

Spaces, Places and Future Learning

By Frank Keane

The use of innovative technology and practices to re-imagine learning spaces were explored at the Futurelab Conference held in The Rich Mix Cinema Complex, London. One of the most important and key messages emerging from the conference and a challenge for us all involved in the educational sector is that teachers and pupils are becoming systematically disengaged from schooling.

The typical classroom in school has changed little in the past 100 years with only 'the furniture becoming cheaper and the posture of our students becoming more slumped'. In addressing this issue Lord David Puttman (Chairperson of Futurelab and former film producer) spoke on the need to re-conceive learning to be more inclusive of children's experiences, interests and passions which occur outside of the school environment and to reconnect learning with communities.

It is interesting to note that only 15% of a child's time is spent in a formal education setting so it is becoming increasingly important to find ways of acknowledging, valuing and rewarding learning that takes place outside the classroom. If we are to maintain a true learning culture we must 'inhabit the wild' outside of the confines of educational institutions and utilise the more natural learning that happens in museums, galleries and life in general.

It is time to 're-magicalise the world' and to 're-infect the population to rediscover the world' rather than allowing them to become 'numbed and dumbed down'. School has become a chore for children in the 21st century and the time has come to put the wonder back into learning, to make school 'so compelling that it need not be compulsory' and to design new ways of doing things not just new things.

The time is ripe for educational reform. Children are now engaging with physical, digital and virtual spaces for both playing and learning and the Conference stressed the importance of rethinking and

redesigning learning spaces to encourage these new learning adventures. The importance of redesigning space and the use of innovative technology can play a major role in this regard.

The role of innovative technologies and the role ICT has to play in the modern world cannot be understated. The ubiquitous presence and utility of ICT in modern life are having a significant impact on the way we live, and even on the notion of an educated person. It has led to the concept of the knowledge society - sometimes also called the learning society or information society.

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This conference provided the opportunity to think imaginatively about the learning spaces of the future and on the possibilities for transforming these learning spaces with innovative tools such as computer games and mobile, tangible and embedded technology.

The conference also examined the importance of design especially the design of new learning spaces that enable, encourage and facilitate more personalised educational experiences. The design of learning spaces could facilitate the development of a wide range of skills such as creativity, innovation, risk taking, performance skills, presentation etc. It is important to empower the learner and to organise learning spaces to ensure that the



Frank Keane, principal of Shantalla Primary School, Galway.

learners are given more choices, greater voice and control over their education.

The possibilities afforded by new technologies and the investment in building schools for the future may facilitate radical change in education. It also indicated the need to develop a long term vision which will inform the physical design of both school buildings and the virtual space of embedded and purposeful technologies in a digital world. It was certainly futuristic in its vision for education. It opened up the debate on how learning takes place and where learning places have changed radically and we now need to adopt a radical approach in providing learning opportunities and examine carefully the potential of providing new innovative learning spaces for the 21st. century.

Frank Keane is Principal of Presentation Primary School, Shantalla, Galway. He is a Member of the Presentation Centre's Community of Learning Innovators



"Switch it Off" message promoted by young Mountmellick enthusiasts, all prizewinners of the art competition on Energy Saving and Climate Change Photo courtesy of Mr Joe Barrett, Laois Nationalist.

GOING GREEN IN MOUNTMELLICK

by Imelda Carew

'Together we can make a difference' is the message constantly being promoted by Mountmellick Environment Group (MEG) and this was certainly borne out at the recent Energy Saving and Climate Change information day organised by the group. As Joe Barrett from Laois Nationalist reports: "Huge crowds attended the daylong event organised by MEG to raise awareness about energy saving and climate change. The most striking thing about the event was the number of young people who attended. Normally, the fine weather and school holidays would keep the young people outdoors. However, they flocked to the Mountmellick Development Association (MDA) buildings to take part in the varied programme of events."

Joe went on to say "To see such a large attendance is a testament to the many people and groups who have been active over the past number of years in raising environmental issues in the schools and community. A number of businesses and groups specialising in the environmental sector had trade and information stands, which drew a lot of interest from those who attended.

A big attraction on the day were the speakers, Helen Cantrell, Programme Officer from Friends of the Earth, Joe Durkan, Programme Manager from Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) and Annemarie Nugent from Cloughjordan Eco Village. Each of the speakers prompted a huge interest from the crowds and engaged them in a lively insightful debate.

High on the list of concerns among the people who attended was the introduction of incinerators to deal with the mounting problems of waste. Each of the speakers spoke of alternatives to incineration such as increasing the rates of reducing, reusing and recycling. The common thread among the local people was their high awareness of the need to conserve the existing resources and the need to reduce energy use."

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RTE's Eanna Ní Lamhna to address The Challenge of Sustainable Living...

see page 2 for further details.





L to R, Maureen Bassett Independent Consultant, David Rose, Jean Johnson & Jonny Dyer of The Inclusion Trust UK, and Ann Marie Quinn pbvm at the Notschool.net awareness raising event in Croke Park Conference Centre, Nov 2006.

Croke Park: Not rugby, Not soccer but a Notschool.net Seminar.

Presentation Centre Team and 'Inclusion Trust' Team U.K. co-hosted a seminar in Croke Park on Notschool.net – an internet based virtual online learning community.

The aim of Notschool.net is to re-engage young people in learning and foster in them the desire and ability to return to lifelong learning and ultimately employment.

Although work can be set, produced and assessed online, the idea is that it is not at all like school. The learners are known as 'researchers' and the teachers are known as 'mentors'. There are also subject 'buddies' and 'experts' who offer support to the researchers as they embark on their exciting venture of re-engaging in learning.

The Presentation Sisters, building on the success of the UK model, have set-up a central team to pilot this innovative model of learning in Ireland and are recruiting mentors to work part-time online, to facilitate 'learning gains' with the young people. The project will offer learning opportunities to young people who for a variety of reasons are no longer engaging in education.

For more information please telephone (01) 4509406

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Global temperatures have risen over the last 100 years as a result of people creating greenhouse gas emissions by burning fossil fuels and other simple daily activities such as leaving the TV / computer on standby, which uses up about 20% of the electricity that it would normally use when it is fully switched on. 20 to 30 per cent of our species are also in danger of becoming extinct, as a result of global warming.

The speakers pointed out that each of us has a part to play in helping our environment and that many actions are small and simple like switching off lights, boiling just the amount of water you are going to use, having proper insulation in our homes, driving only when necessary, turning the heating down to 20°.

Some of the highlights of the day were the entertainment from members of Mountmellick Comhaltas Group and the

THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Current pressures on the global environment, if allowed go unchecked, will have a negative impact on the quality of our lives, that of our children and future generations. The natural resources are being depleted, temperatures are rising, water tables are falling and plant and animal species are disappearing. The responsibility for changing to a more sustainable lifestyle rests with each of us, either as an individual, member of the community or an organisation.

On Monday 9th July 2007, the Presentation Sustainable Living Task Group are launching a nine-month programme on Sustainable Living

The launch will be part of an information day featuring Eanna Ní Lamhna on Biodiversity and Sustainable Living and Chris Southgate & Associates, architects of the newly refurbished Nano Nagle Centre, Ballygriffin, who will provide an overview of the recently installed mechanisms which enable a more sustainable lifestyle.

Venue: Nano Nagle Centre, Ballygriffin, Mallow, Co. Cork.
Time: 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Who should attend?

The day is designed for anyone interested in exploring the challenge of sustainable living and who is wondering how to get started/take further steps or is interested/willing to engage in the programme, either as an individual or with a group, over the next nine months.

Further information from presnagle@jmin.iol.ie

Booking through: Nano Nagle Centre, Ballygriffin, Mallow, Co. Cork. Tel. 022 26411
Cost €20 including lunchtime snack, tea, coffee.
Limited places

presentation of prizes to students from the local schools who had taken part in an art competition, organised by MEG, on the theme of Energy Saving and Climate Change.

MEG and the Presentation Centre will be considering the issues that were raised throughout the day and will be incorporating them into their plans of action on promoting environmental awareness and advancing the idea of developing a green town.

MEG is a community group in Mountmellick Co. Laois, which promotes active community involvement in environmental issues.

Imelda Carew pbvm is the Presentation Centre's programme leader for ecology and human rights.

Reaching Out to Learn

By Maureen Bassett

A new report on Lifelong Learning and Outreach by the Presentation Centre for Policy & Systemic Change calls for greater recognition of the need for outreach to engage people in learning. It also calls for the promotion of intergenerational learning and greater integration between service providers. The report draws on the experience of seven pilot education and outreach initiatives over a four year period.

In 2002, the Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change initiated a pilot programme which aimed to develop new approaches to adult and community education. It was intended that projects would meet hitherto unmet local needs and contribute to policy learning. The programme was firmly situated both in the policy context which prevailed in 2002 and in the vision and aims of the Strategic Plan of the Presentation Ministry. This stated that: A major implication will be a shift from a ministry predominantly of service provision to one focused on developing innovative models in response to urgent unmet needs and to influencing public policy and systemic change. (Towards a New and Radical Agenda 2002-2006, p. 4)

In line with criteria set out, seven projects participated in the programme. Three focused on intergenerational learning, two on the development of outreach strategies and two engaged directly with young people.

PROJECTS WHICH PARTICIPATED IN THE PROGRAMME

Millennium Family Resource Centre, Ballingarry, Co Tipperary
Before 5 Childcare and Family Centre, Churchfield, Co. Cork
Mayfield Action Response for Social Transformation (MAST) Clondalkin, Dublin
Southill Integrated Development Programme (SIDP), Co. Limerick
Presentation Family Centre Listowel, Co. Kerry
Drogheda Youth Development, Co Louth
North Presentation Secondary School, Farranree, Co. Cork

Outcomes for Participants and Projects

The report highlights that there were many valuable outcomes both at local project and Programme levels. The projects concerned with intergenerational learning had positive outcomes for both mothers and children and in

some cases there were knock-on effects into the local community as some women became involved in other local initiatives. For the women, benefits included increased confidence, time for personal growth and reflection and links to other learning opportunities. The benefits for children included: increased engagement in school based learning; the ability to make links between community and school based learning; increased confidence and self esteem. Strengthening of relationships between mothers and children were also reported.

For projects concerned with the development of outreach strategies the key benefits to participants at local level was engagement in learning and accessing other opportunities and services in the community.

A key outcome from those projects concerned explicitly with young people (whilst each had very different emphases) was the development of their sense of 'having a say' in matters that impact on them and other young people.

There were also positive outcomes for most of the host organisations including the development of new approaches/strategies, increased participation by members of local communities and linkages with other relevant organisations.

Policy Learning

The Programme was situated within the framework of life- long learning. The Centre endorses the understanding of life- long learning contained in the White Paper, Learning for Life, 2000

... a relatively seamless progression through an educational continuum from cradle to grave with opens boundaries between the worlds of work/home/education (cited in Call for Proposals, 2002, p. 1).

It also endorses the OECD view that argues that this requires a major shift in orientation from institutions, schools and programmes to learners and learning.

The report outlines valuable policy learning from the Programme which confirms this view. In particular it concludes that the need for an **integrated approach** was evidenced across all the projects and reconfirmed the need for commitment by all agencies to such approaches in the interests of learners/service users. This entails a 'generosity' of approach and the 'letting go' of territorialism; integrated

approaches also require support and resources, e.g. to develop networks.

Outreach, Intergenerational Learning, and Learning Innovation

The report highlights the need for

- recognition that outreach work and strategies are central, requiring full integration into development work and backed with adequate resourcing
- that the barriers to participation are largely systemic and not situated in the individual
- that centres and services need to change in response to the needs of those reached

- to recognise the value of intergenerational learning approaches and in particular those which involve the primary caregiver –in most cases mothers; these should take account of both the needs of children and of the caregiver ; the full potential of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme needs to be maximised through real partnership with community initiatives and the need to consider the location and employment of HSC personnel in and by community organisations; the need to extend the scheme to include all disadvantaged children

There is a need for

- investment and support for the development, testing and evaluation of a range of **innovative learning approaches** to ensure that all young people and adults, particularly those affected by educational disadvantage, benefit from education and learning systems.

The report also identifies the need to ensure ongoing core funding for **community development and community education** including resources to meet the costs of participation. This is based on the evidence of the Programme which reconfirmed the importance of responses that address the development of social capital, social networks and whole communities rather than isolated individuals. It concludes that there is a need for further development of structures nationally and regionally to support the full development and implementation of the promise of the White Paper Learning for Life (2000).

Maureen Bassett is an independent research consultant and author of the report. Copies of the report will be available email: info@presentation.ie

Launch of Plan for Ministry

The Launch of The Strategic Plan for Presentation Ministry 2007-2012
September 22nd 2007,
at Mount St. Anne's Retreat Centre, Killenard, Portarlinton.

For further information on this event email: info@presentation.ie