Five take-aways, 10 tweets and three videos

Sunny South reflects on the Second Boys and Technology Conference

Stephen Harris, principal Northern Beaches Christian School

The Second Boys and Technology Conference, held in Melbourne recently was a great chance for like-minded educators to get together, discuss, learn, network and share ideas about the impact of technology on schools, boys in particular and their families

What set this conference apart was the access we had to the voice of the students with a great keynote speech by a Brighton Grammar Year 12 boy who articulated so well the role of technology in his life and a panel of very candid students talking about their own experiences with technology – their likes, dislikes, frustrations and suggestions for teachers. The keynotes were varied and well targeted – great educators and learners themselves with vision and ideas to share.

Stephen Harris, principal of Northern Beaches Christian School – a leading innovator in 21st century learning was inspirational. This is a school that truly walks the talk. Conferences are an opportunity to take stock of your own situation, reflect on the actions and thoughts of others and go back to your own school invigorated about the future of teaching and learning with technology.

Here are my top five take-away thoughts from the conference.

Teachers in 2025

Teaching may be very different in 2025. This is the year that next year's K students will be graduating. It will also be the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. Those of us who believe in the skills and values of 21st century learning will be hoping that this framework is entirely embedded in our curricula; students and teachers involved in different types of learning – both face to face and online. But the sense of community a school brings will still be important – a community of learners with teachers as the facilitators of knowledge gathering and synthesis, innovation and creativity – empowerment through ICT enhanced student-led learning. Teachers do not need to be the expert, rather be able to assist students to manoeuvre the vast arrays of information out there. Quality teachers will still be important as coaches of life skills and inspiration to their students.

What we need to be increasingly aware of is the safe and responsible use of the internet for students. The digital and mobile world poses challenges for teachers and students that need addressing. The ability for future employees to Google the digital presence of an applicant means that students need to be directed in safe and appropriate behaviour online.

Teachers working in collaborative teams should be a feature of how we work not just for planning but also for teaching. This is a preferred model for Steven Harris from NBCS, the power of many rather than one to excite and engage learners working independently and in groups.

What needs to change

Currently the average age of teachers in Australia is 48. In the next 14 years most of those teachers will not be teaching. Steven Harris believes that there are 10 key factors that need to change to promote the skills and support educators.
• A shared vision
• Intuition
• Risk-taking
• Collaboration
• Teamwork
• Creativity
• Edbed ideas
• Action
• Lots of PD
• Creative curriculum models.

Schools in the 21st century

Restructuring of school staff, particular management structures to reflect new ways of teaching and learning will be paramount to the success of a 21st century learning environment. Professional development of teachers is also a big ticket item for schools expecting their teachers to shift to new learning models – the support is vital. ICT features but there will be a move to a BYOD (bring your own device) model and ICT needs to be seen as the tool NOT the driver of the learning.

Schools need to change – the salutary tale of Borders (Steven Harris) is a warning to all institutions that we cannot keep teaching and learning in the old factory/industrial models of the past but look to a future educational paradigm that engages students and prepares them for a future that we cannot predict.

Learning spaces will require more flexibility for different styles of learning and enhance group work and collaboration as well as support the use of technology (in all its forms).

Technology as an empowering tool for all

The proliferation of the mobile device – the iPad or Android tablet, the smart phone, the iTouch, various recording devices and portable video has meant that learning can take many forms and be tailored to the

learner's special needs or preferred learning styles.

Apps for the iPad are numbering 425,000 and growing. The power of being able to find (or create) an app that suits a particular needs is extraordinary in range and capability. Assistive technology is one area that has benefitted from the growth of mobile devices and speech driven software for example is useful for many students that face learning challenges.

There are apps for the management of learning, organisation, collaboration, independent learning, communication and creativity. Using these tools helps us to create new models of learning, re-thinking teaching.

The trick is to use these apps as a tool to facilitate learning, discovery, creativity and innovation and as a place to organise learning to save time and manage. It is however a cautionary tale. Distraction is a major issue, especially with boys using mobile technology. We all know how easily it is once a mobile device is in your hands to experiment and get off task and it's no different in a classroom situation. The quality of the teaching and integration of the use of the device must be carefully targeted.

Mobile devices such as the iPad have a real place in the delivery of epublishing and an advantage can certainly be seen once there is a good availability of text and other books to download. The portability, the ability to copy and paste text, highlight and make notes etc means that the text becomes more easily manipulated, portable and available.

Mash-ups are the future of learning – the ability for a variety of delivery methods to students via video, audio, text and image and also students doing their own mashing up of content to create and innovate new knowledge.

Learning spaces

Learning spaces are an interesting adjunct to technology. Mobile technologies don't sit well in the industrial model of desks and chairs.

We need to rethink teaching spaces to fully maximise the power of collaborative teaching and learning, the anywhere anytime nature of mobile learning and create inviting, colourful, practical interesting learning spaces for our students. Furniture, technology, size, colour and design are all important factors.

Stephen Harris (NBCS) also discussed learning spaces and showed examples from his own school where they bravely have broken down classroom walls for more collaborative teaching, utilised outdoor spaces for learning and seamlessly incorporated technology into all learning environments.

During the conference several providers of technology equipment were available to chat to and there were a couple of really exciting products that would enhance any learning environment.

Video conferencing
Digital microscopes
Digital measuring equipment
Tables with short throw IWBs
To name a few….

My top 10 tweets

As an enthusiastic Twitter user, I tweeted madly through the conference – both to get the messages out there to my Personal Learning Network (PLN) who were not able to attend and also as a reflective tool and summary of what I enjoyed and learned at the conference.

My top 10 tweets that made me think more about my own teaching and learning were:

- *Education occurs when you ask what sort of society do you want? What sort of people do you want? (Quote: Gardner)*
- *By 2025 we need to change the way we measure success in education*
- *Technology can connect learners with similar interests across ages across cultures*
- *The gathering of content is not learning how to learn*
- *The tablet is not necessary for people in this*

room, it's for normal people. (Quote: Steve Wozniak)
- *Use the SAMR model to define tasks you want to do with a mobile device*
- *Some students (the quiet ones in class) like the anonymity of commenting online*
- *The iPad is a game changer in education because of 'hope' 'serendipity' and 'convenience' (Quote: Gerry White)*
- *Flipped classrooms as a model for better learning*
- *Think then do… do then think, which one are you?*

Videos… the future

In keeping with the mobile/online and innovative theme of the conference I took note of video recommendations to watch after the conference. Not only are they usually great ways of seeing other people's thinking and creativity, they are also a reminder of the conference themes. These three videos are a glimpse into the not too distant future and can act as a kick start to developing ways we might be delivering learning in the future.

Watch these for a taste the exciting world that's just around the corner.

The Pranav Mystery
A day made of glass
I teach therefore you learn (or do you)

I have dipped into my thoughts about this conference ever since returning to school. I have used take-always from the workshops and keynotes in my teaching already and our school planning for mobile technologies in the near future. It was a truly worthwhile experience not only for me personally, but my school also benefits from the knowledge and enthusism I bring back. ET

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