Getting down with the kids: A Self-Organised Conference Session

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An emerging big question is whether technology or pedagogy should take the lead in the creation of the 21st century classroom. At the heart of these arguments is a now commonly held observation that whilst students are learning in 21st century classrooms, teaching continues to be based on 19th century methods. In 2007, Laurillard advised that the focus of collaborative educational research around new technologies should be on: "what does it take to learn and how do we help learners in the process" (p.360). This advice came in the face of the possibilities offered by technology at the loss of pedagogical grounding.

Since then integrationist approaches have emerged such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), which guide practitioners towards a specific focus on curriculum content knowledge as the driving force in design for learning with technology. Similarly, educational technology providers are creating what they see as solutions (such as the SMART amp™) to support the orchestration of the classroom with technology.

The issue remains as to the extent to which systems such as TPACK embed in sufficient depth the knowledge required to evaluate the affordances of technologies. Likewise, even when off-the-shelf educational technologies are accompanied by numerous supports, teachers struggle to harness these products in a pedagogically informed manner. This impacts on the use of new technologies in education and the sustainability of the products themselves.

A Self Organised Learning Environment (SOLE) approach, developed by Mitra and colleagues, sits within the area of new technologies for education which both challenges 19th century teaching methods and supports learning in the 21st century classroom. Often viewed as challenging the dominant activity (Leont'ev, 1981; El'konin, 1977) in both education and research, SOLE has a growing research agenda with issues such as the future of learning, the role and contribution of digital technology to education.

SOLE grew out of a series of experiments with children in rural India (the ‘Hole in the Wall experiments’) involves people answering a Big Question in self-organised groups and sharing computers with internet access. Here, the internet is seen as assistive technology and urgent response to the evolving knowledge ecosystems of our time (Mitra, 2014). The role of technology within SOLE can be viewed as part of a complex self-organising system made up of a number of properties which control the environment, but where neither one controls the other (Mitra, 2014). This blurring of boundaries therefore puts a premise on the technology pedagogy divide.

This session will initiate audience-led exploration of questions arising out of the technology-pedagogy debate using the SOLE approach. Its innovation lies in the combination of technology and pedagogy to the design and impact of the event via participatory methods before, during and after the session. It gives the audience hands-on experience with the issues the session wishes to address.

The session will be run as a SOLE with a big question. Three questions will be aired online (using twitter with the hashtag #BigQuestionBERA) in the lead up to the conference and the final question...
chosen at the start of the session. It will be a self-organised case study for how technology and pedagogy is integrated through SOLE, based on a big question about technology and pedagogy.

The session will be led by collaborators of SOLE Central, a research hub at Newcastle University which include school practitioners, researchers and educational technology providers. Evidence about what happens before, during and after the session, including the outcomes of the Big Question, will be collected and analysed (ensuring proper consent is granted) to form part of a future publication to which participants will be invited to contribute.