Opening Address  
Creativity & Innovation Forum  
Tuesday 3 March, 2009

I am a seventeen year old high school student living in a metropolitan area. I guess this means that I chill out by listening to my iPod, spending upwards of two and a half hours on the internet each night and finding new visual and audio material to post on my MySpace. My father and step-mother are teachers, my mother is a teacher and my step-father goes to work at my home away from home, Brisbane Girls Grammar School. As a student of Information Technology, Visual Art and Instrumental Music, a significant portion of my time is spent in our School’s new Cherrell Hirst Creative Learning Centre.

After high school, I plan to create a career for myself in the publishing industry, hopefully as a creative director or editor. Now, one might think that all this means that I am well-placed to offer answers to questions faced about “creative and innovative economies, technologies and pedagogies”. This is absolutely not so! In fact, I do not even own an iPod, I don’t have a MySpace and I am not without my fair share of “I hate technology” moments! My teacher-parents along with my School, however, do have me thinking about my future and today, at the beginning of this conference in the Year of Creativity, I would like to pose several questions about the possible directions that technology and creativity could take me and my peers.

Despite my lack of iPod connectivity, I believe I am technically a member of what has been dubbed the iGeneration? I cannot recall a time when the internet was not available to me, I am a very active consumer and I yearn for creative outlets. The fact that our generation is innately equipped to manipulate and exploit the full benefits of creative technologies is undeniable. We are “prosumers” creating, exporting, and receiving in equal measure. If you’ll forgive me for quoting my own year nine English assignment, “we have been labelled the “most supervised” generation. This has had two main effects: - firstly, we spend more time at home and therefore utilising the technology at our fingertips and secondly, we feel the need for individuality, creativity and rebellion. In comparison to the Builders, Boomers, X and Y, we are thus the most difficult to target. It’s easy to appeal to the conformists or the materialists but how does one target the individualist? To appeal to the teenager’s desire for individualism, we must advertise a blank canvas.”

It now seems to me, that this need for individuality reflects the way that creative technologies can be utilised. Microsoft CEO, Steve Ballmer (2005), tells us, “The number one benefit of information technology is that it empowers people to do what they want to do. It lets people be creative. It lets people be productive. It lets people learn things they didn’t think they could learn before, and so in a sense it is all about potential.” Speaking to my step-mother about the idea of technology in learning, she felt it was important that I reassure the assembled educators that your jobs are not in jeopardy and that in fact they are simply evolving. She told me, “Technology is simply a tool; the role of the teacher is hardly different. In fact, it’s no different to presenting a blank canvas. The challenge for teachers now is to help students use these tools in the best way that we can. For instance, the
simple paint program on a PC is not unlike doing a painting in real life, creatively.” And in one of her more philosophical moments: “The tools of the past can unlock the future.”

But, what does it mean to be creative, nowadays? How do technology and creativity meet? How does one “blend” pre-existing material into an innovative creation that is one’s own? This collaboration and fusion in multimedia allows students to be multi-modal and 3 or even 4-dimensional as they have never been. There currently exists massive creative potential in our youth and we have the opportunity right now to invest in this creativity. We stand on the precipice of a second renaissance; in this Florentine moment we can act now to endorse creativity and positivity. Even considering economic downturn, we have the wealth at this point to take a leaf out of the Medici book and invest in future creativity. Considering the way that the way we use creative technologies, what can we expect of technological advances in the future? If we are using “the technologies of the past to unlock the future”, what’s next? If we reflect on the way technology has evolved in the last twenty years, we can look to the future and wonder, will this kind of growth continue? If the accessibility of technology continues to increase at this rate, the technology that is available in schools skyrocket also. But what can we expect? Can we expect anything, or is it a matter of taking what comes in our stride? It is the students of today that will enter this taskforce, implement these innovations and build the tools with which “Renaissance Reloaded” could occur. How do we see both technology and creativity together? Is creativity a measure of skill in the creative arts? Is it the act of thinking about any subject in a way that is “out of the box”? Is creativity a way to problem-solve and a way of looking? The mind boggles as this question simply raises more! The question of creativity as a teachable and learnable skill is more difficult again!

Yes, all these ideas are educationally relevant, but our schooling is but 12 years leading up to and equipping us for our time in the workforce. In this day and age, our place in this part of society is significantly influenced by the creation of new jobs in the technological and creative fields. Education Minister Rod Welford describes employment opportunities in solving “world issues such as climate change, disease and famine, [driving] innovation and technology across the globe, as well as [tackling] more issues including improved public transport and skills shortages . . . [and] promote productivity and growth in new industries”. This is the daunting task that will face a workforce of individuals who will, according to Mark McCrindle’s research, average five careers and twenty employers in a lifetime.

Of course, creativity, innovation and technology extend much further than the workforce. These qualities have meant that the i-Generation are active rather than passive participants in their world, whether it be tangible or virtual. We are critical of elected officials and democratic institutions; we reflect and comment on what we see and we invite the reflections and comments of others. We have become adept at sculpting our identities by finding a creative niche in an almost impossibly large world. We expand our leisure time by multitasking; we need to be connected. We have no time for old news.

For me, the end of this year will be a defining moment in my life. I leave behind the comfort of secondary study and begin to attempt to create a career for myself in this undulating and evolving industry. I’m leaving the safe and creatively-open and encouraging environment to test my skills in the real world. Launching into an industry that has practically undergone a total revolution in the past 20 years and continues to develop exponentially is hugely challenging. Historically, we see
publishing as books, books, books (newspapers and magazines) and then a veritable media explosion. Having already asked where technology will go next, I wonder now, after online magazines and interactive fiction, where will the publishing industry go? Along with my peers, I enter a world of uncertainty – economic recession and climate change aside; I have no idea what I am getting myself into. At the same time as knowing exactly where I want to go, I have no idea where I want to be. However, while daunting, the feeling is also quite liberating – there is no precedent for what I plan to do. But, uncertainty here offers opportunities – people attempt to create certainty as they look to cement their place in their world.

So, my final question is one on which I must keep you posted: where will my experience and interest in creative technologies take me?

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