Education doesn’t have a very good track record with innovative technologies. A few folks reading this
will be old enough to remember being banned from using the “new” ballpoint pens for fear that their
cursive script handwriting might be ruined. Others, later, may have been prevented from using their
slide rules, or in still later years yet had their calculators confiscated, or told that it was the “wrong
type” (“we don’t allow programmable functions here I’m afraid”). Education has had a track record of
first confiscating, and then appropriating, emerging technologies. Even the potential that computers and
laptops offered became tamed by a mass of “managed services” and by a stultifying focus on a small
suite of tools for office workers, rather than perhaps the freedom of tools used in creative industries, or
in play. For many, the power of moving images was reduced to weakly animated text on a PowerPoint
slide. Even the remarkable, free, open world offered by the World Wide Web was rapidly closed off by
massively filtered internet provision and by parallel “equivalent” services. “We have our own YouTube”
authorities would proclaim, literally blind to the 10 hours of video contributed every minute to the real one.

Education’s question, faced with most emerging technology, has traditionally been a simple produc-
tivity view of “how can this new thing usefully improve what we are already doing?”, rather than “what
new things might we now do?” The excitement of games became tamed to “spelling space invaders”,
the art, installation and celebration potential of a computer plus projector was reeled back into an inter-
active white-board and so on. It has always been relatively simple to achieve this appropriation of new
technologies, because the pace of change was rapid but manageable. We had only been on the gentle
slope of an exponential curve that is now, finally, beginning to steepen very rapidly indeed. On the gentle
part of that slope we had plenty of time to reflect on quite small technological changes - and to head off
perhaps the perceived dangers of that potential change. I remember a debate running for several years
in the early 80s about whether we should have colour or monochrome computer monitors! People sug-
gested that colour might be damaging for students’ eyes! But now that we have reached the steep bit,
where the Technology Progress against Time curve leaps skywards, we have but the blink of an eye to
make sense of huge leaps in technological capability, and that changes everything.

Mobile technology is the first to appear in our classrooms and to successfully resist education’s
hunger for appropriation. It is the first technology already on the steep part of the exponential curve.
When I put some of the very first “luggable” phones into a classroom in early early 90s the children saw
a potential right away: “we could talk to people in France and improve our language skills; it wouldn’t
matter where they were, or we were, we could talk about what we were doing” they said, eyes alight with
excitement. Education didn’t give up the fight easily and produced the usual list of hokum to justify the
usual bans: texting would ruin children’s prose, radiation might fry their brains; when TV used video
to show fictional fights and incidents it was “drama”, when children did it, it was “happy slapping” and
so on. But mobile technology is essentially personal, portable and powerful. As schools were fretting

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about texting children were already social networking. This time the pace of change meant it was all too easy for the children to remain one step ahead. And they did.

Today of course mobile phone technology is an integral part of very many classrooms: children summarise their understanding, snap images from the board, blog their field trips, bluetooth to their teachers, do day-in-the-life projects through their phones with other schools, sample and exchange data, and - as this book reveals - much more besides. This post-Google generation see a whole new potential for themselves as learners and they see much of it lying beyond the structures and strictures of the old education system of the last century. Mobile learning has already shown itself to be a watershed in learning - the moment when the learners, finally, had an authentic say in what the future might be like. The biggest certainty we have as we move forward is that education won’t appropriate this next tidal wave of change. Tomorrow will be a very different place. This excellent book gives us some hints about what kind of place that might be.

Stephen Heppell

Stephen Heppell (Professor) is CEO of Heppell.net, Professor of New Media Environments at Bournemouth University, Emeritus Professor Anglia Ruskin University, Visiting Professor University of Wales, Newport and Executive Chairman LP+. Stephen founded and ran Ultralab for a quarter of a century, building it into one of the most respected research centres in e-learning in the world - at one time Ultralab was the largest producer of educational CD-ROMs in Europe - before leaving it in 2004 to found his own global and flourishing policy and learning consultancy Heppell.net which now has an enviable portfolio of international projects all round the world such as Learnometer and HorizonTAL. Stephen pioneered, and was the guiding “father” of, early social networking with seminal projects including Schools OnLine for the UK Department of Trade and Industry in 1995/6, Tesco Schoolnet 2000 from 1999 (the then Guinness Book of Record’s largest internet learning project in the world) and Think-com with Oracle from 1999. He was a founder board member for Teachers.TV and sits on the board of the UK’s Skillset and on BAFTA’s Council. Stephen created in 1998, and then guided for ten, years Notschool.net, at the time a uniquely effective project to re-engage children excluded from school by behaviour or circumstances. His recent awards include: in June 2006 Stephen was awarded the Royal Television Society’s Judges Award for Lifelong Services to Educational Broadcasting and in 2008 he received the BETT for Outstanding Achievement in ICT Education.