

# Schools and Schooling in the Digital Age

## The Future of Learning MirandaMod series 2011/12

At the first *Future of Learning* live workshop series for 2011/2012, called *Schools and Schooling in the Digital Age*, Dr Chris Yapp, a MirandaNet Fellow, shared his research for his new book about the design for learning with teachers who are aiming to improve the achievements of pupils who are not reaching their full potential in school.

The MirandaNet Fellowship is an international professional organisation of educators who share knowledge about the role of digital technologies in the future of learning. Christina Preston who founded the Fellowship in 1992 is now Professor of Educational Innovation at Bedfordshire University. Together on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011 MirandaNet Fellows and Bedfordshire student teachers and staff ran this live workshop, called a MirandaMod which includes the combination of digital communication technologies like social networking, micro-blogging, video streaming, video conferencing and digital concept map construction. These technologies ensure that professionals who cannot attend can still join in online, interrogate the materials on the web afterwards and help to create and spread professional knowledge.

The participation of educators who attend MirandaMods, face to face and online, is acknowledged in the developing resources whether they are student teachers, teachers, senior managers or policy makers – all the contributions will ensure that this intellectual exercise in professional knowledge building allows professionals at all levels of the education system to have their say. The intention is that pupils, parents, carers and governors in schools will also contribute to the knowledge created and stored online about creating effective learning experiences.

### Social learning

This MirandaMod was held in the same week when Michael Gove, Education Secretary of State, made his first references in office to the emerging Department for Education policy on digital networks in education at The Schools Network conference<sup>1</sup>. He said, "There is a perception by some that my department isn't especially concerned about such things [as digital technologies in learning]. That we care more about Tennyson than technology. That our interest is in Ibsen, not iTunes. That we're more Kubla Khan than Khan Academy<sup>2</sup>. This couldn't be further from the truth. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that our school system not only prepares pupils for this changing world, but also embraces the technological advances which are transforming education.... "

Gove makes a direct reference to kind of social networking used in the MirandaMods to bring teachers together in professional communities. "One of the greatest changes can be seen in the lives of children and young people, who are at ease with the world of technology and who communicate, socialise and participate online effortlessly..... Yet the classrooms of today don't reflect these changes. Indeed, many of our classrooms would be very

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<sup>1</sup> To see the article on the Department for Education web site, go to <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a00200484/michael-gove-speaks-to-the-schools-network>

<sup>2</sup> Gove's speech on the topic of traditional educational content. <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a00200373/michael-gove-to-cambridge-university>

recognisable to someone from a century ago. While there has been significant investment in technology in education, it has certainly not transformed the way that education is delivered... We owe it to pupils across the country to take this issue seriously”.

In the context of children’s experience, Gove pointed out that, “Two-thirds of five- to seven-year-olds use the internet at home, rising to 82 per cent for 8- to 11-year-olds and 90 per cent for 12- to 15-year-olds. Over a third of 12- to 15-year-olds own a smartphone, and typically use the internet for 15.6 hours every week. Children are increasingly embracing technology at a younger age: for example, 23 per cent of five- to seven-year-olds now use social networking sites.”

In this context, MirandaMods aim not only to give professionals the same kind of experience of social learning that children and young adults enjoy, but also to master and extend these activities in order to capture and share existing knowledge, but, based on what is known, to build new knowledge collaboratively. This approach amongst professionals will ensure that students discover more purposeful ways of using social networking.

### **Using digital technologies in learning**

In the MirandaMod on 30<sup>th</sup> November, Dr Yapp’s argument was that, “Technology is pervasive....we only notice it when it doesn't work. But educational technology is both the means and the cause of change”. In this session his aim was to explore how technology might be used in a productive way at an organisational scale to improve the learning experience of pupils. Underlying his thesis was a question that is fundamental to the learning relationship between teachers and pupils; a question that transcends the technology they use, but also shapes the way they use it. “Does a good teacher fill an empty mind, or light a fire to motivate someone to learn?” His view was that the answer has to be debated before technology as a tool can be deployed effectively.

Teachers at the event said that Chris had stimulated them to think more widely about how schools might support not only pupils but their families as well when learning difficulties are evident. For example one teaching assistant, said that working in a secondary school she had seen first hand the pressures teachers are under to achieve good grades. This limits the pupil in here view, as they learn at different rates. The teacher then becomes frustrated as they only have a set amount of time to stay on a topic. This teacher said that attending the event at the University of Bedfordshire enriched her learning tenfold in this area:

“I was amazed by Dr Yapp’s thoughts on the future of ICT in schools. I really liked the idea of the school being used out of hours, for the community and totally agree this is a potential way forward.

I also really loved the fact the learning should be personalised. Pupils would get so much more out of education if it was streamlined to their needs. I am looking forward to being part of a community moving-forward in which ICT can be used so much more effectively not only in schools but in the wider community too.”

### **Mapping the debate**

On a large screen, participants at the event and online created a digital collaborative map of Chris’ talk based on the very open questions he was asking the whole school to consider: Which processes in schools are most open to automation, now and in next five years? What data do schools have which is useful to help them improve? Which stakeholders could IT

make biggest impact on from position of school effectiveness and achievement? What should school leadership team look like by 2020? What new roles would be a priority to improve schools systemically? What should schools stop doing by 2020?

Participants in the 2011/2012 series will continue the process of adding their own comments on the map and suggesting further resources.

### **Microblogging**

In the lecture hall comments from educators online were coming in throughout the event on large screens alongside Chris Yapp in the form of text, concept maps and talking heads. Student teachers from the University of Bedfordshire who were assisting with the broadcasting, video streaming and back channel applications were surprised by the numbers of professionals who were joining the event on Twitter (#mmshift2). Until this point this class of students in IT had only used the social networking application, Facebook, for setting up meetings and contacting classmates

Judging by the Tweets, teacher participants in this live workshop appreciated Yapp's suggestion that schools should be learning hubs in the community. They saw this as offering the school's digital resource for everyone including parents who might be able to improve their business reach. Another Tweeter commented to participants: "Interesting ideas on school governance from Chris Yapp.... check the slides out later"

This was followed by a question, "Are head teachers heads of just one school or lead learners in a community - investment in Another Tweeter liked the idea that digital technologies might help with motivation: "What gets your pupils excited? Having fun while they are learning". A useful reminder in the efforts to improve achievement in the classroom.

Joining in the Twitter stream the students were intrigued by the related intellectual debates that were taking place simultaneously as Chris's talk inspired new thoughts. For example, a separate strand in 40 characters was emerging about the value for language learning: "[This talk promotes] new ways to organise language teaching for 2020. Any school could teach any language - by utilising new thinking and tools." This stimulated a strand from those who are arguing that computer languages should be reintroduced into the curriculum. One participant tweeted, [Chris is suggesting] new ways to organise language teaching for 2020. Any school could teach any language - by utilising new thinking & tools" A reply came back in the Flash meeting stream. "On entitlement to learn two languages what about Python and Java?"

### **Flashing**

Other educators were coming in online on Flash meeting- a free application rather like Skype, but used for recording a transcript of the online groups' textual response to events they are watching on the video stream. There was some banter in these exchanges about thinking, sharing and multi-tasking: "I'm with you while cooking, tweeting and updating dropbox". Some were exhausted having been out marching in the strike; "It all got a bit much, phew, too much marching today! I need four hands". This group posed some careful questions that were read out to Chris by the student teachers who were reading the scripts on the screen in the auditorium. This group asked about importance of creative ICT in project based learning with others rather than an emphasis on programming citing a significant recent industry push for the inclusion of e-skills in the curriculum. They also

asked, Do schools innovate, or do teachers innovate? Will Government ICT Strategy & emphasis on the cloud accelerate the community provision Chris is advocating?

### **Next MirandaMods in January 2012**

This debate will continue, free to educators, at the BETT12 exhibition, in London, Olympia where MirandaNet is in partnership with the Achievement for All programme run by the Achievement for All 3As charity and PwC and funded by the Department for Education ([www.mirandanet.ac.uk/bett/](http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/bett/)). Topics are: Wednesday 11th: Exploiting mobile technologies in learning; Thursday 12th: Improving access to achievement using digital technologies; Friday 13th: Empowering students to harness the power of social networking for learning and World-wide educational innovation; Saturday 14th: Teachers taking charge of their own professional learning; One world: setting up curriculum exchange.

**Note** The Achievement for All programme is a tailored school improvement framework, delivered in partnership with leaders, teachers, parents, pupils and support professionals, that aims to raise the aspirations, access and achievement of pupils identified with SEND. A two-year pilot has demonstrated unprecedented impact for SEND pupils, who progressed faster on average than all pupils nationally in English and Maths. Achievement for All schools may wish to apply the Achievement for All framework to a wider range of vulnerable pupils in line with their whole-school improvement strategy”.

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