

WHEN THE FUNDING ENDS: USING THE HANDSON ICT MOOC AS A KEY ELEMENT IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE EU ICT INDUSTRY.

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Abstract:

This paper concentrates on potential methods of sustaining the development and use of the EU LLL funded HANDSON ICT MOOC after the project ends in April 2015. At this early stage in the project, the MirandaNet Fellowship, the English partner that leads the sustainability work package, outlines the position of the ICT industry in the UK in order to stimulate the investigation of similarities and differences in the partner countries: Greece, Spain, Slovenia and Holland. The key challenges for UK industry in 2014 are to: generate or respond to business opportunities internationally; encourage those seeking system change to look to the UK and facilitate the UK response; increase the involvement of third country collaboration; work with EU and global players. On the basis of evidence from MirandaNet activity since 1992, the authors recommend developing a HANDSON ICT community of practice during the pilots that will want to use the environment in the future to develop further courses for teachers that showcase EU products and services in a classroom setting in a situation. In this context the teachers who become co-researchers gain valuable ICT professional development in the uses and pedagogies associated with digital tools. A range of other partnerships have also been set up as part of the sustainability programme that increase the dissemination of the findings through accreditation and global publication.

Keywords: education research and development, professional development in ICT, community of practice, collaboration, sustainability

1. THE ICT EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN THE UK

Britain has been a world leader in IT service and products for education since the early 1990s when the Learning Grid was the first national internet service for schools. BETT¹, the international trade fare, held in January in London, has been the international showcase for products and services, Becta². The government agency was the international shop window for UK research.

The key challenges for UK industry in 2014 are to:

- generate or respond to business opportunities internationally;
- encouraging those seeking system change to look to the UK and facilitating the UK response;
- Increasing the involvement of third country collaboration;
- working with global players.

BETT continues to be a focus for potential global clients. However, since the demise of Becta it is more difficult for educators abroad to know where to access reliable and trustworthy UK information about classroom practice and research in the use of digital products to improve learning, teaching and administration. Our particular concern is the limited availability of quality CPD in digital technologies across the country, especially now that computing has been introduced as a curriculum component. As far as we know professional training is continuing the trend identified in *The Landscape for ICT CPD* (Pachler, Preston, Cuthell, Allen and Pinheiro Torres): to be localised and focused on the technical use of the product without the underpinning pedagogy and the ownership that this research suggests is essential in the effective uptake of digital tools. In addition, teachers have few channels where they can publish their knowledge and expertise to a wide audience and influence policy like the doctors do in the Cochrane review³. In the next stage the HANDS-ON ICT partners will detail the situation for ICT education in the other four countries.

2. MOBILISING THE PROFESSION

One way for the EU education Industry to reach the profession and potential clients is to work through the existing professional organisations. We offer as an example, the International MirandaNet Fellowship⁴, established in 1992, that was the first Face Book for educators. The organisation, free to members, is modelled on a system of self-led improvement called a community of practice (Wenger 1998). This term refers to a human process of working and learning together that has been operating for centuries (e.g., as in medieval craft guilds). However, newly explored in a socio-cultural context, the concept provides a useful perspective on knowing, learning and knowledge building in professional life, and has been particularly useful for online contexts for focusing attention on the interests and practices that keep communities together rather than just the geographical co-location.

In research terms communities of practice are seen as the best method of securing system led change.

In a UNESCO report MirandaNet is cited as a successful CoP that effects change in teaching and learning worldwide, using digital access to provide a platform for the disenfranchised:

Such collaborative problem solving is important to many ICT teacher educators, who have relatively little access to technical support or to view new developments. Exchange visits between countries have strengthened community members' resolve. The exchange of information is two way, as it flows from the wealthy to the less well resourced and back again (Resta, 2002, p. 29).

The MirandaNet Fellowship now has nearly 1,000 members in more than 80 countries. The visitors to the website show that there is a global hunger from professionals and parents to know what works and what the research says. More than 850,000 pages are read each year of teachers' varied publications and 6,000 unique visitors read up to 11 pages. Visitors often return. These figures show that the global demand from education professionals and policy makers is increasing for reliable information about

¹ <http://www.bettshow.com/>

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Becta>

³ Cochrane research reviews <http://www.cochrane.org/cochrane-reviews>

⁴ www.mirandanet.ac.uk

classroom practice and research in the use of digital products to improve learning. Much of the MirandaNet that is published research is funded by industry which also gives the teachers involved as co-researchers an important low cost professional development opportunity: the practical, grassroots-based iCatalyst programme for professional learning based on action research principles.

The research and the case studies that are being read so widely are written by teachers as co-researchers in an action research programme called iCatalyst⁵ where they make decisions about how they can use a service or product to advantage in the classroom. They are mentored by MirandaNet Fellows in learning how to make secure judgments and publish their evidence in a form that other teachers want to read.

In terms of global connections especially third world collaborations, MirandaNet Fellows have developed iCatalyst systemic change projects using digital tools in places as far flung as Bulgaria, China, Chile, Czech Republic, England, Friesland, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. Many of these contacts have been made through BESA introductions. Each international MirandaNet chapter continues to link to the international MirandaNet base where the language is English. We are seeing increasing interest from the BRIC countries and the USA: currently we are starting communities in Thailand and Pakistan. Some of the associate companies who have supported these action research projects in schools are: Apple, GroupCall, IRIS Connect, LightSpeed, Microsoft, Promethean, Oracle and Steljes. Current MirandaNet associates are: BrainPop, Brother, Engage, Follett, GroupCall, Iris Connect, LightSpeed, MERU, Tablet Academy and Yellow Spot. Many of these companies have EU branches.

3. A MODEL FOR COLLABORATION WITH THE EU ICT INDUSTRY

The MirandaNet Fellowship is a partner in the HANDS-ON ICT development⁶. This is a free and open source environment being developed in the EU LLL programme with partners in Greece, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands. When all three pilots are complete, the HANDS-ON ICT environment could be a host for teacher-designed modules and case studies in the practice and pedagogy surrounding EU products and services. It will be another source of dissemination for materials testing EU products and services that are quality assured by teachers.

A MirandaNet knowledge construction and dissemination activity called a MirandaMod⁷ has already been adapted at BETT14 by the HANDS-ON ICT team to collaborate with teachers, teacher educators and companies interested in sharing their expertise about MOOCs⁸: two MirandaMods at BETT15 and one with interested companies have already resulted in a MOOC research group on Google Hangouts.

In explanation a MirandaMod is an informal, unconference where educators meet face to face and online to discuss and share ideas about the use of technology in education and lifelong learning. They are a regular feature of the MirandaNet calendar and are often held, alongside, or as an integral part of other educational conferences or events in the UK and around the world.

MirandaMods use the power of social media to connect participants, allowing them to participate online, through a range of collaborative technologies including video conferencing, microblogging and collaborative concept maps, emphasising the social element of learning. MirandaMods are usually broadcast live. The name from the MirandaNet community and the Gaelic word for a 'gathering or assembly',

Some of the other ways in which the HANDS-ON ICT project might choose to improve sustainability and dissemination are by:

- increasing the entries on the blog() in order to to enrich the experience for visitors and extend the showcase for companies;

⁵ <http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/consultancy/case-studies/professional-development-programmes/>

⁶ Hands-On ICT Project handsonict.eu

⁷ www.mirandanet.ac.uk/mirandamod/

⁸ <http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/researchexchange/mirandamods/programme-january-22nd/>

<http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/researchexchange/mirandamods/programme-january-23rd/>

<http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/consultancy/networking-dinners/>

- extending the MirandaNet lounge again at BETT15 as a focus for the HANDS-ON ICT provide a welcome for international educators;
- Increasing the programme of online discussions about ICT issues called MirandaMods;
- increasing the research evidence provided by teachers for teachers through the pilots.
- running workshops for companies that elect to support the HANDS-ON ICT project that will help them to develop their international research and marketing base.

MirandaNet has also brokered a partnership between the HANDS-ON ICT project and three innovative projects that can be used to improve EU industry collaboration with teachers and dissemination to international partners:

- The **Learning Designer**⁹ project that provides teachers with a template for publication that is based on many years of classroom investigation by Professor Diana Laurillard and her team at The London Knowledge Lab;
- The **MESH Guides**¹⁰ project led by Professor Marilyn Leask at the University of Bedfordshire where teachers can contribute their case studies to pathways that are used to reach professional judgements on the current evidence in the same way that the doctors use the Cochrane review;
- **INGOTS**¹¹ accreditation that in tune with our research into action research provides free optional tools and flexible systems for teacher trainers so that they can decide the best way to motivate the teachers. This system is achieved within the nationally recognised qualifications systems including performance points and is endorsed by the UK Department of Education.

4. CONCLUSIONS

During the first year the partners in this project have been active in developing innovative ways of involving teachers and companies in the development and sustaining of the HANDS-ON ICT environment. Already some valuable partnerships have been made, a research group has been formed and interchanges of ideas are taking place online. As Europe emerges from recession the intention is that this open source, free web environment will assist many more members of the teaching profession in using ICT creatively in their classrooms. Indeed although this is a collaboration between partners in Europe there are already signs that teachers beyond Europe in countries like Thailand and Pakistan will find this resource valuable not only for learning about how to use digital tools in the classroom but also finding out about some of the products and services that the European ICT industry has to offer.

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⁹ Learning Designer <https://sites.google.com/a/lkl.ac.uk/ldse/>.

¹⁰ MESH <http://www.meshguides.org/>

¹¹ INGOTS <http://theingots.org/community/about>