

Boys and Technology: 2nd Annual Conference
Learning together in tomorrow's digital age
Crowther Institute
29-30 August, 2011, Melbourne, Australia

Student Panel Presentation

Andrew Baylis: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. This session is to hear from those that Steve Harris asked us to attempt looking through their eyes: that is, the students themselves.

The rules for the boys are to not name schools or teachers. They are here to represent every adolescent teenage boy not just their particular environment. What we are hoping to do is build up some common themes.

Now we've heard a bit about this already today. "Textbooks are always the wrong information in the wrong order at the wrong price and the wrong weight in my backpack". This is a quote from Jed Macosko, an Associate Professor of Physics from Wake Forest University. And we've already heard from some of students already – if all the textbooks could be put on the iPad that would be fantastic.

(speaking to students)

How many of you, though, actually have an experience of using an eBook or a pdf as a textbook or how much of this is still pie in the sky?

S2: I had my first go of using an iPad today and I found it quite useful that all the books are on there. There's also a lot of educational apps that help and I think it would be a good idea if schools did trial them.

AB: Has anyone actually used it in their on-going learning so far?

S8: We've used it with our Maths textbooks, so it's easier. And in English we've used a lot of books.

AB: When looking for explanations or information how often would you use Wikipedia as your first port of call – or Google or your textbook? Can you rank them in order – what would be your preferred option and then what would you do next?

S3: You'd go to Google and then the first site would be Wikipedia and if Wikipedia didn't have the answer you wanted you might go and have a look through your textbook and hope there was something in there. You'd definitely use the Internet first, though.

S9: I use the same method – I Google what I want and it's likely to be the first thing. But if you do think something might look wrong you'd always check your textbook again to see if you've got two different things.

AB: Some people would say that textbooks are used to find the questions and the Internet is used to find the information to answer those questions. Would you guys agree?

S3: Yeah I would, because if you look on the Internet you don't usually find that many questions you only find more answers, so a textbook is just basically a place you go find the questions and the Internet is where you get your answers.

AB: On this topic of accessing information, eBooks and how the students research, are there any questions from the audience?

AM1: Given that eLearning is really self-directed, I'd like to ask how the boys keep themselves on task without getting distracted from the other bits and pieces online?

S11: I'm not going to lie; it's kind of hard to not get distracted when there are so many resources at your fingertips. But there are solutions that you can use today that can help you, like things that shut down all social networking sites on your user. To keep on task we try to remind ourselves that it's due at this point and we keep footnotes as well as timings, but we do our best.

AB: So it seem we are hearing that it's going to be more and more of a challenge to keep on task. Which brings me to mobile phones – and I this question is directed at the audience as well – how many of you have left your mobile phone at home and don't have it with you? *(counts audience)* Ok, not many.

What about you, boys? How many of you don't have your mobile phone with you? *(none of the boys put their hands up)* Right. *(laughter from audience)* And how many of you have ever come to school without your mobile phone? *(a few raise their hands)* And would that happen often?

S3: Only if I've run out of battery or credit.

(laughter from audience)

AB: How many of you occasionally come to school without your homework or your textbooks?

(all boys raise hands; laughter from audience)

AB: It's the old keys, cash, camera routine except that now it's actually keys, cash, phone, isn't it. We take our mobile device with us all the time. Now, a loaded

question but I want an honest answer. How many of you would use your phone in class routinely whether or not the teacher's observing.

S2: If the teacher' just – if it's like a film and it's just *really* boring (laughter from audience) you just get it out and play a game.

AB: What about others who would use phones? Do you text – what do you use them for?

S10: You're just using them to keep yourselves entertained if the class is really bad.

AB: A CISCO report quotes data from Denmark showing 16-year-olds use mobile technologies to connect every day and almost all the time. The only times they have very limited connectivity are between 9 and 11, 11:30 and 1 and 2 and 3:30. *(pause)* I wonder what that's telling us? *(to students)* So, what do you guys use your connectivity for? What would you say is the key thing you use the connectivity, the Internet etc. for in your day-to-day life?

S4: I talk to my mates – find out what's going on after school and on the weekend.

S9: I'm usually on Facebook. I can also be gaming sometimes.

AB: So social networking is key. How much time in a day would you be spending on recreation and social networking compared to using the Internet and your connectivity for accessing information for learning. Would it be a 1 for 1? Would it be a 2 for 1? Two for social, one for learning – the other way around? 5 for 1? What sort of ratio – just so teachers here can get a sense what it is used for.

S1: Well, I probably use social media about 4 to 1 compared to using information for homework.

S2: Different days have more homework and stuff, so you might not get out much so you probably will spend more time on social media sites

S7: It depends on what activities I have. If I don't have anything on then I'll probably spend most of my time on social media.

AB: So, when you go home and you might have some homework, would you be online for half an hour, an hour or two hours? What would be the typical time your computer or your device is on. Whether or not you're looking directly at your Facebook or whatever – how much time are we talking about here?

S4: I turn my computer on when I get home and it doesn't get turned off until I go to bed. It's always on Facebook. It's either there or in the background – so I might not be directly on it but it's always there.

S8: An hour and a half a day.

AB: Are there any questions from the audience about this use of social media by teens? Perhaps someone wants to challenge the comment that if class is boring they will be playing games or listening to music.

AM2: With social networking are you just passively seeing what other people are writing or are you actively engaged in writing as well?

S3: Well it really depends. If you've had a really interesting weekend you might want to spend time looking at what your friends have done. You already know what you've done and you might have written it up during the weekend but you haven't really been in contact with your friends so you might want to just have a look at what they've done, like, maybe they've been to the snow or something like that.

S11: I'm a very passive user of Facebook really. I only check what my friends are doing, what everybody's doing and maybe if my friends are going to the movies or the city or something.

AB: Dr. Adam Cox is a US psychologist who did a two-year research project on 'significance' in boys' lives. He questioned boys from around the world about Facebook. There was one memorable quote from a 16-year-old in the USA, which went something like: "Facebook is an essential waste of two hours of my life every day. I connect to stay in the loop to find out what everyone else is doing. If no one used Facebook I wouldn't miss it at all because I'd be outside socializing with my mates." (*to students*) Would any of you like to respond to that? If there was no Facebook would just mingle with your mates – or is Facebook a necessity?

S4: I agree with the quote – I only use Facebook to feel connected with all my other friends but if no one was on it – if not a lot of my friends used it there'd be no reason for me to so I'd probably be out with them.

S10: Yeah, a good example of this is what happened to MySpace a couple of years back. Everyone used to use MySpace and then no one used it so literally no one does that anymore and everyone switched over to Facebook.

AB: Whether it be USA or Australia or the UK – there seems to be a theme right around the world – boys, especially, almost feel forced to be on Facebook because that's what everyone else is doing. However, to be online at home when they could be outside kicking the football or socializing – there's appears to be quite a tension created; something schools could think about. Are there any other questions on this Facebook issue?

AM3: I'd just like to ask the boys if they actually feel peer group pressure to be on Facebook? Do you actually get comments about why you're not on Facebook – why you aren't talking to anybody – do you feel pressured to do so?

S4: No, but you just feel left out and not part of anything if you're not there. There's no one saying "Why aren't you on Facebook?" and no one fully cares if you're not on Facebook but it's all about how you feel.

AM3: So you think if you got rid of your account nobody would care?

S4: No. Some people have stopped using their account for their homework and stuff and it's not really major or anything.

S9: I don't really get asked why I'm not on Facebook because I'm not that popular as everyone else but it doesn't really matter to me very much *(audience laughter)*.

AB: Facebook is just one of the features of Web 2.0 but there are also blogging, tweeting and so on. How many of you boys actually have a blog?

(none of the boys put their hands up)

Well – that makes it interesting because my next question was why do you run a blog! So – I'll have to ask the audience. How many of you have a blog? Well – certainly more than the students! Can I just ask one of you why you choose to write a blog?

AM4: It's just a chance for me to talk about many different things. Rather than having discussions with peers and other educators I can talk on the one forum about three of my passions without being troubled or told that this is wrong – it's my forum, it's my space, I can do what I want to do.

AB: So it's a chance to talk about things you want to talk about in your own time and in your own space. Now, if you think about the normal teenager who *loves* talking about things they want to talk about - and yet we don't have anyone here – and they may not be a totally random sample – that runs a blog. *(to students)* So given you have an opinion and given you love sharing your opinion, where do you do that if it's not on a blog?

S3: Facebook

(other students agree)

AB: So Facebook is the teen side of blogging – they don't feel they want to publicize elsewhere. How many of you have a Twitter account?

(none of the boys put their hands up, murmuring from audience)

Well! *(to audience)* I already know many of you have Twitter because there are so many tweets coming through about this conference. So, the obvious question to us

all – why are the adults in blogs and Twitter and the teens are not? Because I thought this was their space not ours

AM5: We're time poor so we're trying to save time

AB: Yes – and maybe we have more pearls of wisdom to throw out there.

AM6: I have it so I can learn what they're going to doing.

AB: Yes – but if they're not on that space ...

AM6: And colleagues.

AB: Yes – well we all jumped on as soon as Facebook and the other social networking sites came out. I certainly looked and found out what was there, but if the teens aren't using sites like blogs maybe we should be somewhere else.

AM7: I was just wondering what the boys thought about my school's policy about teacher's not being on Facebook because as parents we thought it was really good but as teachers we've been told not too – do you guys have any comment about that?

AB: I suppose there are two questions there – one is: "How many of you would have your parents as friends on Facebook?" (*laughter at the boys' reaction*) and two: "How many of you would have your teachers as friends on Facebook?"

S2: If you have your parents and you post something they will ask you a lot of questions about it. I had one teacher on Facebook but it just felt weird seeing their statuses and their photos so I kind of deleted them.

S9: Yeah, I have my parents on Facebook but it's not by choice (*audience laughter*) but it can be a dangerous place the Internet so it's good to have your parents on if you have to – so they know what's going on. I know one teacher from my old school who has a second account just so he can have students. I reckon that's the better option, for teachers not to use their main account so you don't see what else they're doing. You just see the teacher side of them on the Internet.

S4: On Facebook you can have someone as a friend and you can be in the same group as them. I think it's a great idea to have teachers in a group, say like in a class and you have them as a group or in your football team and your coaches are in a group. But having a teacher as a friend just feels a bit awkward.

AB: Taking the question one step further – what if schools set up their own social networking space, similar to Facebook but purely for teaching and learning? Would that be an attractive place where you could deliberately go to interact with classmates and teachers?

S3: Yeah, well Facebook did actually start out as an idea for that type of social networking but it developed into something bigger so maybe a school could do that. They'd have to keep a tab on who's monitoring because it might go a lot more worldwide than that because that's what Facebook eventually did. It would help students but it would have to be monitored quite strictly

AM8: I'd like to know with your use of social media if identity theft or loss of privacy is an issue for you? Do you worry about the way you post on Facebook? How it might be interpreted in terms of whether you might just be having a bit of a go or a 'muck around' and whether those who don't know you might take it the wrong way and so in a sense, you're building up an image of yourself that might not be authentic.

S11: As most people probably know Facebook has no password encryption, meaning it is very, very easy to break – and I'm not going to say how I know that! It's a risk for pretty much anyone to be on Facebook sometimes but we don't see it that way. With identity theft, it can only happen if a) they know how to get past a server site and know which IP address to look for if they're in the same kind of network and they have to be pretty skilled or they know the right programs, b) they need to know your passwords from somewhere and you should never tell anyone your password so that can't be a problem with your account being stolen. With posting statements and for who can see them, usually I haven't worried about it because I know my parents usually don't see any of my statuses or anything from my site. My brother doesn't show them. I just have a joke with my friends pretty much. I don't have any Facebook theft.

S1: I don't tend to post much on Facebook; I more just talk with my friends on chat. I don't really try and joke too much, I just talk to them and if I really want to joke with them I usually just do that in real life I guess.

AM9: How many of you have multiple identities online and have any of you actually tried to get out of Facebook?

S4: Not sure if this counts but I made one for English, about some book we read. I haven't actually deleted yet & I get pretty weird friend requests (*audience laughter*). I tried to delete my own account for like exams and stuff but I always end up reactivating it again a week later.

AB: So is it too hard to get rid of your Facebook account?

S4: You can't actually delete your Facebook account – you can deactivate it but it can be reactivated at any time.

AB: This question is for those of you that have you got a phone with Internet access. How many times have you actually accessed the Internet from the playground at school say at lunchtime or recess?

S4: A lot (*audience laughter*). If we've been watching a movie in class I like to get on IMBD and check it out to see what other people have thought about it and who's in it. Or if someone says something at lunchtime and you just want to double-check it, it's just so easy to reference everything.

AB: This obviously an issue for all of us. We're worried about closing down our own internal networks but the students are out there in the playground with 3G wireless accessing anything. So do we need to ask why we would bother closing something down?

AM10: But they can use them in class.

AB: Yes, they could do.

S4: For Literature at least my teacher will ask a question and nobody will really have an answer and he's not too sure and it always falls back to me to just do like a quick search (*audience laughter*). It is educational; people aren't sitting in class 24/7 updating Facebook with 'OMG! In Latin, so bored'. Personally I use it just to double-check things or find out more about something.

AB: Following on from that idea – Cybersafety. All of us are really worried about access rights, monitoring, controlling, locking down, blocking, filtering and yet students can access whatever they like and more directly at recess and lunchtime. Can we, and please do not mention school names, have some stories about how easy or hard is it to use your school's network to access the information you want and whether you are then tempted to actually use your own resources at home or in the playground because sometimes you cannot find the information you want in your school's space.

S4: At our school we did a project on World War 2 in Year 9 and the amount of sites that were blocked for World War 2 for weapons or guns or other silly reasons – it just made it too hard, so it ended up everybody doing the project at home. But Facebook's really easy to get on to so we spent our entire time on Facebook at school, then did the project at home (*audience laughter*) because the school had blocked what we needed and hadn't blocked what we didn't need (*more laughter*).

S11: Sometimes I find our school's blocking system a little bit weird. It gets rid of some of the resources when you are trying to get to them – it just blocks them out. I mean it can take you thirty or forty minutes to get past it but then you've already wasted your class. Usually if we try to find something and it's blocked we get stuck so we usually just wonder what to do from there – you try to get around it or look for more resources so the blocker pretty annoying.

AB: Some of you do IT as a subject. Would you suggest that in many schools this blocking is seen more as a challenge to get around rather than actually being totally effective?

S11: Well – it can be annoying but it takes you a while to figure out which way to do it and eventually you’ll end up breaking more rules than what it’s worth. The blocker should just be blocking the sites that shouldn’t be accessed – and how do you see if it should be accessed? OK - if it’s got this many bad points going for it, block it out. But it shouldn’t be blocking the resources that we see as could be useful. So if we find resources that are useful, it would be nice to be able to email an IT help desk at the school and just say “I find this site useful, I’m using it for this subject and I’m not wasting time, can you please unblock it”, rather than spending forty to fifty minutes trying to get around it.

AM11: I’d just like to ask how many of the boys use the FUSE website (<https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/pages/Teacher.aspx>) which is the most brilliant Department of Education Victoria ‘*bucketload*’ of resources that would answer all your assignments and all of your research questions. Now we were asking here earlier what the boys are using – they’re using Wikipedia, they’re using their textbooks and they’re using their Internet. Now they’re not the only resources and we as educators in schools have a responsibility and duty to direct these students to those fabulous resources we are all paying for and their parents are paying for and they are being added to daily by their own peers because the amount of student resources that have gone in there in the last twelve months is phenomenal – this is good stuff. There are databases, there’s other stuff out there but we have to guide them to it. Don’t get me started

AB: Thank you – very important words. Teachers still have to be guiding – students can’t do it all themselves.

AM12: Just a quick question to get a student perspective. How would you see it working if you **can** actually use your mobiles, you **can** actually use iPods and so forth in class – and it’s not against school rules? How could teachers make that work – find a middle ground between our job as teachers and your job as students?

S2: I guess it will take a while for people to get used to. Like there will be people mucking around on an iPhone & stuff at the start but it will only be when teachers get over that issue of ‘everybody just wanting to play games’ that people will actually start to act seriously and use it for actual work

S11: Personally I use an iPod in class when I want to get my work done – it helps some students focus. What I’d do is a probationary period for that – is talk to your network admins of your school, you can sometimes get software that takes the snapshot of the desktop and shows you what the student has currently up and what they’re doing and what it is. If it’s not related to the task, you can walk over and say ‘dot, dot, dot or whatever you feel fits, and see how that goes for two or three

months and see if the students drop down and if the network status goes we've been accessing these sites over the last couple of months – it's all good. That would require a little bit more work for two months but after that I'd say you'd be fine

AM13: Would you be happy to sign some sort of agreement or something like that, like from the school perspective.

S11: Yeah I'd be happy to sign an agreement saying I would use my iPod to listen to music in class, I would try to keep to the task as much as possible and only go to sites that provide resources for that task. I'd sign that agreement happily.

AB: We've mentioned the distraction effect of these tablets and toys. I'll throw this question to the audience actually. How many of you have actually dissected the frog on the iPad you were given for the conference? (*murmuring, laughter – hands go in the air*). Right – so while you were trying to listen to a speaker or maybe even the students you were trying to multitask. We *know* though that human beings can't actually multitask but rather split their attention. (*to students*) How often in class would you be trying to do the same thing? You've got this technology, how much is there of "Oh, I've got this interesting app or whatever, the teacher's talking and I'll get distracted". Is it a big issue being distracted?

S9: For some students I think it is a bit of a distraction because with the technology in our class it's quite easy to get in and out of different apps. If I'm on a game and if I saw my teacher coming around the corner I could swap to a different app in less than a second. But really it's a self-discipline thing because you're really interested in the task itself.

AB: So maybe the iPad is a bit of a problem for teachers – it's too easy to change from the app your using to the work you should be doing.

S3: Well the distraction factor only comes in when the teacher's saying things that are completely irrelevant. Almost every class I've thought about saying to the teacher how can we apply this? How is the fact that we can find the ratio of the amount of pizza we need to buy to fill this truck and how much the volume of the pizza will be relevant to what we need to do because we're never going to need to pack a truck full of pizza (*audience laughter*). I think the relevance and the distraction thing ultimately comes down to the teacher introducing topics that are completely relevant to any job the student can be doing in the future – it ultimately comes down to the teacher.

AB: That makes an interesting point for the teachers in the room. We had the luxury before the technology of a captive audience and captive tools so we could very much direct the flow, even if inside their heads they'd turned off. But if they have access to technology, if they are not seeing the relevance immediately, we're going to have to adapt our practice because very quickly they will be doing something else with some other tools.

AM14: My experience is that quite often students might be doing something that's different but it's not irrelevant a lot of the time and it usually is a case of, as the young gentleman just said there, I'm not switched on by what's happening right now but I am interested in this area and they might go off on different aspects of it.

AB: Good point. They are learning but they may not be learning what the teacher is teaching.

Salman Khan, creator of the Khan Academy, talks about 'flipping the classroom' where basic content could be accessed at home and the interactive discussion, the deep and meaningful learning could happen at school. When we think about how much of a teacher's day is standing presenting content and how little that provides for discussion, flipping the classroom may be the thing to do. *(to students)* How would you feel if instead of saying "Let's watch this video for twenty minutes and then we'll talk about the questions", actually watching the video for homework and then coming back to school with some questions pre-prepared for discussion. Is that a viable model for teaching and learning, to flip the classroom?

S2: Most people see that just as an option really. We tried it in English and only five people in the class actually went home and watched the video. We never had the discussion and nothing happened when we didn't watch the video. He just dropped it.

AB: OK, so that's an obvious problem if you don't do your homework.

S11: I personally would love the idea that you watch the resources and everything at home, and then you come in and have the interactive discussion. Then you have your views that you saw at home plus the views of your peers and everybody around you. You get everybody else's opinions in that discussion and it just becomes – you've got more time for it. It's much easier.

S1: Yeah, I'd have to agree with that. It is very good to just be able to go home and access it on the Internet or something like the portal. You can watch the video in your own time and stop and start it if you need to. You can maybe write down a few notes and get your opinion down and then share your ideas with the class and the teacher. Answering the questions as a whole class is a lot easier than doing it by yourself.

AB: We're just about out of time, but I think the message we have heard from these young men is that technology is part of their lives and we're not going to change that. I've certainly been affirmed, and I hope you have as well, by how positive they are about using technology for learning. They seem to be saying there are ways they would love to use this stuff to learn. I think our responsibility as educators is to change our school systems so we *do* leverage this enthusiasm for the technology. We learn from them too.

Before I came here I expected all the students to have blogs and all of them to have Twitter accounts. Now I've got to rethink that. So if they're not doing that, if Facebook's the place, what can we do as educators?

Please join me in thanking these young gentlemen on stage