

○ YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR TECHNOLOGY AND THE FEAR IN SCHOOLS

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This paper is a conversation piece about the failure of schooling to embrace the technology that 21st century young people use as part of their lives. It directs attention to the fears that schools – and probably many adults – have of young people and their technology. It argues that it is not technology that is the issue but the 20th century attitudes of schools, schooling systems and governments. It is this attitude that actually controls schools, their young people and the amount of and manner in which technology is used. It briefly explores young people and their technologies and looks ahead to emerging technologies, but again all within the context that it is not as much about technology as the culture of schools. Technology, through the Internet, enabled the global knowledge economy but schools have not really embraced either. The paper concludes with the possibility that young people empowered by their technology may well rebel against the irrelevance of their schooling and its controlling culture, particularly technology.

I can't imagine not having student voice. I have always had it. (*Claire de Vos, Year 12, 2010*)

Perhaps this best describes what I need to say about young people and technology. Some schools enable students to have their voice. Most don't, but young people have voice outside school through technology, particularly social media. Social networking, just over the last few years, has empowered young people way beyond where they were at say five years ago. While schools may stop it within their borders, they will not stop its influence nor the conflict that will emerge between schools and their young people if schools do not embrace the way young people embrace technology.

I recently attended an ICT Conference largely with ICT leaders and technologists from a range of public and private schools. My paper was about schooling in 2010 and their clients – young people. I got a strong sense that schools generally are still fearful of how young people use technology. Just as with a physical fence around a school to keep people in and others out, there are 'fences' around how schools embrace and allow young people to use technology. Schools seem to embrace what it is about ICT that they can control and use for administration and managed teaching purposes. To what extent they are embracing it to foster learning, create relevance with young people and work with the enormous skill sets and dispositions that young people have is questionable.

For many years I have argued that schools have to open their doors to the world in which young people live and operate (Warner 2006). Since the late 1990's this world has increasingly involved more and more sophisticated ICT. We acknowledge, for example, their capacity to write an essay and network on FaceBook at the same time, but we deny this activity in school. At a recent workshop with Deputy Principals from some seventy primary schools, there was not one school that gave young people access to social media sites at school. Indeed very few of them were comfortable with mobile phones at school, though more allowed them as long as they were kept in bags or lockers and not used!

A key element of our problem is fear. We fear what young people might do and how they might use their power. For too long we have viewed schools as institutions that manage and discipline young people. If we give them freedom, how will we control them? Teacher education programs and new teacher induction programs have classroom management as a key theme: control of young people in groups. We live in an age in which the Internet has empowered young people. They have immediate access to information, communication, commerce, collaboration, sharing and networking. The great majority display enormous maturity in their on-line behaviours. Yes, they make mistakes, sometimes get into trouble and there are some obsessive behaviours. However, this is their world. They are not afraid of it, but we are afraid of the potential consequences of it all for how we manage schools.

I do need to argue that it is not any sense of interference with their learning, even their literacy and numeracy, that causes such fear, but a direct concern with losing control. In the early years of the Internet, Edna Apek (2002) and young people directed our attention to the immensity of the change and the need for us to learn to share authority. Apek saw that the Internet revolutionised the balance between the power of the adult and the status of young people. However, this only really happens outside the school, despite the increasing questioning of the relevance of schooling and school curriculum by both young people and employers. A recent student survey caused us to reflect on the results to one question from a senior at Year 10 level: 'Teachers clearly explain *why* we are learning, not just *what* we are learning.' I met with the whole year group who had suggested that this was not a strong part of their current experiences. They talked to me about relevance, particularly the relevance of subjects like maths and the fact that teachers do not adequately relate it to the real world of young people or to their aspirations. Even in a school where young people overwhelmingly endorse their student voice and the closeness of their relationships with teachers, there is a sense of a gap between the world and what happens in school.

The second element to fear is perhaps a rationalisation to hide our real fears. There are dangers on the Internet. These are real. However, there are dangers on our streets, there is bullying in our homes, our schools, our communities and our workplaces. On Friday August 13 2010, the NSW Government issued a warning about letting young people walk alone in the streets because a 13 year old had been asked a question by a man in a car. There are 'bad' people in the world, but they are overwhelmingly outnumbered by 'good' people. If we continue to 'cotton-wool' our young people our society will decay because there will not be the creativity and the risk taking that enables a society to function in a healthy manner and to create the wealth through entrepreneurialism that is needed to ensure economic growth and competitiveness in this global knowledge economy. With such fears in our leadership it will be very difficult to create the sort of open culture within schools that characterises social media. Such fears are not conducive to management through protocols.

I think as a mature community we do recognise that the dangers of the Internet are very similar to the dangers in our communities and much the same as they have been for centuries. The Internet creates greater exposure and the speed of communication and contact has increased. However, this is about teaching young people and their families to identify the dangers and to be able to deal with them. Removing the technology from schools is simply hiding a problem – but worse, it is about schools refusing to take up their social and emotional responsibilities in terms of the education of young people. The Victorian Government has removed social networking

from its new Ultranet, ostensibly because of privacy fears (that word again), but there are no significant privacy issues as such in closed communities. It would appear that the real reasons are more likely to be fear of the empowerment that young people feel through their social networking. Given the real fears, one would have thought that the best place to teach young people about using technology safely would be the school. After all, teaching and educating are our business. If we cannot teach for safe and ethical use of technology then should we be trusted to teach young people at all?

A third element of the fear is security against virus attacks and related malicious attacks on computers, systems and personal privacy. I am not a technologist but again it would seem that most networks can manage these reasonably well even when using cloud technology. Schools do fear that students and teachers can bring in all sorts of problems if the network is not tied down tightly. I suspect we need to get over it and learn to manage as best we can. If a young person can take their device into McDonalds and connect they surely are going to believe that they should be able to do it at their school.

The contrast to the restrictions and controls within schooling is the freedom that ICT, particularly the Internet, has given to the vast majority of young people in the developed and much of the developing world. A few years ago we directed attention to young people and Generations Y and Z as being the Internet users. One would have thought that schools, therefore, would have been amongst the first to embrace it with their young people. However, true to their history, schools have avoided it and at best will become corporate followers in say about ten years. I guess this is not too bad as it is some 90 years since Taylor's¹ hierarchical, tightly controlled factory style of management, and schools still embrace it.

Dennis Masseni explains:

The corporate sector now understands that transparency is the new world order in communications. Control of the brand is gone. It's a world where the institutions must saddle-up beside their community and become part of the conversation as an equal. You spin – you die. (Masseni 2010)

He describes social media as accessing, sharing, commenting and collaborating online. He argues, from a Survey with 140 School Principals, that schools are 'spooked' by social media and need to learn from the corporate sector.

Neilson's Social Media Report (<http://www.asiadigitalmap.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/social-media-report-mar10.pdf>) directs attention to the fact that social media use is now embedded in Australia's social behaviour. The Report says:

Research Director for Nielsen's online business. 'Incredibly, nearly nine in ten Australian Internet users (86%) are looking to their fellow Internet users for opinions and information about products, services and brands, and Australians' engagement with online word of mouth communication is going to increase in coming years as social media plays an increasingly important role in consumer decision making.'

Social networking on sites such as Facebook was a key driver in Australians' trial and uptake of social media. Close to three in four online Australians (73%)

have looked at others' profiles on social networks and well over one third (37%) of these report to be interacting with others via social networking sites on a daily basis.

So, the keys to effective use of ICT in schools are: one, to overcome our fears of young people and how they use technology, and; to create school cultures that actually embrace young people and their 21st century world. We tend to spend our energies more on how we as adults can use 'our' technology in schools to create new engagement and learning opportunities rather than looking at our attitudes to what schooling can and should be. We sometimes appease ourselves by talking about how we might create the conditions so that in ten years time there will be sufficient change. Governments have done this so often with the notion of 2020! Perhaps the baby-boomers are using delaying tactics so that the issue is left to the next generation! However, as Elliott Eisner (2004) argues:

Preparation for tomorrow is best served by meaningful education today...we will realise that genuine reform of our schools requires a shift in paradigms from those with which we have become comfortable to others that more adequately address the potential that humans have for shaping not only the world, but themselves.

Educators, therefore, need to tackle these issues now. This also means that Governments need to identify the real issues and create the policy vision that empowers schools to act.

This directs attention to how we take responsibility for attempting to understand the nature and potential of incoming new technology (Warner 2006). ELTHAM, for example, developed very early in the first decade of the 21st century a secure Intranet that gave transparency to curriculum, immediacy of communication and on-line continuous reporting. Individual students, their parents and their teachers were in a customised and secure interactive environment. ELTHAM students have always had Internet access, open use of computers to access the Internet, games and social media and mobile phone use. It is hard to keep up! However, we do need to think about incoming technologies because as they come, young people will be amongst the first and most active users. Schools do need to get to the leading edge in terms of technologies rather than slowly following the corporate sector, but these technologies must be about supporting how young people will use technology and how we develop transparency, communication and interaction with all stakeholders.

Having said this, the issue of culture within schools is not about technology but rather it is about how the people in schools work with each other and the types of relationships that they have. In a school culture where younger and older people work together, collaborate and fundamentally respect each other as people, fear is not a feature of thinking or behaviour. However, in a traditional hierarchical school where young people are less engaged in the decision making and working life of the school, there is a greater chance that the decision-makers will fear how young people will react to greater freedom and autonomy. In this there is then the fear of allowing a tool (ICT) that young people as digital natives 'own' into the open life of the school.

We need to change this culture so that young people can use technology as they do within their 21st century living or recognise that young people will use it themselves to bring about

change. In this spectre lies the potential for increased conflict. This isn't about a physical battleground but rather a climate of increasing antagonism and disengagement. Even the young people who currently 'play the game' to get their results, particularly final year results for university entrance, will disengage in school. However, it is the sixty percent of young people whose talents lie elsewhere who increasingly disengage but who may well find school more attractive if their social media, games and other technology can be part of their schooling experiences.

Part of our control is in our making the decisions about what technology and how it should be used. This is fine if we want to be at the leading edge and take Hamel's view (Hamel 2004) that we are going to surprise and excite our clients by what we are doing. I believe ELTHAM did that by creating its Intranet, the Knowledge Network, which provided transparent curriculum, communication and continuous on-line reporting. However, in the main school control is about restricting the use of technology by young people because it threatens adult ownership of the culture and curriculum of the school. It is rarely about being at the leading edge and there is sufficient evidence that schools are well behind the corporate sector.

Unlike much of the corporate sector, however, schools' clients are young people and there is a community expectation that schools are educating young people. Perhaps the big issue is that from Governments to individual households there is limited knowledge about what this education should be or be about and even worse, total insecurity about how it should happen. At least the corporate sector generally has a clear focus on what it is selling. Schooling does not have this focus. Hence, it relies almost entirely on an historical perspective on what 'good' schooling should be and works very hard to distance itself from the realities of the world that its clients, students, are living in.

I recently talked with our final years students about their use of technology. Not surprisingly they contrasted their personal use with what they have to do to manage VCE exams. Some in fact are trying, and I emphasise *trying*, to reduce their use as it does not fit with the assessment expectations of final year examinations. What a weird world! Major assessment is still via written exams in long-hand not via computers or indeed the Internet. It also is still totally individual rather than team-orientated, which is very much in contrast with the use of social media, much of the games world and indeed, the world of work.

However, even in such a world young people can take their skills and attitudes and apply them to traditional learning. We have to believe that they can develop the skills and disposition for self-directed learning and, using their technologies, master even the most traditional forms of learning and assessment that we throw at them. Matt Blair, a final year student, mastered the iPad as a tool for his learning. The technology didn't do it. The person did and made the technology work for him. Young people can do that. I direct attention to the following YouTube reference: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V0tYs_Ogds

However, one of our fears is that young people will not achieve as well as they should if we give them the freedoms to become self-directed learners and self-managing in their behaviours. This is not true, but it takes an enormous leap of faith or 'legislative' decree to enable such transformation. Greg Whitby, Executive Director of Schools, Parramatta Diocese, directs attention also to the high performances of NSW HSC students in the transforming Diocesan schools (BOSS 2010, 62). I certainly direct attention to ELTHAM's results, where young people in both their VCE examination results and their post-school successes demonstrate that transformed schooling that enables freedoms and self-management works. It is sad however, that we need to make such

statements, as the school assessment systems are as outdated as the industrial curriculum that we subject young people to. We still, for example, prepare young people for industrial learning and assessment in an age in which technology and the immediacy of the world of information and communication is much more about 'just-in-time' learning.

The 'gurus' appointed by Governments are recreating schooling in their image and ramping up standards so we are '1980's best practice', but avoiding the fact that young people are in a transformed world that owes little now to the industrial paradigm. It may have served a previous generation well, but it does little for the digital natives who are now in the second decade of the 21st century. We have to move beyond believing that at best schools should only use technology to the standard of their teachers or the systems that employ them. The YouTube video of ELTHAM student, Matt Blair, is a good illustration of young people saying 'let us move with our world and help us to understand and work with it'. His technology world can help revolutionise schooling, but only help. To really work it needs the attitudes of people in schools and systems to change to focus more on how schooling can provide for young people a 'best-fit customisation'.

No longer is reality, for example, just what we can feel, smell, taste and see. The physicality of accessing, storing and sharing information is shifting and our 'digital natives' seamlessly weave this into everyday life. Rather than printing out schoolwork, an email with a link can be sent to where the document is stored on the cloud. Textbooks can be downloaded and viewed on screen with students having capabilities to highlight, search and summarise texts.

Schooling tends to be a private transaction between the school and the individual. While we teach in groups, the learning is individualised. Today young people, as well as the corporate, business and industrial worlds, tell us that learning, living and working are a social transaction. Technology makes learning a more 'just-in-time' process which is applied and has social consequences. The move to Web 2 technology has added the social interaction dimension that young people have made their own. Learning is about sharing information and constructing new knowledge or meaning and sharing this in social space. It does not deny the importance of the enabling skills nor the essential methodology of disciplines, but these need to operate in an integrated and relevant context. New paradigms are emerging that are several paradigms ahead of what we currently offer young people in our schools. Russell Ives, Deputy Director, iNET² Australia argues that allowing young people to utilise technology in their learning provides opportunity for students to collaborate in constructing new knowledge and communicating that in a powerful way through social media. In this context knowledge grows and schooling and its young people are more in sync with the global knowledge economy.

There's a new generation of learners. We need to help them transform the world by transforming our fear of technology into curiosity.

Service industries, indeed all industry, are absolutely curious about the client. At what point does business ever say 'we know all there is to know about the client' and do what they have always done? Young people and their world have transformed, schools surely should be curious about them.

When we realise our responsibility to students – our client – the message becomes: what should be the roles of school and teaching in this new world? What should be the role of technology? We fear combining curriculum and technology as young people use it and we fear above

all losing control of assessment and measurable outcomes. In 2010 we assess industrial curriculum in industrial ways and get at best industrial outcomes from our schools.

We owe our students the best and that entails examining what is going on in their lives so that we can make the educational experience as relevant to their lives as possible. We need to be curious about our students and the world in which they live. Social transactions are becoming most relevant to students. Why? Students are curious about the world in which we all live – and of greater importance, social media is central to growing their social world. Technology has allowed this natural curiosity to flourish yet we as educators have not caught on. In fact, we should question just how much a 'client culture' exists in the education industry.

If we want students to learn from us as educators, we need to start learning from them.

What is needed in schooling and schooling systems is leadership with integrity, technological vision and a powerful and urgent curiosity about the client, the young people we tend to call students.

I don't know at what stage young people will take their frustration and anger with schooling and rebel. The frustration and anger existed, particularly with young men, long before technology became part of their lives. However, what we should realise is that technology has empowered young people in ways we never even imagined. They now have the tools and probably the attitudes to rebel. And, their world of technology may well allow them to learn very effectively without traditional schooling. I could argue that their learning may lose some of the riches that schooling can provide, but they may well be more creative and innovative than they are now and just as literate.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Frederick Winslow Taylor is a controversial figure in management history. His innovations in industrial engineering, particularly in time and motion studies, paid off in dramatic improvements in productivity. At the same time, he has been credited with destroying the soul of work, of dehumanising factories, making men into automatons. <http://www.skymark.com/resources/leaders/taylor.asp>
- ² iNET stands for International Networking for Educational Transformation

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