

**Media Lab Europe**  
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ICT and Education:  
**INCREMENTAL PROGRESS OR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE?**

Discussion group: **TECHNOLOGY**

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MARK JACOBS, BBC INTERACTIVE LEARNING

I'm going next because I know I've got an aeroplane waiting at the end of this afternoon. My name is Mark Jacob. I work for BBC Interactive Factual Learning, in the area of innovation, and before that for 20 years I was a programme maker. I was on a table with a very learned group and I'll do my best to reflect their thoughts. Our subject area was Technology. We all felt that technology essentially is offering us and will offer us fundamental change. The world we live in will not be the same in 5-10 years time – and that is excluding our thoughts about, obviously not describing sub-Saharan Africa here – we are talking about the world we live in. So we elected to paint a portrait, as a group, of our kind of world. And if learning and education is about preparing us to live in that kind of world, let's try and anticipate what it might be.

We thought we might have to live in a world where communities come and go in an instant, virtual communities that are set up for a particular subject area or a particular interest. We'll have a world where we'll have multiple personalities, information will be ubiquitous as we understand it already. It will be ubiquitous in the virtual environment around us as well, we'll pick it up from our mobile phones as well as through desk-tops. The real and the artificial, the real and the unreal, will begin to get blurred, there will be different sensory experiences – haptics – all of you I'm sure are familiar with this term. And we got very excited about the idea of virtual kissing machines. (LAUGHTER)

We thought the scale of our interaction with each other – the size of this, the numbers of different kinds of interaction – the potential for those interactions are almost infinite. And that is quite a different kind of world than we have inhabited in the village or even the city from which we came. And we thought perhaps we are used to leading linear lives, one event following another, one clear goal, while this new world will provide us with non-linear lives, both in time and space. I've always wanted to say that (inaudible) – it's called a Dr. Who world. We thought as a group that actually schools are in crisis. Perhaps the only form of technology you might find in some American schools was the weapons scanner, and perhaps at best what our schools are offering us at the moment are 21<sup>st</sup>-century tools in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century education system – but we felt technology could offer us much more.

Schools need to become more porous; education, viewed as a lifelong experience facilitated by technology; and technology can offer us a feedback loop which takes us on a step: it can help us create content in new ways, it can help us express that content in new ways. I'm aware, for example, that the BBC is setting up big public screens, and there will be 9 screens in cities across England and Scotland by the end of next year. There will be new ways to reflect on that content and iterate it, and this iterative process perhaps makes it easier for people to accept the system, both from their peers and from teachers. What technology will be able to offer is not so much a personal journey but a personalised journey. Technology will be able to understand more about your needs as a learner, whether it's kinaesthetic needs or other needs. Youngsters will find it easier to pass information to each other. The teacher in your locality, the teacher next door – if they don't know the answer to the question you are trying to resolve, you will be able to turn to a teacher in China or Tibet.

So by looking to the future, perhaps we can imagine the world we need to prepare our children for, and indeed the world they will – as reminded by my group – the world they will create. So we are about to create an ethical and political space that will enable us to move between the weapon scanner in today's schools and the virtual kissing machine of tomorrow. And in true broadcasting sense, I'll ask you to address the questions to my group rather than me. No – that's fine! Any thoughts on that? Any other comments from the group? They are all scared!