

**Information services in the 21st Century
Library management and technology
Middlemash 2009
MMIT conference on mobile learning**

Association for Learning Technology Conference

Blending digital technologies with pedagogy

Equipping school children with the technology skills required for higher education and keeping abreast of changing student expectations were some of the key themes at the Association for Learning Technology's September conference. Vanessa Pittard, Director of Evidence and Evaluation at BECTA presented research showing the stark social divide in England in terms of internet access. 39 percent of children (representing 455,498 children aged 5-16) in England with an income less than £15,912 (the general eligibility threshold for free school meals) don't have access to the internet at home, whereas at income level of £27,196 and over only seven percent lack access (296,566 children). The Government is investing in a home access project to buy parents connectivity and a computer to help fill the gap.

BECTA findings show that schools are trying very hard to keep up with technological changes but are not necessarily succeeding in equipping children and young people for the future or building the right competencies and behaviours. The Agency is currently working closely with QCDA (previously the QCA) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families to consider revisions to the primary curriculum and to identify competencies required from primary school leavers. This aims to meet recommendations from the Rose Review that primary school leavers should arrive at secondary school ready to begin gaining skills in independent learning.

In 2008 only 27 percent of secondary school teachers used technology to enable pupils to work with others, although this was excellent progress on the previous year, there's much scope for development. 17 percent used technology across the five areas of: gathering information, analysing information, being creative, solving problems, and working with others. In terms of whole school around 35 percent of secondary schools in this year's survey were e-enabled or e-mature.

Despite these seemingly low percentages, invited speaker Aaron Porter, Vice President (Higher Education) of the National Union of Students (NUS), pointed out that some students feel they take a step back in terms of their use of technology when they arrive at university and that universities should take into account technology use in schools when preparing their strategic plans.

The Open University's new Vice Chancellor, Martin Bean, explored similar themes in the lifelong and higher education context. He emphasised that the

use of technology in education is less about trying to find pivotal points of massive change and more about recognising it's a journey. Martin showed that 21st Century skills are very different from earlier days of rote memorisation and testing memory skills. Today's university students have never known the world without the web with most using it on a daily basis and having one or more social networking profile. Educators must accept the changing nature of our student population and find a way to blend digital lifestyles and education. He said higher education should get back to putting the learner at the centre: institutions can't just push information at students anymore, pedagogies and services must revolve around students.

Making made some humorous but very valid points about people's scepticism about technology, he illustrated that resistance to change in education is not a new phenomenon. At a teachers' conference in 1703 concerns were raised about how students would manage if they dropped their slates and broke them and weren't skilled in preparing bark, whilst in 1950 educators were concerned that ballpoint pens would be the ruin of education. The pace of change has certainly speeded up: at the ALT conference many presentations were available via real time broadcasts to a disparate community and delegates were twittering and giving a real time critique of the speeches.

A version of this article first appeared on IQ Education's website www.iqmedia.co.uk/

The hottest trends in learning technology and fusing Facebook with further education

Michael Wesch, social anthropologist and expert on the impact of digital tools on culture opened the Association for Learning Technology's conference with a powerful speech on the impact of technology and how we're moving from being consumers of media to creators of media.

Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Kansas State University, Wesch's research builds on media discourse expert Marshall McLuhan's work of the 1960s – 1970s and shows that we must understand how media mediates our relationships with each other. For example, why is breaking up with a partner easier by text than face-to-face? Wesch gave the example of the lecture theatre as a medium – we can see how our environment for receiving messages affects the way we behave; in this situation the walls and surroundings give us the messages: to learn is to acquire information;

trust authority for good information; information is scarce and hard to find...

At Kansas State University students today typically have three technology devices each, such as a mobile phone, iPod and laptop. Gilly Salmon's informal 'ATM survey' at the UK's University of Leicester shows a similar pattern in the UK. But these findings aren't just pertinent to higher education: students are the workers of tomorrow. Students' expectations for use of technology in working life are shaped by their 'fun and friendship' use of such devices and they expect to be able to use the same technology when they enter the working world.

Invited speaker Aaron Porter, Vice President (Higher Education) of the National Union of Students (NUS), demonstrated that world-class higher education is no longer limited to the UK but is now emerging across the world. The UK should seize the opportunity to take the lead by utilising technology and transforming the world of students through sharing good practice. This could be through initiatives such as stimulating a sense of academia through Facebook and other social networks that students are already using in a social context. Martin Bean, new Vice Chancellor of the Open University, pointed out that students won't want academic staff stalking them in their 'own' space such as Facebook but that more needs to be done to meet students where they live in the virtual world.

The subject of digital identity and students and educators profiles in the virtual world was tackled in a workshop where we learnt that our identity is always subject to change and that we're defined by our relations in a social community. What can feel like a semi-private context may in fact be exposed to the public view. Participants were introduced to and supported in using a range of online tools and services to establish an online identity, including blogging, social bookmarking, video and photo sharing sites. Associated issues of privacy, professionalism and search engine optimization were also explored and knowledge of such areas will be increasingly essential for anyone using the internet.

The huge and ever-growing amount of information that is now available on the web or on company intranets threatens to engulf many of us. David Price introduced Debategraph, a tool which uses the internet to gather and filter thoughts – this can be used in a government context to analyse information and opinions from the wide variety of experts that cannot be brought together by traditional means such as forums and committees. Debategraph works with The Whitehouse, MIT, OU, Downing Street etc, helping policy makers to see different ways to see and understand the challenges they face in policy making as none of us has sufficient perspective to be able to see the whole picture of complex problems in social policy: the type of problems we confront are too big. It could

equally well apply in a work context where company intranets are increasingly repositories for a mine of information but analysing threads of research or opinions can prove problematic.

David's final comments were thought-provoking: The way we teach at universities often produces students who create isolated work which isn't contributing cumulatively to social understanding and social good... although universities are starting to use wikis for assignments which are graded and available publicly. If we could just take a small percentage of the energy that flows into students' work and direct it outwards to public structures we could help to address our gaps in knowledge.

The challenge posed for education is great. It is to increase effectiveness, productivity, and quality, whilst institutional and agency budgets are reducing, rather than just to promise improvements. At the same time we need to ensure the spread of innovations that are scalable and of long-term value, both educationally and financially, whilst keeping learners and learning at the heart of our thinking.

A version of this article first appeared on www.trainingzone.co.uk ■

Next year's ALT Conference "Into something rich and strange" – making sense of the sea-change, **will focus on the structural and pervasive shift in the nature of the internet. Speakers and workshops will examine the way that educators and learners are always connected; how the technology devices we all use are growing in capability and diversity; and why the information environment and the tools and services that we use to navigate and to interact with it and with each other are in great flux.**

Watch keynote speaker and invited speaker sessions from the conference at altc2009.alt.ac.uk/posts/6563972 For information about ALT-C 2010, visit www.alt.ac.uk/altc2010 or contact ALT on 01865 484125.



Photos: Photoshy

Above, Martin Bean: 'need to blend digital lifestyles and education'; below, Michael Wesch: 'we must understand how media mediates our relationships with each other'

and finally...

MMIT now blogs and twitches



The MMIT website is undergoing some changes, so we have launched a new Wordpress blog to allow for better collaboration and easier updating. 2010 will also see the return of the factsheets on the main website.

The blog is at mmitblog.wordpress.com and will focus on technological developments and related news in the library and information sector. Comments and submissions are welcome and you can subscribe by email or RSS. This blog is a work in progress so please get in touch if you have feedback.



We are also on Twitter where you can keep up-to-date with Group and journal developments: www.twitter.com/multimediait



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For all enquiries, please contact the Managing Editor at catherine.dhanjal@theansweruk.com or on 01883 650434.

New events sub-committee



MMIT now has an events sub-committee. The sub-committee will continue to be responsible for MMIT's annual conference, as well as the MMIT-

sponsored workshops at the biannual Umbrella conference. The committee is also seeking to work with other groups (e.g. CILIP branches or other Library and Information special interest groups) to organise and develop more regional-based multimedia and information technology workshops, seminars and conferences. If you are interested in working or collaborating with MMIT in the events area, please contact Leo Appleton (l.appleton1@jmu.ac.uk). ■

See pages 22-23 for MMIT's conference on mobile learning



If undelivered please return to *Mmit*, 1 Yew Tree Cottages, Woldingham, Caterham, Surrey, CR3 7EA, UK