

# What's that sound? 'Tweet'

## New perspectives on leadership and learning

BY JUDY O'CONNELL

### Introduction

Leading learning is taking on new dimensions in our multimodal world. We are all familiar with the idea that 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is bringing some new forces into play. Like many others, I am passionate about the changes in the learning environments of our students – at least, excited about the possibilities, if not always the actualities. I have been blogging about this – and the information frameworks, tools, concepts and activities related to this – since May 2006. Yes, I know that is not a long time, but it is longer than some. For that reason, I am always keen to engage in dialogue that explores new perspectives on leadership and learning.

A recent comment by Doug Johnson, a director of media technology, provided a point of reflection:

It seems to me that that the continuum between reactionary educators who still find overhead projectors a cutting-edge tool and progressive educators who seem to master each tool and *philosophy du jour* is stretching ever longer every year. As a classroom teacher in the 1970s and 80s, we all taught pretty much the same way, with the same sets of tools.

But today, teachers and librarians are, let's charitably say, heterogeneous in their skills and outlooks.

Technology use is the most obvious culprit for stretching the continuum, but there also seems to be other factors at work – improved communications, more voices and an explosion of theories and practices and philosophies of education.

Are our technologies bringing educators closer together? Or are they driving the teaching profession apart? (Johnson 2008)

Yes, this is an interesting and highly charged area of discussion and debate about technology immersion, which bubbles along underground in some schools or drives the water-wheel to power change in others.

### Powerful learning

Recently, Australian teacher librarians and teachers were at the forefront of initiating change in a new program launched as an international professional development program. This program is facilitated by recognised American authorities Sheryl Nusbaum-Beach and Will Richardson. This international consortium of participating schools has teamed with the leaders of Powerful Learning Practice to create a comprehensive, systemic one-year professional development program that engages educators from participating schools in transformational conversations about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Powerful Learning Practice (PLP) uses a blend of face-to-face and online curriculum to connect small teams from 20 forward-thinking, independent schools from around the globe to establish a powerful, ongoing learning community. In addition, it prepares schools to move forward in systemic ways after the one-year commitment ends by laying the groundwork sustainable PLP project plans.

What is particularly interesting about this program is that it is driven by use of immersive, collaborative Web 2.0 tools, in order to transform the learning and teaching environments in our schools. In this model, the technologies are definitely driving the educators closer together – right into the multimodal world of their students.

St Joseph's College in Sydney has formed a team to take part in the Powerful Learning Program. Other



Judy O'Connell is the head of library and information services at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Sydney. She takes a leading role in working with emerging technologies, innovation and Web 2.0 and their application for learning and teaching in schools and school libraries. Judy is also on the editorial board of *School Libraries Worldwide*, the official professional and research journal of the International Association of School Librarianship. Keep in touch with Judy's work at her blog, <<http://theyjude.wordpress.com>>.

continued next page

from previous page

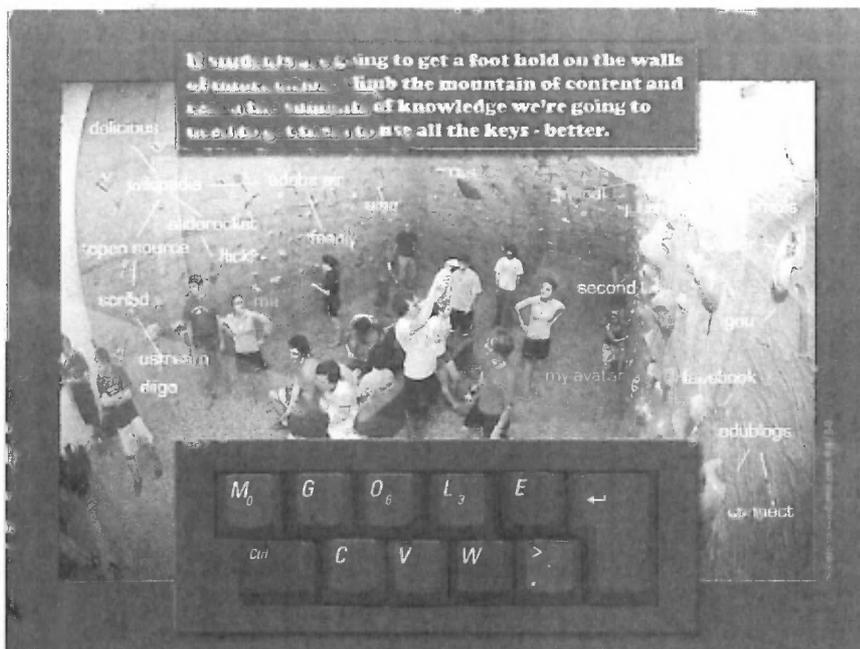


Figure: Join the Web 2.0 world (source: <http://deangroom.wordpress.com>).

schools are listed on the wiki, including the international participants from New Zealand and USA. Two Australian teacher librarians are 21<sup>st</sup> century Fellows in this program: Jenny Luca, from Toorak College in Melbourne, and me. Also included in the teams is Andrew Hiskens, manager of the learning services division of the State Library of Victoria.

Teacher librarians have a vital role to play in the reformation of learning in a multimodal world. Teacher librarians also have a vital role to play in transforming the nature and quality of professional development opportunities to create cutting-edge leadership in learning.

### Emerging debate

During term four, 2008, a debate emerged both in Australia and around the world, redefining professional development conversations in public, online and in conference. In Australia, it was triggered by the 2008 Australian Computers in Education Conference. The same discussion was also triggered as a forum discussion on the Conference Ning for NECC2008, the annual global conference of the International Society for Technology in Education.

The discussion is revolving around *fair use* and *digital citizenship* of teachers involved in professional

learning opportunities. Web 2.0 makes participation pervasive, with blogs, twitter, UstreamTV, Flickr and other tools that disseminate information, capture audio and video, and facilitate immediate discussion and comment on events taking place. That there is a need to shift is clear, but that professional standards and ethical behaviours should also be part of the shift is also being demanded by all.

What should we expect in our professional development events, and what should we be able to do? I have a lot of experience in the use of Web 2.0 tools to improve my professional learning – and can no longer tolerate sitting in an event without wifi access and the opportunity to share and discuss my learning with my *personal learning network*.

Jason Zagami, previously an ICT coordinator in schools who lectures at Griffith University, created an online survey to gather feedback from educators on just this topic. Jason put it on Twitter so that we educators could contribute to the survey, which was designed to simply and quickly gather a perspective of our views. Jason believes in the application of principles of open access and open source to educational processes and policy development. Innovation for us both is about using technology in ways that are no longer 20<sup>th</sup> century in

focus and application.

### Mash-up leadership

These are my thoughts on collaborative leadership at professional learning events based on my response to the survey. These ideas flow naturally from my 21<sup>st</sup> century view of learning and collaborating with my global personal learning network.

#### 1. Connecting with wifi

It is essential to have the freedom to search links, explore ideas and interact with concepts being presented at a conference or professional learning event. I choose my options as to when to listen and stare at a conference presenter, or when to listen and connect with my laptop to check out links, share ideas with others, or discuss issues being raised. If I am bored, I certainly do not want to be captured with no escape. I would rather check my e-mail than waste the time sitting in a presentation that does not demand my attention. *Live blogging* of events is also a great way of reflecting, learning and sharing. If a presentation is worth listening to, it is worth sharing. End of story.

#### 2. Using mobile phones for blogging, texting and microblogging

When it comes to professional learning, mobile phones are absolutely essential for being engaged with the content, expressing opinions and reflections about the presentations, and just plain having fun through interaction. It is time to remove the *industrial model* from conference presentations, and allow them to be interactive and collaborative. However, remember to use the tool; do not abuse the tool.

If a presentation is worth listening to, it is worth using Twitter to post a message. If a presentation is not worth listening to, it is worth *tweeting* about that, too. Twitter is about conversation and reflection. I particularly like it

'Let's be clear what is cacophony and what is productive learning.'

when questions come in via twitter that can be presented to the speaker for response. I like it even better if there is a twitter stream of the conference on display, so everyone attending the conference can see what is being said and what is being reflected upon.

### 3. *Sharing presentations with those not in the room*

Share with the world – the more we share, the more we grow in our understanding of what is possible. Refusing to share is like writing a book, publishing it and refusing to allow anyone to borrow it from the library. If you only want us to buy a book, or buy our attendance at a conference presentation then you are not a 21st century learner. Sure, getting the information via shared feed at a conference is not as good as being there – we know that, because we love the face-to-face interactions. But sharing content is the next best thing! Go for it.

Pictures can often tell a story. Capture a presentation screen and show us, the attendees, the interactions taking place. It is fantastic if people take pictures and share them via their photo stream – just keep the flash off, please!

The same goes for audio and video footage – as long as it does not disrupt the streaming bandwidth for the main presentations (assuming the conference organisers are savvy enough to realise the value of streaming!). Standalone audio recordings are fine, but not as good as a presentation that incorporates image or video.

Either way, I am keen to see us publish or share at all times. Why? It is great to have the opportunity to go back to sessions in this format, as good presentations lend themselves to review for further reflection. It is about deepening our learning and

understanding – not limiting it!

It is really smart when conference and PD organisers incorporate streaming into their program, instead of impacting the audience's opportunity to focus on blogging, microblogging or using online tools to collect conference notes etc. If we believe in *cloud computing* and using Web 2.0 to organise, reflect, share, communicate, analyse, synthesize and collaborate then we do not build restrictions into our conference and professional development structures. We must capitalise on Web 2.0 to promote and disseminate the ideas and information being generated by the collaborative crowd.

### Go with the crowd

Awesome. Now we have a true leadership challenge for teachers and teacher librarians.

Charles Leadbeater (2008) talks about *We-Think*, creating a culture in which more people than ever can participate, share and collaborate, ideas and information. He explains that:

Ideas take life when they are shared. That is why the Web is such a potent platform for creativity and innovation. It's also at the heart of why the Web should be good for: democracy, by giving more people a voice and the ability to organise themselves; freedom, by giving more people the opportunity to be creative; and equality, by allowing knowledge to be set free.

Let's go with the crowd. Let's change our leadership models for professional learning. Let's see how these changes can mobilise our classroom pedagogy. Let's learn together. Let's be clear what is cacophony and what is productive learning. Let's create collaborative leadership that is sustained and reliable and builds capacity to know,

learn and teach in our schools. I am thrilled to be part of the 21st century learning that is now possible at a conference, in my classroom, at home, in fact, absolutely anywhere. I want my students to be thrilled too.

Are you part of the Web 2.0 world? Join me. Chat with me. Share.

- Blog: <<http://heyjude.wordpress.com>>
- Ning: <<http://secondclassroom.ning>>
- Literacy mash-up: <<http://simplybooks.org>>
- Twitter: <heyjudeonline>
- Facebook: <Judy O'Connell>
- Skype: <heyjudeonline>
- Google Talk: <Judy O'Connell>
- Delicious: <<http://del.icio.us/heyjude>>
- Flickr: <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/heyjude>>.

### References

Johnson D 2008, 'The continuums end', *The Blue Skunk Blog*, viewed 2 October 2008 <<http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog/2008/10/2/the-continuums-ends.html>>.

Leadbeater C 2008, *We-Think*, <<http://www.wethinkthebook.net/home.aspx>>.

Powerful Learning Practice for Leadership in Schools, Wiki, <<http://internationalplp.wikispaces.com/>>.

Zagami J, n.d., *Jason's online learning and teaching zeitgeist*, <<http://www.zagami.info/>>.