

5.0 Conclusion – what has been learnt ?

The following is a personal reflection of what I have learnt / been exposed to over the last 12 months whilst on the GTC/Miranda Net efacilitation course.

12 months ago I only had a hazy idea of the role of ICT in my school. The school bought computers with appropriate software, established computer areas within the school such that ICT provision was “up to date” and an asset to show prospective parents. However little thought had been given to how all these facilities could be used so that students could become more effective learners.

Government policy re ICT use was not particularly helpful and the Impact2 study on the use of ICT in schools found little of any statistical significance. We seemed to be blindly following the crowd, spending a vast amount of money with little promised gain.

During the first half of the project I became more a lot more aware of the problems and possibilities inherent in using ICT effectively within the school. It was useful to take part in, and practice facilitation in an ongoing discussion forum and I was able, I thought, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of such a learning medium. My project looked at the quality of elearning coming out of an online discussion forum. After an extensive review of the literature I was not a great deal further forward, most of the studies were of doubtful value and little could be used. Despite this I attempted to analyse an online discussion forum that ran for 2 months between February and April 2003. My findings were not particularly startling – there was some learning going on but it was (using Blooms taxonomy) fairly low grade in quality. However, the experience was very useful and it confirmed to me that analysis of online discourse learning left a lot to be desired. On attending the November presentation meeting I was impressed by the quality of work done by other colleagues, many projects were very innovative and successful, whilst others revealed problems and flaws with the methodologies used. All however depended on the hard work and enthusiasm of the researchers. We were I thought speaking very much to the committed. After these presentations the ICT in Schools Division of the DFES gave a talk about the future use of ICT within schools. The scenario the DFES gave is given below. (D Brown Divisional Manager)

“In last 5 years we have:

1. created a wealth of research – and moved the debate to ‘how?’
2. shown ICT can support improvement in attitudes and behaviour
3. shown that ICT can have a direct positive relationship to pupil performance – up to half a grade higher at 16+ exams
4. shown that schools (KS2: age 7-11yrs) with good ICT resources have better achievement than schools with poor ICT resources:
 - (i) even when compared with schools of a similar type...
 - (ii) irrespective of socio-economic circumstances...
 - iii) irrespective of quality of management “

What we failed to do as a group was to question the validity of some of these statements. I would agree with statements 1-2 but I personally doubt the truth of the last two statements. Statement 3 comes from data obtained from the Impact 2 study. In this study correlations between use of ICT and achievement were analysed and in some cases a direct positive relationship to pupil performance was obtained. However correlations do not imply cause.

Statement 4 uses the words “**good** ICT resources have **better** achievement than schools with **poor** ICT resources but the words good, better and poor are very subjective.

Brown went on to discuss the DFES 5 year vision and suggested that “we” need to

1. “make the technology transparent to teachers – *so it is an enabler and teachers can concentrate on the teaching*”
2. ensure teachers can maximise the use of the technology – *so ongoing CPD is essential*
3. make the technology powerful for learning – *so teachers can better tailor materials to match student needs*
4. make ICT relevant for teachers and meet their needs – *so teachers can release the potential of 21st century learning “*

This brave attempt at looking at the future of ICT in schools struck me as being somewhat naive and unworkable. To enable this to work will require a cultural change in school based pedagogy that will have parents and teacher unions doubting the sanity of the government. The problem is converting the rhetoric of Whitehall into school based reality. In order to do so we need to develop and then use a model of school based ICT learning. None was suggested.

As a follow up speaker Peter Twining of the Open University was far more realistic and down to earth. He talked about the problems of using ICT in the classroom mentioning the reality rhetoric gap of high investment in ICT and low impact on learning. He suggested that

“the reasons why ICT is not having the impact that one might expect - relates to ambiguities within the literature, which lead to it being misinterpreted and misused. This is partly because there is a lack of clarity in the literature about what is meant by the terms that are used “

His evaluation was far more critical and was based on talking to over 5300 teacher practitioners. He felt that the brave new world suggested by the DFES was a long way away.

Finally the use of elearning and efacilitation in building theories and models was also discussed. Salmon’s model of teaching and learning online, which most of the efacilitation was based on, was not felt to be appropriate. Other models from Heppel, Davies, Scrimshaw and Preston were discussed and Smith presented his model of e-learning relating to the philosophy of learning. Other models collected by Twining included those of Kemmis, Taylor, Chandler, Dwyer, Sandholtz, Laurillillard, Squire and Twining.(See Appendix 2) Having so many models suggests that elearning methodologies are very much in their infancy; we really need methodologies that bring things to a focus, rather than divide.

I left the meeting in a troubled mind. Previously I felt that the parts of ICT that I had grappled with had some merit but also had problems. Work from colleagues suggested that the way ahead was exciting but full of pitfalls. Governmental thoughts suggested that everything in the ICT garden was rosy and all we need to do was

Twining suggested that we have a long way to go to fulfil the potential of ICT, how we get there is uncertain as the methodologies are many and varied. Over the next 5 years the use of ICT will be refined and developed. Teachers will slowly change pedagogical practice but students will lead the way. Can we keep up with them?