

Home Education, Information and Communication Technology and the Search for a New Paradigm in Education

Introduction

We are witnessing a revolution, the like of which only arises once every few centuries. Of course, one might argue that people have been talking about revolutionary change at least since the 1960s, and yet little truly revolutionary has happened. What we are facing at the turn of the century however, is a convergence of ideology and technology. Confident, arrogant post-modernism has suddenly come upon us, summarised in the following way by Hargreaves,

“Now the essence of the post-modern is in concepts such as variety, heterogeneity, discontinuity, pluralism, interest groups, relativism, localism, centrifugence, as against unity, homogeneity, continuity, integration, community, absolutism, universalism, centripetence.”¹

At the same time, we are confronted by the technological manifestation of post-modernity in the form of multimedia, the Internet and digitalised communication. From the perspective of those who seek settled stability, it is as if the gods have conspired against them. Ideological post-modernity and its technological twin are set to transform our world. Since formal education is a societal institution, schools and teachers cannot escape the tidal wave.

The purpose of this paper is to explore a possible future for the British education system.

The school as the dominant contemporary paradigm

The last 130 years have witnessed the rise of the school as the primary formal educational institution in the developed world. Indeed, one could argue that it is a global institution, since school figures very highly in the educational ambitions of virtually all developing nations. For many it is one of the key litmus tests of developed nation status. This allegiance to the school is so great that for many, including many teachers, schooling and education are seen as synonymous. Gardner has defined school as

“..an institution in which a group of young persons, rarely related by blood but usually belonging to the same social group, assemble on a regular basis in the company of a competent older individual, for the explicit purpose of acquiring one or more skills valued by the wider community.”²

¹ Hargreaves, David (1997) A Road to the Learning Society, *School Leadership and Management*, 17,1, 10

² Gardner, Howard, (1993) *The Unschooled Mind*, 127, London, Fontana.

It's a comfortable definition, and one that misses certain essential features of contemporary schooling. He particularly fails to mention the age-segregated nature of most schools; to *skills*, one would wish to explicitly include *knowledge* and the cosy notion of *young persons* being in the *company of a competent older individual* fails to make explicit, issues of control which are inherent within the institutional school. Indeed, control is fundamental to any understanding of the schooling paradigm; teachers and schools control not only what is regarded as acceptable in terms of knowledge and values, but also what is acceptable behaviour³

Enormous and ever increasing sums of money are spent annually educating young people in schools. In most countries, certainly in the West, students spend at least 11 years and probably nearer to 13 years in formal schooling. And pressure is growing in countries like Britain to extend the period of compulsory schooling still further.

This allegiance to school has been steadily growing since the late nineteenth century when most western nations introduced compulsory state-funded elementary schooling. A fresh impetus occurred after the Second World War with a growth in secondary schooling. By the 1960s the state monoliths of formal schooling were well established and formal education was regarded as a panacea.

Critics of formal schooling are not difficult to find, and while some like Mark Twain, who commented, "*I never allowed schooling to interfere with my education*" are merely clever, others raise far more important issues. Even in the 1960s at the height of the euphoria over education, critics were saying that schooling wasn't working; in 1967, for example President Johnson called together 150 leading educators from around the world to attend a conference whose theme was 'world crisis in education'⁴. Authors such as John Holt⁵ and Ivan Illich⁶ strongly criticised the school as an institution; while right-wing thinkers, such as E G West, argued that the State should never have become involved in education in the first place.⁷ As a result of these criticisms, Torsten Husen commented,

*"By the mid-1970s a sombre mood had replaced the strong commitment to education of the mid-1960s. Euphoria gave way to disenchantment."*⁸

By the end of the 1970s it was possible for Torsten Husen to write his seminal book, *The School in Question*, and catalogue the criticisms that the school faced

³ There are those who might argue that with the advent of government prescribed curricula in many western countries, schools no longer have control over knowledge and values. It seems to me that this fails to acknowledge the powerful place still occupied by schools and teachers and is actually simply an argument about whose knowledge and values schools are dictating.

⁴ For a fuller description of the growing concerns of this period, see Husen, Torsten, (1979) *The School in Question*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁵ See, for example Holt, John, (1971) *The Underachieving School*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

⁶ Illich, Ivan, (1973) *Deschooling Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

⁷ West, E G, (second edition 1970) *Education and the State*, London, The Institute of Economic Affairs.

⁸ Husen, op cit., 10.

from conservatives, humanists, Neo-Marxists, and others.⁹ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the criticisms continued, often voiced most vociferously by right wing protagonists, arguing that educational standards were in decline. Most recently, John Marks, Director of the Educational Research Trust, wrote *An Anatomy of Failure: Standards in English Schools for 1997*¹⁰ describing low pupil achievement at age 7, with students falling further behind as they progressed through their school career. He described school performance as patchy, both nationally and within local educational authorities, and concluded,

“Given the disastrous national situation that this data has now revealed, it is perhaps not surprising that so many teachers organisations and others who for many years have been responsible for education were so reluctant first to agree to National Curriculum tests taking place at all and then to agree to the publication of the results of those tests.”¹¹

Home Education as a search for a new paradigm

Throughout the twentieth century there have been those who have advocated major changes in schools. A S Neill at Summerhill¹² and Kurt Hahn at Gordonstoun¹³ are two examples of educators who recognised that the school needed fundamental alteration. That they came to very different conclusions regarding what was required is not surprising; what is significant is that both felt that conventional schooling was inadequate. Of course, Neill and others in the progressive movement and Hahn, who was most certainly not part of the progressive movement, based their solutions on the school model, and in this respect it could be argued that they were doing little more than tinkering with the system. Most of the fundamentals were left untouched; especially in the Kurt Hahn model; the school was still recognisably the school. The role of the teacher may have changed, especially in the Neill concept of school, but in the end formal learning was still expected to occur in a place other than the real world.

The progressives and other child-centred educators of the interwar and immediate post war years had a considerable impact on the educational landscape of Britain, especially in the years following the publication of the Plowden Report¹⁴ in the 1960s. Open plan schools, child centred education, project-based curriculum and new non-phonetic teaching methods of reading took on the status of received wisdom in the years after 1967.

These reforms were highly controversial, and certainly for right-wing educators represented the beginning of the end. For some, however, they were not radical enough, and the ensuing years, saw the rise of a number of alternative approaches to formal education; two notable examples being the Steiner

⁹ Husen, op cit, Cap 2.

¹⁰ Marks, John, (1998) *An Anatomy of Failure: Standards in English Schools for 1997*, London. Marks based his conclusion on an analysis of National Curriculum test results and GCSE examination results for over 2 million pupils.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Neill, A S, and Lamb, A, (1993), *Summerhill School – A New View of Childhood*, St Martin’s Press

¹³ Rhohms, Hermann, (1970), *Kurt Hahn*, London, RKP

¹⁴ Central Advisory Council, (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools*, London

education movement¹⁵ and the small schools' movement. At the same time a small number of Christian schools were opened. While these movements represented a radical rejection of much that was going on within the established school system, all of these movements still held on to the school, albeit reformed in some cases, as the primary institutional deliverer of formal education.

During the 1970s a small number of families went further and rejected the school in whatever form it took. Instead, they turned to education at home, often involving informal child-centred methods. For many of these families, children were the focus of learning – the role of the teacher was rejected along with the concept of school. Through the 1980s, numbers of home educators continued to grow in Britain, albeit at an appreciably slower rate than that witnessed in North America. Nevertheless, in a very real sense these were the true radicals in search of a new educational model. Few of them, if any, thought in terms of the large picture. Most were simply concerned to find a better way to educate their children. It was these families, outside of the formal educational system, who were in search of a new educational paradigm. Not for them the popular North American term – *home schooling*, it was *home education* or *home-based learning* that they were engaged in, and many saw this as a far cry from any form of schooling, whether institutional or at home.

By the mid-1980s, the number of children being home educated was still very small. It was at this time that Roland Meighan, then a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Birmingham wrote *Flexi-schooling: Education for tomorrow, starting yesterday*.¹⁶ Meighan had spent many years studying the home education movement in the UK and abroad. Meighan argues that conventional schooling is outdated and inflexible; in contrast, home-based learning can “..stress self education, personal confidence, problem solving, flexibility and adaptation.”¹⁷ However, Meighan finds a new role for schooling through his model of flexi-schooling, a term which he sees as having multiple layers of meaning. Whilst starting with the idea of “.. a part-time arrangement whereby school and family sharing responsibility in an agreed contract and partnership”¹⁸, Meighan quickly saw that flexi-schooling could embrace flexibility on a far wider range of fronts, including education in multiple locations, and education without teachers being present, and be a feasible model of learning for the next century.

Of course, Meighan's is only one amongst a range of educational futures that are on offer,¹⁹ it is not the place of this paper to explore these alternative futures. Nevertheless, what they all have in common is a radical questioning of the role of both the teacher and the school in the educational systems of the future. Before exploring these roles, we must consider the rise of information and

¹⁵ A list of UK Steiner schools, and further web site links can be found at <http://www.compulink.co.uk/~waldorf/scuk.htm>

¹⁶ Meighan, R (1988) *Flexi-Schooling; Education for Tomorrow, Starting Yesterday*, Ticknell, Educational Heretics Press.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 2

¹⁹ Meighan, R (1997) *The Next Learning System: and why home-schoolers are trailblazers*, Ticknell, Educational Press, provides an excellent introduction to the subject.

communication technologies (ICTs) and the impact that these technologies are likely to have on the educational process in the early part of the next century.

New Technology and Education

Prophetic voices predicting the growth of the computer and its significant impact on education are nothing new. Both Illich²⁰ writing in the early 1970s and Seymour Papert²¹ writing at the end of the decade, predicted a time when computers and computer networks would deliver information to students in such a way that, at the very least, the role of the teacher would be transformed. It is fascinating to consider that both Illich and Papert predicted the coming of the Internet (without giving it that name) many years before its popular inception.

That computers have not yet delivered the predicted educational revolution cannot be questioned. However, because they have not done so in the last twenty years is not an adequate reason to assume that radical change will not happen in the near future. Information and communication technologies have revolutionised the world, but only during the 1990s. The Internet, digitalisation, satellite communication, powerful personal computers, and above all rapidly dropping prices are all 90s phenomena. It is a sobering thought that the child playing with her Sega Playstation has more computing power at her disposal than NASA scientists had throughout the Apollo program in the 1960s and 70s. Added to this, the pace of development is increasing.

A number of technological advances warrant comment at this point:

- The World Wide Web (WWW) with its hyperlinks, global asynchronous access, and genuine interactivity is almost certainly the biggest revolution in communication since the printing press. It is not an exaggeration to say that as a source of contemporary information – albeit with anarchic organisation – it is unrivalled in the history of humankind.
- Of course vast quantities of water are only of use if one has a wide enough pipe to deliver it. Similarly with the WWW, we are currently asking very low bandwidth telephone cables to deliver huge amounts of data – something that they were never designed to do. The problem of bandwidth is a very real one – witness the number of people who frustratingly complain that the WWW is too slow to use. However, a number of competing solutions, some involving satellites, electrical cables, or fibre optic cables are currently being developed and trialed. In the very near future, the bandwidth problem will be much reduced, and with the widespread advent of low cost broadband communications, a range of activities becomes possible. Not only will one be able to surf the web at faster speed, web pages will be able to provide the viewer with far more by way of interactivity, but educationally, the role of the teacher will be changed for ever. It will be possible to buy in expertise or instruction when one needs it, and in the specific areas that one needs. Small

²⁰ Illich, *op cit.*, 75ff

²¹ Papert, S (1980), *Mindstorms: Children, Computers and Powerful Ideas* 177ff, Brighton, Harvester.

schools will be able to offer as broad a range of subjects as their bigger rivals—in fact the ultimate small ‘school’—the home educating family will be able to buy in any educational needs that they might require. If they require synchronous tuition from a teacher many miles away, they can have it; if the teacher wishes to work with a small number of students in a seminar format, that can be done; if a student missed the lesson, it can be stored on their personal computer for later viewing. The WWW and broadband communications will transform the educational landscape.

- The third technological advance that I will refer to is Virtual Reality (VR). For many years, VR has remained largely the domain of science fiction fans—remember the holo-deck on the Star Trek’s Enterprise—and flight simulators. All this is set to change in the near future as falling hardware costs linked with rapid development in processor power, and flat screen technology will lead to breath-taking developments in VR. Certainly over the next five years we are likely to see VR games involving headsets, gloves and probably suits capable of basic feelings. Whilst we can spend time thinking of rich educational experiences that come from this—think of walking through a medieval monastery or an Amazonian rainforest—the implications for society are potentially frightening. Already, some are describing VR as the ultimate safe sex environment.
- The rise of multimedia—within which I would include CD-ROM, since multimedia refers to the content, while CD-ROM relates to a deliver mechanism. Just as films will in the near future be delivered to homes on a pay per view basis via cable, satellite and other means of telecommunications, so too, multimedia will be delivered via the Internet or its successors. The power of multimedia is considerable. That it has failed to take off in schools in the way in which it was predicted has more to do with how teachers teach and how schools function than because of any weaknesses in multimedia. Multimedia is less a technology for the school, and much more a technology for the individual learner. Because of this, teachers have often failed to know how to use the technology since many are still committed to large group teaching methods. Nevertheless, to be able to pose a question such as, “How do volcanoes work?” and visually see an explanation using video, animation, and audio is a powerful learning context, which the student can control.

It is against this technological backdrop that educators must look to the future. Before considering some of the implications for education, we will briefly consider the UK Government’s approach to ICTs in education.

New Wine in Old Wineskins

The British Government is investing substantial sums of money in linking all UK schools to the Internet. The aim is to create a National Grid for Learning with all schools, colleges, universities and libraries connected to the Grid by 2002. The Grid will be:

*"A mosaic of inter-connected networks and education services based on the Internet which will support teaching, learning training and administration in schools, colleges, universities, libraries, the workplace and homes"*²²

At the heart of the Government's vision is the conventional school, with conventional teachers doing activities that would be broadly recognisable to any member of the teaching profession who had taught over the last hundred years. In a very real sense the Government and its advisors asked the wrong questions. Rather than asking, "How does the use of this new technology demand changes in educational processes and structures?" They seem to have said, "We have schools and we have teachers, how can this new technology be used to help teachers do what they do better." The outcome of asking this question is, inevitably very different from the outcome of asking the first question. The Government made clear its real agenda at the beginning of the White Paper:

*"..to raise educational standards, and improve quality of life and Britain's international competitiveness, especially the new literacy and numeracy targets."*²³

In essence, the Government is happy to pursue reductionist educational policies, which amounts to little more than education being an extension of the Government's economic policy.²⁴ Within this approach ICTs become little more than sophisticated Computer Assisted Learning. This is a far cry from the visionary approaches advocated by Seymour Papert and Roland Meigham, and does nothing to combat the mounting criticisms that have been levelled at the school as an institution over the last three decades.

ICTs and the empowerment of families

It is within this bleak framework that we come to consider some of the ways in which ICTs can empower families, and truly lead to a revolution in learning.

Home education has seen considerable expansion over the last decade in many countries, particularly, the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK. ICTs are playing an increasing role within many home educating families. In the past teachers were needed because they knew more than parents did and because what they knew was not readily available elsewhere. This is no longer the case. Parents are much better educated, and many home educating parents have easy access to information regarding what their children need to know and where they can find

²² Connecting the Learning Society – National Grid for Learning (1997), 3. The white paper can also be found at <http://www.open.gov.uk/dfee/dfeehome.htm>

²³ Ibid. It is fascinating to note that WE Forster, the then Education Secretary, used much the same arguments to urge the House of Commons to accept his Bill which, when passed, would become the first great British Education Act in 1870.

²⁴ Indeed, writing in *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a New Britain*, the Government's Green Paper on Life long learning, Tony Blair actually stated, "Education is the best economic policy we have." 9.

it.²⁵ As more families turn to flexible working arrangement and tele-working it is quite likely that the home will become the hub of a life-long learning family²⁶

The educational rationale for sending children to school for at least eleven years has gone. The traditional role of the teacher, principally as an imparter of knowledge, is no longer sustainable. The Internet and multimedia have seen the demise of both. Teachers are unreliable sources of information, when compared with professionally produced multimedia. To misquote Bridges, "Schooling is a rigid solution to an elastic problem"²⁷ Within a few years, the increasingly blurred boundaries between television and the Internet are likely to have gone. Families will have access to a blend of interactive digital television and the Internet, using a television look-alike and an infrared keyboard. They will be able to surf the web, send emails, and participate in what they see. For parents wishing to educate their children, and for adults wishing to learn in a place and at a time to suit them, this technology represents a truly enabling opportunity.

Some current experiences

A number of online education projects have been developed in recent years. Some, such as the European Union funded Topilot Project and Notschool.Net have targeted groups for which the current school system has failed, either completely as is the case with Notschool.net or partially as is the case with the Topilot Project.

In the case of the Topilot Project, the European Union and the electronic giant Philips have linked to produce an asynchronous learning solution for European traveller children. Travelling families may travel for a wide range of reasons, including circus and bargee work. Traditionally these children have spent the winter months attending local schools near their winter base, but during the summer months when they are travelling with their families they have received little or no schooling. The Topilot Project proposed a solution whereby CD-i was used to deliver curriculum to students who were given battery powered laptop computers, and interaction between student and tutor took place via email delivered via GSM mobile telephony systems. Tutors were normally teachers at the school the student attended during the winter months. In Topilot, email contact between fellow students was not designed into the system.²⁸

NotSchool.Net is an online learning community still in the planning phase, based at Ultralab at Anglia Polytechnic University. It will specifically target non-attenders such as, pregnant teenagers and nursing mothers, those in custodial care, excluded pupil, school refusals and school phobics, and those with long-term medical reasons for absence. The concept behind NotSchool.Net is to

²⁵ Hargreaves, Op Cit., 13-14.

²⁶ This, it seems to me, is genuine life long learning, rather than the contrived and employment orientated training promulgated as life long learning by the UK Government in its life long learning green paper, *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a New Britain*.

²⁷ Bridges, W (1995), *Jobshift – how to survive in a workplace without jobs*, London, Allen and Unwin. Bridges original quote read "jobs are rigid solutions to an elastic problem"

²⁸ Further information can be found at the Topilot home page at <http://edm-topilot.luc.ac.be/>

make education through technology so seductive that pupils will want it.²⁹ Staff/pupil ratios will be 1:4. The latest web technology will be combined with iMac computers to provide students with an innovative learning experience.

Examples of online schools for conventional students also exist. CyberHigh in Canada has been providing asynchronous education to secondary aged students in Edmonton for over four years. Local students have the opportunity to opt to attend CyberHigh instead of conventional school. Using First Class conferencing software, students log on at times to suit them, and download lessons and messages from other students. There are virtual classrooms, special interest clubs, libraries and even cafes at CyberHigh. Twice a year, students get together for a face to face meeting.³⁰

A New Role for Teachers but is there a place for schools?

So are these new institutions pointing the way? Are we to expect a generation of teachers, in the near future to be online tutors for students they rarely meet? The reality is, of course, that large numbers of children will continue to attend conventional schools, and be taught by teachers in largely traditional contexts, using very traditional methods. Indeed, as schools continue to struggle to deliver high educational standards, the cry for more compulsory schooling, starting earlier and going on until the student is much older, may, ironically, become louder. Even the Topilot Project and NotSchool.Net, innovative as they are, both have a vision that extends no further than pupils who are unable to attend conventional schools.

What is required in Britain is a reformation, and this is precisely why the UK Government's plans for a National Grid for Learning represent not only a case of new wine in old wineskins, but also a massive lost opportunity. Instead of spending vast sums of money finding ways to shoehorn ICTs into the existing structures, visionary leadership would have begun by asking the big questions, such as "How does the use of this new technology demand changes in educational processes and structures?" and "In what ways does this new technology transform the landscape within which education is to take place?"

It is not just a lost opportunity; it is a dangerous lost opportunity. The danger is that ICTs will be discredited in the eyes of teachers and educational policy makers. "It has failed to deliver," the argument will go, "in order to achieve high standards in education, we must use conventional teaching methods, in traditional compulsory schools, if necessary for longer periods of time." The spectre of children attending compulsory school for fifteen years between the ages of 3 and 18 is very real.

But the Government's position is backward looking and ultimately unsustainable in the face of the massive societal changes that are likely to hit the whole of the west in the early part of the next century. An intoxicating cocktail of post-modernism, a 'de-jobbed' workplace, virtual reality, and the digitalisation and

²⁹ The term 'seductive' is used on the NotSchool.Net web site. Further information can be found at <http://www.ultralab.anglia.ac.uk/pages/NOTschool/info.htm>

³⁰ Further information can be found at <http://www.cyberhigh.org/>

globalisation of media with its resulting societal fragmentation are much more likely to win the day.

So what role is there for the teacher of the future? Hargreaves is surely right when he comments,

“There is no possibility of a professional unity of vision that can, Canute-like, drive back the post-modern tide of institutional diversity.”³¹

Our educational structures need to undergo a reformation so radical in effect that they will be virtually unrecognisable in comparison with our current schools. Though speaking about US schools, Edward Fiske, was correct when he wrote,

“Trying to get more learning out of the current system is like trying to get the Pony Express to compete with the telegraph by breeding faster ponies.”³²

An opportunity exists to use ICTs to reshape formal education. For children below the age of 11, this could mean delayed admission to formal school, which might be re-designated a Local Learning Centre (LLC) open and available to the whole community for 18 hours a day. Younger children would then work at home with links to their local LLC, via the Internet and face to face meetings. Between the ages of 11 and 14, students and their parents could negotiate flexible learning programs with their local Secondary Learning Centre (SLC). Students might attend face to face for part of the week, but would also have online lessons, perhaps with students many miles apart, with a teacher who was also remote. For students over the age of 14, their education could follow similar patterns, but with the added dimension of links with employers. A student could have one or two-year placements with employers, where they would receive training, undertake genuine work orientated activities and maintain links with their local SLC via video conferencing, email and other ICT means. Throughout their secondary education students would work online both in real-time and asynchronously. In this way, international links could be developed, and students could be introduced to a broader educational perspective. Imagine students asynchronously discussing the causes of the Second World War with fellow students in Europe, the USA, the Far East and Australia, and at the same time having access to the same range of multimedia resources.

In this model of learning the teacher becomes a facilitator or an enabler, pointing students and their parents towards resources and learning experiences. The teacher is still an expert, but the power relationships have changed. It is the parent or the student who is in control; and now the teacher services the declared needs of the learner.

³¹ Hargreaves, op cit. 11

³² Fiske, E (1992), *Smart Schools, Smart Kids*, New York, quoted in Meighan (1997)

Towards a new paradigm for learning

It is not enough to remodel the role of the teacher and the structure of the school. In an age that is fast becoming saturated by information, education must respond by developing innovative strategies in curriculum development. The traditional “just-in-case” approach can no longer be sustained. There is simply too much information, and rates of information obsolescence are too rapid. Our current approach to curriculum will lead to even greater degrees of arbitrariness in content selection and obsolescence even before the student has left school. The only reasonable response is to cultivate what might be termed “just-in-time” approaches to information acquisition. In Just in Time (JiT) learning the need is to encourage students to develop skills that will enable them to recognise their own deficiencies and know how and where to resolve them. Lack of knowledge will not, in itself, be the problem. It will be little more than an acknowledgement of reality.

It may be appropriate at this time to introduce the potentially powerful concepts of *unfamiliarity* and *significant knowledge*. Terms such as ignorance and lack of knowledge carry perjorative baggage with them. What is required is a new concept which acknowledges lack of knowledge, whilst at the same time carrying no inherent criticism. I believe that it is in this area that a developed concept of unfamiliarity might prove useful. At the heart of ‘unfamiliarity’ is the idea of being “not yet acquainted with” a person, information or knowledge. This would appear to be an ideal description of a person’s relationship with most information. Significant knowledge can be defined as that knowledge that provides the key to enable an individual both to discern and to fill the gaps that they have in their own knowledge. It is intimately bound to the concept of unfamiliarity, since it is significant knowledge that permits the individual to encroach upon areas of unfamiliarity in meaningful ways.

Key skills will now be concerned with how the student and teacher recognises their own unfamiliarity, how they develop strategies to establish where their unfamiliarity fits into the broader picture, and how they develop skills to combat this unfamiliarity and acquire knowledge, and information in the areas that they require them. In many ways we may be entering a new age of the generalist – the person who has islands of significant knowledge on a sea of unfamiliarity. It is the significant knowledge that will permit the individual to navigate this sea of unfamiliarity.

JiT learning is the opposite of school learning. There is little of real importance that one *needs* to know in a school context. There is certainly a lot that schools think pupils *need* to know, but with the exception of basic skills – which many schools still find impossible to teach universally – much of this is artificial and orientated towards institutional schooling. Young people – even those that are regarded by their teachers as unteachable – are natural learners. In the real, outside world, there is a lot that young people need to know, and the majority will go to extra-ordinary lengths to learn it. Whether it is pop music or films, knowing how to read a bus timetable or how to drive a car, if it is important enough, then most young people will learn it. The need that is before educators

– whether they are school teachers or parents – is to equip students in the areas of perception, wisdom, values and significant knowledge.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that technologically we stand on the verge of dramatic changes. Whilst teachers may be calling for a period of peace and consolidation after what appears to many of them to have been unremitting change for fifteen years, the reality is that almost certainly they are going to face much greater changes in the coming fifteen years. Outside the school, post-modernism is likely to impact society in greater ways. In addition technological changes are going to leave conventional schools and teachers exposed. There is a real danger that schools and teachers will appear to be dinosaurs – out of place in an information rich age.

If schools, teachers and the government are not prepared to face this challenge, then they might find that consumers, who have come to expect more from their service providers (whether those service providers be supermarkets, airlines or the entertainment industry) simply will not tolerate what is being offered to them. Then Roland Meighan may be proved right, and we really will find that home-schoolers are the trailblazers of a new educational paradigm.

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of Economic Affairs.

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steve@northstaruk.org
www.northstaruk.org

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