

Futurelab conference transcripts

Spaces, Places and Future Learning: Using innovative technology and practice to re-imagine learning spaces

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Rich Mix, London

Models of innovation

Dan Sutch, Futurelab

Dan:

The plan for today is twofold really. One is to talk about the Models of Innovation work that we are running at Futurelab, and the second is thinking around learning spaces, to see if we can create together today an alternative vision for a learning space. Not the alternative vision. Not one we're all going to run off and give to schools and to school leaders to develop, but just another way of thinking about what a learning space can be and seeing if together as friends and as colleagues, we can develop something today. So that's why I'd ask you now to actually turn your phones on, if they're off, but do please put them silent, so that when you turn them on later, they don't have that lovely cacophony of ring tones starting up, so if you can turn them to silent please.

The number there is the number we're going to be using later on in this presentation for some questions that I am going to ask to get your input, but if you have any comments that you'd like to make during the presentation, then the number's up there as well, so please do feel free just to start sending helpful comments, questions perhaps.

First up then, the Models of Innovation work. We've got two strands to this work at Futurelab that are very closely entwined, but we try to keep them separate for research purposes. The first is called Models of Innovation and I'll talk about that briefly, because we are going to come to that later, but it is looking at strategies, methods, institutional cultures that facilitate and encourage and enable innovation. Now that's particularly looking at the design and use of digital learning resources, so we're talking to organisations that are making digital learning resources. We're talking to teachers who are using them, and we're looking at the sorts of activities, workshop activities, design processes that can enable innovation to take place and enable the development of innovative learning resources.

Now the second is one that I'm going to spend a little bit more time talking about today, because it is looking at the capacity of teachers to act as innovators, and when we're talking about capacity, we're talking about the opportunities teachers have to innovate. We're talking about the motivations that teachers have to innovate, we're talking about the encouragement that teachers have to innovate, but we're also looking at the barriers and the things that are stopping them or hindering them developing these new innovative practices, and when we are talking about innovation, it is a great word that is in almost every single publication that I read at the moment. It is a bit of a buzz word, but what we're thinking about here is teachers' ability to develop new practices, to creatively use new technologies, and not just to incorporate them onto existing activities, and from a personal point of view it is then reacting to local needs. How can teachers react to local needs in creative ways, local being individual learners, classroom context, local communities, schools, whatever, but starting from a local position rather than think about initiatives that come from top-down.

So there are two programmes. Now what we're doing with the Teachers as Innovators programme first of all is having lots and lots of conversations, which is a great place to come from, because I'm getting a chance to speak to lots of people like you and in fact some of you I have spoken to recently, and others I am hoping to speak to soon, but it's talking about what we see as the barriers, and what we see as encouragement for teachers to innovate. Again, opportunities, encouragement, motivation and what the barriers are.

We are also trying to create a map of innovation, which is about collecting examples of innovative practice, and the way we're doing that is asking people to identify where that innovative practice is taking place, partly because that gives us an understanding of how other people perceive innovation, but also it gives us a chance to really use a network of people to go and find new practices taking place, but by collecting those examples of innovative practice, there is one type which is a showcase, so we can say to other people, "Look, this stuff is going on". And it really is. There's some great work going on and it's flagging up where it's taking place, but it's also providing us with the opportunity to really burrow down into how that's happening and what's enabling that to happen, and also what's constraining it in developing further. Part of that then is understanding what enables and constrains innovative practice, and there is an e-mail address down at the bottom [innovations@futurelab.org.uk], it really is an open invitation to ask you to get involved, either in a very quick way through an online questionnaire, which is 20 minutes' work, through to having semi-formal or informal interviews, where we can talk about this in a bit more depth, so we can get your perspectives and your understanding of what is stopping or what is enabling teachers to act as motivators.

So what sort of things are we finding? OK, it's a lot easier to flag up the barriers to changing practice than to really highlight what's enabling this new practice, and this is just an example from one session of what's stopping developing new practices. And the barriers are just thrown up all over the place, but what it shows is that a particular problem is identified, and that's the difference in perception of where these barriers are. One of the most obvious ones that I guess we can look at is the curriculum. The curriculum is seen as this great barrier to innovation. Now, there are people in the audience, and I don't know if Mike's here yet, and he'll talk later about how actually the curriculum is not necessarily that much of a constraint. Key Stage 3 history is two pages of well-spaced writing. How can that constrain you for a two/three years of work? Well it's not actually about the curriculum necessarily. The teachers think it's the curriculum perhaps, or some of them we were speaking to. The QCA will say it's not. But what is it about this difference in perception of what that barrier is, because what we need to do is unpack why that is seen as a barrier, so it might be for example the assessment. The assessment is the tail that wags the curriculum dog. Maybe that's the real barrier. Or maybe it's the planning time, that teachers don't have the time to really prepare resources that are appropriate, so they go to the schemes of work, which is an interpretation of the curriculum. Maybe it's the teachers' perceptions of requirements to use those schemes of work, or maybe it's about the way in which we timetable, etc. What we are trying to do is get under the skin of what these barriers are, and these perceptions of what these barriers are, because the perceptions of the barriers are just as important as actual barriers. They just have different solutions.

Now the other thing we're trying to do then, in unpicking what these barriers are, is to work out how we can get over them, and there are loads and loads of different ways of dividing these barriers up, and this is one that comes through quite strongly. To divide them into first order barriers, and second order barriers. Now the first ones traditionally are where we focus most of the work, in terms of Government focusing work on how we are going to get over this adoption of ICT, developing new practices or creative practices, and it's things over here which are the more tangible barriers. It's things like access to the technology, having the skills or the understanding of how to use a mouse and how to use particular projects or particular programmes, the technical skills, and that's where most of our resources are focused generally, about getting computers into schools, about getting these timetables set up, etc. But in actual fact it is these second order barriers that are so often missed, and they're the absolutely fundamental ones, because this is the psychology and sociology of practice, these are the conversations that have to take place, develop people's understanding about why new practices should emerge, why we should take creative approaches, why we should be using new technologies in the first place. What is the benefit and what is the point of it? And it's a tricky place to be. I suppose the NOF programme attempted to look at those, but because of it's timing ended up looking at these and looking at the fields of using a mouse rather than the really pedagogic underpinning. So one of the things we are looking at is how can we develop ways of getting over these second order

barriers that are based upon very, very long, detailed, complex conversations: that does not necessarily fit in with our current CPD model perhaps. What we are really looking at on that second order barrier is the embodied beliefs of teachers. What they see their role as, their perception of their role as teachers, their role as innovators, the role of schools inside communities, inside societies, etc, and it's a long process to change.

Now it is far too early in this project to start telling you what we're finding, but a lot of the things that are emerging when we're talking to people are about these conversations that need to take place, about creating a shared vision, having discussion to really get people thinking about where schools should be or where they sit in the communities. That conversation alone is about creating networks of practitioners, but again going back to encouragement, motivation, and opportunities: not just providing a space for a network online but the motivations and the encouragement to using it, the reasons to use it. Different models of CPD and initial teacher education, the re-professionalisation of teachers is something that is coming up, not just in the literature, but from talking to people about what is the teachers' role at the moment? Are they just deliverers of streams of work or are they curriculum designers? Should they be curriculum designers? Some of the people I've been talking to recently have been talking about the de-skilling of teachers over the last 10-20 years and the way in which they are changing their patterns of work. They are changing their approach to the use of the classroom. The idea of the re-professionalisation of the teacher, if you think about the important activities that teachers should and need to be engaged in outside of the classroom to reform classroom practices. Again, I'm thinking about schools at the moment. This is Teachers as Innovators, but it goes wider than that by thinking about what sorts of activities and conversations we need to be having about learning activities, rather than just going the traditional route, and part of that, the part about viewing the professionals as teachers, apart from teachers developing their identities as professionals, is public understanding of education, and that is something that again is coming up. How can we think about the schools as separate places from communities? How can we think about changing radically practice if we don't think about the relationship between community and schools, and if we're going to think about re-professionalising teachers, we can't do it as something separate. We have to think about it in a wider situation, public discussions about what education is for, what the role of the school is when we're building these schools, etc.

Right, so what's this all got to do with learning places and learning spaces? Well, the Teachers as Innovators is about teachers being able to react in new spaces, being able to work in new spaces. It is about teachers being able to react to new possibilities of these new spaces the new technologies allow and afford, and it is also teachers being able to be involved in the conversations about designing these new spaces, and being involved in creating those new visions, so the Teachers as Innovators work fits quite easily into how we're going to transform these learning spaces. The Models of Innovation work is about looking at these strategies for idea development, idea conception, idea capture, all the way through to looking at institutional cultures for supporting innovation and new ideas to develop, and about thinking about new ideas and how we can get them to fruition, in a market sense or perhaps even in a building sense. So, with this in mind I've picked out a phrase from the blurb for this conference which is about transforming those learning spaces, which I think is quite a nice phrase just to keep in the back of our minds for the rest of this session.

With this in mind, the plan for the rest of the session is to see together if we can come up with an alternative vision of a learning space. We will wait and see if it is going to work, but one of the things we are going to look at is different ways of capturing that, so we have Ben Carruthers hopefully sat somewhere in the room. Ben over there, who is going to be doing some wonderful things today in trying to capture what we describe as this new vision and he is going to try and capture it in an artistic way, in a visual way. At the same time we're going to have Tim Rudd. Tim is going to try and narrate the ideas we come up with. So we are going to have two different ways of capturing some of the discussions we are going to have today. We are not going to try and create a new vision for schools. We are not going

to try and create The Vision for schools, or The Vision for learning spaces, but just an alternative vision. Perhaps something as a think piece or a conversation piece, and this is another way of asking you to fill out your evaluation forms, at the end of the day the vision we all share now, the vision we all talk about and develop will be available, printed out on the reception desk, so Tim and Ben are going to be working very hard over the next few minutes.

Now, thinking about the word 'transforming' and I notice Ros in the audience, so this is something to relate to previous experiences! The word 'transformation'. If you take a morphological view or etymological view, it is about becoming the opposite shape, or the actual process of becoming the opposite shape. Transforming. And I suppose if you think about shape in this context, we're not just thinking about the building, but we're thinking about the shapes of social structures as well. We're talking about relationships between the schools and the communities, how can we transform those shapes? Those shapes we have set in our mind. So rather than just trying to create another vision, try and think of something that is actually going to transform the shape, what is really going to be the opposite of what we have now perhaps. Maybe that's our starting point. Completely opposite from where we are now.

Of course it isn't that easy necessarily to think about just coming up with a new vision, and this was something that was touched on briefly yesterday, and I think that's a wonderful title for a slide, the idea of unlearning schools... the place we go to forget things. Anyway, unlearning schools is how can we begin to really think about these visions and take advantage of new technologies that weren't there when the last load of schools were built, and new social actions and new ways of understanding who learners are and how people learn that weren't there 50 years ago. How do we get to those sorts of visions without basing it upon what we already know ourselves as to what a school is. The idea of unlearning, rather than moving towards something, about moving towards expertise or mastery, it's actually moving away from what we know. How can we put away what we think a school is and how we think a school should act, how we've experienced schools, how can we move away from that to really think about a new, transformed learning space, and some of the questions that were in the re-imagining learning spaces document are really useful here - what if things could be really, really different? That is a really powerful question, where do we go? What are the sorts of visions and debates that are needed to underpin the design? What are the new resources that allow very, very new social interactions and how can we take advantage of those, and not ask what buildings we want, or what new seamless technology we want, but what sort of education do you want to see in the future.

So the first question I am going to ask you to text in, and if you don't want to text, or you haven't brought your phone with you, then please talk to the person next to you. We will spend about two or three minutes on this particular question before we move on. It's a chance for you to have an input, a chance for you to talk to the person next to you, the people behind you and swap business cards and that sort of thing. What is the underpinning vision, the particular vision or theme that you would like to see fleshed out in a scenario today? I'll tell you where this is coming from. Seymour Papert has this wonderful phrase about innovation diffusion and he says, "The innovation sets out to change the school, but the school changes the innovation". And he's not just talking about how schools are sometimes described as these rigid structures that don't move with teachers that don't like change. What he is talking about is if you're going to try and share an innovation, you're going to try and share a practice really properly, it's not actually the practice you're trying to share, but the principles that are underneath it, because if you really think about those principles that underpin your vision, then when you share your practice, those principles can be shared more easily. The practice will change. We know how the practice will change between different locations and different social contexts, but the principles are things that we want to share.

So the first one is can you text in what that principle is, what are those things that really

underpin a particular vision? And there are some examples there, is it that online should be far more important as an approach to learning than the physical? Should it be about the community based, the entrepreneurial spin-off, etc. OK, now once you're thinking about that, here is a list of all these questions that appear in the 'Re-imagining Learning Spaces' report, and perhaps these are something that can guide you to thinking about this educational vision, the principles underpinning it. There are some great questions to think about. What if learning spaces were just satellites and hubs, time and space boundary were flexible? Is that the most important thing in the way in which we should rethink our education at the moment? Remote experts and new networks of expertise? What if education was taken out of party politics - as it potentially happening to the NHS and has happened to The Bank of England? What would that do to our transformed educational system? Will it transform the educational system? What if individual learners were just given a lump sum of money, perhaps some guidance to go and find the learning path that they want to develop? What would that look like, if they were just given that funding? Maybe we should go for something really wacky, like what if every 5 year-old had to join the same class because they were born in the same month? OK, so the first question is to have a look at the educational vision, and let's see how we're getting on.

This is where we see your input and comments - I'll read them out as they come in. OK what are the key themes so far? OK, so we're looking at empowering learners and valuing their voice. Empowerment. We should get rid of schools and base education around creating things. Personalised learning tailored to individuals. Community-based peer-to-peer learning, self-empowering, personalised, ability to choose where, what and when. Fantastic, OK. Now we're going to think about those for a while. Does anyone have a particularly strong feeling about any of those, other than the one obviously referring to me, that they would like to build upon for the rest of the day? This is a chance now just to talk about some of these issues, so the sorts of things... certainly, talk about empowerment. Getting rid of schools and basing education around creating things. So we've got empowerment. We've got creating, personalising and then community-based. Anyone like to stick their hand up and suggest which one of those we should follow on today? Anyone have a particular desire to follow any of those? Oh, we've actually got loads more coming in, wonderful, thank you.

Freedom to explore was another one, authentic learner activity. Acting as expert practitioner in their subject areas. Subject research skills more valued than subject knowledge. Learning should be about sharing and not about power-keeping. We need to start with the needs for the learner. So OK we've got this empowerment, we've got this personalisation starting with the learner's needs. We've got community-focused, students' respect for teachers is critical. Project-based collaboration, we need to remodel assessment systems to better match new learning styles, people and places in tune and there are more and more flooding through. OK, would anyone that has submitted any of these suggestions like to talk about it a little bit further, so we can pick one? The idea is we are going to pick one from this group, and we can track them together, so something around empowerment, something around collaboration, something around personalisation if you want, and that's what Tim and Ben are going to run off with. Then we've got some other questions that we're going to build up to try and create the basis of this shared vision we have. Anyone like to talk about some of those, or should we move on. OK, we'll come back to it.

Now, the next question we have, I'd like you to give some input please, and we'll go back to the first questions and try to select one of those. It is about the technology. Now it's not about being technology determinists, but we do know there is a congruence between the emergence of new technologies and new social practices within learning, so what are the technologies that have particular affordances that you want to take advantage of? Are they things about being mobile and being able to go to lots of different places at once and remain connected? Is it about the communication of using the new technologies that we really need to take notice of? Is it about sensing different things in the environment? Is it about the privately owned technologies, as opposed to the school and a change in that responsibility, change in the ownership issues? So there are lots of different sorts of

technologies, what is it in particular that you think we should be really trying to take advantage of? Now, this is only one element, and I know of course in a vision we need much more than this, but what is one particular aspect of technology that you think we need to take advantage of.

Let's head back to our comments here. Fantastic. OK. We don't need skills, all stakeholders should share a vision. A safe, caring space. Education must meet learner needs, why, what and how. Attendance should be voluntary: what would you do if schools were voluntary? If schools really had to react to the learner's needs to get them through the doors in the first place. Location independence, trust, teachers' respect for the students is critical. Student mentoring teachers, teachers teaching learners to teach themselves and their peers, collaboration, mobile and collaborative. OK. So let's go back to that first education point then. I think the ones we have then are probably about empowerment, about personalisation, community. I think those are the main key themes, so can we have a show of hands which one of those you would like to follow through in terms of this vision that Tim's going to try and write about and Ben's going to try and capture. Hands up if you think the empowering of the learner is a key principle that we should be building on today. Thank you very much, what about if it's personalisation, so starting from the learner's needs, perhaps let's look at the responsibility, perhaps resting more with schools, trying to distinguish personalisation from empowerment. Oh, that's quite even. And thirdly, the community aspect. Who thinks that is the focus, that it should be a community and not the other end. I'm going to go for one of the first two. I think it is between empowerment and personalisation. Can we go for two? They're very difficult to distinguish. I'm sure that most people would have very different definitions of them but I know what you're saying, they are very much interrelated so we'll go for the both then, Ben. So we're looking at personalisation and empowerment.

So hopefully then we are now thinking about particular technologies, and they really are absolutely flying through at the moment. Let's think about the next one which is about types of interactions between teachers and learners, and I guess what we're looking for here is a way of categorising that relationship. So are we looking at a change to the kind of expert and novice to a more co-design approach. We are going to look at mentorships, co-learners, communities of learners. So from your passions or from the opposite of what we have already, wherever you want to come to this from, how are we going to think about that relationship between teachers and learners? How would you categorise that? It is a difficult one again. Again, if you haven't got a phone, please do talk to the person next to you, just for a few minutes while I go back and look at the 48 new messages that have just arrived, please just spend two minutes talking to the next person about any of the last few questions, the particular vision, the technology or this characterisation of some sort of the relationship between teachers and learners.

OK thank you very much. Absolutely wonderful how many we're getting here. It's remarkable that we still see this idea of turning phones off as we go into schools and we know there are of course huge, huge issues around how we manage the use of phones and things, but as a way of just sharing ideas, or at least putting your view across in a very safe environment and hopefully a risk-free environment it is absolutely wonderful, so thanks for all your input so far. OK, so looking at the technologies then, Tim and Ben especially, mobile and collaborative is coming through quite a lot, communicative about 24/7 access, collaborative again, instant, technologies that don't get in the way of verbal communication, 3D learning interactions, those that empower us as creators. At the moment the things that are coming through in terms of the technology - and again please jeer loudly if you disagree - communicative, collaborative technology, technology for designers and creators, mobile is coming through quite a lot, so we're looking at technologies that encourage and allow collaboration and communication, which are necessitated by each other, so those are the technologies that we are going to look at in this particular phase. So far we've got this personalised, empowered principle of our learning environment. We are going to support that with technologies that facilitate and enable and afford communications and collaborations.

The last question before I go back to finding out about these relationships is about the use of space, so starting from the idea that we are going to begin from the principle of empowering learners and personalising an education system. Then we are going to think about how we are going to have these technologies that enable communication and collaboration. What is the fundamental change of space that will be needed to represent this? Are we thinking about actually if we had these collaborative, communicative technologies we can do this away from each other? Do we need big spaces like this where we are all focusing down on one place, even though we need space to talk with each other. Do we need a café culture? Virtual space? So what is the fundamental need of space and how would you design that?

This relationship between teachers and learners and how we are going to try and talk about that. Co-learners and collaborators, we're looking at equal partners. All of those suggestions are appropriate. Interchanging roles. Ongoing mentor, collaborator and critical friend. We'll pick up on that in a second. The teacher as a guide on a personalised journey. So we've got lots of different relationships here, but there is something definite about this idea that the changing role is interchangeable, so teacher and learner not being fixed roles, but being in different positions. Unless I hear some severe jeering, perhaps the categorisation of that relationship then is an interchanging role between the teacher and learner, so we are looking at perhaps communities of learners then, rather than a teacher and learner.

So the final one looking at the sorts of space that represent... buildings need to be smart and interactive, flexible spaces. This is where Tim and Ben run off and try to capture the sorts of things you are talking about, and in fact all of these things are really important, so just from four simple questions the number of issues, and some of them I'm sure are just trying to do things that are opposite to what we have, but look how many different possibilities are beginning to emerge just through these four questions. So what are the sorts of questions that we need to be having at the beginning of building schools or just when we are really re-imagining, rethinking about learning spaces?

Let's roll on down through this space, Starbuck's schools, community-based. It's my learning space and my space, let me learn where I want to. It won't be the same each day, so that's going to match the flexibility. Space is less important than the culture of the school. The teachers move, not the pupils. The space does not match as much as the relationships. The right space wherever and whatever that may be, so I think flexibility is the sort of theme that is emerging through those inputs. So, flexible spaces that are appropriate for what you want to do when you want to do it, that can almost react to the needs.

So, the intention of this vision is not to provide the answer or solution but just to ask some of the questions or just to provide another way of provoking some responses to how we think or rethink about learning spaces and there are some other things that of course we can do. We need to think about what are the right questions? Are those four questions the right ones to be thinking about how we are going to develop a vision or are there more? Again there is another list, please text in other questions that we should be asking, because asking the right question is of course just as important as getting the right answers, and what are the other principles? How can we define those principles that we all share and all agree on without having a really long stretched conversation, or perhaps that is the only solution. There's an example of a vision that went through a different process from a workshop with Futurelab and Becta that had 40 or so key stakeholders involved. They came up with all sorts of ideas about how can you really think about what we can base this educational vision on.

I was going to end by asking you the questions, because I feel like it's far more useful, but it's also questions that I want to ask you and I don't know if we'll have time now. Things like what are the key barriers that you see from your position in the wide range of

stakeholder groups that we have here today, what are the problems with developing these really innovative, really radical new practices? Sometimes it's market forces, sometimes it's other barriers to identify, and what can then be done then to provide these three things, encouragement, motivation and opportunity for teachers to innovate, and that is what we are after, and then finally the question we're not going to get to either is about how we can share these sorts of examples related to practice. So I'm going to end with an e-mail address - innovations@futurelab.org.uk - so if you have answers to any of those sorts of questions or if you want to be involved in any of these research projects around models of innovation, please do get in touch. Don't phone this phone, because it's not mine and I won't answer it, but please do contact us through the e-mail address. Thanks.

Q:

You've innovated this morning. You've shown technology I didn't know anything about. I've never voted like this. Can you tell us how we've done it please?

Dan:

There's actually quite a raft of technologies that will let you text to e-mail systems and from e-mail systems to text. However, all I have is my phone connected to my computer by USB wire, and I'm just showing you the file explorer. If you have bought a phone in the last three or four years that can connect to your computer, then you just go to file explorer, and you can see every message that is coming in. Come and chat or email me and I can talk you through it, but it really is that simple. So connect up to your data projector in your classroom, or wherever, and you have another way of enabling people to input into your session.