schools, where learners are known well by staff who are supportive and enthusiastic are also those schools that make innovative use of ICT. Take learning platform development for example - in my own LA the best implementations are in primary and especially in infant schools. Resources are provided for parents to use with their children, even Reception children take an active part, shared learning via wikis is common, learners use forums and messaging. While some secondaries are getting there the culture of upload all the resources you can afford and tell the kids they are there does tend to prevail.

However, I'm going off at a tangent (not for nothing is this called Editorial Ramblings!) so let me return to substantive points and the future of school support.

So, what might ICT support look like a year hence? There will be independent consultants of course, a hardy and adaptable breed used to taking on a variety of roles as needs arise and offering the personal touch that teachers appreciate. However, they also face threats from the supposed process of service accreditation. Where the 'Timetable' speaks of Accredited School Providers and Accredited Schools Groups what does this mean for sole traders and small companies. If it accredits the person, as the Naace Certified ICT Professional status could then no problem. But what if accredited status is reserved for large organizations able to meet, for example, stringent financial requirements. The 'Timetable' talks of markets but just how free would these be. And where would local authorities stand? As I write there are strong rumours that they will not be permitted even to have teams of advisers set up as arms length trading units, let alone centrally employed.

This then potentially leaves the field open to the large BSF providers and consultancy service companies to dominate this pseudo market. Little research is needed to ascertain the level of fees they expect to command - £900 per day is not uncommon. How will schools feel about paying such rates, even if they do receive all of the funding currently spent on National Strategy advisers, which itself is doubtful in the current economic climate. These consultancy companies, often with meagre educational background, have little concern for individual teachers and schools - they answer to shareholders and see schools simply as another client to boost profits, and at the taxpayer's expense. Will such companies have the interests of the whole community, school and beyond, at heart? A local co-operative approach might however, though behind the pre-election facades I don't detect the will to actually go down that route in any sensible way.

So where does this leave us as Naace members? The answer, in my view, is that the need for Naace becomes greater than ever, not only as a community of expertise but increasingly as a quality assurance and standards organisation. It is only bodies such as Naace that either alone or in partnership with like-minded groups can continue to set and uphold standards for ICT throughout schools. Consider our member's expertise in ICT Mark - it is second to none. Naace can take a lead in ensuring standards for our own members and standards for suppliers. It is also Naace members who can drive innovation and question orthodoxy. Those are areas that we simply cannot afford to lose in the coming maelstrom.

Naace may well need to adapt and evolve to meet the challenging circumstances that are presenting themselves - and that means the membership as a whole, including sponsors will need to support the Board of Management in moving the organisation forward over the next year or so by ensuring that your views, expectations and needs are made known.

Can we meet these challenges? As we learned from Barack Obama, "Yes we can!"

Paul Heinrich  
Acting Editor

Paul Heinrich can be contacted at [paul@paulheinrich.co.uk](mailto:paul@paulheinrich.co.uk)

## References:

DCSF (2010) Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system - Timetable for action." May be found online at:

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=Cm+7588&>

Schumacher, E F (1973) Small is Beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered. Blond & Briggs, London

## Securing Innovation under BSF Managed Service Contracts - Draft Guidance

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)

*This guidance has been developed for Naace, as an outcome of a BSF Thinktank event held in December 2009. Originally planned simply to distil the findings of the day, subsequent contributions to a first draft by a large number of Naace members has resulted in an expanded document, which goes well beyond the original brief. Naace would like to thank all those who contributed, many of whom will inevitably recognise their own words. Endnotes contain links to relevant sites and documents with other references to BSF process documentation shown by Roman numerals in the text.*

*Within the context of BSF it must be remembered that BSF is not a building programme, it is about developing learning environments fit for twenty first century learning and many BSF programmes involve remodelling and/or refurbishing existing schools, rather than building new ones. Indeed, the refurbishment may extend only to the ICT provision itself.*

## The Need to Innovate

This report asserts that there is a need to innovate in BSF.

The world in which we are living has changed enormously over the last twenty years and this is likely to accelerate as we move through the twenty first century. However, not all current

educational provision seems to be taking these changes into account and preparing learners for their future. Many of these changes relate to developments in ICT.

## Rates of change in ICT

The rates of change in ICT continually provide opportunities for educators to improve both the learning experience and outcomes. The learning experience must prepare learners for the future and ensure that they have the necessary skills and competencies to contribute to the world in which they live. They will need to be able to make effective use of ICT throughout their lives, so it follows that knowledge and understanding of, and competence with, ICT should be under continual review and change.

## The BSF Requirement and Transformation

The general BSF requirement is, in summary, a requirement to transform education. An LA must produce a **Readiness to Deliver** statement which must state a widely agreed transformational, coherent, and compelling long-term **vision** for education and children's services in its schools<sup>1</sup>. This transformational vision is then used to determine all other outcomes through **strategies for change**. This vision for transformation should inform strategic leaders' thinking on how the developed learning environments will be used and this, in turn, will inform what new, refurbished and remodelled buildings will look like.

In the ideal world the LA and the schools will have worked together to develop and shape a shared vision for learning that will underpin the strategic direction of all schools within the LA. This will not preclude each school adding the key features that will exemplify the school ethos and how it meets the needs of its community.

## The Role of ICT

The role of ICT in this is integral, as the following quotation from PfS Guidance describes: 'The key component that links buildings with teaching and learning is Information and Communications Technology (ICT). BSF will provide:

- a step-change in the level of ICT provision in secondary schools in England
- buildings designed to maximise use of ICT
- managed ICT services which guarantee availability and reliability
- incentives to develop the use of ICT in teaching and learning'<sup>2</sup>.

In remodelled or refurbished schools, ICT can often be the catalyst that facilitates the development and implementation of more personalised learning pathways involving greater flexibility and creativity. In ICT only BSF schools, the imperative to relate ICT to transformed education is at its strongest.

## The Need to Secure Innovation

A Managed Service is the default position in BSF as it transfers risk away from schools and generates aggregated savings. In both policy and practice, it is not possible to have a BSF project without an ICT Managed Service. Although the perceived drawbacks are rooted in loss of control, experience of the implementation of Managed Services has led to a widely held view that Managed Services stifle innovation, causing tension between two key areas of BSF; transforming education and a Managed Service. **This document aims to clarify the nature of this tension and offer some methods for its amelioration.**

## Causes of Tension

### Transformation vs Evolution

In the key document 'Expectations of Transformation with Building Schools for the Future'<sup>3</sup>, the BSF transformation is expected to be of both teaching and learning, and substantial not incremental, to meet the needs of individuals in a rapidly changing world, and radically improve outcomes. However, it is often more appropriate to think of transformation in terms of an evolving process - education needs to continually adapt to the changing world if our learners are to thrive. Also, change does not happen overnight; it is a complex process and adaptations and innovations may be small, particularly in the early stages as educators and learners try out and adopt new ideas. There is a clear tension between the **radical expectations of BSF and the need for change to evolve.**

There are a number of points within the whole BSF process of developing a vision for transformed education, to determining the requirements of the learning environment<sup>4</sup>, including the ICT provision, to deliver the transformed outcomes, to the actual delivery of the transformed processes and outcomes, where there is tension, largely resulting from **inexperienced leadership and management of the process.** This is partly because decisions are made without considering the vision for education: throughout the entire process, and beyond, this must be the guiding principle. *'Don't take your eye off the ball.'*

### The Contract

The **contractual nature** of the Managed Service is seen as a major cause of tension. A Managed Service is a commercial contract and the contractor cannot allow, in a commercial context, any vagueness in the terms of the contract- *'What you get is what you pay for.'* This is apparently at odds with the need for a Managed Service to be flexible, to allow schools to adapt, vary or extend the provision, as their understanding of the role of ICT in the achievement of their vision, develops<sup>1</sup>.

### The Development of the Vision for Education

Not all the educators involved in receipt of a Managed Service (commonly called the stakeholders or end users, who should include parents and children) are fully involved in the **development of the vision for education.** This is particularly important, bearing in mind there

are always differences between educators regarding what, how, when and where children should learn. These differences may be fundamental. In addition, although we often refer to a vision for learning, these evolutionary changes frequently require significant changes in teaching styles and this, for many, is perceived as a threat. Critically, if the stakeholders (and in particular the staff who will implement practice in the new learning spaces) do not understand and buy into the educational vision then they will subvert it, which, almost inevitably, will result in a return to 'traditional practices'.

An example of how this may impact on provision and the specification of the Managed Service is in the context of access to the internet and e-safety. Some schools lock down their systems completely, their paramount concern being the protection of the learners; others leave them comparatively open, but attempt to empower the students to be discriminating users. Some schools aspire to do both, as learners mature. These different views need to be aired, and decisions made on the basis of the sort of learning one aspires to. This question is more fundamental than it seems. It comes down to a set of pedagogical beliefs about what learning is and **how learners learn**. If you believe that learners should ultimately find things out **for themselves**, as they learn to learn, then you will have a different requirement to where you believe that learners find things out best by **being told** or **by being presented with a restricted or limited range of source materials**. Where this aspect has not been debated properly, one approach is to demand flexibility with regard to filtering, so that the school can 'innovate' in this area. This leads to the demand that the Managed Service needs to be **flexible**, to allow **innovation**. The reality is that there is **insufficient clarity of shared vision<sup>ii</sup>**, and/or **ineffective management of the evolution of the vision**.

In practice, there are three elements to the development of a vision. Educators might reflect and agree on:

- their aspirations for learning
- what can be achieved without BSF
- how aspirations for learners can be enhanced given the opportunity of BSF or other investment.

One of the key differences between having BSF and not having BSF is the role of ICT. In the former case, a radical, integral role for ICT is expected. All of these three steps of vision development can be done incompletely, and not sustained over time.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Transformation, learning and teaching**

There are misunderstandings of what is meant by **transforming learning and teaching**. First of all, the nature of how people learn does not change. What should be transformed is support for learning because we are not going to transform the underpinning mechanisms through which people learn. Then, it is very common for the transformation of support for learning to be taken to mean what you are doing now, only much better. This is not entirely

unreasonable. Most if not all educators continually aspire to improve the support for learning they provide, and many rightly believe that they deliver a high quality learning experience, given the constraints within which they have to operate, and the resources available. They believe that where resourcing is the key inhibitor, BSF will remedy this. A common example of this thinking in action is that there should be interactive whiteboards in every learning space (not classrooms, of course) because where they are well used there are gains in motivation. This decision should have been the result of a discussion regarding interactivity in the classroom, and how this is best delivered to improve learning outcomes. One might ask whether students are interacting with the learning or simply interacting with the board?

There are similar fundamental pedagogical principles at stake as in the earlier example. If you believe that a learner should contribute to the learning process, then you will have a different requirement than if you simply wish to have an **enhanced delivery** mechanism for content. If you have a commitment to the development of interactivity, particularly through feedback from learners to help the educator modify the learning process on the fly, then you will have an interest in all those ICT based tools which help do this, such as voting/response systems, online applications which promote sharing and feedback, and so on, as well as non-ICT based solutions (put your hand/thumb up if....). You will then have an interest in incorporating these technologies into the Managed Service. The simplest way to approach transformation is that it requires doing some things (not everything) differently in order to do them better, and this is the opportunity which BSF offers. If we define innovation as doing things differently to do them better, we must conclude from practice to date that there is insufficient commitment to innovation.

## The Role of ICT, and Innovation

There is great variability of understanding among the educators involved in the development of the learning environment regarding both the current and future possibilities for the role of ICT in existing learning programmes. If anything, this variability is growing, even after 25 years of curriculum development, largely due to rates of change in ICT. Therefore the requirement that ICT should be used to help transform learning is doubly difficult to implement when there is no clear, widespread, shared understanding of how ICT helps with current learning. For many educators, it is still true that they don't know what they don't know'. There is no simple universal approach to the evaluation of the role of ICT in learning and teaching, and there are almost as many starting points for developing understanding as there are educators, in any given BSF community. This illustrates one of the key features of the concept of innovation. Asking someone to innovate is entirely dependent upon their starting point; **innovation is a relative concept not least in the sense that one person's innovation is someone else's established practice**. It does not mean the same thing to all educators in a given audience. It follows that **effective innovation** is strongly correlated to **effective professional development**, involving a commitment to:

- finding out about the ways ICT might help with teaching or learning

- being enabled to try new things out
- actually trying them out
- reflecting
- when they are successful (not least when comparing benefits to costs), embedding them
- informing others
- repeating all these steps.

We know that a sustained change in practice is achieved by making the change of manageable scale and high value to the educator. This is true regardless of the driver for innovation, whether it comes from the individual, or from a strategic direction. In this sense, a Managed Service, if it removes the anxiety from experimentation, through the guarantee that everything always works, supports innovation, rather than stifles it. Another key advantage is that the school's intellectual capital can now be entirely focussed on the improved use of technology rather than its management, maintenance, replacement, and so on. However, if educators are barred by the Managed Service from trying new things out, then the Managed Service will stifle innovation. There is **insufficient understanding of the nature of effective innovation**, how it is promoted and embedded.

Another fundamental issue is that ICT provision may or may not make assumptions about learning. For example, generic software tools can be used equally to support a paradigm of learning, which emphasises the acquisition of knowledge, or one which stresses competences. Conversely, in the past, many VLE designs were based on learning metaphors which replicate lecture-based, content-heavy approaches. Many ICT developments in education have tended to be driven by perceived views of how students were learning in school. The interactive whiteboard is a case in point based, as it is, on a model of learning that is essentially 'eyes front.'

At the same time, the National Curriculum description of ICT as a subject is not neutral to beliefs about learning. It stresses problem solving, undertaking investigations, planning, developing and evaluating, for audience and purpose. This is a statutory entitlement to a range of competences, which, once learners have acquired to some degree, should be deployed in other contexts. This reinforces the need to achieve **consensus of beliefs with regard to learning itself.**<sup>iv</sup>

Perhaps the most common area, where a Managed Service is alleged to be stifling change, is in the deployment of hardware and software. Rates of change in this area seem to imply that if new devices come along, they cannot be used, and that new software cannot easily be deployed, except at additional cost.

## The Management of Change

The scale of change involved with BSF is unprecedented, in several aspects; the scale of the funding, the requirement for the nature of the changes, and the length of time involved for the

changes to take place. Schools and LAs are inexperienced with managing long term large scale change. These key stakeholders often lack experience and confidence in the degree of change and in identifying exactly what they would like the ICT to do so the ICT specialists can specify systems with which they are familiar, rather than systems that will facilitate the learning. There is undoubtedly **insufficient competence with the management of the change required for BSF**. The result is that too often a vision, no matter how well developed, is not sustained into, and beyond the creation of the learning environment, even though the nature of the environment is determined by the vision. Simple questions like *‘why is the building like this?’* and *‘what sort of learners did we agree we were looking for?’* need to be readdressed. When this is done, the role of ICT can also be readdressed, in the context of the delivery of the agreed learning. <sup>v</sup>

## Some Responses

### The Contract

Developing the Managed Service contract is a complex detailed process. Strategies for change lead to an ICT Output specification, which in turn leads to an Authority Requirement and thence to a contract. It is possible in the welter of detail and consultation, to lose sight of the key aspects.<sup>vi</sup> Innovation is one of these. The Guidance and Examples for Development of Draft Authority Requirements for ICT (November 2009)<sup>5</sup> suggests these four headings:

- Using ICT to offer a wide range of choice and access
- Using ICT to support flexible working
- Using ICT to manage data and improve efficiency
- Using ICT to secure data and protect the user.

The idea of using ICT to innovate, or helping teaching and learning evolve, is conspicuous by its absence and a simple way of ensuring that it is at least considered is, when the first draft of the Authority Requirement is complete, to ask a group of strategic leaders of ICT to review it to ensure that innovation is possible. This might be done by asking each of them, once there is a shared vision, to pick an innovation they have planned based upon some need identified or improvement in teaching method, and check that it will be deliverable.

- Is my innovation possible?

There are Managed Service Providers, who are conscious of the need to innovate and offer a variety of solutions. These will be offered as case studies at a later date.

### Visioning and Transformation

The more time, effort and thought put into the development of the transformational vision; the better the outcome in terms of specifying exactly what is required. This is usually well done by school senior leadership teams, except for ICT. There is a need for specific support for school transformation teams, to engage systematically with the opportunities provided by

ICT. Commonly, engagement with other key educators, especially the teaching staff, is much less well done. All staff might be asked to engage with the visioning process through these questions.

- What do we want from an education system in the 21st century?
- What do we want our learners to know, understand and be able to do when they leave us?
- What kind of people do we want them to be?
- What sort of learning opportunities and experiences do we need to provide to achieve these desired outcomes?
- What will we need to be able to do this, in terms of human resources and physical/technical resources?
- How can we begin to prepare?
- How well do we do it now?
- How will BSF help us do things better, both the things we do now, and the things we could change? **How will ICT help?**

### **The Role of ICT and Innovation**

There remains a continuing need for opportunities for professional development and reflection at all levels, to improve understanding of, and competence, with ICT for learning and teaching. For many years, through its professional development programme, particularly its annual strategic conference, Naace has been pre-eminent in this area. Naace continues to lead support for professional development through the ICTcpd4free courses<sup>6</sup>. Among Naace partners, Vital<sup>7</sup> have recently launched a national programme to integrate ICT provision at a regional level with a series of blended courses. These courses will focus on small components of the pedagogical aspects of using ICT to achieve desired learning outcomes, and meet immediate needs. They support the concept of evolving rather than transformational change.

Within the school setting, the following questions might be helpful.

- Do staff know the school targets for innovation, and the expectation on them?
- Do staff know where they are and what their next steps are?
- Do staff know to achieve a specific outcome such as using an interactive response system to improve A4L in order to accelerate achievement?
- How is staff development (CPD) in ICT managed? Who is responsible?
- What impact is CPD having? How do we know?
- Does every department/area/faculty have an ICT development plan?
- What one new thing is each member of staff going to try next year?
- What resources have been earmarked for this?

### **Rates of Change**

These are such that there is a need for the continual monitoring of the potential for all changes in ICT resources, and especially new hardware, software changes and how they might be used to

have a greater impact on learning. There is no systematic public method for sharing this practice, (although the Vital community website, in common with others, including the Naace website, aims to provide support for this sharing) nor is there a simple tool, which might be universally applied to assess impact against costs. It will be the role of Naace to examine this area further.

## The Management of Change

The vision for learning should be refreshed perhaps even annually. This is because in every school, there is turnover of educators, and those new to the school were not party to the development process, which resulted in the shared vision for transforming learning. It should also form the core of every other ICT document and initiative, so that its drivers are constantly referenced and aimed for. Progress against planned actions for change should also be reviewed annually. Key questions which schools should be helped to answer, are:

- Where is the plan for implementing the school strategy for change?
- Who is in charge of ensuring that the plan is being followed?
- Who is responsible for refreshing the vision leading to the strategy for change?
- How often is this done?

## Next Steps

Further offers to contribute to this document would be most welcome. Please send these by email to [tim@shpartners.net](mailto:tim@shpartners.net), copy to [julie@shpartners.net](mailto:julie@shpartners.net), both of whom are compiling this report on behalf of Naace.

Naace will coordinate the production and dissemination of further guidance:

- A cost/benefit analysis tool for learner activities using ICT
- Case study materials from Managed Service Providers and LAs, illustrating how opportunities for innovation are offered within contractual arrangements
- A development programme for school transformation teams, to be offered to schools and LAs, to allow them to engage with the opportunities ICT presents in BSF and indeed any investment programme.

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1 [http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/documents/Readiness\\_to\\_deliver\\_Feb2009.pdf](http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/documents/Readiness_to_deliver_Feb2009.pdf)

2 <http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/library/ict.jsp>

3 [http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/library/education\\_transformation.jsp](http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/library/education_transformation.jsp)

4 Whether new build, remodelled or refurbished.

5 [http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/library/bsf\\_guidance.jsp#ICTGuidance](http://www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/library/bsf_guidance.jsp#ICTGuidance)

6 <http://www.ictcpd4free.co.uk/>

i The contractors' reluctance to allow flex stems from the payment mechanism which penalises them for any non-compliance with Key Performance Indicators. The use of new, untried technologies therefore represents a commercial risk which is unfairly weighted in their disfavour. The school gets to experiment and the Managed Service Provider gets to pay if it doesn't work.

ii So this is why all stakeholders (not just sample schools or the initial wave but primaries, FE, WBL, etc) must be represented in the ICT Stakeholder Group which works to define the Output Specification. In this way, outputs can be written with the requisite flexibility (or consensus on the level of 'rigidity' can be agreed by all).

iii A significant barrier here is the capacity and expertise of teachers to participate in the evolution of a transformational vision. Often, they are the most conservative factor in the process, with the Local Authority and Managed Service Provider's attempts to introduce transformational ideas resisted strongly. There is a need for the SFC/ OBC section of BSF to include defined processes to help school staff challenge and extend their understanding of what schools need to deliver for the 21st century.

iv or an Output Specification which successfully takes account of variance in this areas.

v Another change management issue is its conflation with CPD and the need to distinguish between skills training and pedagogical paradigm shift. Change management should be about helping staff to fundamentally reconsider their models of practice, for example the journey from a chalk and talk 'sage on the stage' to a facilitator of student led learning, where direction, methods and outcomes are in students' hands. Different approaches are needed for different situations. For example, coaching is often a very effective approach in helping practitioners to reconsider their models of practice, but it is unlikely to be appropriate in developing a new set of ICT competencies with new equipment.

vi Particularly as the Authority Requirements (on which the Managed Service contract is entirely based) are currently exclusively concerned with technical matters and do not even mention change management, let alone innovation.

## **The Research Conundrum: A critique of current approaches to research on the impact of ICT in education and a call for a new approach.**

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*Academic research has, over more than 25 years, provided depressingly poor headlines about the impact of ICT in education - relative to what teachers and senior leaders in schools believe and report.*

*There is now a critical mass of schools in the UK, greater than 10% of the schools in the country, who fully believe in the impact of ICT - sufficiently to justify investment and effort to embed its use in ever-increasing ways. There is also a long tail of schools who remain to be convinced and to act similarly.*

*There is a case to be made that those schools that have embedded ICT properly are now improving faster than those that have not. The experiences of pupils are certainly very different between these kinds of schools to an extent that could soon become very embarrassing, as parents gain more insight into the educational offerings provided by schools in their area.*

In assessing the impact of ICT in education it is the headlines that matter. There are huge mounds of descriptive and anecdotal evidence but it is the 'hard' evidence that holds sway. This is what the media, politicians and parents hear; few ever look at the deeper material. ICT is expensive and there has been a very large national investment in ICT in education. It is necessary that the links are seen between the use of this ICT and improvements in learning and school operation.

The education research community has some responsibility for the lack of strong positive headlines. Too often the headline about a research report is "ICT has no (or very small) significant impact on learning outcomes" instead of what is probably more true, "Researchers fail to find the mechanisms by which ICT produces the impacts on learning that teachers report."

But it is not all the fault of researchers. It is quite possible that for many of the ways that ICT is used in education that there is no direct causal link between ICT and improved outcomes, making it hardly surprising that researchers fail to find any. It must be added that there certainly are situations where ICT enables activities which would otherwise be impossible or considerably more difficult, though even here it may be impossible to show a direct link. It is people who produce improved outcomes. A question we have hardly asked in a research context

is how ICT changes the attitudes and approaches of pupils and teachers, in ways that make it more likely that improved learning outcomes will result. This is of course hard; it entails looking subjectively at individual human beings and brings great difficulty in creating control groups. But as a personal and anecdotal observation from 25+ years working with schools that have been achieving well with ICT, the only common factor that I can identify across all of these different examples is that the pupils were taking greater personal responsibility for their learning.

I suggest that it is time to realise that the level of certainty in research that academics desire before publishing headlines about the impact of ICT in education is not possible. We need a new approach that can be more helpful to teachers and senior leaders and more convincing for policy makers. We need to see strong statements such as “Pupils learn to read more than 50% faster with ICT - pupils improve their reading age by 19 months in only a single year”.

This is not a new problem. It has been clear that there is a problem since the early 1980s, when the Computers in the Curriculum project attempted to research the impact of the use of software for learning. By the time the 3 year project reported inconclusive results, the black and white or green-screen programs being researched, running on machines with 16Kb memory, had been replaced by colour programs running on 64Kb BBC Bs. The technology changes too fast for longitudinal studies, as do the attitudes of the people towards it, while shorter studies cannot be linked to increased attainment in national tests and qualifications.

The second problem is that ICT almost never acts in isolation. The second part of the above quote about reading ages comes from a press release on the Docklands Literacy Project in the early 1990s and the startling reading age improvements were actually achieved. But though the provision of Acorn PocketBooks to all pupils was a major part of the project, there was much more involved. The rather devious way the PocketBooks were provided to the pupils - they each had to produce a near relative, in the school, to sign for and collect the PocketBooks - leveraged parental and family attention. Several of the schools had never previously seen family members of more than around 20% of their pupils, but all the pupils produced some kind of relative to sign, such was the incentive. There were also writers in residence and visits to libraries, and much other effort by the schools and teachers. How could the impact of ICT be isolated?

A third problem is how to replicate the impacts of ICT. The very diverse ways in which ICT is used in schools and classes mitigates against finding powerful general conclusions that cannot be ignored by other schools. But if schools slow to adopt ICT are to be strongly encouraged to do so, there must be imperatives that make sense in the context of their own community, educational philosophy and school culture.

**So how to proceed. A couple of stories to try to get inside this problem:**

In 1984 on a Microelectronics Education Programme training course that I was leading, a headteacher from a Rotherham primary school commented to me “It’s very strange, though we only have two BBC B computers, and the pupils only get around 15 minutes each a week using the word-processor on them, almost all the pupils have increased the amount of handwriting they are doing by a half to two-thirds.” That sounds to me like a headline “50%+ increase in pupils’ writing from ICT”. I of course asked her if she had the evidence from before the use of computers started so the change could be quantified, but she unfortunately didn’t have it in any coherent form. We discussed at some length what the mechanisms for this observed improvement in handwriting might be, but these were all attitudinal things that would be hard to research; seeing their work properly printed making them want to write?; knowing that the word-processor spell-checker could overcome their poor spelling?; knowing that even if you have problems holding a pencil there are other ways to write?. And of course other things were changing in the classroom at the same time, perhaps increased display of the children’s writing bringing more audience and positive feedback? What research process could unpick, validate and display what was happening here?

In 2005 as part of a study on learning platform use I visited Kevin, the head of science at a school in Keighley. In discussing how they were using the learning platform they had installed, Kevin explained that knowing all the pupils could access the platform out of class, he had suddenly at the end of a recent lesson decided to set a forum question for homework. In the last couple of minutes of the lesson he said “OK - homework - all of you provide an answer to this question in the online forum - Which has more energy, an iceberg or a kettleful of hot water?”

#### **This resulted in:**

- All the pupils put an answer in the forum; none wished to be very visibly seen to have not done the homework.
- The more timid pupils were able to contribute as much as they wished.
- The less able pupils read what the brighter pupils wrote, before devising their own version of the answer they liked best.
- The brighter pupils engaged in some debate about each others’ answers, exploring several threads.
- Kevin was able to see all the pupils’ answers in a single place, so was more easily able to identify the common misconceptions that would have to be corrected next lesson.
- In the next lesson he was able to ‘ground’ the pupils more quickly, as they could each see their own contribution and could remember some of the other contributions they had looked at and thought about.
- And he had accessible some pupils’ answers to lead the debate, that looked at the problem from their viewpoint. (Such as the pupil who said “I’d pour the kettleful of water over the iceberg, and if all of the iceberg melted then the kettle has more energy!”.)

**Let’s analyse this learning process relative to holding the debate in class, with pupils individually preparing an answer for homework:**

- It would have been hard to get all of the pupils to contribute.
- The forum approach gave more thinking time, continually stimulated by new postings.
- the debate was multi-threaded instead of pursuing only one thread at a time.
- There was higher order discussion amongst some pupils, which would have been difficult to develop in class while keeping focus on the key principles.
- There were more different approaches to answering the question available to the pupils to consider.
- The teacher saved time in preparation.
- The teacher had higher quality and quantity of responses from the pupils to plan how to approach the discussion next lesson.
- The work could be done by each participant at a time when they were receptive to it.

Some of these things are hard to measure, such as quality of attention - though teachers assess this constantly in class. But even just looking at the total time committed by the pupils to engaging with the question, we could surely have a headline “Four times the learning with ICT!”.

The challenge to educators is to find practical ways to see and present what is happening when ICT improves learning, teaching and how schools/colleges operate. It is only in schools that the new more effective processes can be developed and studied. This must involve analyses of the processes involved and comparison with attempting similar processes without the ICT. It must also involve looking at the attitudes and motivation of the people involved. What cannot be measured precisely will have to be estimated; we must measure what we get not get what we measure. If we fail to win the argument that ICT considerably enhances learning, while believing that it does, the life chances of many children will be harmed. To win the argument we must have headlines to combat the headlines of those who feel education should revert to traditional pre-ICT approaches. The headlines will have to be strongly supported by educators, so behind the headlines we need the data and deeper evidence to convince.

The challenge to researchers is to help the teachers do this, to create the tools and research approaches that can validate what the teachers are seeing, to help them see it properly and so that they can assess the relative impacts of different approaches. Teachers are naturally modest about the changes they are making. They need help to reflect on them. They need the strength that comes from agreed ways of analysing new approaches. The lesson of the last 20 years is that current research approaches are not producing what is necessary to win the argument, nationally at a political level. If more than 10% of schools are proving to their satisfaction that there is major impact from ICT, the balance of probabilities is that there is a real effect that researchers should continue to look for until they can identify causes, and find ways to quantify improved outcomes with sufficient validity to underpin national action.

The challenge to the policy makers must be to properly question the headlines and to talk sufficiently to the professionals to be convinced the headlines are true and valuable. If there is

clearly positive impact from ICT on learning/teaching processes, as seen by analysing the learning activity processes, but the improved assessment outcomes politicians want to see are not rising, they might question what national assessment processes are looking at and how. And consider whether national assessment measures are looking at the main factors important for the health of the nation and its people in the 21st century.

And we then need policy makers to invent processes to rapidly replicate proven benefits of ICT across all schools - before the growing gap in educational offering between schools becomes socially divisive and politically explosive.

Roger Broadie is an independent consultant working on approaches to assessing the impact of ICT in education, particularly working with an online group of Naace and Mirandanet members and with a number of schools that have embedded use of the Frog learning platform and the diverse ICT systems and software they access through it.

To become involved with the online group or to contact Roger please email [Roger@BroadieAssociates.co.uk](mailto:Roger@BroadieAssociates.co.uk)

## How much of a School is the Building?

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)

*Why Learning Platforms are good news for those who want to facilitate learning*

## Learning a Lesson from the Snow Closures

In January, many school buildings across the UK were closed due to the snowy conditions, and the news reports were full of fears about the impact that the closures would have on children's learning. It was fascinating therefore, that the media did not report on the widespread variety of ways that schools used to continue to provide learning opportunities despite the buildings being closed. During this period of snow closure, the schools who put children's learning first and made provision for continuity through their learning platform instead just got on with it, and no-one necessarily knew any different! For example, schools in [Wokingham](#) now consider their learning platform such an integral part of their learning provision, that 89% of the schools were regularly and continuously using it throughout the snow closures, with over two thirds of children logging in to take part in learning activities. This indeed was not a rarity. Schools across the UK, using all kinds of online tools (not just learning platforms) were busily continuing teaching and learning. A brief look at the hundreds of examples shared in [Tweetworks](#) gives you an idea of the variety!

The familiarity that children, teachers and parents had with their learning platforms which meant that they could depend on using them during the snow closures, did not happen by accident. This took place at schools who had put learning first, looking for opportunities in every class, not just in one or two departments or innovative corners, for the learning platform to add value to learning experiences. The common theme with these schools is that they had identified areas where their learning platform can make a difference. They had developed their learning platform over time, focusing on learning, so that when the snow did close the buildings, it didn't matter; it was natural to turn to the learning platform to continue learning provision.

The “Big Difference” in this approach is that the schools weren't focusing on using the technology to create paper-free communications, putting files online, or even sharing teaching resources. The schools were focusing on ensuring that children's learning was exciting, engaging, and that the children were part of opportunities that built on existing provision. That's what engages the children and that's what engages us as teachers!

In observing the key features of schools where their learning platform is supporting impact upon learning a couple of key trends emerge: [Parental Engagement](#), Children's Independent Learning Skills, and Opportunities for [Personalisation](#). Schools who have focused on these aspects have seen tangible results in a short space of time, but most importantly, have seen sustainable benefits and impact. These are the schools we should all be learning from, and here are a few such schools, sharing their experiences.

First, Horndean Infant School, a multiple winner of Becta Excellence Awards, who ensure that parents are active partners in learning in order to ensure impact upon children's learning.

### *Parental Engagement*

*At Horndean Infant School using the learning platform to engage parents in their child's learning was our main aim. Parents can experience a variety of media sources to appreciate what their child has been doing in school. A key benefit of the learning platform is that it is secure which allowed us to start uploading videos of the children's class assemblies to allow absent and working parents to see them without the guilt of not being able to attend. Subsequently other videos of special events and clubs have been uploaded too. Along with videos we have added photos and sound files of the children learning and special events in and out of school. Other ways of engaging the parents have been to have 'Learning Areas' in each year group. These areas are broken up into Literacy, Phonics and Maths. In the subject areas there are a variety of activities specific to groups of children, thus allowing for a more personalised learning. Parents can identify what their child is specifically learning in school and can work on this with them at home. These are mainly links to games on different websites but other activities have included phonics resources to print and do at home, sound clips to hear specific phonic sounds, videos of stories we are learning in school, quizzes and much more. The children enjoy sharing the learning platform with their families and as a school we*

*provide a drop in time for parents to come in with their child and share their learning online. Children are developing their own e-portfolios which have resources such as IEPs to ensure a supportive link between home and school for those children who have an IEP. It has enhanced its importance through being updated more regularly. The parents have their own area on the learning platform too which has a variety of links including news pages and to the PTA.*

*Hannah Knight, Horndean Infant School, Hampshire*

Another school who are ensuring parents have the opportunity to engage with their children's learning effectively are Westbrook Old Hall Primary School who have taken an interesting approach to the mobility of learning.

### *Parental Engagement*

*At Westbrook Old Hall Primary School the learning platform provides a strong link between home and school. All children have log-ins and are able to access learning opportunities beyond the hours of the school day. All teachers share homework tasks twice a week onto the learning platform and in addition they provide learning tasks such as 'Maths Problem of the Week' in their class areas. Children and parents are encouraged to contribute to school discussions through the use of forums, for example, in Year 3 the children take it in turns to take home their class bears and add to the 'Bear Blogs', and parents are encouraged to take an active part in this activity.*

*The children in Years 3 and 4 have their own Ultra Mobile PC which they take home each night. The learning platform allows the children to continue accessing all of the learning resources used in school so that they can continue their learning outside the hours of the school day. All Key Stage 2 children save their personal learning resources into their ePortfolio, and update progress against their learning targets so that parents and teachers can see their developments and support their next steps.*

*As children are regularly using the learning platform to support their own learning, parents know that they too can use this space to access resources, information and guidance in order to support their child.*

*Gina O'Rourke, Westbrook Old Hall Primary School, Warrington*

For older students the role of parents in their child's learning changes, but critically, the learning platform can still play a critical role in enabling engagement. Bradon Forest encourage students and their parents to share out-of-hours learning achievements back into school through a creative eportfolio project called "My Learning Space".

*My Learning Space: My Learning at School, Home and Beyond*

*At Bradon Forest School the learning day is being extended by the school's very popular and well used learning platform. Building on the regular and embedded in-class use of the learning platform to create interactive and engaging learning activities, the pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning after school. In the ongoing My Learning Space project and competition, pupils use their ePortfolios to reflect on all aspects of their learning life; lesson materials, targets, learning partners, reflection diaries, self & peer review resources and social learning aspects. The My Learning Space project was introduced in school through pastoral support, and as it spans all areas of pupils learning, they now use it both at school and home to share and celebrate achievements.*

*To complement class use of the learning platform, teachers share resources for the pupils to use for their homework and revision, and analysis of last year's y11 showed that more than three quarters used these during their exam study leave and felt that it enhanced the quality of their revision. Our science department have embedded a range of multimedia learning materials including the popular "Wow Show" bringing Science Experiments to life.*

*As our school community has grown more familiar with the learning platform being the one-stop-shop for learning anywhere/anytime, on planned school closure days, work is set, collected and marked through learning platform forums, quizzes and tasks. During the recent snow days in January, all pupils had work set for all classes missed and one parent commented that they had never seen her daughter work so hard!*

*"The school day is no longer 8.45 to 3.25 but literally open all hours".*

*Dave Wright, Bradon Forest Secondary School, Wiltshire*

Equally, parents are able to help primary children to share out-of-school activities and achievements in similar ways, as shared here by Weston Village Primary School.

### *Using the Learning Platform Beyond the Classroom*

*We've been using the learning platform in a variety of ways that mean children can continue their learning beyond school.*

*As the children are primary aged, the activities offer the opportunity to involve and engage parents. For example, our Year 1 children took part in an "It's A Small World" project where children took turns to host the visiting teddy bear (Benny) overnight and were able to record their experiences using a forum on the learning platform. Parents were involved in helping the pupils to type their answers and/or record short voice clips using the inbuilt sound recorder and as such as scaffolded in these literacy activities with their children.*

*Older year groups use the learning platform to share homework and spelling patterns with their parents; motivating children to share what's going on at school and to invite their parents to be part of their learning at home. Equally, this helps parents to be able to pre-empt*

*children's homework and gives them ideas to talk to their child about when they get home from school each day.*

*Home learning projects set through our learning platform have provided great opportunities for independent research. For example, during our Romans topic children contributed to a forum to record their personal research into aspects of life in Roman times. Children without online access at home were able to complete tasks at break times using school computers. Combining class work with home learning in this way generated significant enthusiasm for the topic, and boosted children's learning; both in quantity and quality!*

*We have also been able to use the learning platform to publish class podcasts. Sometimes these have been one-off audio recordings to share work that the children have been doing in class with people beyond the school; radio adverts, news reports, interviewing visitors to school, and presentations made by the children. Others are a more regular feature. We have 4 reporters appointed in the class at the beginning of each week who make brief notes about what has been learnt during the week and any special news about what has been going on at school. Towards the end of the week, a child acts as editor (to make sure everything makes sense and suggests any missing content) and another child acts as a sound technician (who is supported by the previous week's sound editor). The weekly podcast is the responsibility of the children, who work independently on the task, once they have been supported during the first few weeks.*

*Jan Webb, Weston Village Primary School, Cheshire*

*<http://janwebb21.primaryblogger.co.uk/>*

## Valuing Teacher's Professional Expertise

So how have these schools achieved this kind of embedded use of their learning platform? How have they managed to move into a position where this is not only a reality, but part of everyday school life? The key theme has been supportive, focused professional development, and most notably, the professional development has not been focused on the 'how to' mechanics of using the learning platform, it's been to value teacher's existing expertise, and to use this as a building block for explore new and creative ways of extending learning opportunities for the children.

One of the striking things about the schools who have the most embedded use of their learning platforms has been the way that the leadership teams have recognised that this offers opportunities for a new kind of teaching and learning. This kind of teaching and learning provision forces us to rethink the nature of learning itself, and reconsider the variables that surround children when they are learning in this way, and the skills that we therefore need to teach them.

Notably, the approach taken by these schools has not been “How can we learn how to use the learning platform?”, but instead “How can the learning platform help us improve the learning that we provide?” This way, the professional development recognises the skills and expertise that teachers have in teaching and learning, and values individuals as professionals.

Some schools, such as Weston Village Primary in Crewe, have been particularly good at encouraging staff to peer-share, by using screencasts ([www.jingproject.com](http://www.jingproject.com)) to capture good teaching and learning opportunities for other staff to watch - and demonstrating how these were achieved, what the outcomes were, and what the impact on learning was. A number of schools, including Stoke Damerel Community in College have made this part of their whole-school improvement plan with their “From Good to Outstanding” project where staff share their lessons, plans and outcomes through film, and open up discussion forums to engage in dialogue about ways in which effective learning takes place. This brings a new dimension to lesson observations, making them sharable with colleagues for everyone to benefit from, and fosters a true culture of “we’re all learning together”. Although confidence in this kind of open professional-sharing takes time to develop in any school, the benefits are clear, and a simple “Today I taught....” discussion forum is a good place to start staff sharing their teaching experiences, and developing a culture of reflective practice.

Other ways that schools have developed this kind of CPD include:

### *Using the Tideway School Learning Platform to support CPD*

*During 2009 in Tideway School we began to develop the learning platform as a tool for delivering staff CPD. The rationale behind this was that online training and support could:*

- *Be flexible in terms of ‘delivery’ times;*
- *Allow participants to better reflect on their own learning over a period of time;*
- *Lead to higher quality outcomes as staff worked collaboratively with each other;*
- *Be experiential as teachers developed skills through using the tools they would be applying to learning in the classroom;*
- *Be better targeted in terms of the subject areas involved and the topics being covered.*

*The first pilot programme involved members of the senior leadership team. It aimed to raise their awareness of ‘what teaching looked like when a learning platform was embedded in classroom practice’. Six members of staff were involved in total, with training taking place online over a two week period. There was a ‘guarantee’ that staff would spend no longer than 10 minutes a day completing course activities. An initial introduction to the course took place in a face-to-face meeting. A daily email was sent as a reminder of updates to the training area. Activities involved using a forum, setting up a wiki, designing an assessment exercise and completing an actual task that had been used as a KS4 learning activity. This model of delivery has now been used with the Science Department in school, prior to a planning meeting about the development of the platform in that subject area.*

*Jim Fanning, Tideway Secondary School, East Sussex*

### *Continued Professional Development*

*Continued Professional Development is an important part of Horndean Infant School's community. The Learning Platform has enhanced this in a variety of ways. As part of performance management everyone's target, across all teaching and support staff, was to develop their skills on the Learning Platform in order to ensure children were using it effectively. Staff had become familiar with taking part in professional tasks through the Staff area of the learning platform, and this area has quickly grown to include team-teaching and specific development programmes, such as Inclusion Development.*

*Having the learning platform has allowed for easy access for all staff and as it is a secure area, parents cannot see what goes on in the staff pages which retains staff confidence in online CPD. Currently we are in the process of developing learning platform curriculum portfolios online so staff can see examples of levelled work in specific subjects and learning platform activity planning to match.*

*Hannah Knight, Horndean Infant School, Hampshire*

### *Weekly Sharing of Good Practice at School Staff Meetings*

*At Bradon Forest the Learning Platform is a key aspect of teacher's CPD. Since its introduction in 2006 there have been many whole school CPD events where teachers have developed resources to enhance learning on using the Learning Platform. The original team of teachers from all faculty areas have been meeting regularly then passing on their expertise and experience to their faculty colleagues. The MFL have a standing item on their weekly agenda that allows the team to share good practice.*

*The effective use of the learning platform is part of the North Wiltshire Federation Staff development CPD day in February 2010. Resources for the day are available on the learning platform and teachers from across North Wiltshire will be introduced and have time to develop web 2.0 applications like blogs, wikis and podcasting.*

*Training does not stop with just the teachers. Our Teaching Assistants receive regular training to allow them to help their pupils learn effectively and to update their own learning resources to ensure high quality learning experiences.*

*Dave Wright, Bradon Forest Secondary School, Wiltshire*

*A closing thought...*

As you will have observed, these schools are all using their learning platform to provide learning opportunities which range far and beyond classroom activities. Although the schools are using their learning platforms at timely and appropriate points during the school day, they are also ensuring that children have the opportunity to apply their school learning in wider contexts by taking this learning into home, out into the community, and into children's social lives. They are removing the segmented nature of timetabling and physical buildings, and in the process breaking down some of the barriers that can often prevent true learning taking place.

As many are going through varying stages of developing the primary curriculum or planning for BSF, it is timely to consider what "school" means, and just how tied to a building the concept is...

Fiona Aubrey-Smith can be contacted at [Fiona.AubreySmith@uniservity.com](mailto:Fiona.AubreySmith@uniservity.com)

## **Kids and Gadgets: How School Children use Communication Technology**

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- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)



### *Background*

*The rapid progress with digital technology is testament to man's ingenuity and capacity for progress.*

*There is no doubt that digital technology has enabled significant productivity improvements and spawned numerous benefits in health, education, work and home. New technology has established new ways of learning, working and socialising, whilst also considerably changing our approaches to communication and the way we handle our relationships.*

However, there is a but, and a big one at that! The long term consequences of communication technology innovations are not yet fully understood. As Vilfredo Pareto (1909, pp. 46) poignantly

observed that no individual actually can foresee the consequences of a present day decision; in his words, ‘something that risks being bad in the future is not represented with sufficient intensity in consciousness to balance what may be good in the present’, and that was said in 1909!

The Internet and other digital technology gadgets are the latest in a line of “improvements” to our lives. What is critical is the nature of these innovations. Reality today is that the combination of low cost availability and stimulation of the individual often through trivial digital content, ease of access, and anonymity, all contribute to highly mood altering experiences. Each new wave of digital interaction encourages a new relationship, often fun and exciting at first, and if used in a balanced manner can be a life-enhancing experience rather than a life-draining activity. The question is, is that the way most cost driven, commoditised, digital technology innovations are used?

Although much thought has been given to the creation of new gadgets enabling communication, unfortunately less time is spent on thinking how individuals will adopt these new tools for their benefit. Certainly little attention is given as to whether the more traditional communication mechanisms such as letter, phone or indeed face-to-face communication, are anymore beneficial than their modern counterparts. For example, it is becoming evident young people do not sufficiently pursue active sports but instead overspend time on sedentary playing with their digital gadgets. Enjoying multimedia stimulation does not compensate for neglecting physical health. Yes, the challenge and excitement of visiting new places on line and learning something new cannot be denied. However, more time spent in a ‘virtual world’ and less in the “in-vivo world” reduces a young person’s ability for personal expression and the sustenance required for maintaining social relationships. Excelling through digital expression and promoting ‘virtual’ relationships, is no compensation.

## The Study

Placed within the context of changing trends in social networking facilitated by different forms of technology mediated communication (TMC), a recent joint study by Cranfield School of Management and Northampton Business School examined the nature and the volume of mobile phone calls and text messaging, as well as computer, email, instant messaging and access to social networking sites by school students between the ages of 11 years and 18 years old. A sample of 267 students from a local school totalling 1,277 students in the Midlands, took part in this study.

## Study Findings

Our findings show early age adoption of communication technologies. Access to a computer is gained before the age of eight; use of the Internet between five and ten, use of a mobile phone

between eight and ten; and access to social networking sites between the ages of eleven and thirteen.

In median terms, the students report spending around 1-2 hours a day on the Internet and around 30 minutes on mobile phones, with a largish minority highlighting considerably more time on both. As far as the mobile phone is concerned, the majority send and receive around 20 text messages a day, with a small minority reporting over 100 texts per day. The students report they recognise that the use of text shortcuts had a significant, but negative impact on their spelling and school work in general.

Further, the children report that they as teenagers, as well as adults, develop 'urges' and deep 'cravings' for technology gadgets which in extreme cases is described as technology or internet addiction. A separate study also showed that individuals who crave for access to their gadgets and/or internet first thing in the morning and obsessively check emails in the middle of the night, display comparable addictive forms of behaviour to those hooked on other addictions.

Yet, the symptoms of Internet addiction are vague and are often difficult to diagnose. Individuals report they experience loss of sleep or anxiety when not online or in contact with their e-social network. They also report withdrawing from their family and peer groups, and exhibit low levels of concentration on their schoolwork. Some students even report that their focus on technology results in lower grades in school. Further, the results reveal that technology obsession hinders a student's spelling skills, implicitly encourages plagiarism, and unwittingly undermines classroom learning.

Despite school policies restricting mobile phone usage, students report using the phone frequently, with the majority making calls from the toilets. Also the 'secret' use of technology in the classroom suggests that the current methods for minimising the use of technology in the classroom are ineffective. Instant messaging is particularly favoured by students as it allows users to communicate in real time with their friends. Interestingly, landline telephone is reported as being used principally to contact a teacher or the school in general.

Additionally, a large majority report logging onto at least one social networking site, with Bebo and Myspace as the most common. Over half (52.4%) use virtual games on-line (see Figure 1 below).

On average, the school students report spending between one to two hours on these sites (see Figure 2 below). Furthermore, 34.9% female students are more likely to spend at least two hours on these sites compared to 21.6% male students.

## Concluding Thoughts

The 'secret use' of mobile phones in the classroom is well known. In the words of a teacher, "when students have the opportunity, and think that the teacher is not paying

attention, many students on many occasions email friends, using instant messaging, surf the web - check the football results! Young people that have grown up with technology are very clever and quick at using it, and of hiding it too". Our results indicate such practice does not just apply to mobile phones but a range of technology mediated communication.

There is a need for further on-going inquiry into the use and impact of information technology on young people. For example, using text slang to write text messages, email messages and instant messaging is quite common among students. Whether the overuse of slang has a detrimental effect on the writing skills of students or whether the more literate students are able to both use slang and more complex ways of writing, raises the question of is there a growing divide between literate and less literate students.

Considering that digital communication is multiple, distributed, emergent, dynamic, and unprecedented in terms of innovation and adoption, the need for studying technology impact on young people's capacity and appetite for learning is urgent. Our study emphasises the urgency as only a small minority of the students in our study expressed any concern regarding the negative side of communication technology.

Professor Nada K. Kakabadse can be contacted at [Nada.Kakabadse@Northampton.ac.uk](mailto:Nada.Kakabadse@Northampton.ac.uk) Professor Andrew Kakabadse can be contacted at [a.p.kakabadse@cranfield.ac.uk](mailto:a.p.kakabadse@cranfield.ac.uk)

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*How exciting! A white BETT! For the first time in years there was no queue to get into BETT. Yes - snow had hit the first day of the BETT show but it didn't make any difference. The exhibitors were there and all the more for me. Well, until later in the day when everyone else turned up. What was in store? Would the face of ICT be changed forever to meet the expectations of the next generation learning?*

## Microsoft

The Microsoft stand were giving away 1GB memory sticks so I watch some demos of their search engine - Bing and the World Wide Telescope which is a useful Astronomy resource. There is a new multimedia delivery tool for teachers called Semblio which is being released with the next version of Office. This will let teachers create multimedia lessons and distribute them as a package to students. Photosynth is also being developed to put together images into 3D panoramas using the on-line tools.

## Smartboards

The Smart stand usually has something innovative and I wasn't disappointed. True to their logo - 'I love my smartboard'. They were dispensing more love in the form of goodies. After collecting a tee-shirt, pen and finger pointer I looked round to see what was new. The stand was very busy but the first thing to note was the new short-throw projector called the 685ix which is a huge improvement on earlier models that they tried a few years ago that stuck out on a pole. This one was compact and sat directly over the board.

I saw the Smart table last year at BETT. The table is a multi-user touch screen with software built in for primary schools but this year I saw an example for secondary schools. The table was set up as a way of playing with light sources and experimenting with reflection and refraction. It looks as though it has potential but this example works well with the real science tools so I don't think it adds too much to the educational experience.

I watched a beta, online version of the Smartboard software. This means that pupils can open up notebook files without needing the software loaded on their computer. There are also two improved voting systems now for primary and secondary as well as the slate and document camera to enhance the learning experience. Other software included the new mathematics tools that are free to download and use for a month's trial. There is text recognition for maths equations, various clever tools and graph production.

## Mirandanet

The lack of training for ICT has always been one of the barriers to really using the technology well. CPD was one of the themes at the Mirandanet stall and Christina Preston is currently undergoing a study to find out which models of CPD are most effective. Throughout the time at BETT people were contributing to the MirandaMods - informal, loosely structured meetings of like-minded educators to share ideas about the use of technology to inspire others.

## Naace

I should mention Naace here not just because membership entitles one to use the exclusive lounge with free refreshments and relaxing chairs which was very welcome and gave me a chance to pop in the RM Learning spaces for a glimpse into the future. Coming back to Naace though I was taken with the launch of their CPD area called ICTCPD4Free which will be of interest to all practitioners.

## CC4G

CC4G has changed adapting their log to read Connect, Create and Go. Originally a resource for encouraging girls to join computer clubs. They are moving forward with a teaching and learning activities called journeys that are useful not just for clubs but mapped across the curriculum as well. Teachers can use existing journeys or create their own from the building blocks called nuggets. There are modern activities mainly in the History, English, Science and Art areas that should have wide appeal. All the activities are mapped across the curriculum and there are full lesson notes for teachers. It is not just for girls. Their aim is to encourage girls and boys to re-think their perception of jobs in the ICT industry.

## Creativity

Creativity is always a theme at BETT and this year I had a good look at the Kudlian animation studio. This is Wallace & Gromit territory and with some plasticine models and plenty of patience maybe your students can create a masterpiece film. This is great fun but what is the educational gain? I walked on to the Zu3D stand who were also demonstrating an animation studio that could record sound tracks on top of the animations. They recommended the use of the software in language teaching where the tools could be used to make maybe a French animated film that could be hugely motivating.

Kudlian also have a weather studio software. On the computer, you set up a map using the various weather symbols, write a script and then stand in front of a blue screen and video your weather production reading from the build in auto-cue. Good fun and although you could probably do a lot of this with general office products the software makes it easy to get started.

## Mobile learning

For years at BETT I have monitored the use of mobile devices. Now the iPhone has arrived there is a revolution. I stopped at Zuzertu which creates applications for the iPhone. Biology and physics revision notes with tests are just the start of something big. The next development is that teachers could monitor how well their students are doing through the applications. This new generation of smart phones are the first mobile device that I have seen at BETT that has real currency for school children.

There are others out there. 'Acumen Mobile' have a range of applications that include improving the messaging between school/college and home. They also have virtual workspace available so that a pupil could upload information from a field course to their space on line.

## Fun and games

Magic Studio takes the power of web 2.0 technologies to offer an on-line platform to build interactive resources. Think PhotoStory with interactivity. Students can use the web based tools to make interactive learning resources. Text, images, audio and video can be added to highlight the key points of the presentation but this has far more to offer than PowerPoint. The set up is free and then you pay by usage that is capped to a maximum. This makes it easy to get started and you don't need to worry about any initial expense.

## Simulations

Using computers to simulate practical things that are too difficult to do in the classroom have always been useful. I still remember a remarkable Nuclear Power Station simulator that was available in the early days of the BBC micro. Things have moved on. I came across the SimVenture business simulation experience which allows users to set up and run a company for a virtual three years.

Global Conflicts offers something different, as it allows students to explore and learn about different conflicts throughout the world and look at the underlying democracy, human rights issues, globalization, terrorism, climate and poverty. The focus is South America, Palestine and child labour in Bangladesh.

## Computer Aid

Are you throwing away old computers? Then contact Computer Aid International as they will wipe the hard drives and distribute them to schools, hospitals and disabled people mainly in Africa. Data security is guaranteed and they comply to WEEE legislation.

## Conclusion

It was another inspiring BETT but not quite living up to my expectations given the new technologies around. Perhaps in the end, the snow outside was the most exciting thing.

## Links

Microsoft Semblio

<http://www.microsoft.com/learningspace/semblio/>

Photosynth

<http://photosynth.net/>

Smart Express

<http://express.smarttech.com/#>

Mirananet

<http://www.mirandanet.org/bett/>

Naace ICT CPD

<http://www.ictcpd4free.co.uk/>

CC4G

<http://www.cc4g.net>

Kudlian

<http://www.kudlian.net/>

Zu3D animation - Zuztertu

<http://www.zuztertu.com/>

SimVenture

<http://www.simventure.co.uk/>

Computer Aid

<http://www.computeraid.org/>

**‘Vital’ unveiled – £5.6 million technology professional development programme for teachers in England goes live**

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)

*Vital (Transforming Lessons, Inspiring Learning), a new professional development programme for teachers in England, had its official launch at the 2010 BETT Show in London in January.*

The Open University (OU) and e-skills UK - the team behind the £5.6 million DCSF-funded scheme - took full advantage of BETT 2010 to unveil details of this new CPD programme, which aims to boost both the specialist teaching of IT in schools and the use of ICT across the curriculum.

"The response among the many hundreds to our stand was extremely positive," says e-skills UK's Debbie Forster, Vital's Programme Co-ordinator. "It confirmed the hunger among school and sixth-form college teachers for effective continuing professional development in technology which is delivered, crucially, in ways that are sensitive to the time and other pressures teachers face."

In line with the findings from research conducted during the development of the Vital concept, teachers at BETT expressed high levels of approval for the scheme's emphasis on highly practical courses focused on classroom practice. Teachers also welcomed the shift from 'one off training' to ongoing professional development with frameworks that allow individuals to identify new learning opportunities and plan their own development in a more coherent way.

"Vital will recognise and build upon the expertise that teachers already have, and support them in sharing 'good practice'. Through the Vital Community, practitioners will be able to reclaim their rightful position as leading-edge creators and thinkers in education," explains the OU's Peter Twining, Vital's Programme Director. "Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to get time out of school to attend courses and we recognise that discrete courses are not always the most effective form of staff development. Vital's provision focuses on peer-to-peer collaboration, structured bite-sized '15 minute CPD' activities and courses combining different proportions of face-to-face and on-line learning. We will maximise the benefits of informal learning, while providing routes for teachers to receive accreditation for their staff development."

By 2011 there will be a stable of 25 new courses on offer for specialists who are teaching technology (IT/Computing) as a subject, and for all teachers using ICT to enhance teaching in other subjects. The first of these, launched at BETT 2010, are focused on elements of the 14-19 Diploma in IT and on supporting the use of schools' virtual learning environments (VLEs) to enhance student collaboration and reflection.

The Vital website will support a range of vibrant online communities where teachers can share expertise, raise issues and explore interesting practice. The website also provides opportunities for other continuing professional development (CPD) providers to showcase their offerings,

giving schools easy access to a rich source of information about the full range of ICT-related CPD available to them.

“One of the challenges for schools at the moment is identifying suitable staff development. We are determined to add value by helping schools locate relevant CPD opportunities, including referring them out to other providers’ courses,” says Peter Twining. “Our goal is to work with all the key stakeholders to maximise the collective impact that we can have. We would like to avoid any duplication of effort in the development of ICT CPD, and to that end we are collaborating with other stakeholders to coordinate the development of high quality CPD materials that will be available free of charge for educational use on a national scale.”

To find out more about Vital go to [www.vital.ac.uk](http://www.vital.ac.uk) .

## JISC Collections for Schools

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)



*New Ofqual guidelines highlight the many challenges faced by pupils when navigating the open web. How can schools respond?*

JISC Collections for Schools builds on the success of JISC Collections, which as a cornerstone of the HE and FE sectors, already provides online subscriptions to 100% of universities and over 85% of further education colleges through its central licensing role.

Guidelines recently published by Ofqual highlight the many problems faced by pupils when searching for information on the open web. The issues of content accuracy, appropriacy and copyright theft are a world away from the carefully-managed learning experience traditionally offered to children by their school and represent an ICT challenge to which teachers and managers must respond.

One solution is to provide students with access to carefully-selected online subscription resources. An advantage of using these databases, as Ofqual states, is that “the information

they provide has been written and reviewed by experts.” (Ofqual, “Using Sources”).

In the past, the cost of online subscription resources has been a major barrier to widespread uptake by schools. However, as a result of an important initiative funded by Becta, over 20 online subscription resources are now available to state-funded and independent schools across the UK at discounts of up to 75%.

Launched in 2008, JISC Collections for Schools offers resources which together provide broad coverage of the National Curriculum from Key Stage 1 upwards. Selected by a panel of experts from the school community to be appropriate, accurate, and curriculum relevant, resources include copyright-cleared image and video libraries, curriculum-mapped games and simulations, newspaper archives, general and subject-focused reference and learning materials.

Independent and state-funded schools are increasingly working together - both in informal groups and through organisations such as School Library Services - to pool their purchasing power in order to achieve greatest savings. So far, JISC Collections for Schools has been a great success, and over 1 million children across the UK now have access to one or more resources.

Find out more about JISC Collections for Schools at [www.jcs.nen.gov.uk](http://www.jcs.nen.gov.uk).

To read the Ofqual guidelines in full: <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-12-24-plagiarism-students.pdf>

## Strengthening the home-school partnership

Cited in:

- [Advancing Education Spring 2010](#)



*September 2010 is the deadline by which the government expects every secondary school in the country to be providing online information to parents on their child's progress. Mark Leighton of Blatchington Mill School offers some practical pointers on*

*how schools can implement an effective system that will help strengthen home-school links.*

Engaging parents in their child's education is not just about getting them to visit your website, it's about being able to give them something meaningful when they get there. Reporting achievement, attendance, SEN and behaviour information will, the theory goes, give parents what they need to get more involved in their child's education. More involvement, means more support and a child that learns effectively, which is good news all round.

But with so much at stake, we need to make sure we get these systems right so they report the information that parents want and understand. And we need to take care that we are not adding to teachers' workloads by implementing them.

Before Becta announced their deadlines, my school, Blatchington Mill, was already exploring how to involve parents more in their child's school life. We had conducted a survey of parents and it confirmed our belief of how little of the information sent home via students actually reached its intended audience.

## **What parents want**

We set up an online parent portal that allowed parents with internet access to get up-to-date information about their child from home or work by publishing student data direct from our management information system (MIS).

Since launching the portal in September 2007, we have discovered that parents like access to a wide variety of information on their child's school life. However, two areas that draw them back into the site over and over again are information on homework and attendance.

Knowing what assignments have been set and the date they are due in by has helped students and parents, and although homework diaries are not part of Becta's requirements, I would recommend all schools make this part of their parents portal as it will get parents engaged with the site.

Without having to nag or pester their children, parents can discuss assignments, already knowing what it may be about and when it must be completed by. Many mums and dads have told us that they feel their children really appreciate the fact that they are taking an interest in their school life.

Parent, Marica Walker, told me, "Where both my daughter and I found it useful was if she had perhaps not fully understood her homework assignment. Previously it would have been difficult to help, but with the parents' portal we could log on and look at the homework log and figure it out together."

With access to real-time attendance information, parents of students who may have had issues in the past appreciate the chance to go online and see that they have attended all their lessons that day. Others simply want to verify that their child got to school safely after they had said goodbye to them at their front door.

Once you have parents logging on regularly, achievement data helps further develop home-school support. Parents have told me that by seeing their child's grades from previous years as well as their current ones, they can see if there is a problem straight away and can step in and help.

General school news finds a good home online and permits us to publicise events and information that we think will be relevant to parents. Examination dates and times, as you can imagine, are also extremely popular. We have developed this area of the portal to also cover information on what revision has been set, so a parent has everything they need to support their child.

## **Keeping mum**

I think it's important to share as much information as possible. The more transparent we can be, the better. However, there are certain precautions that it would be advisable to take.

Don't inundate parents with teacher speak. Schools often produce a lot of information and reports that are full of jargon. Try to make the information as relevant as possible to the person viewing it, or include a key to information that is bordering on the 'only to be understood by those with a PGCE' category.

Remind teachers that when entering information on the MIS, their comments may now be published online and so the more colourful comments relating to a child's behaviour, for example, should be avoided. On the subject of behaviour, it is worthwhile deciding which incidents you do want to publish. Would publishing every small infraction be useful, or would you prefer to mention the more serious ones so that parents are not unduly concerned? Likewise, when reporting on incidents, you need to be careful that if more than one child is involved, parents should only be able to see information relating to their child and not the other children involved.

## **Support**

The other important lesson that we learnt was to start slowly. Roll out portal access to a small group of parents, starting perhaps with PTA members and then moving on to a single year group. This will give you the opportunity to iron out any hiccups in the system before it is released to everyone.

In addition, this ensures you can roll out any training for parents easily. We have provided face

to face support for parents with ICT staff at parents' evenings and other events throughout the year. On occasion we have even got students involved in the training.

## **Teacher workload**

One question I am frequently asked by other schools is how much this new approach has increased teacher workload. By publishing much of the student data direct from our MIS, a lot of the additional work has been avoided.

However, it is true that whilst some teachers have adopted the change wholeheartedly others have been slightly more cautious. They have had to invest more time to feel comfortable with the system and it is important that we offer these teachers the right support.

## **Improving school culture**

It is interesting to see how parent-teacher communications have evolved at parents' evenings since we introduced the portal. Conversations focus straight away on the issues at hand because parents come already informed with the information from the portal.

Online communication also enables us to communicate to the so-called 'invisible parents'. It is often the case that teachers talk to the same parents, who regularly attend parents' evenings and school events. We can now engage those parents who are unable to attend meetings because of work commitments or those who feel uncomfortable at school.

There is definitely a greater sense of community about the school now. There are currently 200 hits on the site by parents in an average week, which varies depending on the time of year and the activities taking place in school. We also have about 10,000 hits by students per day, which gives an indication of the scheme's popularity two years after its launch. Different forums have been added for students, teachers and parents to interact with each other and discuss issues that are relevant to them and the school.

The success is demonstrated by the fact that now the technology is up and running, parents continue to provide suggestions of what information they would like to see online. The more we can draw the parents in and integrate them into school life, I think the better it will be for everybody.

Mark Leighton is an assistant head and ICT director at Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College in Hove. The school uses Capita Children's Services' SIMS Learning Gateway technology within its student, staff and parent portal.