



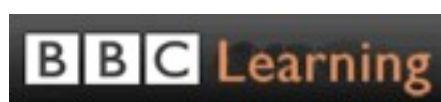
Alone Together ?

Social learning in BBC Blast

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... with thanks to the *BBC Blast* online and *Blast on Tour* teams, without whose help the research would not have been possible.

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The aim of the Arts and Humanities Research Council/BBC KEP is to develop a long-term strategic partnership bringing together the arts and humanities research community with BBC staff to enable co-funded knowledge exchange and collaborative research and development. The benefits from the outcomes and outputs of these projects should be of equal significance to both partners. To find out more about the AHRC/BBC KEP please visit the AHRC's website at: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/KnowledgeExchangeProgramme.aspx>



Foreword

Blast is the BBC's most ambitious and sustained experiment to date in user-generated content. Comprising an online showcase/community together with a range of offline events and training schemes and an annual TV series, *Blast* aims to be a catalyst and incubator of teenagers' creative skills in the fields of art and design, music, dance, video, gaming, writing and fashion. Starting 5 years ago as a small pilot project within BBC Learning, by the beginning of 2007 *Blast* was growing fast, mounting a nationwide roadshow of creative workshops, attracting tens of thousands of uploads of young creatives' work to its online galleries, and generating real excitement from everyone who came into contact with the project.

At a time when education policy-makers were beginning to edge away from an information-transfer concept of learning toward a more experiential, skills focused, lifelong-learning model - and just as educators were beginning to get to grips with the learning potential of the world wide web - the success of *Blast* suggested the possibility of something truly transformational: harnessing a creative community of young people to the promotion of peer-to-peer or *social* learning.

That is why the *Alone Together?* research collaboration between Bristol University and BBC Learning is so important. Responding to the BBC/AHRC Knowledge Exchange Programme's call for research into the BBC's role in enabling user-generated content, the research set out to improve our understanding of social learning in UGC communities through a close interrogation of the actual experience of teenagers participating in *Blast* during the second half of 2007 and the first half of 2008. It asked who exactly is taking part in *Blast*, how well the different parts of the project fit together, and how fit-for-purpose the Blast online environment is.

Most importantly - because of far-reaching application - the research asked how we can know whether learning is taking place in a UGC community like *Blast*, and identified the existence, quantity and quality of "learning conversations" as touchstones for such learning.

The research raises some difficult questions about *Blast*, suggesting that we have hardly begun to tap its potential as a learning environment. It also makes a number of practical recommendations for aligning *Blast* much more effectively with its learning ambitions - recommendations which are now being used to help inform a thorough rethink and redesign of the *Blast* website, due to relaunch in 2009.

Finally, the project demonstrates in the clearest possible way the value of this kind of collaboration between the BBC and the research community, especially in the fast-moving, intellectually contested and momentously important field of learning.

John Millner

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the main findings of a BBC/AHRC joint-funded research project into social learning in *BBC Blast*, carried out between September 2007 and September 2008. The overall aim of *Alone Together?* is to increase our understanding of how learning takes place in and question how, where, and why learning dialogues can and do occur. The outcomes of the research highlight two key perceptions for *BBC Blast*. The first is that learning dialogues are processes rather than events, and consequently the emphasis of *BBC Blast* needs to focus on **work in progress** rather than finished work. The second is that there needs to be further consideration of the identity of *BBC Blast* as a **learning resource**. Key findings and suggestions in relation to the website are as follows:

- 1) The positive comments of the respondents to the online questionnaire demonstrate that what is enjoyed by users of Blast are precisely the learning and productive debates. This suggests that the unique attributes of *BBC Blast*, and what distinguishes it as a resource from other sites, are precisely the educational or learning aspects. For the users of the website, it is the more **educational** facilities of the website which are consistently highlighted. Access to the experts, good feedback, high levels of dialogue and incentives to post creative work by setting deadlines and competitions were frequently articulated as the enjoyable and sustaining elements of *BBC Blast*. These are not only the main attributes enjoyed by users; they are also the attributes maintaining interest for returning users. In turn, returning users are required in order to produce iteration, reflection, alteration and interaction which are key characteristics of learning conversations.
- 2) The website therefore needs to become a **development** community. Places where learning and productive dialogue **have** been located (writing and music (lyric) message boards) suggests that created work and the dialogue around it, needs to be better interweaved. This would give the dialogue immediate context and encourage browsers to post through observing model answers and comments.
- 3) Competitions to have work displayed (along with deadlines) are cited by users of the website as necessary to compel them to produce content (Appendix II & III), and the showcase section, with a quality assessment, could be a way to continuously offer and assess work. This would give the showcase a different identity as the representative space of the highest quality work, and criteria of judgements could then appear alongside work. In turn browsers would have criteria on which to similarly assess work and they could begin to model answers based on this.
- 4) More crucial, however, is the addition of an extra space where users can upload **partially completed** work for constructive criticism. This would entirely change the ethos of the site to one from a display culture to a developmental culture where creative **processes** (learning processes) could be evidenced. Learning would be much more visible and incomplete work would encourage authors to return to read comments and post update versions. Iterative dialogue would be more tenable. Most importantly, duration, reflection, alteration, iteration, discussion, interaction and adaption (all the characteristics of learning conversations) would be visible. Further, partially completed visible work would mean that all levels of users would be catered for, as they could both identify and rate their own skills, and find equally-skilled works with which to engage.
- 5) The navigation of the website needs to improve. The restrictive and linear way users of *BBC Blast* have to move to and from an object of interest, means that work is hard to locate, navigation is slow, convoluted and frustrating. Restricted movement is even more noticeable when we compare *BBC Blast* with other websites such as MySpace, YouTube and Bebo. These are a just few of the named websites respondents to the questionnaire highlighted as other popular sites (Appendix 5). By comparison with these other sites, *BBC Blast* is slow, clunky and restrictive.

- 6) The number of visitors *per se* needs to increase. More visitors will lead to greater network effect and dialogue will improve alongside numbers. This project has found that it is the loyal and **returning** users who contribute most meaningfully to learning dialogues. In order to increase the number of returning users, *BBC Blast* first has to increase numbers *per se*. This has to be achieved through design modifications and increasing general knowledge about *BBC Blast* through advertising and promotion especially aimed at schools and youth groups.
- 7) Coupled with increased numbers, visitors also need to be engaged and returned to *BBC Blast* through the design of the website. This is an ongoing concern of the Blast team where design modifications are working towards feeding visitors back into the website at every opportunity. Once they have seen a particular piece of work, there needs to be a facility which directs them to similar work for example. If users watch a short clip from an expert on how to make a film or write a script, they should then be directed to the film showcase or message board.
- 8) Search facilities and improving navigation needs to coincide with these feedback loops. Users need to be able to direct interest and search for particular pieces of work or genres. *BBC Blast* is not currently supporting more advanced media creators and assumes that the user population are primarily browsers. The lack of a search facility makes navigation frustrating. It also deters users coming to the website for the first time in order to view their own work from the tour.
- 9) Navigation and the speed of response in terms of moderation need to improve. The major deterrent respondents highlighted related to the moderation system and the affect this had on the slow uploading of material or comments to the website. Indeed, the delay time between writing and seeing ones comment appear, is cited as frustrating and off-putting by respondents to the online questionnaire. Indeed, many of the threads within the message boards contain comments from users who have posted once and never returned. The moderation and slow speed for uploading material also means that messages can appear out of sequence if some (such as the mentors) posts appear first. This disrupts the flow of the thread and in worst cases stops the discussion. The moderation system also means that users are unable to share resources as names and websites are blocked. The creative journey *beyond BBC Blast* is not supported.
- 10) In relation to the message boards, the role of the mentors is crucial for modelling answers and developing and advancing the discussion. While encouragement clearly is important, the Mentor responses suggest that they remain unaware as to how to specifically and overtly support learning. More thought is required around what skills mentors need and whether this role should be fulfilled by an industry expert or a learning expert. Mentors produce a high percentage of posts which fail to advance the discussion (Appendix III). However, this percentage is exacerbated by the fact that, as experts, their comments often read as definitive statements rather than expressions of opinion. Such statements stop the discussion rather than advance it. Mentor expressions of preference carry more weight than the teenagers because they represent the adult expert voice. The mentors need to approach the message boards as a potential learning space, and need to be aware that their answers are not simply responses to a particular post. Instead they represent how to answer questions and offer criticism. They have the power to develop or prevent the discussion and encourage or dissuade users. For mentors, the message boards need to be a learning space, and the mentor roles need to reflect this recognition.

In relation to the tour element of *BBC Blast*, learning could also be better supported. However, the specific issues relating to the tour seem to be communication with delegates and facilitators, and the knock-on logistical issues of temporary and discontinuous event organisers. In turn, these findings also raise questions about the identity of Blast and the support of works in progress rather than an emphasis on finished and completed work:

- 1) The general knowledge about *BBC Blast per se* is very low. This is one of the major factors detrimentally affecting traffic to, and experience at, the tour. Lack of knowledge means that organisers have to spend a large proportion of their time introducing people to *BBC Blast* concept rather than devoting time to promoting individual workshops to participants.
- 2) Lack of knowledge about *Blast* is compounded by the fact that the *BBC Blast* brand is not always pushed on the day by facilitators or organisers. When the delegates are asked if they have ever visited the website, a large proportion expressed ignorance about the presence of the website *despite the address being on their wristband* and on posters around the tour site (Appendix I). This means that the website has not been flagged up during their workshop and delegates remain ignorant to its presence. Even when the website is flagged up by organisers and facilitators, delegates do not get to experience it while on tour because of time and location restrictions. However, twenty minutes at the end of a visit could be added to workshop lengths and used to explore the website. This would more firmly establish the various elements of *BBC Blast* and offer the delegates routes to develop their creative work and interests beyond the tour. It would also establish the website as part of their (enjoyable) experience on the truck offering a positive context from which to explore the website.
- 3) A better way of booking workshop places needs to be explored as the online booking system is clearly not working. It is not only that delegates book the workshops and then fail to appear, it is also that the on and offline populations are so diverse. In general, the website offers poor information about the tour – for example directions to the tour site are **never** given. This not only means that the tour is difficult to locate, it also means that the tour can only be attended by delegates with central and local knowledge. This reduces possibilities of individual attendance especially if delegates cannot articulate where the tour is or how they can get there to relevant adults. It also produces another barrier to an already notoriously unenthusiastic demographic.
- 4) There is little information about the logistics of the day for parents or adults. A 'parents' section could be included within the tour section to include directions, information about the skill levels of workshop, the qualifications of the truck team and workshop facilitators, and security or medical issues. It is clear that even when delegates do book online, there is no guarantee of their actual appearance at the workshop. Consequently these processes need to be made as easy as possible, and delegates need to be persuaded to attend. As teenagers are rarely in control of their own time, a booking system which requires only teenage consent seems somewhat ineffective. It is clear either that the online system should be a preliminary indication of interest, to be followed up with real guarantee of appearance (through parental confirmation for example). Or the online system needs to be entirely replaced with a real location-specific booking system.
- 5) Facilitators need to be made aware of the level of skills of the attending delegates in order to better plan their sessions. This can only be achieved through communication with the delegates themselves. Workshops need to highlight learning aims and outcomes during each session so that the delegates can leave with a tangible understanding of what they have learnt. In turn, this will promote the event to teachers and parents who will be more willing to continue a relationship with *BBC Blast* if they witness beneficial learning outcomes. Short taster sessions should continue to run, but with a reduced claim regarding outcomes. The best a 45 minute session can achieve is a vague understanding of some elements of the creative process. A 45 minute session should not claim the same learning outcomes as a 2 day workshop. Sessions should clearly outline level of skill required, learning outcomes and depth of involvement into the creative process. This will allow delegates and schools to better plan which session to attend.
- 6) Event organisers clearly need more time to devote to each workshop. There also needs to be more continuity across locations. This is not only an issue about planning each

event; it is also an issue about the legacy of *BBC Blast*. Event organisers who are not BBC employees do not have the autonomy to continue good relations with schools or delegates beyond their event. Although event organisers are loyal to their particular event(s), this does not necessarily transfer to the BBC or *BBC Blast* brand. The lack of continuity and short term participation of event organisers (coupled with limited involvement in the tour from the web team) means that each event functions as a one-off rather than as a continuing demonstration of the facilities and products available through *BBC Blast*. There is little continuity between events, and the permanent truck team have additional responsibility of providing that continuity.

- 7) Finally, if a purpose of the Blast tour is to ensure a legacy for *BBC Blast*, then working with the schools and youth groups is crucial. Delegates who leave with unfinished work need facilities and support to continue to work on their creative product. Schools also need to be supported to offer these resources and understand the creative and pedagogical benefits of *BBC Blast*.

The major issues regarding the outcomes of the *Alone Together?* project are all grouped within two major and recurrent themes: the identity of Blast, and the need to emphasize and support work in progress rather than completed work. The two issues are intertwined in terms of processes of learning. Foregrounding **creative work in progress** would therefore re-enforce the learning facilities of *BBC Blast* by prioritizing the very processes upon which a learning dialogue is founded: iteration, alteration, reflection and adaption.

Introduction

Alone Together? is one of eight similarly funded AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange projects. Running for 12 months, the overall aim of the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme was to facilitate co-funded knowledge exchange between the BBC's Future Media & Technology division and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.¹ *Alone Together?* looks specifically at *BBC Blast* (www.bbc.co.uk/blast), focusing on user generated content (UGC) across both the tour and the website. Working collaboratively with the *BBC Blast* team and its parent department BBC Learning, the aim of the project is to increase understanding of social learning in UGC communities. By developing understanding of how UGC can support learning conversations, this project provides insights into how social learning can be facilitated and supported.

This Final Report is produced at the end of the research project which commenced in September 2007. The report encompasses both the tour and the website elements of *BBC Blast* and follows the key research objectives as outlined below. The three previous reports (Tour Report December 2007, Website Report February 2008, and the Mentor Activity Report June 2008) are included as appendices and will be referred to throughout this report. While the previous reports considered specific elements and aspects of each strand of *BBC Blast*, the aim of the Final Report is to outline the key findings as they relate to the research objectives, and offer final reflections relating to learning and *BBC Blast*. As a pilot project within the knowledge exchange programme, reflections and outcomes which relate to the process of learning are crucial for considerations of practice.

The report follows the main objectives of the project as outlined in the original case for support.

Our **objectives** were to:

- Create new knowledge of user engagement with UGC
- Discover how online interactions around UGC can and do lead to learning conversations
- Inform the development of the BBC UGC offer through effective knowledge exchange with the BBC.

The introductory sections outline theories and practices utilized in our assessment of learning dialogues. The behavioural typologies of online productive dialogue are similarly outlined in order to demonstrate our criteria for the assessment of dialogue and creative work within *BBC Blast*. Further, while the foremost objective of the research project relates to considerations of learning, it is important to emphasize that although *BBC Blast* falls within the educational remit of the BBC for 13-19 year olds, *BBC Blast* is primarily concerned with *informal* learning. Indeed, the *BBC Blast* remit to 'inspire and equip young people to be creative' does not openly or obviously highlight learning considerations – although this is implied in the concept of 'equipping' - and the website falls into a somewhat greyer area between an educational resource and a social networking site (Appendix 4). Indeed, one of the major findings to emerge from the research relates to the identity of *BBC Blast* as either a learning resource or a social networking site. Feedback from the more frequent users consistently cites the more educational aspects of the website as attractive: the access to the experts, good feedback, and useful dialogue and debate. It is engagement, rather than the provision of resources, which is important to the more loyal users.. Furthermore, patterns of use suggest that it is only when real incentive (deadlines, competitions, quick and useful feedback) is offered that teenagers productively contribute. Finally, the research demonstrates that use of *BBC Blast* is primarily tied to social and cultural factors, so that rather than producing facilities and technologies with assumptions of use, design and implementation of such resources need to start at a grass roots level and consider what potential resources users actually need or want.

¹ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News/Latest/Pages/AHRCBBCawardhalfamillionpoundsinKnowledgeExchangeProgramme.aspx>

Research Context and Rationale

Alone Together? was conceived by Angela McFarlane of University of Bristol and Mairin Murray of BBC Learning and it is worthwhile outlining the rationale behind the project. Indeed, this offers further context from the dual perspectives of industry and academe and goes some way towards explaining the major research objectives as outlined above.

Knowledge Exchange Project Rationale:

The *Alone Together?* project addresses the User Generated Content (UGC) theme of the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme (KEP). In particular, it is concerned with the barriers and drivers of participation, and the triggers and motivations of users. Following this, the site design and management strategies that can maximize participation are also of interest. *Alone Together?* sought to provide new knowledge relating to the themes of Future Formats and Future Audiences within the Knowledge Exchange Programme. Indeed, knowledge of the UGC communities provides wider insights into future audiences and their patterns and habits of use and appropriation. In turn, these findings can inform future designs of such spaces. Finally, the focus on young people's use of UGC sites addresses the KEP's theme of Children's Content and Participatory Environments.

Industry Rationale:

From an industry perspective, the *BBC Blast* initiative addresses the public service remit of the BBC to create web spaces that are sites for knowledge exchange. *BBC Blast* is a flagship example of a web space which goes further than the standard UGC hosting site with a feedback facility. It aspires to provide support for users to learn, and develop their creative knowledge and skills. Exchanges between users and expert practitioners therefore seek to engage users in dialogues around their interest in, and production of, a wide range of media including video, music, images and text. The 'Alone Together?' project addresses these aspirations through the development of understanding of how such interactions in UGC web spaces can become learning conversations. Consequently, the Final Report (and the project as a whole) ultimately provides insight into how the interplay of site design, content and management can support this newly emerging form of social learning.

As broadcast media providers respond to the challenge of Web 2.0, the BBC is seeking ways to engage more directly with users. There is a focus on delivering content in more varied forms through diverse channels. In relation to *BBC Blast*, these include recent partnership with YouTube and the release of iPlayer, as well as associations with organisations such as the BFI and YourGame². However, as this report suggests, the continuing challenge may not lie in the area of content that is offered to users or content that used offer the BBC, no matter how flexibly, but in *engagement* with the users who want to go further and participate directly in the generation of content.

Theoretical Rationale:

While there is a terrific buzz around User Generated Content (UGC) and the power of this form of publishing to democratize the creative process – everyone has a voice and a space to be seen and heard – there is little critical evaluation of what is actually happening in these spaces. Similarly, whilst it is easy to find examples of rich and complex UGC, there is also much that is banal or trivial. Research into social networking sites is finding that quality and quantity of content posted depends as much on social and cultural factors as on website facilities (see Facer *et al.* 2003). In addition, website use is often conservative, and as Buckingham suggests, even banal:

² The association with the British Film Institute (BFI) offers a film day for teenagers where they create and show films made during the day at the BFI. In conjunction with YourGame, Blast offers game workshops where teenagers can contribute to the creation of games.

Most young people's everyday uses of the Internet are characterized not by spectacular forms of innovation and creativity, but by relatively mundane forms of communication and information retrieval. (2008: 14)

As Sonia Livingstone suggests, teenage use of social networking sites also depends as much on offline experiences as online ones and is contingent to a large extent on everyday practices and habits rather than technological innovation or the provision of new resources (2008). Furthermore, she argues that social networking is as much about validating and elaborating existing friendships as about building new ones. This finding somewhat undermines the notion of an exploratory and investigative experience online, and instead demonstrates a more conservative use of new media for the continuation of already established social relations.

The advent of 'Web 2.0' and the increasing facilities to create non-text based content has also provided rich data in relation to UGC. However, as Arthurs (2006) suggests, it is only around 1% of the user demographic who actually post content. By comparison with the 1% who post content, 10% of the user demographic is likely to comment on the content, but the majority (89%) are peripheral observers who rarely comment or produce content. This suggests that despite the technological facilities of Web 2.0, use continues to be primarily observational and insignificant in term of content creation. This has implications for *BBC Blast* especially considering the *BBC Blast* website not only has a strong UGC ethos; it is also somewhat reliant on teenage content contributions and comment for its success and existence.

Research into internet use by *young* people, however, does suggest that a significant number (64%) participate in content-creating activities online (Lenhart *et al* 2007). However this statistic includes those who create a profile online (for example) and never return to it. Consequently, it neither accounts for prolonged use nor the invested level of participation. In addition, the 2008 Ofcom report suggested that 49% of 8-17 year olds have set up profiles on a social network site, which correlates with research findings in the USA which suggests that 55% of 12-17 year olds participate in social networking sites (Lenhart and Madden 2007). Neither of these statistics, unlike this research into *BBC Blast*, offers indications of levels of sustained use or patterns of posting.

Current research therefore raises questions around whether and how the BBC, in keeping with its public service remit, can engage with the growing communities of UGC authors. Indeed, an evident feature of UGC sites is that they are social in nature. As well as offering space to post content, there is an open invitation to comment on other's work and engage in conversation around the work or related issues. Consequently, if social factors affect online dialogue, then general knowledge about, and awareness of, *BBC Blast* also needs to be considered. Although *BBC Blast* is not overtly designed as a social networking site, the message board and showcase facilities embed the identity of *BBC Blast* within this genre. Indeed, one of the major questions around *BBC Blast* continues to be around the identity of the resource as either a *support* (into which we would also include social support) or an educational *resource*. Indeed, it is the tension between these two identities which is at the heart of this research project.

Learning Dialogues

Research into online learning has outlined a number of key behavioural indicators which contribute to a learning dialogue. For the purposes of this project, learning dialogues are also defined as social learning due to the facilities for peer assistance and interaction both on the website and the tour. Consequently, we draw on the definition of social learning defined by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) and refined by Ab-Jailil and McFarlane (2008 in press). This is where social learning is an 'assisted performance' whether in relation to mentor assistance or peer assistance. It is useful for our purposes because it encompasses the key behavioural indicators of learning dialogues which are duration, reflection, alteration and iteration. These components of learning dialogues also correspond to Pask (1975, 1976) and Laurillard's (2004) work which suggests that learning dialogue includes discussion, interaction, adaption and reflection. Both

accounts of learning dialogues above stress similar behaviour and it is worthwhile investigating these further.

Duration

As research into online learning environments demonstrates, the creation of social presence online through communication is vital for encouraging online social learning (Gunawardena in Tu 2002: 38). By definition this requires sufficient contribution to an online dialogue which may be expressed through the length, number, frequency and/or persistence of posting. Frequency increases the potential for rich dialogue not only because contributors return to read responses to their own posts, they also return to further contribute to the debate. Indeed this relates to notion of the 'network effect' (originally developed in relation to the use of the telephone) where an increase in numbers of visits to a website also increases the level of dialogue as more people find the debates useful to them, and therefore contribute in productive ways. Similarly, the more discussions which one can relate to, the more possibility there is of contribution. The overall effect is a higher level of engagement and investment in the debate which is not possible if contributors post once and never return. Indeed, as Tu (2002) suggests, social presence is a significant contributor to learning outcomes because the established level of debate or performance of the individual online has to be maintained once social presence is established. It is evident from the research that the core group of loyal and returning users to the *BBC Blast* website has established certain roles for themselves which they consistently perform at a dialogical level. Rich and meaningful debate is more frequently found within the conversations to which the core group contributes. In accordance with both Tu (2002) and Tharp and Gallimore (1988), then, duration and presence are key factors contributing to learning dialogue within *BBC Blast*. Finally, duration implies length of contribution and frequency of return (and therefore sustained interaction). Duration depends on the subject matter, the length of the threads and other users. It is assessed in relation to the context in which the post appears. In many ways, duration is a prerequisite for the other learning characteristics below.

Reflection

Reflection is a key demonstrable outcome of a learning dialogue and can include reflection of one's own opinion and reflection on other contributory points to the debate. Reflection demonstrates consideration and it is a key element of a learning dialogue which highlights areas where opinion has been thoughtfully considered and supported. Laurillard's early learning conversation model requires both reflection and adaption (see below). As she argues, adaption and reflection are two different processes, 'one being action on the world, the other being talk about those interactions with the world' (1993:103). Reflection requires engagement and therefore a certain amount of longevity if the user considers their own point in relation to other comments or past experiences.

Adaption

In a similar vein to alteration, adaption can be of an opinion or style of contribution. As users become more assimilated into the discourse of the website, they adapt language, style and rhetoric in conjunction with the other users. However, while adaption of language and rhetoric demonstrates a higher level of immersion or investment, the adaption of personal work to conform to the opinions and responses of others is also relevant. Reflection, interaction, iteration and longevity are key contributory factors to adaption.

Alteration

Alteration tangibly evidences moments where opinion has been considered to a productive effect. In many ways, alteration is an outcome of reflection and consequently

also requires engagement and longevity. For alteration to occur, reconsideration must have been significant especially to reproduce a piece of work as a consequence. It also evidences a judgment of value both on ones own original comment or work, and on the comments or criticism received about it.

Iteration

As with reflection and alteration, iteration also requires longevity of engagement. Contributors must return to the conversation or debate in order to produce iterative dialogue. They must engage with previous comments or other peoples work in order to contribute iteratively and productively.

Discussion

The factors outlined by Pask and Laurillard's work overlap somewhat with that of Tharp and Gallimore. Discussion similarly requires both engagement and reflection as users demonstrate the ability to defend opinion and thought through discursive practice. They must engage in the language and techniques of that particular conversation, thus demonstrating longevity and commitment and continue to progress the debate through productive contributions.

Interaction

As with discussion, interaction requires engagement. Contributors must not only interact with other contributors, they must also interact with their previous comments. Interaction indicates embeddedness within the discursive technologies as contributors demonstrate interaction through the similar use of language and rhetoric. Interaction produces a sense of community and is clearly one of the aspects about the message boards that *BBC Blast* users appreciate. The collectively created fiction on the Writing Board, for example, demonstrates interaction at a highly productive level as users engage, contribute and produce new works.

Taken together, the key contributory elements of learning describe a scenario where a user has become engaged through iteration and duration to a particular website or message board. S/he has learnt how to contribute through observation and discussion and has contributed and then continued to return and debate. In many ways, then, the key behavioural indicators also overlap with Lave and Wenger's (1993) notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LLP) which outlines the process from 'newbie' to active user in online scenarios. Here, newcomers adjust to the affinity space by initially observing and participating in minute and superficial, but important, ways. Through peripheral activities, users then become acquainted with the logistics and grammar of the website. Through observation, new users can model their own contributions on existing ones, and in time become core contributors. When the trajectory from newcomer to active user is demonstrated in this way, the detrimental effect of non-productive and disengaged comments or messages becomes apparent. Creative learning involves an iterative **process**. Consequently, if such processes are invisible for browsers, they will not be encouraged to respond iteratively as users. Indeed, if part of the impetus to contribute comes from observation, then reading closed statements of opinion or preference is less likely to induce the observer to dialogue than reading a questioning or exploratory dialogue.

All the elements cited above describe a higher level of engagement and interaction than simple and singular posting to a message board. Although the elements appear in varying degrees within each conversation, they all require engagement in order to be productive. Singular posting (which the majority of contributions to the *BBC Blast* message board are) neither engage with previous comments, nor productively contribute. Instead, they tend to be statements of opinion or preference, and require no feedback or comment. The singular statements often close down discussion rather than invite it, and produce uninteresting dialogue for observers and peripheral contributors who are then less likely to respond.

Methods

The nature of the project requires a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in both the collection of data and the analysis of it. Three main modes have been employed: the online **questionnaire** for the interrogation of the more frequent and loyal users, and for the collection of expressions of opinion about the website and tour. The questionnaire method was also employed in the Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III), where a survey was issued to each mentor and responded to in writing. **Interviews** and **observations** were utilized for the collection of *BBC Blast on Tour* data, where a more flexible approach was needed to accommodate the variations and particularities of each event. In relation to the website, observation was also employed, and comments and movements were tracked through weekly **logging** of the message board comments and showcase material between November 2007 and July 2008. The comments within the message boards and showcase were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) from which the majority of visual evidence within the report is produced. The dialogues themselves were analyzed in relation to the behavioural learning indicators outlined above and the longitudinal weekly logging over the eight month period has produced a sustained understanding of use and habits for posters on the message boards.

The website research was initiated in November 2007 with a comparison between *BBC Blast* and other key websites. The Website Report (Appendix II) details this comparison in relation to the presentation of content and discussion, comparing *BBC Blast* with You Tube and Fanfiction.net respectively. In relation to comments and content within *BBC Blast*, the top five messages from each message board were analyzed between 10am and 1pm on each Monday for the first 4 months. This particular time was chosen in order to include school times and it was presumed that teenagers would be most able to visit the website during lunch hours. The BBC website, unlike many social network sites, is accessible within schools and the researchers believed that this was relevant in understanding the more social discussions occurring in the message boards. It was assumed that visitors to the website were using the message board system in lieu of a social network site. Consequently these posts during school hours were contrasted with analyses after school (between 6pm and 8pm on Wednesday evening between February and June). In addition, every fortnight, the most recent five messages from the message boards were analyzed on a weekend. As suggested, this was to ascertain patterns of use throughout the week, inclusive of school days, and to ensure that contributors to the website who posted only on specific days could be included in the project. The variation in time and days were also specifically chosen in order to test whether teenagers were primarily using the website during school hours, or on specific days. However, the delay in uploading material to the board has produced inconclusive information regarding specific times, although the research has demonstrated that specific days are not preferred by particular users and that, in general, use of the website and message boards is very minimal. Threads with longevity were also reviewed specifically in relation to multiple threads within one topic and motivational reasons for posting. The message boards provide an arena to discuss content (especially the music and writing boards where lyrics and chapters are posted directly into the thread) and similar interests, but it is primarily the showcase where non-text based content is presented. Consequently the showcase arenas for each strand (film, music, games, writing, art and design, fashion, dance) were also investigated and this encompassed actual content, which was reviewed.

The method for the collection of the *BBC Blast on Tour* data was responsive to the particularities of each event, and the daily itinerary. Primarily, research interest in the tour related to the creation of UGC and the relationship between the tour and the website, although the project was also interested in outlining learning potential and activities within the tour especially in relation to the *BBC Blast* Learning Model (Appendix 4). However, as the *BBC Blast* on Tour report indicates, investigations into the tour raised a number of interesting questions around the particularities of the Tour as an autonomous entity, and the overall identity of *BBC Blast* in relation to other youth arts facilities in the area (Appendix I). Furthermore, imprecise uploading of content to the website in 2007 (which was mostly resolved at the commencement of the 2008 tour) raised questions about the logistics of the website-tour relationship, especially as it became obvious that the

populations visiting the tour by comparison with the website were entirely different. The interviews with tour delegates were entirely voluntary, and took place as they were leaving the workshops, or milling around on a short break during the workshops. The interviews with the teenagers lasted between a minute and four minutes, and were kept short and unobtrusive. In addition to the delegates, interviews were also conducted with the work experience people, the facilitators, the tour and event organizers, teachers and parents. This was to obtain general reflections and contrast perspectives on learning outcomes. All of the delegates interviewed enjoyed their experience, for various reasons, and most were enthusiastic about what they had achieved during the day.

1. Who is posting UGC to *BBC Blast* (and why)?

The first major question of this research project relates to the identification of the profiles of users who *do* post content. This is important not only for a wider understanding of the population supporting *BBC Blast*, but also in order to identify those populations *BBC Blast* is not currently attracting in order to inform future strategies which widen participation and contribution. The demographics below are sourced from both the website and the tour. In relation to the website, the population of contributors to *BBC Blast* is sourced from both the online questionnaire which encompasses the more loyal and frequent users, and the observations and logging of actual content posting over the 8 month period (November 2007- July 2008). In relation to the tour, the population encompasses the delegates interviewed, which were chosen as random samples from each tour location visited.

The Website

As the online questionnaire (189 respondents) indicates, 80% of respondents are female. In terms of representative samples, if we return to Arthur's (2006) '1% rule' (see above) the questionnaire represents the 10% of the overall users of *BBC Blast* who contribute: it does not account for peripheral users or observers. Indeed the questionnaire represents the more frequent users of *BBC Blast* as this is the population more likely to comment and offer feedback. The gender imbalance represented through the questionnaire is also supported through the logging activities, which found that, when actual names were offered, a much higher percentage of users were female. Although the gender imbalance is not necessarily significant by itself, as the Website Report (Appendix II) suggests, current research into social networking sites is finding that teenage girls are much more likely to perform chatty and supportive roles online. Sonia Livingstone's (2008) recent work on teenage users of new media suggests particular trends are emerging specifically in relation to young female teenagers who perform supportive, friendly and enthusiastic identities online. As she suggests, social networking sites have a predominance of supportive comments and discussions which are in keeping with both the age and gender of the users, and their offline behaviours. As the Website Report suggests, if it is the case that supportive roles are the norm for young female teenagers, then wider questions are raised about the possibility of generating the potential for learning when the statistics from the questionnaire suggest that 80% of the users are female. While it is perhaps too simplistic to suggest that gender has a direct correlation with the level of dialogue, Livingstone's findings, and the themes of discussion within the *BBC Blast* boards, do raise questions around how to encourage richer learning dialogue in a way that also negotiates gender performance online.

As the chart below indicates, 79 of the 189 (44%) respondents are in the 15-17 year age category and 54 (30%) are in the 13-15 age category. This suggests that the majority of contributors to *BBC Blast* are in the GCSE age group (also supported by the Tour demographics and the mentor responses). The older demographic of 17-19 year olds accounts for 13% of the respondents:

1. I am:			
under 13:		3.9%	7
13-15:		30.3%	54
15-17:		44.4%	79
17-19:		13.5%	24
19-21:		2.2%	4
21-25:		3.4%	6
over 25:		2.2%	4

As the mentors suggest, the age of the contributors is affecting levels of dialogue (Mentor Report, Appendix III). Indeed, the Games mentor in particular has noted that she suspects the age of the contributors to the games message board is particularly low considering the level of dialogue within the board. As with gender demographics, the age range of the contributors does not necessarily or straightforwardly affect learning dialogue; however, if the *BBC Blast* remit is to attract 13-19 year olds, then there are clearly issues around attracting the older demographics to *BBC Blast*.

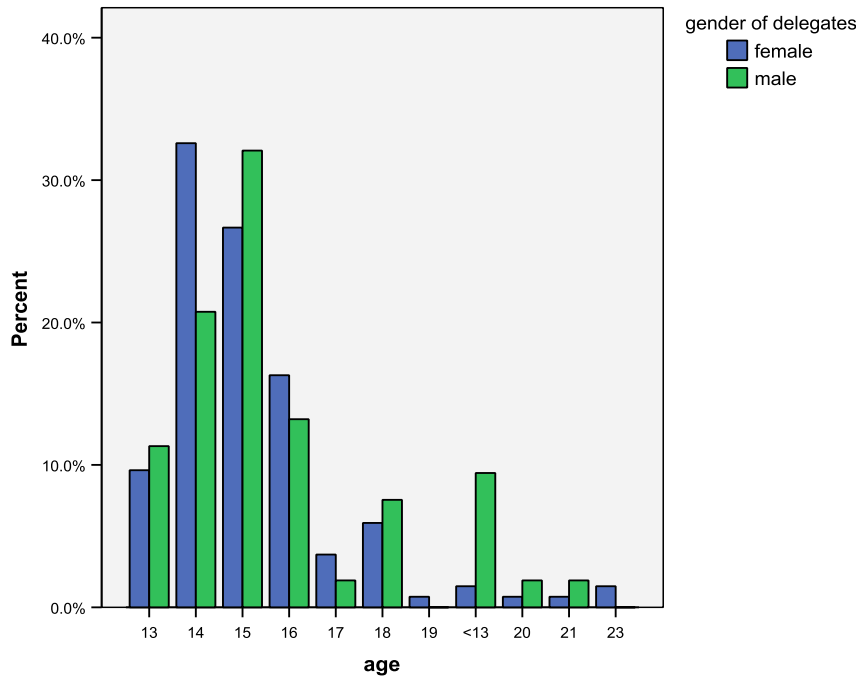
The online questionnaire also demonstrates that there are significant variations in terms of geographical location. Indeed, 40% of respondents live in London or the South East, whereas areas such as Wales, the North East, Northern Ireland and the North West, account for less than 5% of respondents. Although class signifiers were not requested in the questionnaire, it is important to emphasize that access to the *BBC Blast* website out of school hours is contingent on internet access. Furthermore, when North East and Scottish tour locations were visited, a significantly smaller percentage of interviewees had internet access at home. Although regional specificity is addressed through the Tour, where the *BBC Blast* truck visits certain regions and facilitators are chosen because of their local knowledge; the geographical imbalance in relation to the website participation suggests that *BBC Blast* and knowledge about *BBC Blast*, only significantly reaches as far as the South East and London. Again, this raises questions for the promotional side of *BBC Blast*, especially considering that a basic lack of knowledge about *BBC Blast per se* is detrimentally effecting both tour and website demographics.

In relation to the showcase element of the *BBC Blast* website, posting comments remains a minimal activity, and on a general level there is very little commentary activity within the showcase *per se*. It is also evident from observation and logging of content and comments that the showcase and message boards contain two separate populations of users. Although the tour generates much of the material within the showcase section, the content is uploaded through the *BBC Blast* web team rather than being sent autonomously. This means that the gender and age demographics as indicated below are also applicable to the population 'uploading' content. As with the tour, then, it is a predominance of female teenagers in GCSE age groups whose content appears within the *BBC Blast* showcase. Furthermore, much of the showcase material since November 2007 remains unchanged and the quantity of material within the showcase is relatively small. As the Website Report indicates (Appendix II), much of the music material has also been showcased on YouTube and Bebo, and has received much heavier traffic there. Indeed, when a comparison between *BBC Blast* and My Space is undertaken (see below and Appendix II), a range of issues are raised relating to the design and layout of the showcase section and the difficulties of navigation.

The Tour

In a similar vein to the website, the tour element of *BBC Blast* also has a significantly higher percentage of younger teenagers, and teenage girls visiting the truck. In 2008, a greater spread of geographic locations was visited so that the significance of location could be analyzed. As well as the 2007 locations of Scunthorpe, Leeds, Salford and Middleborough four further locations were visited in 2008. These were Barking (London); Swindon; Newcastle; and Glasgow. It should be noted, however, that the Glasgow event differed significantly from the English locations as the *BBC Blast* team are permanent members of staff. By comparison to the English locations, where organizers are contracted for 3 month periods, this means that Scotland (Northern Ireland and Wales) events can be planned for the entire year. Consequently, more time can be spent in the appointment of workshop facilitators and work experience assistants, and more thought can go into the logistics, themes, and quality of the event. Furthermore, the organizers in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have more control over the budget for *BBC Blast* by comparison with the English tour organizers who have a set budget for each event and a three month (or less) time frame in which to allocate funds. For Glasgow, this meant that the tour event could be promoted on radio, television and posters around the city and general knowledge about *BBC Blast* and the event itself was increased. In turn, this meant that the facilitators could promote individual workshops for specific needs, rather than (as with English events) promote the entire *BBC Blast* remit. Consequently, each delegate attended a workshop which was more attuned to their specific needs, rather than, as with the tour locations in England, attending an event their teachers thought was worthwhile.

The graph below represents the ages and gender of all of the delegates and work experience people (WEX) interviewed during the tour locations above. As the graph indicates, there is a much higher percent of delegates attending the tour in the 13-16 age group and the highest percentages of female delegates are aged 14, and male delegates 15. As the *BBC Blast on Tour* Report indicated (Appendix I), the gender and age demographics are dependent on how the delegates arrive at the tour. If it is a school day, there is a more balanced gender representation and the age of the delegates tends to be in the 13-16 age groups. Out of school, when teenagers have to arrive at the tour autonomously, there are much fewer male teenagers present. While attracting and sustaining interest of a teenage population is notoriously difficult, the statistics (Appendix I) do suggest that more thought needs to go into persuading teenagers out of school to come to a *BBC Blast* event, and ensuring their presence. Even when teenagers do sign up for workshops online (and this has only consistently happened at the Glasgow event), there is no guarantee they will turn up. Indeed, in Glasgow, despite the workshops being fully booked, many teenagers failed to appear on the day and this left workshops empty. It should also be noted that a significant finding to emerge through the interviews with both the delegates and the teachers, is that many of the school day delegates (the majority of delegates interviewed) participate in workshops directly relating to their schoolwork. In Barking, for example, the fashion workshop was entirely filled with a school textile class. Similarly, the film workshop was entirely filled with a media studies group. While affiliation with academic work ensures interest at pedagogical level, it is less obvious how the workshops differ from school work, and what new skills the delegates are learning. However, affiliation with academic work is an ongoing aim of the *BBC Blast* on Tour remit, and there is clearly tension between this educational aim and the remit to reach more disenfranchised demographics through the tour, or introduce them to new workshops and activities.



Finally, it should be noted that, as with the showcase-message board relationship, the population visiting the tour events is not the same one visiting the website. The online questionnaire asks delegates if they've ever been to a tour event, and the results are below:

20. Have you been to <i>BBC Blast</i> on Tour?			
I've been many times:		0.7%	1
I've been once or twice:		5.1%	7
I've heard about it:		54.7%	75
never heard about it:		32.8%	45
not interested:		6.6%	9

As the chart indicates, only 5.8% of the visitors to the website have been to a tour event while 94.1% have never been. The presumption that the online booking system for the tour will attract and sustain interest in the tour therefore seems highly controversial if the populations of the tour and website are so different. Further, if 32.8% of visitors to the website have never heard about the tour, questions are raised not only about the visibility of the tour element online, but also the navigation and layout of the website.

What motivates users?

The online questionnaire asks users of the website what they like and dislike about the website. It is interesting that their responses in terms of preference all relate to the unique attributes of *BBC Blast* by comparison with other, similar websites. It is not only the four main elements cited below that the teenagers enjoy about *BBC Blast*; it is also the association of the BBC brand with *BBC Blast* and the implicit assumption that the experts and work are of a high standard. It is also evident from the questionnaire, the website, and the tour that the users of *BBC Blast* assume that quality judgments about work are being made prior to the showcasing of it. In turn, this validates the work online as good quality when in fact, as the *BBC Blast* team assert, all work, as long as it sits within the house rules, is posted online:

We don't judge it in terms of their talent or skills. So it doesn't matter what you do, we put it live as long as it doesn't break the house rules and that's just basic things like taste and decency

As the *BBC Blast* team suggest, at this relatively early stage in the website's life the important goal is to accumulate content regardless of quality. For the users of *BBC Blast*, this means, however, that there is an underlying tension between assumptions of quality, and the actual work being submitted. This perception also relates to issues of learning which are discussed below.

The four main motivational reasons for contributing to *BBC Blast* cited by respondents to the questionnaire were:

- the range of media on the website
- access to the experts
- the quality of feedback
- the competitions.

Taken together, the comments of the questionnaire respondents suggest quite strongly (as does patterns of content submission, and discussions with youth panel members) that teenagers need incentive (e.g. competitions) to create work. Consequently it is not primarily or solely the technology facilitating content – or the provision of resources –, but the socio-cultural and educational practice of submission to a deadline and the promise of recognition potentially in the form of a prize. Indeed, members of the youth panel also articulated the importance of incentive when they suggested during discussion with McFarlane that it was not the potential prize but the deadline, which ensured the production of work. Certainly in the Writing Board, where pressure to continue the story comes from readers and commentators of the work, there is a much higher frequency and percent of actual creative content submitted. Again, this suggests that it is (peer) pressure to produce content, rather than the facilities to showcase or create, which prompts the uploading of user generated content:

Q: What do you like about the website?

A1: Being able to find like-minded people, get tips from experts and the competitions!

A2: How you can see other people's talents. And let other people comment on you work.

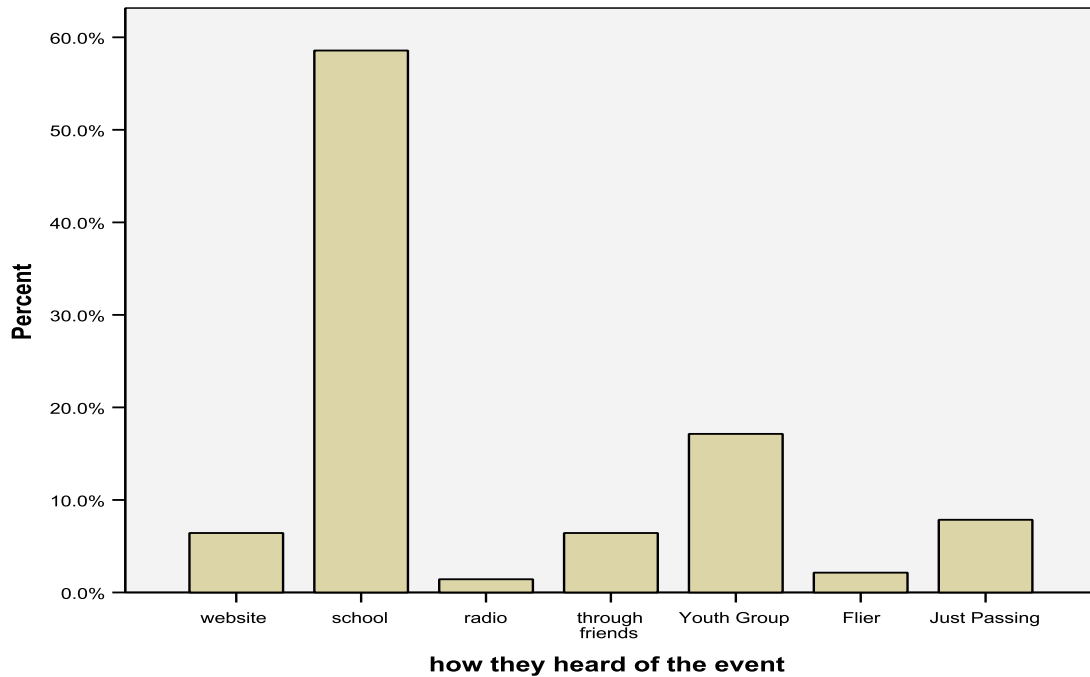
A3: The fact that there are different boards for different subjects and that there is an expert on each board. I also like the tips and tools, as they help me get inspired.

It is interesting that it is the questionnaire respondents, rather than the *BBC Blast* teams or tour organisers, who can eloquently express the qualities that make *BBC Blast* unique. The *BBC Blast* remit 'to inspire and equip young people to be creative' is therefore emerging in relation to the *incentives* the website can offer, rather than the equipment or facilities it can deliver. Finally, the motivational reasons cited above are all **educational** reasons, and firmly position the enjoyable qualities of *BBC Blast* within an educational remit. While we will return to this below, it is worth highlighting that for an educationally 'grey' website like *BBC Blast* (see above); it is **precisely** those educational aspects which are marking it as both unique and enjoyable by the users.

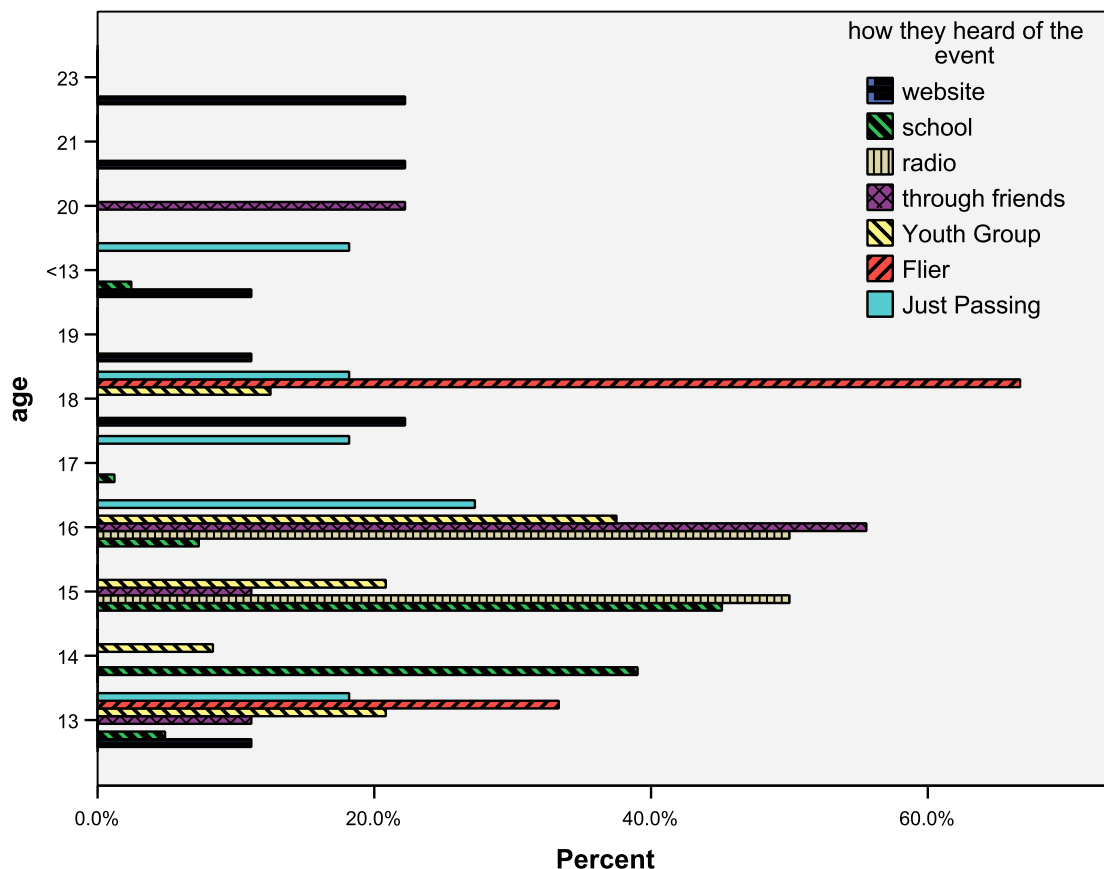
The Tour

It is much more difficult to ascertain pleasurable aspects of the tour from delegates because they rarely choose workshops or events to attend. More often, and during term time, the school either decides which workshop would be most compatible with their current GCSE choices, or gives the student a choice of two or three workshops to attend. Consequently, when speaking to the delegates about why they chose to come to a tour event, they frequently respond with a proclamation that the school brought them. Although occasionally the student can identify the connections between school work and the tour workshop, more often, this connection is made by the teacher when outlining why the students are attending a particular workshop. In terms of outlining motivational reasons for attendance, then, the current logistics of the tour remain unhelpful. Similarly, the appearance of the generated content on the website is not within the delegates' control, as content from the tour (if completed) is immediately sent to the *BBC Blast*

web team to be uploaded. Workshop delegates at present therefore have little autonomy over the choice of workshop or placement of content online. The graph below indicates how delegates heard about the tour. The statistics presented are from those delegates interviewed during each event, and they demonstrate that in the majority of cases, delegates heard about *BBC Blast* through their school. It is also worth commenting that out of all the events in England, only two delegates signed up for the workshop online.



The graph not only demonstrates how little knowledge there is about *BBC Blast* per se, it also has implications for continued use of *BBC Blast*. Indeed, if delegates associate the tour events not with *BBC Blast*, but with their *school*, there is a far reduced chance of continued interest or participation outside school. When we correlate information about how they heard about the tour event with the ages of those delegates interviewed, the majority of delegates who heard about the event through their school are also in the GCSE age groups:



Older participants tend to hear through word of mouth while the work experience people (20 and above) were mostly informed through the website after following links from the main BBC website. The graph suggests not only that sourcing delegates through schools accounts for a significant proportion of delegates, it also suggests that the range of advertising and publicity surrounding each event is also working to attract a wider demographic generally.

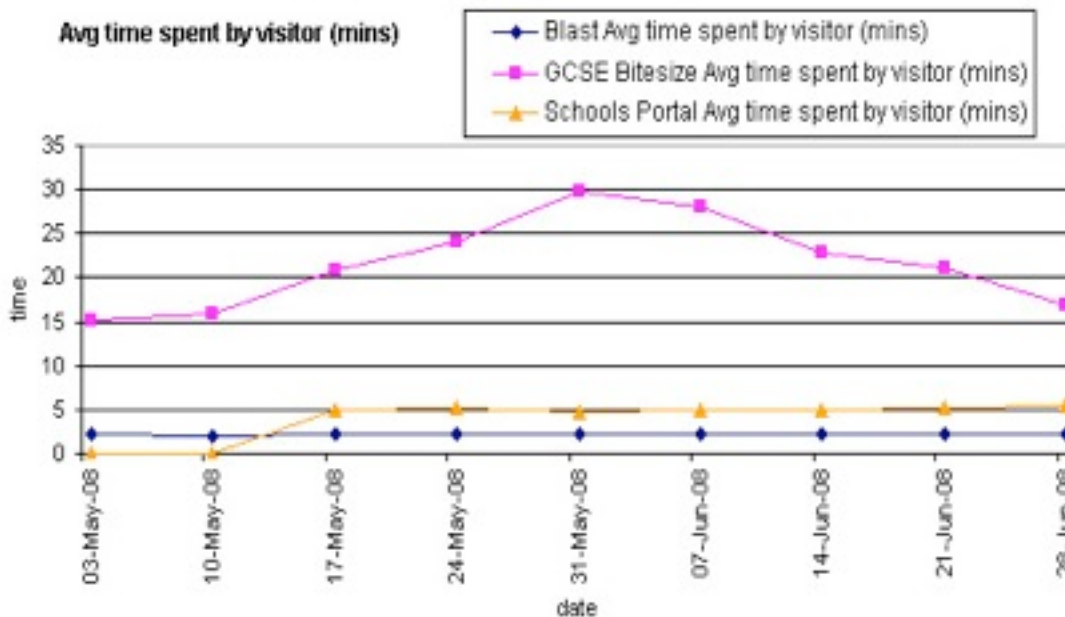
What Dissuades Users?

It is also worth outlining the less favourable aspects of the website and tour which were noted by the participants. By comparison with the favourable elements of the website, the elements which were found to be frustrating or annoying were all architectural and design issues. These findings emphasise that *BBC Blast* does not exist in a vacuum, and the slow uploading speed and navigational issues are exacerbated when *BBC Blast* is compared with other UGC sites such as My Space or Bebo. As the Website Report (Appendix II) suggests, navigational issues are important not least because this is in part how meaning and inference about a website is created. Indeed, as Nicolas Barbules suggests,

Directing navigation through the Web always has significant semantic implications because they shape and constrain the range of possible meanings users can derive. (Barbules, 2002: 76)

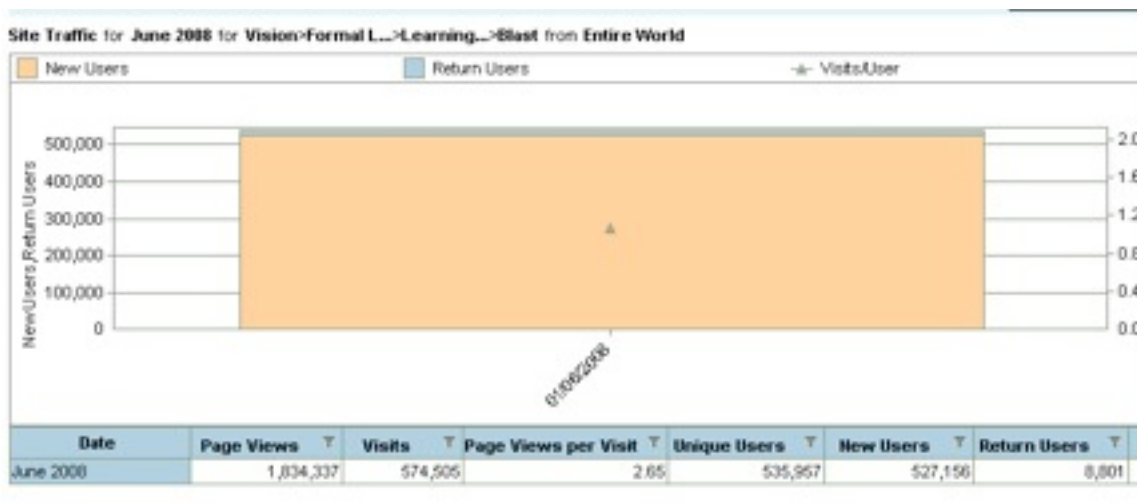
For *BBC Blast*, where navigation is, to use Lunenfeld's phrase 'extractive' rather than 'immersive' (1993) direction is more linear, and users have to move *to* an object of enquiry and then *away* from it. As Lister *et al* suggest; more immersive media is characterized through the navigation of 'representatives of space and simulated 3D worlds' (2003:21). To a certain extent,

then, *BBC Blast* could be claimed as 'immersive' in that users move through representations of data in order to reach the desired location. However the overarching premise of reaching a singular object of enquiry at a time, in a fixed location, and then having to move back to the content page before continuing, means the website is fundamentally extractive in design. These navigational issues are not lost on the users of the website. Not only do they comment on the uploading, moderation and navigational issues as I discuss below, frustration is also evidenced by the short length of time users spend on the website:



* Graph courtesy of *BBC Blast*

As the graph* indicates, by comparison with both GCSE Bitesize and Schools Portal, the average length of time users of *BBC Blast* spend on the website is consistently small. Indeed, the analysis of the message boards indicates that 98% of all users logged have posted less than 5 times over the eight month period. As Arthur's 1% rule suggests, if posting content is contingent on presence online, the implications for posting content are also exacerbated by the statistics represented above. Furthermore, as the graph* below indicates, the ratio of returning to new users is 1.7%. Again, this severely impacts on the possibilities of posting content to the website:



* Graph courtesy of *BBC Blast*

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the online questionnaire primarily reveals navigational and moderation issues as the key frustrating elements of the website. They consistently highlight the same issues in relation to the website:

Q: What do you dislike about the website?

A1: Difficult to find stuff.

A2: I'm quite tired of having my messages blocked by house rules, and then not being told which I've broken -- it makes it very difficult to avoid doing it again.

A3: The showcase sections are poorly set out, and over complicated to navigate.

While navigational and design issues are clearly contributing to the small amount of traffic to the website more generally, they are also issues which can be rectified by the *BBC Blast* team. In general, they suggest, as with the issues relating to what users of the website enjoy, that it is not enough to simply provide facilities and content. Instead, much more thought needs to go into from where, and how, users have come to the *BBC Blast* website and the implications and effects this navigation has on the overall interpretation of the *BBC Blast* website.

The Tour

By comparison with the website, proclamations of dislike of elements of the Tour were much rarer and many related to the issues already discussed above. Delegates felt frustrated when they attended a workshop they were not really interested in, but had been signed up to via the school or a third party. They also felt frustrated if their level of skill was not accounted for. The learning model (Appendix 4) demonstrates three levels of skilled delegate: newcomer, intermediate, advanced. However the latter two skill levels were rarely accommodated. Instead most sessions were 'taster' sessions, meaning that the delegates with some experience or skill were rarely accommodated. In Glasgow, for example, the Stop Animation workshop was attended by two teenagers who had recently done Stop Animation with the same facilitator at a Youth Arts event. This meant that the taster session *BBC Blast* was running was entirely inadequate for them, and they sat in the corner refusing to participate. Similarly, at the Newcastle event (2008), the delegates attending the DJ session brought their own records and clearly had experience DJ-ing. However, the facilitator had not prepared an intermediate session, so could not offer a planned session to them:

The lads that have come in are obviously, from what I can gather, pretty much been (sic) into it for a couple of year, like the majority of them. So I had to scratch that [laughs] and just go with the flow really. Just let them mess around with it.

The frustration the DJ-ing delegates felt coming out of their session was perhaps unsurprising, and although they clearly took pleasure in an activity they enjoyed, they were less sure about what they had got out of the workshop in terms of skills or knowledge:

B1: there was nowt I didn't know before

Interviewer: What about you, was there anything new to you?







B4: nah, not really. Like the technology was different, but it was the same, like the controls were the same, so we worked it all out like

In general, the more negative aspects of the Tour relate to the occasions either where choice and autonomy is taken away from the delegates in terms of workshop attendance; or their individual level of expertise is not accommodated. These are planning and logistical issues then, especially considering the facilitators are given the learning model on which to base their sessions. As the DJ facilitator suggested, it would have been far more helpful if he had been aware of the level of skill of the teenagers attending his workshop. Indeed this was even noted by the teenagers, who also suggested that they would have learnt more had they been separated into skill sets:

We might have done better separated into skills. Or he could have gone to an MC session... aye coz he was trying to listen to us an' that, just to get ideas, so it wasn't as good for him

2. Can the Dialogues that Emerge around UGC actually Support Learning?

The second major research question concentrates specifically on issues relating to learning and productive dialogue. The question relates not only to whether the design and implementation of *BBC Blast* is conducive to learning dialogues; it also relates to UGC more generally, and whether the discussions around, and comments on, content actually have the facility to support learning. As suggested above, the productive and learning dialogues have been assessed in relation to Pask and Laurillard and Tharp and Gallimore's conceptions of learning conversations. Further, as James Gee has suggested (2003), quantifying social learning is a difficult task not least because there is very rarely any evidence of tangible or quantifiable production. Consequently, and as suggested in the Website Report (Appendix II), knowledge exchange is **not** considered within the remit of a learning dialogue. This is for a number of reasons. Not only does knowledge exchange offer limited demonstration of reflection or alteration, there are also minimal facilities to assess whether the resources and information are followed up or considered unless users articulate their actions within the message boards. Indeed, this raises a number of questions around the assessment of the 'lurkers' or browsers of the website, especially as the online questionnaire demonstrates, a significant percent of the respondents to the questionnaire identify themselves primarily as browsers:

5. I would describe myself as:			
an active user (posting, commenting, uploading, and downloading):		22%	43
a browser (looking, occasionally posting):		46%	91
an uploader (uploading my stuff):		7%	14
an infrequent user (occasionally visiting):		10%	20
none of the above:		6%	12
Other (<i>please specify</i>):		8%	17

Indeed, while it is expected that there would be a much higher percentage of browsers by comparison with active users (see Arthur's 1% rule above), the respondents to the questionnaire by virtue of their participation already fit into the active user category. There is something going on in relation to self-identity as an online presence, then, which also needs addressing, especially if a higher percentage of the more active users still consider themselves as primarily browsers or infrequent users. There are three issues, then, to be addressed in this section. The first relates to the kinds of learning dialogues which have emerged, and the general pattern of posting comments. The second issue relates to theorizing the higher percentage of browsers, and asks whether these users can be accommodated and affiliated into learning dialogues. The third issue follows this and relates to a wider social and cultural issue about self-identification as active user of, and contributor to, a website. Recent research into gaming, for example, has found that active users are considered excessive 'geek' gamers and are often dismissed by 'normal' gamers who consider their activities to be abnormal (Thornham 2008). Indeed, questions emerge around

what it *means* to be actively interested in new media and technology, and to identify oneself as an active user and contributor. This issue also relates to a contemporaneous project within the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme, which is finding that adult posters of UGC are also considered as a particular kind of (obsessive, argumentative, frustrated, and abnormal) individual (see UGC@the BBC) This section which concentrates on issues relating to learning is divided into two halves. The first section relates to the website, and negotiates the three issues suggested above. The second section is concerned with issues relating to learning within the tour element and draws on the learning model (Appendix IV) to outline the levels and modes of learning within each workshop as they were observed and recorded. Following this, considerations of learning by both the delegates and organizers are highlighted in order to demonstrate the very different conceptions of learning and potential effects these conceptions have on the organization and dissemination of the Tour initiative.

The Website

The Website Report (Appendix II) details the methods and categories of assessment for learning dialogue. The two main components of the website – the message boards and the showcase – were assessed in relation to the characteristics outlined above and in relation to a set of common criteria which emerged through observation and logging of the website between November 2007 and July 2008. As the Website Report indicated (and continued observation until July 2008 supports), **17%** of the dialogue within the message boards emerge as productive or learning dialogues. The majority of discussions within the message boards are statements of opinion or preference which neither engage with previous comments, nor continue the discussion. Instead they close the dialogue down as they require neither response nor consideration from other message board members. Detailed examples of non-productive dialogue can be found within the Website Report, but it is worth offering a few examples here as they demonstrate the general level of dialogue and expression within the message boards to date. The discussion below details responses to a query about favourite recent gigs. In what follows, the statements of activities and expressions of pleasure are straightforward responses to the original questions: they neither engage with the previous comment, nor do they ask any further questions. It is an excellent example of extractive dialogue and demonstrates the content and tone of 83% of the message board dialogue:

'what's ya fav gig you've been to recently? what gigs are u looking forward to and what bands do you want to see?'

'I got cheap tickets to see Dolly Parton - she was fab!'

'Iron Maiden, Twickenham, 5th July. Oh my sweet lord it was awesome. I was on the pitch, damnit, it was so amazingly great.'

'Mcfly, M.E.N. Arena. With Elliot Minor. 😊 But I'm going to The Ting Tings very soon and R.E.M. in September, which should be good. I'd love to go to a The Verve gig, or Avril Lavigne'

'I went to GIAN (give it a name) not that long ago. It was awesome! Paramore, Plain white t's, you me at six, to name but a few.'

None of the key characteristics of learning dialogues outlined above (duration, reflection, alteration, discussion, interaction and adaption) are evidenced above as users simply post non-interactive comments in response to the original question. The dialogue is much more focused on establishing similarities of experience rather than actually debating or discussing the various gigs. Indeed, it is more akin to Livingstone's findings of dialogue on social networking sites which works to align contributors of the discussion into similar opinions or activities (2008). The overall aim of these discussions is to produce supportive and friendly, non-threatening environments. The similarities in terms of the design and tone of the message board community by comparison with social networking sites seem to be producing similar performances within either environment. In turn, this raises a more pertinent question around whether, in fact, message boards are conducive to learning dialogues. It is certainly the case within *BBC Blast* that some message boards lend themselves more easily to learning dialogues than others. The writing and music board, for example, where actual content can be posted along with comments and criticism, has a

much higher percentage of learning dialogue more generally. And as the Website Report suggests (Appendix II), learning conversations are much more likely with loyal and returning users to a particular board. Contributors to one particular message board (rather than to a range of boards) have a higher percentage of contributions to learning dialogues. As suggested, Tu's research goes some way towards explaining this finding and it is clearly the case that productive contributions within the message boards are the outcomes of a few key users (Appendix II). This suggests that there is a consistency of performance within the boards, and those consistently offering good feedback continue to do so. The performances of the most frequent users Rosie and Lisa however, are rarely productive as they tend to perform chatty and social roles within the boards they visit. Rosie and Lisa also clearly know one another away from the boards, and many of their dialogues are continuations of discussions started away from *BBC Blast*. Livingstone's research into social networking sites is finding that the majority of contributors support existing friendships online, rather than use the sites to establish new ones (2008). If this is the case (as it seems with Rosie and Lisa), then there is less chance of a deviation from their established offline roles and consequently less chance of productive or learning dialogue if these are not the kinds of responses already established by Lisa and Rosie.

If learning dialogues are produced through contributions from a key group who consistently offer good feedback, then high quality responses need to be established from the start. Modelling answers and offering tools for constructive criticism are therefore key to establishing good dialogue within the message boards especially as this will compel the more peripheral users (the browsers) to offer good quality responses when/if they do begin to comment (as I discuss below). The Writing board, which has a much higher percent of learning dialogue by comparison with the other boards, not only lends itself to a learning exchange in terms of design (as creative work can be posted alongside, and chronologically related to, the feedback), it also has a core group of consistent users, including the writing host, who model answers and offer good feedback. This raises the level of dialogue within the board more generally and means that anyone seeking the techniques and tools to comment (through observation) can assess the level at which they are required to respond.

Considering the main characteristics of learning dialogues are iteration and duration, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is consistently the **core** users who offer good feedback and contribute to learning dialogues. Indeed, despite low traffic to the website on a general level, it has been possible to ascertain and offer examples of good learning dialogues from key members of the online affinity space (Appendix 6). Again, it is worthwhile offering a brief example of a learning dialogue, not least because it demonstrates the level of engagement of users of *BBC Blast*. The example below is from an ongoing thread about Nintendo consoles within the Games Message board::

Message 6 - posted by [L \(U3874821\)](#), Sep 23, 2007

Well, the difference between the DS and the DS Lite is that, DS Lite is slimmer, and lighter and it has also got slightly better graphics. Well anyways I don't think there's much difference apart from that but I would say I prefer the DS Lite as I personally like the design of the DS Lite than the original DS.

L

Message 7 - posted by [mysti \(U8299164\)](#), Sep 23, 2007

I didn't realise that there was a difference in graphics between the two. How significant is it? I have an original DS as when I got it the DS Lite hadn't been released. However, I am considering buying a DS Lite as it would be a lot easier to take anywhere because of it's weight. Would you recommend buying one? Or should I just stick with what Ive got? I don't really take my DS anywhere at the moment, but I would be more inclined to carry it if it was lighter.

Thanks 😊

mysti

As with most of the productive dialogue within the boards, those involved in the debate above are also the better known names within the games message board, and this further emphasizes the

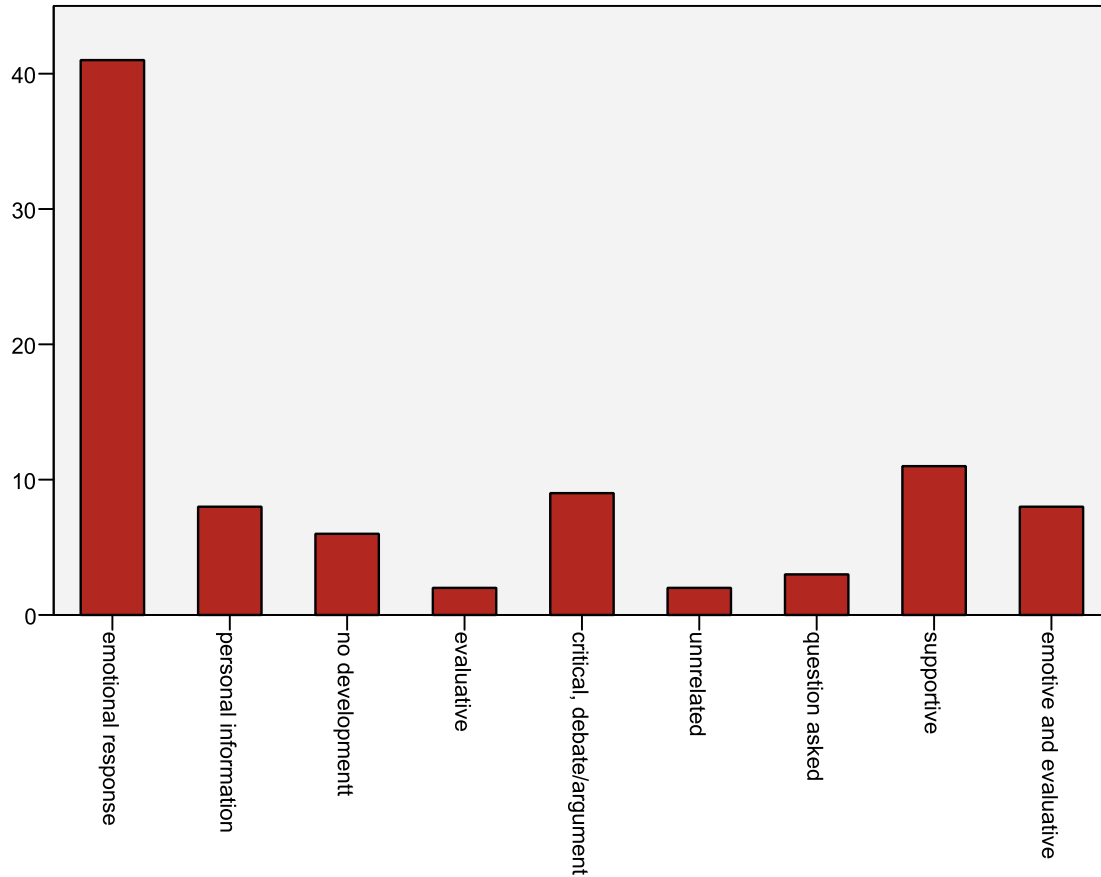
suggestion that before productive dialogue can even be considered, a core group of loyal and returning users needs to be established. The key to the development of this discussion is the fact that each contributor engages with the previous post, thus tying in their comment to the overall thread. The comments evidence many of the behavioural learning characteristics outlined in section 4. The reflective analysis of each console interacts with the preceding post, answering a question about the difference between the DS Lite and normal DS. Mysti similarly interacts with the previous threads and her comment above is iterative in that she has posted a number of times here. She also demonstrates alteration and reflection when she amends her comment claiming she wasn't aware of a difference in graphics. Finally, she continues the discussion of the thread by asking a number of questions which work to continue the thread and open it up to further comments.

Although learning discussions are much rarer than the more chatty threads within the boards, the statistic of 17% is quite high by comparison with social networking sites where the majority of threads are similarly chatty and friendly. The educationally 'grey' nature of *BBC Blast* also lends itself to more social discussion as the website is not overtly supporting learning dialogue in terms of emphasis or design. However, as suggested by the Website Report (Appendix II), when the productive dialogues are compared with other writing based websites such as www.fanfiction.net, learning dialogues not only emerge *without* intervention of a mentor and start at a grass roots level; the dialogues are also much more advanced especially in terms of analyses of the created content. This suggests not only that some UGC formats lend themselves more readily to the message board system, it also emphasises that it is primarily a core, loyal and interested group of users which is necessary for productive exchange. The dialogues on websites such as fanfiction.net are between returning users which increases the potential for iterative and reflective exchange.

The Showcase

The showcase section of the website similarly lends itself to certain kinds of content. Indeed it is the film showcase, rather than the message board which facilitates the display of non-text based user generated content. Similarly, the visual and audio facilities of the showcase section lend themselves more easily to art, fashion and music showcased work. Indeed, it is only the games section where user generated content is unavailable as there is not the resources as of yet to display or create one's own games. Despite the facilities for showcasing a greater range of work within this section, however, much work is uploaded from the tour by the web team, rather than being straightforwardly uploaded by the creators themselves. In turn, it is much harder to gain insight on uploading statistics from the displayed material.

Although there may be an increase of facilities available to upload work, the comments within the showcase are much less frequent. Indeed, most content within the showcase receives no feedback and this raises further questions about the nature of the showcase in terms of attracting constructive criticism. Indeed, a showcase section displays **finished** work, and consequently constructive comments relating to the design or skill (for example) are hardly invited. Instead the showcase invites reflection on the finished product and perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the comments received are simple expressions of like or dislike. As suggested, a section where work in **progress** is displayed would invite comments on the creative process, and fundamentally change the nature of the website from a display website, to a website based on dialogue. It is also worth reiterating that those posting work to the showcase are not the same population as those posting comments to the message boards. The same user names rarely appear in both sections and the level of comments on the showcase is generally very low. Consequently the educational and learning benefits of the core message board users do not translate to the showcase where there are no comments on which to model one's own answer other than expressions of dis/pleasure. The graph below demonstrates the range of responses within the showcase. As suggested, the expressions of pleasure or displeasure are the most frequent kind of response:



It is not just the nature of the showcase which undermines the possibility of constructive criticism. Current research into social networking sites discuss pleasures and attraction of involvement as being tied to the creation and construction of an online identity/identities. As the Website Report suggested (Appendix II), the possibilities for creating a display page in which to show your own work (like MySpace, for example) are severely limited on *BBC Blast*, where the graphics of the page are minimally alterable. If a motivational reason for positing content is tied to expressions of online identity as Weber and Mitchell suggest (2008), then the restrictive facilities of *BBC Blast* would deter many potential contributors. Indeed, only a brief statement to explain the work is allowed, and when we compare the same content across websites (see below), we find an entirely different visual display if the author of the content is given autonomy over the presentation of it. Indeed, current research suggests that when facilities are available, teenagers are creating a hypertextual, intertextual and bricolage identity online. Teenagers³ are creating shifting and constantly evolving websites to represent their online identity, interests and achievements (Weber and Mitchell, 2008). The websites are *works in progress*, evolving through active construction which 'constantly sheds bits and adds bits' and changing through 'interactions with the digital and non digital world' (Weber and Mitchell, 2008: 43).

As the Website Report (Appendix II) suggested, the creation of online identities can be evidenced in a range of popular websites such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook through the downloaded aesthetic-enhancing patches and the creation of multiple links and tags across sites. The layout of such sites therefore tells us some really interesting things about what and how teenagers are interacting and qualifying their experience on and offline. However, for *BBC Blast*, where little autonomy over the design of the page is afforded to the user, the display can only showcase the

³ This research explicitly deals with teenagers, although work on adult websites such as Facebook are also reaching similar conclusions (see Buckingham 2008)

material itself, rather than the created identity of the user. Further, only single pieces of content appear on the same page, which exacerbates the linear movement through the website.

Learning dialogues around the showcased UGC are therefore extremely rare on *BBC Blast* despite the facilities for the presentation of non text based content. Part of this relates to the nature of a *showcase* as displaying finished material, and part of it relates to the lack of control an uploader has over the display of his or her work. Indeed, further questions needs to be raised about motivations for uploading content if *BBC Blast* does not offer facilities to present a bricolage identity to the *BBC Blast* community.

In relation to the actual uploaded content within the showcase, they also rarely evidence the behavioural learning characteristics discussed in section 4. Contributors rarely post work more than once and if they do, there are no facilities to search for an author or to group themed work together. This means assessment and possibilities for iterative creative work on *BBC Blast* are rare, and it is only within the Writing message board that iteration and duration for the created content is visible. Alteration of uploaded content is not possible unless uploaded more than once as there are no facilities to alter creative work online. This also severely reduces any possibility for adaptive or reflective work if users are posting finished works non-iteratively. Finally, there is little interaction either with the website, or users of the website, by those who post created content. Indeed there are few facilities for dialogical exchange beyond the posting of a single piece of content.

Theorizing 'Lurkers'

Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of situated learning, and especially their conception of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) goes some way towards theorizing the browsers of *BBC Blast* and positioning them at least within the possibility of productive learning exchanges. LPP is useful for the analysis of online use because it also accounts for how newcomers to websites (for example) can become more involved users (1991). Legitimate peripheral participation also works in conjunction with James Gee's notion of an 'affinity space'. Affinity space, as Gee argues, replaces connotations of togetherness, communication, and societal relations, with those of a common goal and organization based on interaction rather than external or top down logics. Moreover people may come together in an affinity space for a common purpose that can be fleeting or long lived, or a mix of both for different users. Within affinity spaces, the shape and look of the texts produced depend on an affinity of logic, which, in turn, is generated by the users themselves. Changes occur within these logics rather than as the result of an externally imposed order (Gee 2004: 5). Seen in this light, LPP outlines the process of alignment to the affinity space through an initial learning of the logics of the space, which then translates into a production and support of those logics by the users. For *BBC Blast*, LPP offers a more positive account of the browsers or 'lurkers' of the website. The theory suggests that rather than simply observing, 'lurkers' are actually learning the logistics of the space and will eventually (perhaps) contribute in more tangibly and visibly productive ways. LPP also suggests that membership of a community of practice, or affinity space, is mediated by the possible forms of participation. This directly relates to design issues of *BBC Blast* as discussed in section 11 and suggests that further thought needs to go into creating an easier and more visible comment facility as well as a section which focuses on creative work in progress. If newcomers can directly observe the practices of core users, mentors and experts, they can understand the broader context into which their own efforts fit. For *BBC Blast*, although tracing the learning practices of browsers is impossible unless they articulate it somewhere, there is nevertheless an increase of *potential* for learning dialogues which is contingent on easy and accessible comment facilities (for example). Finally, then, LPP widens possible participatory groups for the website beyond the 1% who do actually consistently post content (Arthur: 2006).

A section which prioritized work in progress would encourage both the browsers and the core users to post comments. Users could post unfinished work from both the tour and from individual

creative work in order to receive feedback and advice from other users. This section would therefore mesh the tour and website elements together more cohesively. For browsers, this would offer a range of entry levels into the website: less confident users who have little experience of creating work could see a transparent process; active creators could offer advice based on experience and resources. Such a section would also be a useful resource pedagogically as it would highlight potential issues and problems with both resources and experience. For teachers who want to encourage creativity, *BBC Blast* would therefore become a resource for all ages and experience levels. Discussions would centre around creative progress and advice as well as critiquing creative works in the process. Users would therefore learn, not only about the critiquing process and how to construct useful criticism and offer good feedback, they would also gain resource-rich advice in terms of material and direction.

The showcase section (if retained) would also evolve into a display area of judged quality work complete with assessment criteria and judgement. Rather than being a conglomeration of inputted work of varying levels and skills, the showcase would offer the 'artist/writer/film maker' of the week/month. This would position the *BBC Blast* team in an assessment rather than uploader role, which, as respondents to the online questionnaire suggest, is already assumed. Combining the work itself with a statement indicating judgement criteria would continue to make such quality judgements transparent. This would offer practitioners a base from which to judge their own work, and could potentially improve creative works. As the writing board demonstrates, good feedback has increased the standard of writing over a long period of time.

Altering the showcase, and including a 'work in progress' section would accommodate both the 'lurkers' and the core and loyal population. New visitors would be able to see both the products of creative process and the criteria on which it is judged, and therefore learn the language and process of creating work. Core users would offer advice and high quality work and be able to showcase good work in the designated section. They would therefore be given a higher level of visibility as recognised creative practitioners producing quality work.

The Tour

One of the major issues affecting learning within the tour relates to the design of the workshops which overwhelmingly are designed as introductory sessions. This is compounded by the failure of the booking system which means that facilitators have no way of knowing the level of delegate skills. Not only do facilitators therefore have to differentiate learning experiences within each workshop (and have the skills required for this); they also have to design and create workshops with **no knowledge** of the range of skills of the delegates. While learning dialogues *per se* do occur within the workshops in more traditional forms of teacher-learner, scaffold, and peer assisted learning, the research was primarily interested in discovering what the delegates themselves thought they were learning (Appendix I). There were two reasons for this line of investigation. The first related to whether teenagers could actually identify out of school learning, or whether it was considered as something else. Following this, questions are raised around the potential effects for the *BBC Blast* website which does not overtly claim educational parameters, but *does* assist informal and out of school learning. Indeed, if delegates could identify informal learning and found it unthreatening and enjoyable (for example) then the surreptitious nature of learning on the *BBC Blast* website would be slightly redundant. The second reason was to understand at a more discursive level what teenagers considered learning to be. Indeed, as Buckingham argues (2006:11), creating a hegemonic group is unhelpful for discussing actual practice. Following this, assigning young people behavioural and characteristic stereotypes is similarly unhelpful for outlining learning practices. It was important, therefore to offer the teenagers a voice to account for their experiences, rather than assign them educational **experience based on an** (adult) analysis of modes of learning within each workshop. Indeed as we outline below, adult and teenage perceptions of learning outcomes were very different.

BBC Blast Learning Model

Before outlining the delegates' considerations of learning, it is worth outlining the considerations and assumptions to which *BBC Blast* adheres about learning potential as described in the learning model (Appendix 4). It is also worth outlining whether the learning model was actualised within the workshops during the observed session. The levels of engagement outlined below appear in the learning model (Appendix 4), as they clearly demonstrate, there are a range of delegate skills expected within the workshops. However these skills were rarely accommodated in facilitator planning. Indeed, when the facilitators were questioned about how they had planned each session, including whether they had read the *BBC Blast* learning model, the majority of facilitators could not identify how the *BBC Blast* session differed from their regular youth arts workshops, nor could they identify any specific aspects of the learning model in terms of affecting their planned workshop. The DJ facilitator quoted above (section 6) is just one among many facilitators who had not planned for more skilled delegates.

Out of the levels of engagement detailed below, the most successful and frequent workshops were Level 1: First Time Explorer. Learning within these 'Taster' workshops depended on delegates having little or no knowledge. The workshops had similar formats of explaining techniques and technology and then briefly allowing the delegates to create their own product. Learning outcomes also depended on duration of the workshops and the most successful ones ran over a number of days and involved delegates in every stage of the creative process. The least successful workshops ran as 45 minute to 1 hour sessions where there was not enough time to gain understanding of any technique or technology. A number of these sessions were observed. 'Make a Film in 45 minutes' was a popular short workshop. Here delegates would choose a narrative from a selection of storylines. They would outline the basic premise of the story and flesh it out in a short 5 minute brainstorming session. The facilitators would operate technology, leaving the delegates to perform the story while being filmed. Facilitators would then edit the results with minimal contribution from the delegates who would then leave with a short film in which they performed. A 45 minute stop animation workshop ran in a similar way, with delegates operating the Playdoh models and moving them, but the facilitator editing and producing the final product. In both scenarios, although delegates participated in the collective conception of the story, they gained little insight into the creative practice of filmmaking or animation. Furthermore, in the worst cases, the editing activities actually excluded the delegates, and on one occasion, they left to play football outside while the facilitators edited their film. This meant the delegates' had neither ownership nor involvement in the final product and consequently lost interest in the process.

BBC BLAST LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Level 1: First time explorer

This describes a young person who may be getting involved in Blast or the arts for the first time, or perhaps wants to try out a new activity or genre in a safe and non - pressurised environment.

Level 2: Skills developer

The skills developer is a young person who wishes to further develop their creative skills, capacity and interests in the arts through BBC Blast services.

Level 3: Emerging creator

Creators are emerging young artists who wish to make full and prolonged use of BBC Blast services including creating, submitting and full and prolonged use of BBC Blast services including creating, submitting and showcasing work on BBC Blast's multi -

courtesy of BBC Blast

The three day workshops or full day workshops, on the other hand, saw delegates advancing from Level 1 to Level 2 during the event. These were generally well planned workshops with day one introducing the delegates to the equipment; day two commencing actual filming and day three concluding filming and editing the work. The longer workshops not only meant that delegates learnt tangible skills through the handling and experimenting with the technology; they also meant delegates had more ownership and involvement in the production of creative work. When they were asked what they had got out of the workshop, they responded positively and could frequently articulate the skills and knowledge they had gained:

B1: Well we've been filming outside today so we've been learning the differences between techniques

B2: Capturing still and moving images and stuff

Interviewer: So what techniques have you been learning?

B2: Well like zooming in as they approach the camera. Also when you have mid shots, you have different sort of techniques and you have to do different things depending on what kind of shot you want. And we also learnt like the parts of the equipment used to film stuff

B1: And we also learnt how to put up the camera and set it all up and that

B3: We learnt some of the techniques used for all the different filming, long shots and when you'd use them, mid shots and zooming out when they walk towards you so they're the same size in the frame (Barking 2008)

Although the longer workshops were more successful in terms of engaging users and demonstrating tangible learning outcomes, Level 3 delegates were rarely observed. This also relates to admissions of interest, and even following the more successful learning workshops, delegates would continue to be sceptical about future involvement in *BBC Blast*. Indeed the delegates quoted above were also asked if they would go online following the Tour event:

Interviewer: Have you had a look on the website before?

B3: No

B2: But they have other people's films on there so we can have a look at what other people have done

Interviewer: So you think you'll have a look?

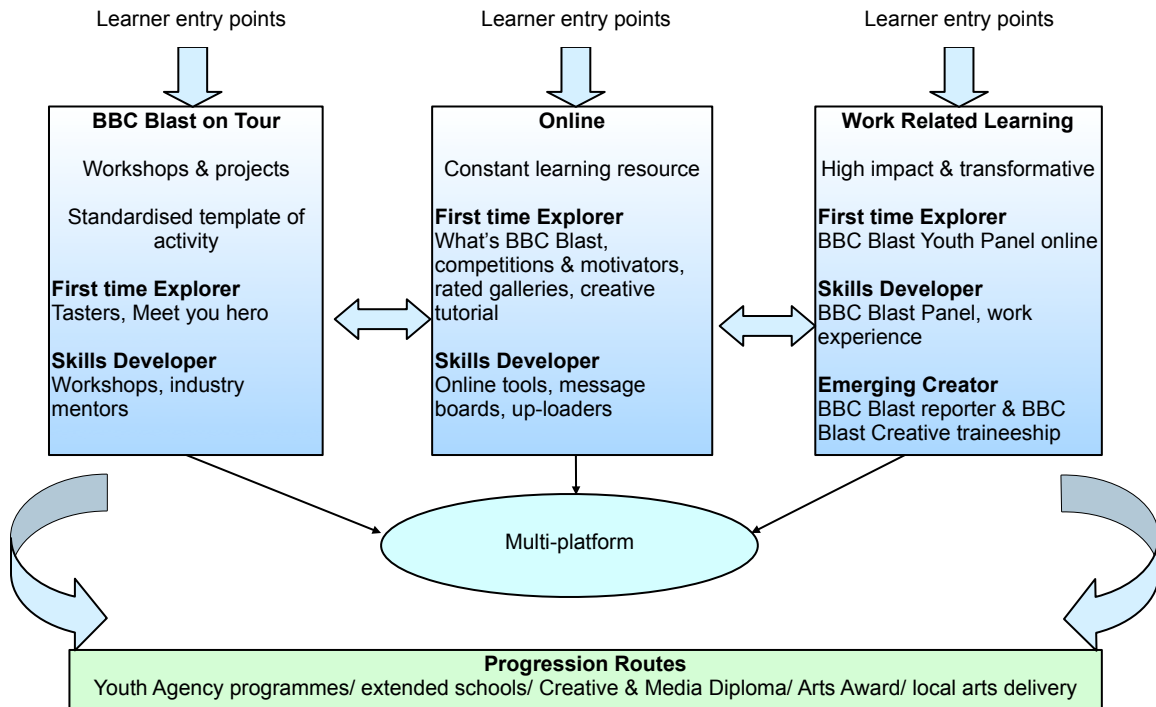
B2: mmm maybe

B3: yeah I'll probably have a look

Interviewer: What about you [to B3]

B4: nah. I mean it was all good, but I don't reckon I will

The lack of evident movement between Tour and Website by the delegates also makes the 'creative journey' envisioned by *BBC Blast* somewhat redundant:



courtesy of the BBC Blast Learning Model

The parallel movement between the website and tour elements have been critiqued in the Tour Report (Appendix I) especially considering the minimal uptake of the Tour via the Website. Similarly, the 'emerging creator' (with projects, showcases, peer mentoring, and individual portfolios) may emerge in affiliation with the Creative and Media Diploma, but is not consistently being witnessed either on the website or tour.

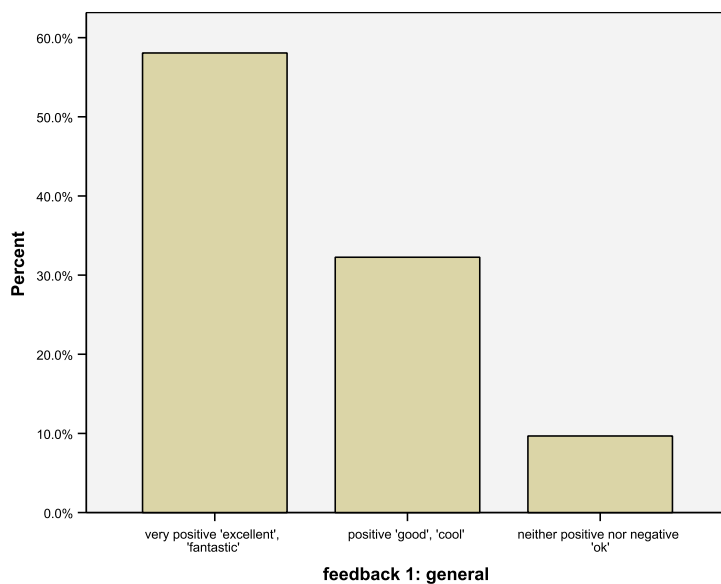
Although the diagram demonstrates the progression routes from the initial experience of *BBC Blast*, and includes involvement with schools and local arts; the logistical issues of employing Event Organisers for a 3 or 6 month period severely undermines this presumption. Not only are the temporary Event Organisers the main point of contact for the institutions participating in the workshops; the Event Organisers also have little autonomy to organise follow up or introductory events. Yet introductory events (such as the events organised in Scunthorpe and Leeds 2007) radically improved local knowledge about *BBC Blast* and consequently increased participant numbers. It is clear from the tour events that continuity between event sis needed if a cohesive *BBC Blast* programme is to be offered.

Continued involvement with the school is also dependent, to a large degree, on teacher enthusiasm and involvement. Interviews with accompanying teachers reveal that unless supported and initiated by *BBC Blast*, there would be little occasion or facilities to continue involvement. Many accompanying teachers are not subject leaders, but have offered to supervise the delegates in a day out of school. They often have little knowledge about *BBC Blast* and although they can observe and participate in workshops, rarely have the required autonomy within the school environment to continue projects initiated on the Tour. One teacher interviewed at Glasgow had struggled to obtain permission to take students away from formal learning for the day, and the involvement in *BBC Blast* was entirely the result of her own initiative, perseverance and dedication. She was very sceptical, however, about her abilities to supervise participants in 2009 if the Tour returned. The major factors she outlined was the logistics of organising transport, supervision and parental consent for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, the interview raised a number of questions about how *BBC Blast on Tour* is fulfilling its aim of attracting more disenfranchised demographics and suggests that in many cases, the static

nature of the tour creates transport, supervisory and financial burdens on the (already disadvantaged) schools.

Understandings and Considerations of Participant Learning

If the workshops varied significantly in terms of both facilitating learning itself and the learning model envisioned by *BBC Blast*, the delegates themselves also varied in articulating their own considerations of learning outcomes. As the *BBC Blast on Tour* Report outlines, these surfaced through a number of questions, each one aimed at, but not necessarily overtly relating to, issues of learning (Appendix I). Delegates were initially asked to describe the workshop, and their activities within it. This usually resulted in delegates outlining their interaction and reflection on the workshop. Following this, they were asked if they knew anything they did not know before. Again, this offered space for delegates to articulate reflection, as well as alteration, and adoption. Finally, they were asked if they thought they had learnt anything. This gave them the opportunity to outline conceptions of (out of school) learning and whether they related what they had achieved within the workshop, to learning. Generally, delegates found their experience very positive:



As the *BBC Blast on Tour* report indicates (Appendix I), one of the most common responses was that they were unaware before they came how much went into the production of media. Indeed, most delegates were impressed with how much thought and planning went into each media project before anything was created. Articulating learning outcomes, however, was much rarer and it became clear that *learning* as it is understood by teenagers, relates to formal learning. *BBC Blast* was therefore not an educational experience for delegates because it did not map onto their conceptions of learning. This is not to suggest they did not learn, however. Rather, the issue seems to be about flagging up learning objectives and outcomes during the workshop so that delegates became aware of them. By comparison with more formal learning environments, workshops neither outlined aims nor learning outcomes of each session and consequently delegates could neither connect the workshops with a learning experience, nor reflect on the learning outcomes. While this is not in itself an issue, it does mean that learning achievements are projected onto the delegates, rather than them being able to articulate them themselves. To return to Buckingham's point (above), this a further reflective division between adults and teenagers involved in *BBC Blast*. Indeed, for adults who have seen the learning model and have been instrumental in planning workshops, learning is a much more frequent and productive

experience. For the delegates, who are not given the opportunity to understand what they were supposed to learn, possibilities of reflective insight is of course, reduced. The statements below are from the facilitators and organizers of the workshops. They highlight very different learning outcomes by comparison with the delegates (below):

So it's opening their eyes to maybe some new opportunities. There's different levels. There are the guys, kids from schools in workshops that are, you know, getting to learn a new skill; there's work experience that are, well its hopefully helping them get on the career ladder and introducing them to contacts; there's creative partnerships which is again more of an in depth work experience type thing where they actually get to manage part of the event so there's different levels that kids get out of the event. Some are just trying things for the first time, some are little tasters, some are maybe getting to develop their knowledge further, and its getting to use all the technical equipment that maybe they wouldn't have access to as well

Everyone will be learning different things. That's the great thing about something like this, that its personalized learning, you know. People can take themselves off into their own err, wherever they want to be learning. You know, some people will be here kind of developing performance skills, you know and stuff like this, with a view to an actual career in the industry. But then there will be other people where it's a confidence thing. You know, they've never done something like this before and it's a real thing for them to be doing it.

They're learning to open their minds and think outside the box! Which is a bit of a clichéd answer but for example you give a young person a camera, whether it's a video or a stills camera, and they would just take the archetypal video or photograph of head and shoulders lets say. When really creative media is about getting a different angle on things and using that camera to the extreme, to the limit, and pushing what you can do with it because that's where things become exciting and people take an interest.

Confidence building definitely. Coz I mean the Learning Support person came over a the end and she was like 'oh well he's mentioned this' so he's obviously got something in his mind now like, where he's possibly going to take this somewhere you know. And I think sometimes people just need a bit of encouragement you know.

For the organizers and facilitators who have seen the learning model and have the rhetoric and discourse of informal learning, the priorities seem to be confidence building, opening minds, thinking outside the box and gaining insight into the industry. The majority of these skills are transferable ones rather than specifically relating to a particular workshop. They are more generic, especially the frequently asserted outcome of 'confidence building' and taken together, the comments raise questions around the unique nature of *BBC Blast* by comparison with other Youth Arts programmes. Indeed, it is hard to discern learning outcomes specifically relating to *BBC Blast* from the statements above.

Delegate reflections, by comparison, tend to be specific to the workshop as they outline tangible skills and precise knowledge gained during their experience. They rarely claim 'confidence' as an outcome although, as suggested, they did often remark that they didn't know just how much work went into the production of media. 'Opening their Eyes' is perhaps the only learning outcome claimed by both facilitators and delegates, although the former tend to refer to it in relation to creative skill and application, whereas the latter group refers to it in relation to physical and organizational activities. The examples below detail the more frequent responses (see Appendix 1 for further comments) to the question, 'do you think you know anything now you didn't know before?':

- B1: The different camera angles which work in different scenes and stuff
- G1: And the editing. And that film is really planned coz you have to do the storyboards and everything. It's not just straight filming
- G3: How it's all shot, the different shots to mean different things

G4: Short and long shots and when you use them
B2: The effort that goes into it as well

G1: VJ-ing is a bit like DJ-ing where you film images you want to use, textures, just anything that goes with themes. Then you can select some music and mix it all together with special effects, sounds and things that change the colours

B2: How to make 'em blink and just like

B1: You just take their eyes out! And then it's flat. If it's flat and there's nowt above it, you can just take the eyes out and put 'em on for the next thing and it's like blinking! ... How to upload, err, sounds and all sorts of stuff innit?

G2: In the VJ-ing one, we've been putting different pictures together and speeding them up and slowing them down and filming them and taking pictures with the camera and messing around with those

G1: Changing the colours and stuff. I've never done it before so everything. I didn't even know what VJ-ing was!

B1: Just how to use the equipment and that

B2: How to set it up and what each thing is for. Also how to warm ourselves up and how to use our vocals properly

B1: We did another thing and then we made wee motors right and a road and all that and we crashed them all together, boom, it was healthy.

Many of the responses above also clearly demonstrate the high level of enjoyment the delegates experienced as they outline their new learning skills and outcomes. Their responses do not negate the learning outcomes the facilitators and organizers outline. However, they do suggest that a better exchange of learning outcomes needs to be established at the start of each workshop. Further, while the delegates can not utilize the same rhetoric or discourse as the adults, their learning outcomes are all specifically related to the individual workshops suggesting the skills they learnt are particularly media-related. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the responses of the *delegates* (as with the questionnaire respondents) who outline the unique learning attributes of a *BBC Blast* event by comparison with other Youth Arts events in their area.

3. To what extent does *BBC Blast* meet its goal of engaging and inspiring creative learners?

Having considered the learning practices emerging within the website and tour elements of *BBC Blast*, the third major research question considers the extent to which *BBC Blast* is meeting its aim of engaging and inspiring creative learners. The relationship between processes of creativity and learning is actualized through the assumption that processes of developing creativity are also those of *learning*. While the term 'creativity' is a slippery term, the idea is that in the development of ideas and products, techniques are learnt; reflection and alteration is enacted; iteration, duration and adaptation are evidenced. In other words, the characteristics discussed in section 4 map quite clearly onto processes of creativity. While the term itself is not only slippery, but tied up in a multitude of rhetoric (see Banaji, Burn and Buckingham 2006) the real concern for this project is in avoiding assumptions that the finished creative product outlines and demonstrates those processes of creativity which can be said to evidence learning. Indeed, assumptions that the creative product in and of itself demonstrates learning is problematic not least because it remains unsupported by the showcased material on *BBC Blast*. Not only are there no parameters within

which to gauge the content against, there is also no learning or creative journey evidenced or accounted for in the presentation and showcasing of the finished product.

Displaying finished work also reduces the possibility of any demonstration of the core behavioural practices of learning outlined in section 4: duration, reflection, adaptation and alteration. Such an approach also somewhat problematically assumes that the finished product visibly narrates the learning journey through representational signifiers. Finally, such an approach remains unhelpful in ascertaining use and practice. Indeed as Avril Loveless suggests, what is important about creativity is not the tools used, but the processes behind it, which can be discerned partially through the representation of meaning:

It is the representation of meaning that is the key that elevates production to a position beyond the merely decorative....This takes time and a continuation of intention and cannot be achieved by ad hoc projects based on mechanical processes. (Loveless and Taylor, 2000: 65, in Banaji, Burn and Buckingham 2006: 47).

However, Loveless also emphasizes the key factors of duration and iteration during which intention is realized. These are the processes currently absent in the presentation of UGC on the *BBC Blast* website, where the finished product is generally presented with minimal explanation regarding intention, inspiration or actual processes of creativity.

The Website

At a basic statistical level, *BBC Blast* is unlikely to fulfill its aim of engaging or inspiring users if the average time a user is spending on *BBC Blast* is around 3 minutes. Indeed, considering the majority of the characteristics associated with learning dialogues (section 4) necessitate duration and longevity, this is hardly surprising. However, the level of engagement can be explored more fully when we look at the actual dialogues within the message boards, particularly in relation to the role of the mentors, and the content material within the showcase section. As the Website Report suggests (Appendix II) the learning or productive dialogues will differ depending on their context. Despite this, it is also apparent, however, that the most successful message board in terms of learning dialogue is the Writing board, and this in part in due to the fact that the text based content appears alongside the comments and discussion around it. Indeed, where the creative product and the discussion co-exist in the same place, there is far more evidence of learning dialogue. Consequently the discussions around written lyrics in the Music message board and the Writing boards include a higher number of learning dialogues by comparison with other strands within *BBC Blast*. This is also an important point in relation to the Showcase section (discussed below), where users have to scroll down the screen in order to read comments on the work.

The Message Boards

As the Mentor Report suggests (and online questionnaire validates), feedback and incentives to post comments are key factors enjoyed by the more frequent participants. Engaging and inspiring users through these modes of response are therefore important not only for encouraging users to post comments, but also for the creation of an affinity space where good feedback and creative work can become the established norm for *BBC Blast*. Further, as the Website Report (Appendix II) indicated, the more frequent posters continually respond to mentor posts within the boards which has, in the 8 month period of observation and according to the mentors comments, somewhat improved their dialogue and status within the boards. The Website Report suggested that one of the primary ways in which levels of dialogue could be improved was through increasing the loyalty and returning base to *BBC Blast*. Indeed, the productive and learning dialogues most often occur between users who return frequently to the boards and have a tangible presence there. In a similar vein to Tu's research (2002), levels of presence correspond with the levels of critical or learning dialogue in many cases. Indeed, the Website Report suggested that there was clear evidence that learning dialogue occurs most frequently when

users are loyal to only one or two boards. This suggests that social presence (and the creation of an online identity) *does* affect the levels and range of discussions occurring within the boards.

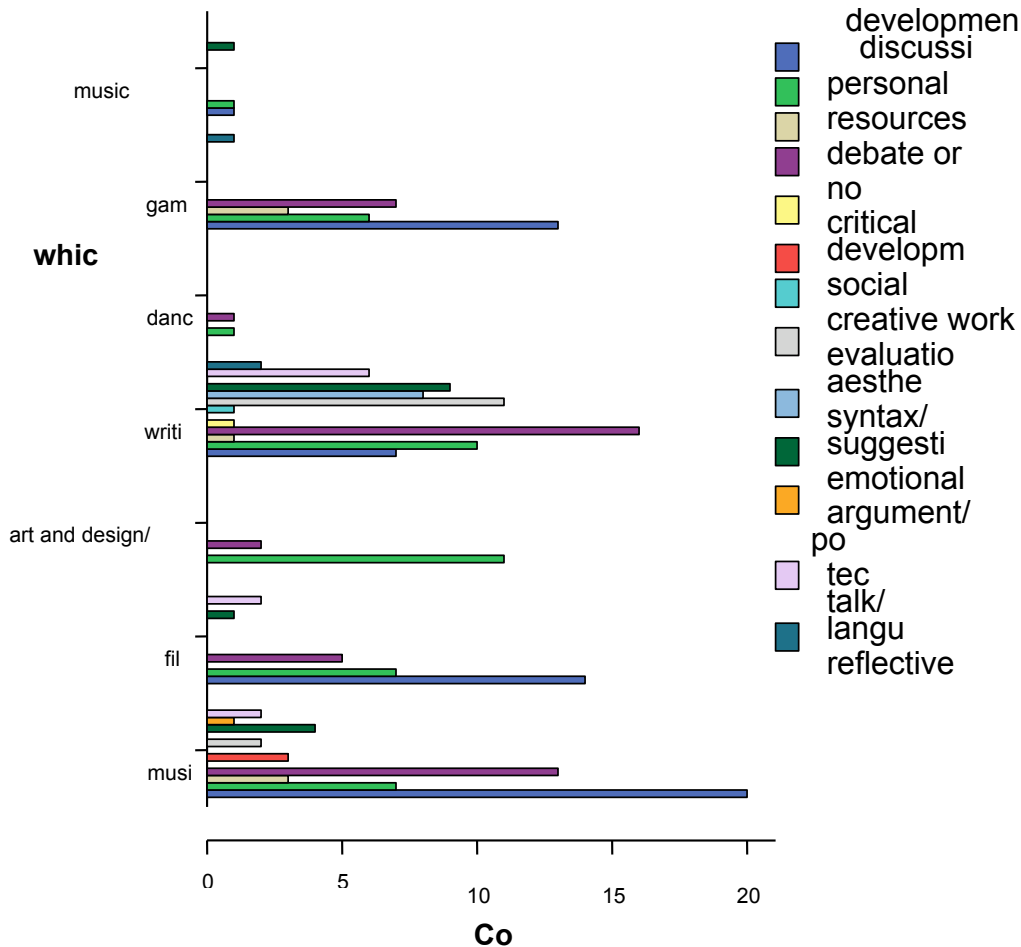
If dialogue is improved through responses to the mentors as with loyal and returning users *mysti* and *Rosie* (for example), then this clearly needs to be considered in relation to both the content and frequency of mentor posts. It suggests, in a similar vein to both *Tu's* research and the findings from the Website Report, that *presence* is an important consideration for both the users *and* mentors in terms of improving dialogue. Indeed, users of the boards cannot respond to mentors if they post infrequently or sporadically.

As suggested above, mentors need to respond in such a way as to *encourage* commentary or engagement from the *BBC Blast* community. Statements of opinion or preference, for example, as found within the boards as a whole, are less conducive to encouraging response. Indeed, as *Wright and Street* suggest (2007), 'the choice of moderation style can be significant in shaping the quality and usefulness of online debates' (2007: 856). One of the key issues to be addressed, then, relates to the *content* of the mentor posts in relation to the discussion thread. These have been assessed through the long duration of research into the boards which has been ongoing since November 2007.

The Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III) demonstrates that some of the mentors are more successful than others in terms of engaging and inspiring users to post comments or creative work. However, the majority of the mentor responses *do not* inspire response and this is primarily because the mentors fail to develop or engage in the discussion thread. Instead, the majority of comments from the mentors are statements of activity or preference which, in a similar vein to the majority of user comments, work to stop or close down the discussion, rather than opening it up. In relation to inspiration or encouragement, because the mentors generally fail to engage or ask key questions which could facilitate discussion, they are not fulfilling the aim of *BBC Blast* to engage and inspire creative learners.

The graph below demonstrates the range of responses all the mentors offer. It is clear that the mentors, as defined by the content of messages and the development of discussion, play a more supportive and encouraging role than critical or evaluative. This means that they do not always develop the discussion, nor do they offer good critical feedback which the online questionnaire respondents claim as an attractive feature of *BBC Blast*. Indeed, even when they offer good feedback or supportive commentary, it is unclear from the ways the discussions develop, whether their responses have been considered by the other posters to the threads. The biggest contribution, as suggested by the graph below is personal information. This suggests that the mentors are primarily concerned with presenting themselves as accessible to the *BBC Blast* communities, and are also perhaps justifying their presence and expertise in the boards.

As suggested in the Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III) the only mentor who does not offer personal information is the *Fashion* host, who instead focuses responses around resources and information. However, this is not always in tune with the discussion, and sometimes works to create a distance between the mentor and the posters to the thread. It also can have the affect of stopping the discussion rather than developing it. The most successful mentor in terms of developing the discussion is the *Writing* host, but even here, the most frequent response *does not* develop the discussion. This raises two important issues. The first is that there clearly needs to be an element of chatty and social response in order for the mentors to present themselves as in tune with the overall tone of the message boards and in order to present oneself as approachable and friendly. The second issue is that critical and evaluative responses are embedded in a greater range of responses which can only be achieved through longevity and presence within the boards. The *Writing* mentor is more successful, not because she **only** offers critical or evaluative feedback, but because she offers a greater range of responses, in which are included more critical and developmental comments. Furthermore, the relationships she has established are the result not only of a long exposure to the boards which has also enabled her to shape the tone of some discussions; the relationships she has established are also the result of her firm commitment and pleasure in her role:



Out of the 246 mentor posts recorded, then, 42 (17%) could be said to develop the discussion and therefore engage with users of the boards. This would suggest that, based on the content of each post (rather than the effect of the post on the discussion) developing the discussion in terms of advancing learning or engaging and inspiring users through peer-assisted performance is not a major activity evidenced for the mentors across the boards. Indeed, the mentors seem to neither achieve learning dialogue, nor see this as their role.

Do the mentors inspire learning?

When we consider the statistical evidence based on the content of posts above, it would seem that mentors infrequently assist or inspire learning in any quantifiable way. However, the Writing/Music mentor, in particular, has commented (in her responses to the mentor survey) that the skills and literacy levels on *BBC Blast* have improved significantly since its inception. This suggests that a cumulative result of mentor involvement is a general improvement which is not apparent from investigations of individual threads over such a short (8 month) period.

It is clear from the research into the mentor activities that the longer each mentor devotes to the boards over a prolonged period of time; the more possibilities there are of critical dialogue. In turn this inspires more users to post constructive feedback which also engages with the other users of the boards. The Writing host has successfully managed to increase the level of dialogue within her boards, so that although the writing board continues to be friendly, chatty and supportive,

there is also a much higher percentage of critical dialogue when compared with the other boards. As suggested, this seems also an issue to do with the architecture of the board and the fact it seems to lend itself particularly well to expressions of written creativity. The Music board is less successful in terms of levels of exchange and critical dialogue, and it is clear that debate struggles here unless it is more chatty and sociable.

Indeed, this raises the question about what the boards should look like, especially in terms of whether they *should* look the same. A successful learning community will differ from board to board, not least because the genre discussed will lend itself in varying degrees to the architecture of the space. Indeed, there is more than one model of success within any one genre. While it is relatively easy to outline the problems and issues within the *BBC Blast* message boards in terms of learning, it is much more difficult to offer a coherent and successful model of a message boards system. Research into online learning argues for multiple approaches to, and definitions of, online learning (Gunawardena *et al.* 2000). As a relatively new field of study, it is apparent that parameters and definition are still being negotiated. Consequently it would be unhelpful given the unique nature of the *BBC Blast* mentor system, and the novelty of the field, to insist on a fixed model of learning dialogue.

Furthermore, the architecture of the online space lends itself in varying degrees to the content of the message boards. If content can be pasted straight into the message board, the tone of the overall thread will differ not least because there is a tangible focus for the comments. The Games or Film board, on the other hand, have to rely on external content to support the discussion, and therefore need an active community away from the boards as well. In turn, this means that the role of the mentor will be different from board to board, and they will have to work in varying degrees to support dialogue. In many ways, the Writing board requires the least amount of work from the mentor simply because the focus of many of the discussions is chronologically presented within the discussion. The Film or Games mentor not only has to create affinity around a topic ('Indiana Jones' for example), they also have to develop the discussion and engage with contributors who may not necessarily have seen the film.

Confidence clearly needs to be built, especially where there are expressions of inadequacy. However, the discussions are not going to develop if this is the only objective of the mentors. Furthermore, if the responses to the posts do not engage critically with the comments to which the mentors are responding, then encouragement or celebration becomes invalid. It is not only a case of having knowledge and expertise within the boards, then, it is also the case of being able to engage in productive ways with the messages in order to advance the discussions. Indeed, considering that a large percentage of the discussions demonstrate a relatively low confidence and competence levels within the boards (with the exception of the Writing board) there is a question around how much expertise the mentors need to have. The use of industry experts assumes that their role within the boards should be as a bridge into the 'real' world, answering questions from a knowledgeable and interested group. However, the majority of the users of *BBC Blast* have interest beyond any one genre – indeed the diversity of genres is enjoyed by users – which would suggest it is less expert knowledge, and more the ability to engage with the users of the boards which is of issue. While knowledge and expertise clearly promote *BBC Blast* as something more than a message board system, the experts also need to engage the posters in meaningful ways without being patronizing or false.

This seems to be a three pronged issue then. Loyalty and retuning users need to be encouraged in order to develop iterative dialogue. If users see and read comments to their own work, it will encourage dialogue and increase the potential for critical engagements. Mentors need to *engage* with the users, responding to their posts and acknowledging interest and engagement through constructive comments. Bland or non-helpful comments which are simply expressions of own opinion without engaging with previous comments are unhelpful and do not advance the discussion. Finally, the mentors need to *develop* the discussions, highlighting interesting points and asking questions – why did you think that? What was it about that particular film/song/game you enjoyed and why? Where these questions are asked, real critical engagement ensues such as within the games message board where debate can become quite heated.

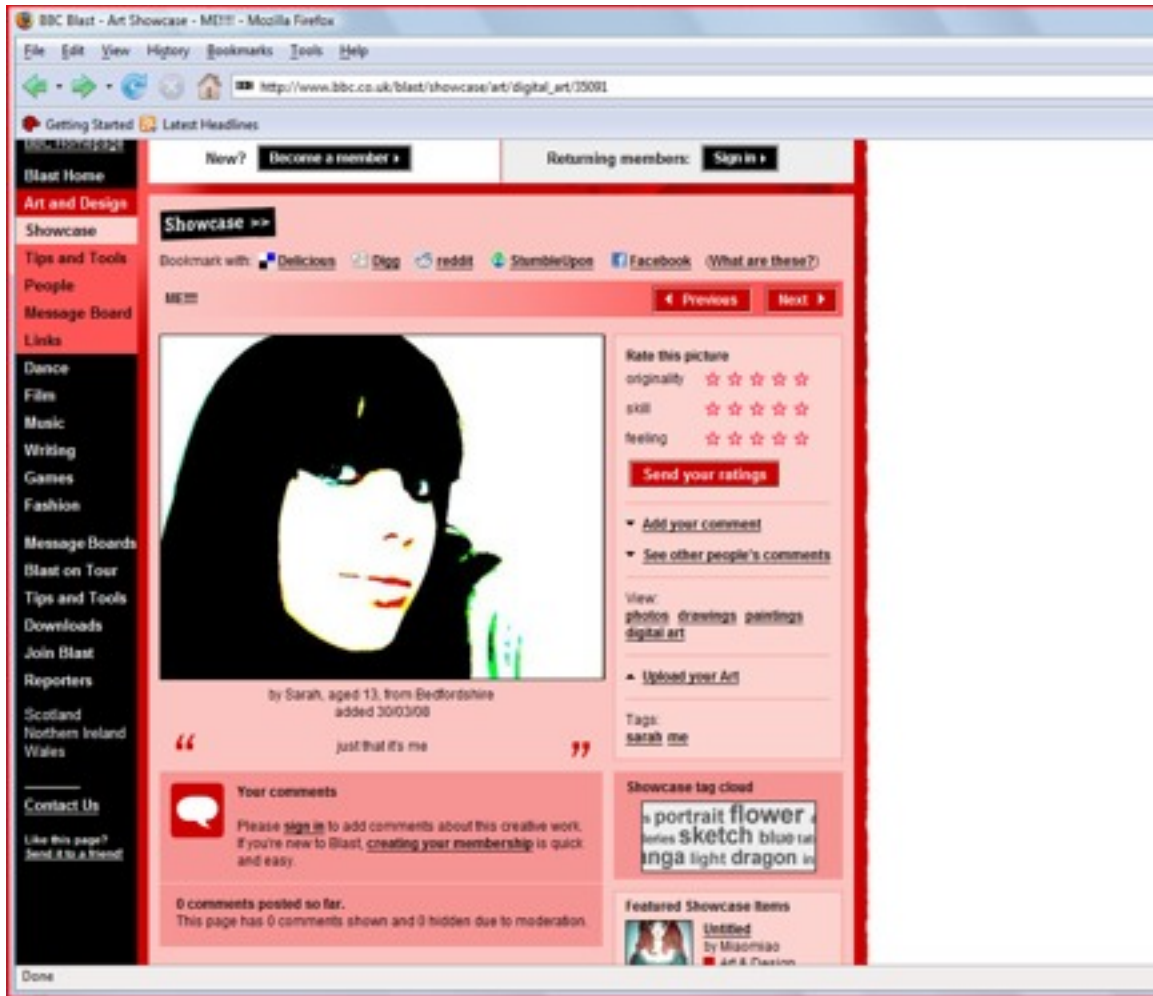
This shifts emphasis away from learning *per se* and onto engagement and development. It suggests that while assisted learning should be an issue, it is not an immediate priority. Indeed, assisted learning will emerge through proper engagement with users and development of discussions. Indeed, the key issue to emerge from the Mentor Activities Report revolves around **engagement**, and how well the mentors are engaging with the users of the board. This does not only refer to whether they are engaging with individual posts, it also relates to the quality of that engagement and whether the mentor is contributing to or distracting, the discussion. Mentors need to constructively engage without being patronising, and this can only be achieved if they have a certain amount of investment and *pleasure* in the boards.

The Showcase

Loveless suggests (above), that the important aspects of creativity are not the facilities and technologies demonstrated, but the process of representing meaning and how that meaning is represented (in Banaji, Burn and Buckingham 2006: 47). The content represented below has been chosen by the *BBC Blast* team to represent the showcased content between the months of January and July 2008. The first five uploaded works from each strand were forwarded to the research team at Bristol who analyzed them in relation to meaning and representation. For the purposes of the Final Report, the showcased content below comes from the art and design section and the music showcase. The art work is a random selection of the work submitted by the *BBC Blast* team and demonstrates a range of technologies, styles and materials. They are presented below as web pages in order to offer a clearer indication of representational and navigation issues. Although film and music content was also submitted to the research team for analysis, they do not lend themselves to textual reproduction. Nevertheless they are included below as web pages in order to offer a comparison between (re)presentation of visual and audio material and across two different websites.

Content

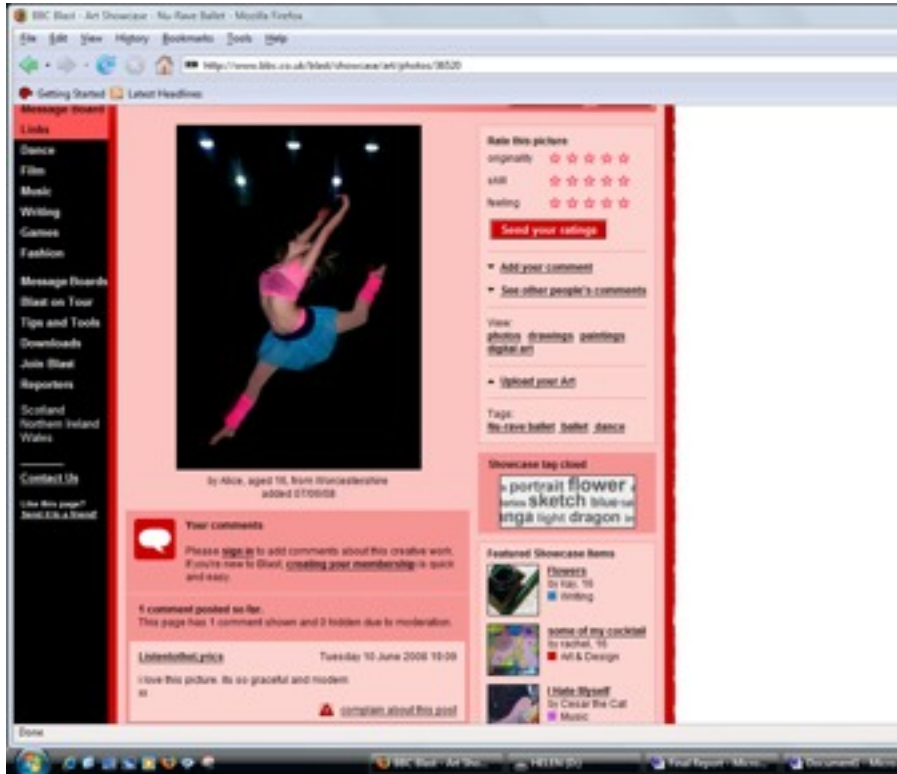
The two photographs below can be found within the showcase section of *BBC Blast*. The first image is a digital self portrait of a 13 year old ('just that it's me). The second image has been uploaded by a 16 year old and has received one comment. Uploaded content can include short comments from the authors which can explain the narrative behind the image, the motivation or the techniques used. Occasionally if comments are included, this precisely what they highlight, but more often they are comments like the one below which identifies who the image is, or where the image was taken. The small insight which could therefore be gleaned about the creative process is therefore rarely used as such. Consequently it is difficult to glean any creative insight into the image. This is clearly an issue which relates to both the ethos of a showcase section where such explanation regarding the process behind the work undermines the presentation of it as final product, and the kind of information the author of the work thinks is necessary for audiences to understand it. The art work which does contain motivational explanation is often finish school projects which teenagers have since uploaded to *BBC Blast*. Motivational explanations contain the rhetoric required by pedagogy – inspiration and technique – rather than any understanding of a personal desire to produce the work. This is hardly surprising if teenagers are required to produce such work as part of scholarly activity. However, it again somewhat undermines the notion that teenagers are actively and continuously producing content. Rather, it suggests that outside incentives are required.



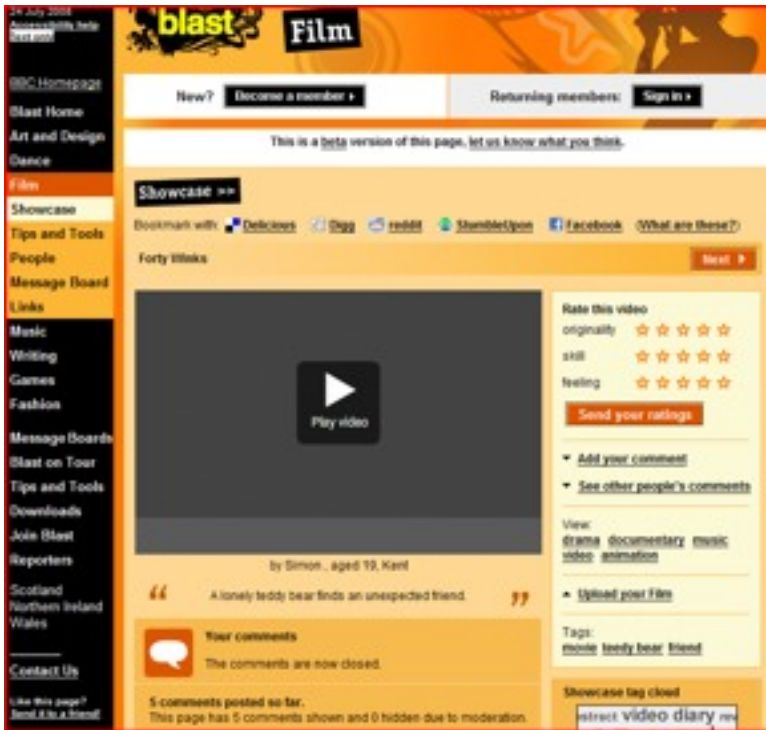
Although the art work encourages a rating system and tagging options, there are rarely comments on the finished work. As suggested, where comments are offered, they tend to be expressions of like or dislike. Indeed the comment below is unusual in that it articulates an interpretation of the image as 'graceful and modern'. As I also discuss in relation to the music content (below) the layout of the page is universal with only the image itself and text comments which are different from page to page. This draws attention to the work itself, but does not facilitate a wider or more autonomous self-representation other than the image itself. It also somewhat separates the work from the page as the singular differential form page to page.

Although a snapshot visual representation of the page is inadequate for the representation of the entire page, a comparison of the two images reveals further navigational issues. In order to view the comments about the work, the viewer has to scroll down the screen, obscuring the actual work as they read the comments. Work which has more than one comment means that if the viewer reads the entire threads, they no longer see the work being discussed unless they scroll back up the screen. Opening a page within the showcase section immediately presents the *BBC Blast* logo and offers commentary facilities but does **not** present the actual comments. As discussed in the Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III) modeling answers and demonstrating the techniques of constructive criticism are a useful way to encourage users to comment. Here, however, the additional activity of scrolling down the screen away from the work itself means that there has to be interest in the comment section beyond the interest in the work. Indeed, users can view the work and click on the directional arrow to the next piece of content without ever having to read comments. The act of moving away from the content and scrolling down the screen is therefore a problematic design issue because it means that the comments are not

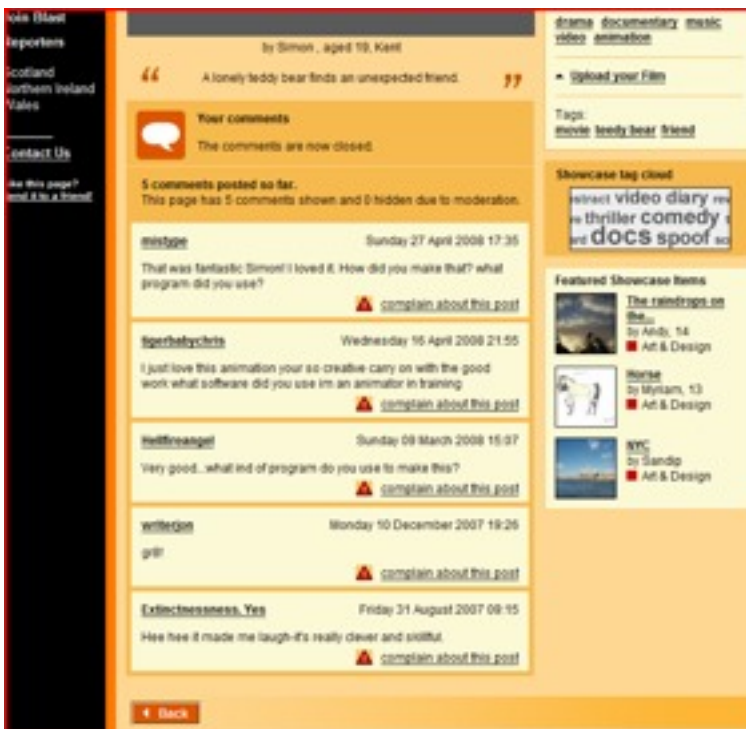
immediately visible and therefore not actively encouraged or seen as part of the necessary ethos of the showcase. It is hardly surprising if the comments are not immediately visible, that they constitute such a small part of the showcase.



Scrolling down the screen loses the original piece of content as the two snapshots of the webpage below indicate. This means that users have to view either the creative work, OR the comments, but cannot see them both together. The comments below also demonstrate the range appearing on the showcase. Even when the initial comment promises to debate the creative processes behind the work, the originator of the work fails to respond to any of the comments. This means that iterative or reflective dialogue (on which learning dialogues are based) does not emerge. Instead each comment is a stand-alone, redundant, and **non-productive** statement which closes down the possibility of exchange, rather than opening it up.



Again, the author offers no information regarding the creative process. His comment refers to the narrative of the animation. Indeed, the animation itself is entertaining with a good mix of visual and narrative devices. Consequently although it demonstrates skill, it is much harder to ascertain any learning outcomes because, once again, it is the final product of a creative process which is not apparent.



A comparison between the presentation of UGC across two different websites (see Appendix II for an in-depth analysis) in terms of presentation and use raises significant issues. Indeed, this relates to Weber and Mitchell's (2008) suggestion that teenagers are creating constantly evolving websites to represent their online identity, interests and achievements. The static design of *BBC Blast* means that *BBC Blast* cannot accommodate frequent and constantly changing identity displays. This is very noticeable when we compare *BBC Blast* with other websites teenagers claim to use (You Tube, MySpace, Bebo) As Weber and Mitchell suggest, such websites are *works in progress*, evolving through active and continued construction. This is partly because, identity construction includes many of the processes aligned to the characteristics of learning outlined in section 4:

Like bricolage, identity construction involves improvising, experimenting, and blending genres, patching together contrasting or even contradictory elements, creating and modifying meanings to suit the context and in response to the requirements, affordances, and meanings of the situation.' (2008: 43-44)

The characteristics Weber and Mitchell outline emphasize *duration* in terms of length of time and commitment to the identity construction; *reflection* of past presentations; *alteration* of past presentations; *iteration* in terms of continual alteration and presence; *interaction* with the technologies available and other visitors to self made site (for example); and *adaption* of techniques and technologies, opinions and other representations which might be useful. However, regardless of whether or not we consider the My Space site below (for example) as example of *learning*; it clearly does offer a clearer indication of the personality, opinions and preferences Lah-Lah Kid wishes to project about himself.



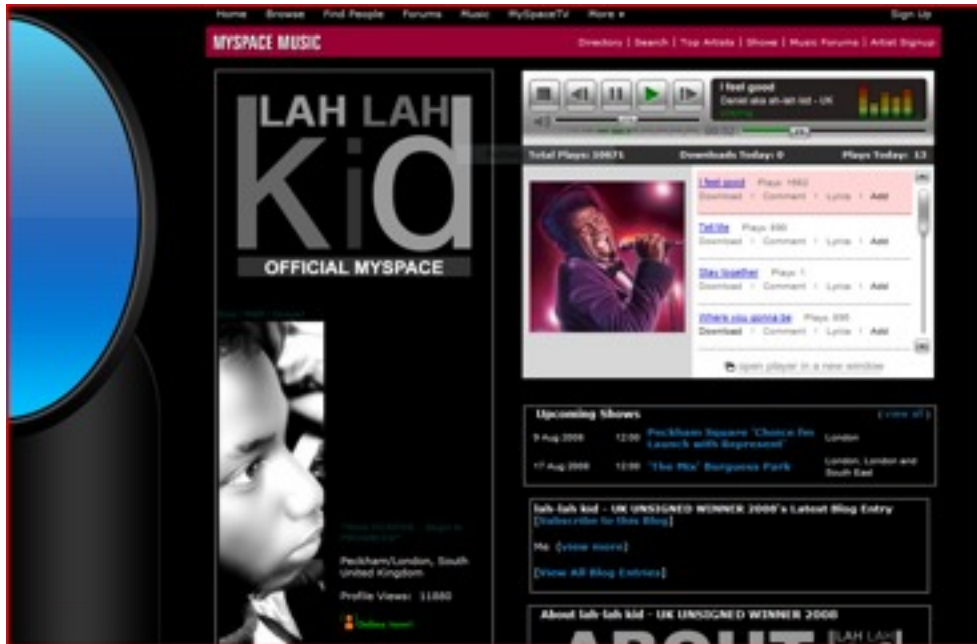
As suggested above (and Appendix II) the presentation of *BBC Blast* content draws attention to the work itself rather than figuring the audio work as part of a wider construction of identity. For audio files, this means that the RealPlayer logo appears in the middle of the webpage along with any comments the author may or may not have contributed. The toolbar on the left of the page

has links to the BBC and *BBC Blast* homepages as well as links to the other strands: *BBC Blast on Tour*, *Tips and Tools* and other links. The point is that this page is a generic page. Regardless of the music track; the layout, look and feel of the page remains the same. Lah-Lah kid can comment on the uploaded soundtrack and indicate, for example, what inspired or interested him, but he cannot change the layout or texture of the page his track is displayed on.

His My Space page is very different. The page opens with a variety of images of the artist displayed in a semi-circle around his name. We are therefore immediately introduced to artist, rather than the work as he poses in a range of stereotypical personas from thoughtful teenager to street-wise and aggressive 'gangster'. The colour, display, navigation and choice of photos are all his creation and work to represent a particular kind of identity as competent and thoughtful persona:



As the visitor scrolls down the page, a *range* of his created music appears on the right alongside live events and more personal information about Lah-Lah Kid. This introduces a range of skills and musical ability beyond the single song *BBC Blast* allows on a webpage. The live events indicate his activities and personal information section allow his space to detail inspiration, activities and thoughts on his work. His MySpace page has transformed in the months of analysis from a cartoon-based page with moving Disney cartoons to this much more professional and organized space. Previous web pages had a much more visually confusing, even incoherent, logic in terms of the layering of still and moving images. The transformation of his MySpace page indicates far more about conscious presentation and his changing attitude to his image and music than the *BBC Blast* space can ever achieve in its current design. The visitor to the MySpace site is presented with a jumble of images and sounds (music plays as soon as you open the site) in order, as Sonia Livingstone's research suggests to represent a 'bricolage' and changing identity online (2008).



In relation to the *BBC Blast* website, the difference in how the two sites are being used suggests some potential challenges for possible use of the *BBC Blast* website. The visual differences are striking when the two websites are juxtaposed and seems to suggest that the My Space page is as much about the image and message as the music. It is less a showcase for the music as it is a showcase for the person. Indeed, according to current research, My Space is not just an audio representation of 'Lah-Lah Kid's interpretation and presentation of his musical identity: it is also a virtual, textual and hypertextual representation. Furthermore, if it is the case, as Barbulles suggests, that the way we move or navigate web space is conducive to how we understand it and what it means for us (2002: 76), then the static nature of the *BBC Blast* site by comparison with the My Space site is affecting how we interpret and understand Lah-Lah Kid.

My Space has a much more rhizomatic movement, where links and tags are created, and interactive elements can be included. This means My Space not only operates as a destination, it is also a kind of transport to other sites and means through which other information can be reached. While this is not necessarily a problem in itself, it does become important if one of the primary motivational reasons for visiting the website is to reach a wider audience, or represent one aspect of a bricolage identity. Arriving at the *BBC Blast* website from somewhere like MySpace or YouTube further emphasizes these differences.

Taken together, the showcase **does not** seem, for the majority of users, to demonstrate creative or learning processes, nor does it seem to inspire or encourage creative learners. This is not only a design issues, it is also enmeshed in the concept of a showcase as presenting final pieces of work at the end point of a creative process. Indeed, calling this section a 'showcase' assumes the work posted is finished work rather than work in development. It also suggests that *BBC Blast* is emphasizing creativity as finished work rather than work in progress. It would far more useful as suggested in the section below, to include a section within *BBC Blast* where partly created content could be showcased. In turn this would encourage constructive debate and discussion more akin to sites like www.scratch.mit.edu where techniques and technologies can be discussed in order to alter the presented work. This produces a much more constructive and learning-based debate about the work itself and in turn means that there is evidence of a creative process.

The Tour

Inspiring and encouraging tour delegates to be creative *per se* can be tangibly evidenced during the tour where workshops enact creative processes which often produce in an actual creative product for the delegates to take away. As suggested above, although facilitators claim more generic learning outcomes for the attendees; the delegates themselves can often articulate more precise processes of learning and creativity they have experienced during the workshop.

However, as suggested above, creative learning depends on how successful the level of the workshop is attuned to the skills of the individual delegate. Further, while it is much easier to celebrate creative processes in and of themselves, it is far from clear whether these processes are the result of formal teaching, or autonomous collective creativity. The influence of the facilitator could often be evidenced in the finished work, especially when finished creative products could be compared across a number of days. While this is not surprising considering the short duration of some workshops, it does raise questions around how the delegates are being inspired. The 45 minute workshops, for example, where the input from the delegates was centered solely on the storyline creation, delegates followed a much more formal notion of creativity. The facilitator would offer a list of storylines from which the delegates would choose and expand on. Every stage of the creative process was carefully managed by both the facilitators themselves and the logistics of the workshop. Further, because delegates **had** to create something in such a short time frame, there was little scope for expansion beyond the set theme, or for explorations of alternative methods of filming. Consequently it was difficult to discern the extent to which *BBC Blast* was inspiring creative learning here.

For the longer workshops, where delegates could spend a number of days producing and experimenting with technology and techniques, it was clear the *BBC Blast* **was** engaging and inspiring creative learning. This was because delegates became acquainted with the technology and experimented with it before planning and scripting a film (for example). This meant they could create a short film based both on their own creative input and the limits of location, technology, and skill as discovered in the preceding days. Further, the delegates worked in the same groups within these workshops so that power relations and confidences also became established as the workshops continued. Collective creativity, in terms of negotiated outcome and process, was far more evident in these workshops and could also be articulated by the delegates.

The major issue for *BBC Blast on Tour* in relation to inspiring and engaging creative learning is not so much whether the initiative does inspire and engage *per se*. Rather the real issue is whether *BBC Blast on Tour* inspires and engages creative learning by comparison with other youth arts in the area. Indeed as discussed in the *BBC Blast on Tour* Report (Appendix I), differentiating *BBC Blast* from other facilities in the area may be a key **aim** of *BBC Blast*, but as the organizers demonstrate, this is logistically much harder to achieve not least because they are required to source facilitators from local Youth Arts:

I think the stuff that we sell our workshops on is that they get to take away their work, you know they get a disk of their work, which I think is unique about *BBC Blast*. But in terms of offering different things from local Youth Arts: it's difficult because as an event organiser you're told you're supposed to use local people and if that's the case, you can only really use what's there for you. So if you've got film people and music people you run those kinds of workshops... And you try to stir it up by bringing in someone new to the area but at the end of the day it's quite a specific brief in terms of what we have to do so there's only so much you can actually play with it.

At its best, the tour element of *BBC Blast* clearly does engage and inspire creative learning by introducing teenagers to new resources and techniques and encouraging them to experiment in their production of content. These workshops differentiate themselves from more formal learning because the facilitators can take a step back and allow the delegates more autonomy in their creative process. The less successful workshops are those with time constraints, and even 3 hour sessions can be too short to affiliate the workshop to the skills level of the individual (As we

saw with the DJ delegates in section 6. Time constraints are also a serious disadvantage in the planning of an event and result in organizers sourcing facilitators entirely from local arts and simply reproducing what is already on offer. At best this produces a more generic workshop which is similar to what is on offer at a local Youth Arts level. At worst, exactly the same workshop is reproduced for *BBC Blast* and delegates leave with little knowledge about *BBC Blast* with which to continue their creative 'journey'.

4. How might the design be modified to maximize learning?

The final research question relates to suggestions regarding the design of both the website and the tour specifically in relation to learning. Indeed, one of the major findings of the project is that learning potentials could be seriously improved through design. In what follows, the section is divided into two areas in order to negotiate the website and the tour. In relation to the website, there are three main areas: the message boards, the showcase, and general navigation issues. There are two areas which are discussed in relation to the tour: the workshops and general knowledge about *BBC Blast*.

The Website

As the Website report (Appendix II) and Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III) outline, design alterations could significantly improve the instance of productive or learning dialogue. However there is also a wider issue which relates to how well a message board and showcase system actually lend themselves to productive and learning exchange. While the adaptability of the showcase to constructive debate is outlined above, it is worth outlining some of the architectural, semantic and interactive issues around message boards. Indeed as suggested in section 2 research into social networking sites has found that performance online is as much about constructing a friendly and chatty persona and creating 'social alignment' (Moore 2005: 98) than actually exchanging opinions and ideas through productive or learning dialogue. While Moore argues that these online interactions do constitute face to face work in that they 'mitigate any offence to other group members taking part in the discussion' (2005: 99) there are issues around how well such dialogue lends itself to anything more than statements of social alignment. This is not only an issue about sustained and iterative dialogue; it is also an issue about whether face to face debate (where contributors 'read' other signifiers such as pauses in sentences, facial expressions, gestures or emphasis as meaningful) actually transfers in any productive way to a message board system. Such semantics are not only impossible in written exchange; the moderating system on *BBC Blast* also negates any possibility of immediate response. Consequently if a user posts a comment to a particular thread within *BBC Blast*, a response could take days to appear by which time the immediacy of emotional or political impetus to actively post a comment will have subsided. Indeed, considering that there are clearly issues to do with admission of 'excessive' interest, the act of posting a comment alone suggests that there needs to be a real incentive (emotional, political) to contribute. The only message board that consistently works at a higher level of exchange is the Writing Board and part of the reason for this is that there is a written piece of creative work appearing chronologically alongside the comments. This not only sustains and renews dialogue, it also offers continued context for the debate. The film, games, dance and art boards, on the other hand, rely on outside experience to renew the debate and perhaps consequently become stilted or turn to more social or emotional expressions relatively quickly. If it is indeed the case (and further research is necessary) that message boards are simply not conducive to the kinds of learning dialogues demonstrated in face to face communication, then thought needs to go into how to maximize the learning potential given expected lapses of time and interest from the contributors.

Message Boards

As discussed in the Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III), one of the ways to maximize dialogue within the *BBC Blast* message boards is through the mentor system. Users enjoy the access to experts and clearly (see Appendix III) respond positively to constructive comments from the mentors. One of the most prolific contributors to the message boards (Lisa) often pursues the Writing and Music mentor for further comments on her work. This not only suggests that there is real desire for good feedback. It also suggests that, when used well, the mentors can reinvigorate discussion, model answers, offer further context and generally contribute in meaningful ways to discussion.

To date, the mentors do not see their role primarily as facilitating learning dialogue. Indeed, when they were asked to outline their aims and what they aim to achieve, they premised support, content, and encouragement as their main objectives:

Games Mentor: To feedback about games which the posters are playing or questions they ask. Pose new questions and encourage chat and (healthy) debate. To try and encourage more chat about videogames as an entertainment form, art form and as an industry.

Writing/Music Mentor: I'm trying to give people the critical and practical tools to be able to go on and do stuff for themselves... I give suggestions and exercises for the author to work out for themselves where the poem's losing syllables or stress, so that they're not going to be reliant on me for the future.

I also want to teach people to interact with each other – so we spend time on critical and communication skills – we can often tell a newbie by the way they may comment on someone's work as "rubbish." I (and increasingly the regular users) work with them to realize the worth, not just for the recipient but for themselves too, of constructive criticism. It's a skill that's useful not just in someone's artistic life, but in their general everyday world.

Film Mentor: My job is to answer questions... stir up debate... get them talking to each other... I like to see lively debate on the boards and feel that new people are engaging and that the ones who I know already are making some progress. I like to see topics which show that they're thinking intelligently, rather than the same old stuff.

Fashion Mentor: To get people discussing topical issues about fashion, in a relaxed and friendly manner. To feed them new ideas, and keep them aware of new developments/issues arising on a daily basis. To answer questions, guide and mentor the users, and be there for them when they have problems that worry them, to give them support, encouragement, and try to help raise their confidence. I aim to give the audience well thought-out answers to their questions, and honest up-front information about how the fashion industry works and operates, both in the UK and internationally. I aim to give them a wide appreciation of the various important job roles in fashion, and in doing so widen their knowledge of the creative scope of fashion design, which so often favors only the 'designer' as figurehead.

As the Mentor Activity Report suggests, however, many of the more constructive aims outlined above are rarely actualized. Indeed, in a similar vein to the teenage contributors, the mentors tend to offer statements of opinion or emotion which often work to close down the discussion not least because a definitive answer is stated by the expert on the boards (see Appendix III).

In relation to design issues, a reevaluation of the mentor roles within the boards is needed. Indeed, although the boards will necessarily look different not least because each board lends itself in varying degrees to learning conversations (see Appendix III), if the roles of the mentors are to encourage debate, then more attention needs to be paid to the logistics of encouraging this. The Mentor Activity Report (Appendix III) highlighted initiatives which would improve the level of discussion such as modeling answers, engaging with previous comments within the threads, and asking key questions.

There are key design issues within the message boards which are also detrimentally affecting the potential for learning dialogues. The moderating system is not only affecting opinion of the boards for the teenage population (see Appendix 5), it is also noted by the mentors as problematic:

Over-moderation [is a problem]. My external links get taken down for weeks on end, and then eventually posted back up when the moderators approve them. This spoils the flow of my conversation with the *BBC Blast* audience, and reduces the audiences trust in me.

For the users of the message boards, the moderating system is not only undermining possibilities of dialogue, users claim they have no idea why their posts have been blocked. The moderating system blocks messages with names of places or sensitive issues. As the users comment, this means they can't develop the discussion in interesting ways:

The most you see on the writing board these s are poems, real life stories and occasionally fantasy. Nothing different. The restrictions do not help that, especially for those such as me who want to branch out from these.

To return to Arthur's '1% rule' (2006), if it is only a small percentage of browsers who actually post comments, then any detrimental design creates serious barriers. Although the moderation system is a necessity for a BBC site for teenagers, there are ways to reduce the negative and preventative effect the moderation system is having on the boards. As the respondents to the questionnaire suggest (see Appendix 5), an automatic email indicating a response to your comment would not only prompt users to return to the site *per se* and therefore increase traffic; it would also prompt them to reply, thus increasing the possibility of iterative dialogue and productive exchange. An email indicating the appearance of a post would also prompt users to return in order to read responses or simply see their comment online.

The Website Report (Appendix II) offers a comparison of the *BBC Blast* writing board with www.fanfiction.net which is a website for creative writing. As the Website Report suggests, while the more productive comments on *BBC Blast* are comparable to fanfiction, the majority of dialogue on www.fanfiction.net is consistently good. This suggests not only that such a mode **can** be conducive to learning dialogue; the comparison also highlights suggestions for *BBC Blast* which could improve dialogue. The noticeable difference is that creative work on fanfiction.net is grouped initially in relation to theme, and then in relation to previous chapters and works by the same author. This means that as a reader, it is possible to view the entire story (alongside comments) and then continue to read work written by the same author. It is also possible to read a number of alternative stories by different authors grouped around a similar theme.

For *BBC Blast*, the only way of reading the entire creative work is if both the work and the comments are read chronologically within the entire thread. For contributors continue their story within a new thread, it is difficult to locate the first part of the story. Further, if the title of the thread does not relate to the story within it, it is not obvious that there is any creative work within the thread. This not only means that locating a particular story is difficult, but following a story is also difficult if the author starts a new thread. Indeed, even if the same thread is used, a browser must scroll through all the title threads in order to locate the story they want; and if they have not made note of the title, this can be very tedious. Respondents to the online questionnaire have also commented on this navigation and design issue:

[I don't like] having to sift through all the Id posts in order to find certain threads

Although such presentation of work does offer context for debate around the work, the linear navigation model means the navigator has little control over what and how such content is being read. Further, the lengthy time needed to locate a particular thread is off-putting. Indeed, the message boards seem designed for casual browsers rather than for interested and genre-specific searches. In a similar vein to the Tour element, then, the website seems designed for first time users and browsers rather than returning users. Sustaining further and specific interest are key to

the development of the website if it is to progress beyond a being facility for more general and vague interest.

Showcase

As suggested above, the notion of a showcase is itself problematic because of the presumption that it is a final piece of work being demonstrated. This reduces any possibility for constructive criticism or dialogue about the creative process when such a process is presumed to have finished. As a presentation of self-identity, the showcase is also inadequate as the comparison with MySpace outlines. Again, the showcase seems designed for general and vague browsing rather than any sustained interest. There is currently no search facility within the showcase which means that if a viewer wants to look at a particular artist or item, they must guess the theme and then scroll through every single item. Searching for Lah-Lah Kid, for example, requires reading **all** the music titles uploaded within the 'Dance and Urban' section. However, if the browser had never heard Lah-Lah Kid's music before, they would not know which genre to search in, and therefore the entire music list would have to be searched. This design may work if a browser is interested in a type of music and wants to listen to some new tracks. However if a browser is looking for a particular song or artist, there are no facilities to support this.

There are a number of design modifications which would support learning, then. The first modification would be the facilitation and support of a 'works in progress' section within each strand. This would not only encourage constructive comments about the creative process, it would also encourage authors to return in order to view comments. Coupled with a notification system, the author of a creative work would then post partially completed work and then be able to return when notified of comments and contribute to the discussion around the work or post revised content.

A search facility of themes and/or authors would also improve navigation and allow speedier access to genres or authors. More sustained and particular interest would therefore be accommodated alongside the browser who could continue to follow each showcase list. As search facility would also mean that content from the Tour could be located by its authors easily and therefore encourage a continued interest in *BBC Blast* beyond the initial workshop. Coupled with a notification facility for delegates to the tour, this system would massively improve uptake and traffic to the website. Further it would reduce frustration Tour delegates currently feel when advised by tour facilitators to search for their work online following a Tour event, and then fail to find it.

Finally, comments on created or partially created work needs to be immediately visible on the webpage in order to emphasise this aspect as crucial to the ethos of the website. As one respondent to the online questionnaire commented:

Do you know how hard it is to critique something when there are very few ways to present an analysis? (18 year old respondent)

This is not only an issue about providing and demonstrating model answers; it also related to the visibility of existing comments on the website. Indeed, viewing and reading existing comments introduces the browser to the level of dialogue and to the logistics of constructive criticism. At the moment, the browser must scroll down the page in order to read comments. Somewhat ironically, the more comments there are about a piece of work, the more chance of losing sight of the work itself as the user scrolls further and further down the page. This means the browser constantly has to scroll up and down the page if s/he wants to contextualize the comment. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that a user can follow the link in the top right of the webpage to the next piece of work without ever having to read the comments if s/he does not scroll down the page. This means that although comments **do** appear on the same page as created works, they are not visible. Consequently the casual or first time browser could leave without ever realizing that a comment facility was utilized.

Tour

Design issues relating to the tour element of *BBC Blast* can be divided into two categories: the tour itself and the website-tour relationship. In relation to the tour itself, there are clearly design issues which relate to attuning the workshops to the skills of the delegate. This not only requires increased knowledge about each delegate (and therefore more communication with them prior to the *BBC Blast* event), it also requires an increase of knowledge about *BBC Blast* per se. Attuning an individual to a particular workshop is much easier if delegates are aware of the kinds of workshops available and range of resources within each one. Delegates interviewed in the course of the research project rarely expressed awareness of other available workshops partly because their entire *BBC Blast* experience was mediated through their school. Most frequently school delegates had no choice over the workshop they attended. Occasionally they chose one out of two possible workshops, but this choice rarely reflected the numerous workshops actually running during the day. Instead, the school had designated two possible options which best mapped onto the educational requirements of their students. In this scenario, final choice of workshop tended to be made because friends were attending a particular one, rather than because of an individual desire or interest in that topic. Ironically, this meant that while the school organizers gained a fuller picture of what *BBC Blast* offers, having decided on two potential workshops, the delegates themselves did not.

Learning outcomes were rarely outlined by facilitators during workshops which resulted in delegates being unable to articulate what they had learnt. This is partly the result of facilitators also being unable to outline learning potentials other than in a very generic way. A more structured workshop where facilitators outlined what and how learning outcomes would be achieved, and concluded with an indication of what the delegates had learnt, would facilitate conscious transference of awareness about skills and knowledge. Although it is not a priority that delegates retain specific learning outcomes, it does enable those to whom delegates talk to about *BBC Blast*, to get an idea about the educational and learning potentials of the tour. For teachers and parents, articulations of learning outcomes by the delegates would promote *BBC Blast* as an educational resource and make them more amenable to continuing the relationship in subsequent years. Structured workshops require increased communication between event organizers and facilities especially in terms of promoting the *BBC Blast* Learning Model (Appendix 4) and realizing it. As suggested above, facilitators rarely produced workshops attuned to the more skilled delegates and instead tended to run introductory or 'taster' sessions. The short time frame in which many event organizers work clearly does not help in terms of designing workshops and ensuring a range of skill levels are accommodated. Instead, event organizers work hard to simply produce a full event, rather than thinking about the educational potential of each workshop. As one organizer stated:

As an event organiser, the most important thing for me is filling the workshops. I want my events to be filled!

There are two issues here, then. The first relates to the logistics of the *workshop* where the research suggests time should be set aside and the beginning and end of each session to outline learning outcomes. The second issue relates to the logistics of the event itself. Here, the research suggests that event organisers should have more time in which to plan an event and interact with delegates, facilitators, and schools or parents in order to better attune a delegate to a workshop. This also relates to general knowledge about *BBC Blast* which was constantly remarked on by event organisers as detrimentally affecting their ability to plan and execute an event:

If people were made more aware of *BBC Blast* first and foremost and *BBC Blast* did more work on that ground level and we came into town with the tour as an extension of that, I think it would all feed in a bit better and maybe work better. Because we tend to come in cold, no one really knows about this or what *BBC Blast* is about.

As suggested above, the characteristics of learning as outlined in section 4 were more evident in the longer (day or three day) workshops where delegates could gain a thorough understanding of

the techniques and technology. It is not the solely the longer length of such workshops which facilitates learning, it is that the aims of producing a film, music or photographs (for example) are **met** in such workshops. The shorter workshops, by comparison, claim the same aims as the longer workshops but the outcomes are rarely the product of the creativity of the delegates. Instead the delegates minimally contribute to the final product which is mostly the result of facilitator involvement. If shorter workshops concentrated on one aspect of the creative process – brainstorming, filming itself, or editing for example – and emphasized this in the preamble to the workshops, then learning agendas would be met. Instead, shorter workshops claim to achieve the same as the longer workshops (Film in 45 minutes for example) when learning outcomes are actually much reduced. This therefore relates to the information about each workshop as well as the logistics of them. Schools and delegates should be made aware that learning outcomes will be much more reduced in shorter session, which can only run as introductions to a specific element of a creative process. They are not introductions to the entire creative process, nor are they useful for delegates with some knowledge or older delegates who are more likely to find the workshop frustrating. Shorter workshops should therefore be aimed at younger delegates, for whom long and concentrated attention spans are more difficult. They should clearly market themselves as introductions to a specific element with an added bonus of a tangible product to which the delegate has minimally contributed. Longer sessions, on the other hand, should clearly market themselves as more thorough understandings of the creative process for delegates with some knowledge or abilities. The marketing of different workshops needs to be at both a local and virtual level: parent and teachers need to be able to access information online as well as through the event organizer. Teachers often commented that they did not know what to expect, and that outlines of workshops and levels would have been useful in planning which workshops to attend.

Website-Tour relationship

The research clearly indicates not only that the tour and website populations are not the same; it also emphasizes that the website-tour relationship is tenuous at best. The online booking system does not work and even when delegates do book online, there are no systems in place to ensure their attendance. The Glasgow event, where delegates did book online, produced fully booked workshops on paper, but the actual workshops were empty as delegates simply did not appear. In its present guise, online booking makes the workshop *appear* full and therefore prevents delegates who seriously want to attend from coming. For the majority of events, however, delegates had little knowledge about *BBC Blast* and therefore were unaware they could book online. Respondents to the online questionnaire also demonstrate that the majority of website users have never been to a Tour event. Only one person has been to a tour event more than once, and only 5% have ever been:

20. Have you been to <i>BBC Blast</i> on Tour?		
I've been many times:		0.7% 1
I've been once or twice:		5.1% 7
I've heard about it:		54.7% 75
never heard about it:		32.8% 45
not interested:		6.6% 9

The 45 respondents who claim to never have heard about the tour is a more significant statistic for the website-tour relationship. The response above suggests that the visibility of the tour online is minimal. It also suggests that users of the website are only using specific elements of the website – and are not browsing all the facilities available to them. Indeed, as the questionnaire outlines, respondents tend to use the website to browse the showcase, post on the message boards and for inspiration:

8. I use the website to:			
download creative stuff:		n/a	14
chat to friends:		n/a	18
check out posted material:		n/a	76
post on the message board:		n/a	70
upload my stuff:		n/a	31
learn from the experts:		n/a	76
for research:		n/a	51
see my own stuff:		n/a	20
comment and rate:		n/a	34
for BBC Blast on Tour:		n/a	19
to find out about other media opportunities:		n/a	62
for tips and tools:		n/a	69
for inspiration:		n/a	78
just browse:		n/a	59
learn from other users:		n/a	63

As the responses indicate, one of the **least** used aspects of the website are the downloadable facilities and the tour.

In relation to the potential for learning, the different website/tour population has serious implications for the possibility of iterative or returning user. For tour delegates who are introduced to *BBC Blast* through the tour, the website is supposed to continue and facilitate their creative journey. This is achieved partly by flagging up the website during their workshop, and also through showcasing their work created on the tour via the website. However, as the research indicates, this transference of attention and interest from the tour to the website is not occurring. Consequently tour delegates are experiencing *BBC Blast* once and are failing to return to the online version. This means that returning or iterative dialogue from this population is scarce and only one delegate interviewed had been to a tour event more than once. The tour as a starting point for further relations with *BBC Blast* is therefore untenable in its present guise.

The diverging populations, interest, and skills of the tour delegates and users of the website are a problem for continuity or legacy issues. Taken as a whole, users experience two entirely different elements with different priorities and identities. While this is not in itself an issue, it does also mean that a cohesive understanding of the remit and ethos of *BBC Blast* was rarely found. Further, the two entities of *BBC Blast* operate as entirely autonomous. Those involved in the tour have little understanding of the website and vice versa. It is hardly surprising, then, that one entity does not actively promote the other. Indeed, there is clearly a design issue here which relates to familiarizing the entities to one another either through knowledge exchange or through more practical exchanges of experience through staff placement. The latter suggestion would require more permanent event organizers as a twelve week contract is clearly only enough time to plan one event, not familiarize oneself with the entirety of the *BBC Blast* offer.

5. Learning in Blast: Final Considerations

There are a number of final considerations in relation to learning within *BBC Blast* communities and spaces. The first is that the model of creating a space for sharing work (ideally work in progress) and discussing that work with peers and experts have shown potential to support learning. This suggests that created work with comments and discussions centred on that work as a model should not be discarded. However, although such a model has shown potential for learning, extensive design alterations are required if *BBC Blast* is to fulfil this potential.

The positive comments of the respondents to the online questionnaire demonstrate that what is enjoyed by users of Blast are precisely the learning and productive debates. It is the educational aspects of the website that users value. This suggests that the unique attributes of *BBC Blast*, and what distinguishes it as a resource from other sites, should be further exploited. Access to the experts, good feedback and incentives to post creative work by setting deadlines and competitions should be increased. These are not only the main elements enjoyed by users; they are also the things maintaining interest for **returning** users. In turn, returning users are needed for iteration, reflection, alteration and interaction which are key characteristics of learning conversations.

Learning dialogue could be better supported through design of both the website and the tour. The suggestions below all relate to the two major issues raised by the project. The first is that, rather than a display community, *BBC Blast* (and in particular the website) needs to become a **development** community. Work in progress, support of continuous exchange, and visible dialogue around creative work need to be prioritized through both the website and the tour. This would fundamentally change the ethos of the website from one where completed work is prioritized, to one where work in progress could be discussed. It would also make the website a valuable learning resource for teachers and parents. In turn, such a move would encourage a greater range of creative skills and levels as browsers could immediately see a range of expertise from the work itself and the comments around it. A change in focus to work in progress would also enhance the learning potential of the website *per se* as users could model critical responses, stages of creativity, and processes of display and response on pre-existing ones. This would raise the level of dialogue and encourage returning users (vital for learning dialogue). In conjunction with improvements in navigation and speed, this could mean users could search for a particular project, person, or titled work; and map the changes from initial concept through to completed work. Finally, promoting work in progress would ensure that the **creative journeys** of the individuals are supported, rather than simply presented as a finished product.

The second major finding relates to the **identity** of *BBC Blast*. Blast has a somewhat vague educational remit of 'inspiring and equipping' young people to be creative. As an out of school resource, and marketed to 13-19 year olds, the website falls into a somewhat grey area between an educational resource and a social networking site. Despite this, the loyal users of the website are very clear about what makes Blast attractive as a tool or resource for them. By comparison with other websites, it is precisely the educational aspects of Blast which users consistently cite as the compelling attributes of *BBC Blast*. This suggests that Blast should more firmly position itself as an educational or learning resource and the design and marketing of *BBC Blast* should reflect this.

- The major issue with the showcase relates to the notion of uploading finished work. It is a good idea to demonstrate the skills of users through some kind of showcase, and indeed one of the reasons users post to a BBC site is in order to present work on a reputable quality-assessed website. Of course, this has to occur in tandem with an actual quality assessment (presently, work is judged only on whether it breaks the 'house rules'). However, showcase sections do offer some form of incentive to post work that will be displayed. The showcase section, then, should represent the **best** of the created work along with criteria, and this should provide incentive to post content. Competitions to have work displayed (along with deadlines) are cited by users of the website as necessary to compel them to produce content (see Appendix II & III), and the showcase

section with a quality assessment could be a way to continuously offer and assess work. This would give the showcase a different identity as the representative space of the highest quality work, and criteria of judgements could then appear alongside work. In turn browsers would have criteria on which to similarly assess work and they could begin to model answers based on this.

- More crucial, however, is the addition of an extra space where users can upload **partially completed** work for constructive criticism. This would entirely change the ethos of the site to one from a display culture to a developmental culture where creative **processes** (learning processes) could be evidenced. Learning would be much more visible and incomplete work would encourage authors to return to read comments and post update versions. Iterative dialogue would be more tenable. Most importantly, duration, reflection, alteration, iteration, discussion, interaction and adaption (all the characteristics of learning conversations) would be visible.
- The navigation of the website needs to improve. As Barbules suggests (2002: 76) the way we move or navigate web space is conducive to how we understand it. Consequently the restrictive and linear way users of *BBC Blast* have to move to and from an object of interest, represents the website as similarly restrictive. Restricted movement is even more noticeable when we compare *BBC Blast* with other websites such as MySpace, YouTube and Bebo. These are a just few of the named websites respondents to the questionnaire highlighted as other popular sites (Appendix 5). To assume *BBC Blast* is visited in a vacuum is somewhat naïve and when we compare navigation across websites, *BBC Blast* appears slow, clunky and restrictive.
- The number of visitors *per se* needs to increase. More visitors will lead to greater network effect and dialogue will improve alongside numbers. This relates to Tu's (2002) research which suggests that online presence will lead to learning dialogues. Indeed this project has also found that it is the loyal and returning users who contribute most meaningfully to learning dialogues. In order to increase the number of returning users, *BBC Blast* first has to increase numbers *per se*. This has to be achieved through design modifications and increasing general knowledge about *BBC Blast* through advertising and promotion especially aimed at schools and youth groups.
- Coupled with increased numbers, visitors also need to be engaged and returned to *BBC Blast*. This should be done by feeding visitors back into the website at every opportunity. Once they have seen a particular piece of work, there needs to be a facility which directs them to similar work for example. If users watch an short clip from an expert on how to make a film or write a script, they should then be directed to the film showcase or message board.
- Search facilities and improving navigation needs to coincide with these feedback loops. Users need to be able to direct interest and search for particular pieces of work or genres. *BBC Blast* is not currently supporting more advanced media creators and assumes that the user population are primarily browsers. The lack of a search facility makes navigation frustrating. It also deters users coming to the website for the first time in order to view their own work from the tour.
- The navigation, and speed of response in terms of moderation, needs to improve. The major fault respondents highlighted was the moderation system and the affect this had on the slow uploading of material or comments to the website. Indeed, if comments take a long time to upload, the user will become frustrated and fail to return to read comments. Indeed, many of the threads within the message boards contain comments from users who have posted once and never returned. The moderation and slow speed for uploading material also means that messages can appear out of sequence if some (such as the mentors) posts appear first. This disrupts the flow of the thread and in worst cases stops the discussion. The moderation system also means that users are unable to share resources as names and websites are blocked. The creative journey *beyond BBC Blast*

is not supported yet the assumption that *BBC Blast* offers everything a creative media producer needs is naive not least because the design seems aimed more towards browsers and first time users.

- In relation to the message boards, the role of the mentors is crucial for modelling answers and developing and advancing the discussion. Mentors **do not** overtly consider fostering learning as one of their primary roles. Instead, they concentrate on encouragement *per se*. There is poor understanding about how to encourage learning both in terms of perceptions of roles or actual evidence of learning dialogues. More thought is required around what skills mentors need and whether this role should be fulfilled by an industry expert or a learning expert. As the Mentor Report suggests (Appendix III), the use of experts in a mentor role assumes that the users of the website are quite advanced and consequently require a bridge between their creativity and the industry. However a significant proportion of posts are by inexperienced users who express lack of confidence over skills, techniques and technologies. This would suggest that the knowledge base of *BBC Blast* users is not advanced and consequently they require less of a bridge to industry, and more of a facilitator of discussion. However, the questionnaire respondents consistently state that one of the main elements they enjoy about *BBC Blast* is access to the experts. This suggests that it is training and a reevaluation of roles which is needed. Mentors produce the same percent of posts (17%) as the teenage users in terms of learning dialogues (Appendix III). However, this percentage is exacerbated by the mentors who, in their role as expert, provide a definitive statement which stops the discussion. Mentor expressions of preference carry more weight than the teenagers because they represent the adult expert voice. Finally, mentors need to understand that although the teenagers may use the message boards informally, the mentors need to approach the message boards as something more than a space to express opinion. The mentors need to approach the message boards as a potential learning space, and need to be aware that their answers are not simply responses to a particular post. Instead they represent how to answer questions and offer criticism. They have the power to develop or prevent the discussion and encourage or dissuade users. For mentors, the message boards need to be a learning space, and the mentor roles need to reflect this recognition.
- As a learning resource, a 'teacher' section could be included which would relate the website to wider educational remits. This would enforce the use of the website by educational practitioners and encourage teenagers to visit the website as a resource. Further, completed and assessed educational work (Art GCSE work for example) could also appear online along with grading criteria and assessment. This would demonstrate the criteria for judgment on an educational level and, when combined with the showcase where judges would also outline criteria, offer the users a model for assessing and producing work.
- The BBC needs to revisit the policy on moderation and look at practice **beyond** the BBC for examples of good and successful moderation systems. The long delay between writing a comment and seeing it appear on the website is both frustrating and off-putting for users. Further, the blocking of names and other websites means that *BBC Blast* cannot direct users to more useful resources (unless it is a BBC resource). Not only does this result in a depersonalisation of responses and dialogue (generic BBC resources appear when a specific request has been issued); it is also unhelpful in terms of supporting creative journeys beyond the *BBC Blast* website. If users are both frustrated with the moderation policies which are slowing down the appearance of posts, and unable to go anywhere else, their creative journey is both stunted and disrupted.

In relation to the tour element of *BBC Blast*, learning could also be better supported. The major issues relating to the tour are communication with delegates and facilitators, and the knock-on logistical issues of temporary event organisers.

- The general knowledge about *BBC Blast* *per se* needs to improve. The low level of awareness about *BBC Blast* is one of the major factors detrimentally affecting traffic to,

- and experience at, the tour. Lack of knowledge means that organisers have to spend a large proportion of their time introducing people to *BBC Blast* rather than devoting time to promoting individual workshops to participants. Traffic past the Tour site on location is full of enquiries about what *BBC Blast* is and demonstrates there is little knowledge generally about *BBC Blast*. If delegates to the tour participate through their school, they tend to associate the day with their school rather than with the *BBC Blast* brand. This reduces the potential for visits to the website from tour delegates and undermines the influence of the *BBC Blast* brand or ethos on the delegates. It also places pressure on the school in terms of the legacy of *BBC Blast* and if delegates leave a workshop with incomplete work, completion of the work needs support of the school.
- Lack of knowledge about *BBC Blast* is compounded by the fact that the *BBC Blast* brand is not always pushed on the day by facilitators or organisers. When the delegates are asked if they have ever visited the website (see Appendix I), a large proportion expressed ignorance about the presence of the website *despite the address being on their wristband* and on poster around the tour site. This means that the website has not been flagged up during their workshop and delegates remain ignorant to its presence. Even when the website is flagged up by organisers and facilitators, delegates do not get to experience it while on tour because of time and location restrictions. However, twenty minutes at the end of a visit could be added to workshop lengths and used to explore the website. This would more firmly establish the various elements of *BBC Blast* and offer the delegates routes to develop their creative work and interests beyond the tour. It would also establish the website as part of their (enjoyable) experience on the truck offering a positive context from which to explore the website.
 - A better way of booking workshop places needs to be explored as the online booking system is clearly not working. It is not only that delegates book the workshops and then fail to appear, it is also that the on and offline populations are so diverse. In general, the website offers poor information about the tour – for example directions to the tour site are **never** given. This not only means that the tour is difficult to locate, it also means that the tour can only be attended by delegates with central and local knowledge. This reduces possibilities of individual attendance especially if delegates cannot articulate where the tour is or how they can get there to adults. It also produces another barrier to an already notoriously unenthusiastic demographic. There is little information about the logistics of the day for parents or adults. Indeed the tour relies on the BBC name to represent itself as a responsible and safe environment for teenagers when this could be re-enforced through a 'parents' section online which would include information about the qualifications of the truck team and facilitators, the medical support and supervisory roles of organisers. It is clear that even when delegates do book online, there is no guarantee of their actual appearance at the workshop. Consequently these processes need to be made as easy as possible, and delegates need to be persuaded to attend. Even when delegates sign up online and intend to come, there is no guarantee they have informed consent from parents. As teenagers are rarely in control of their own time, a booking system which requires only teenage consent seems somewhat ineffective. It is clear either that the online system should be a preliminary indication of interest, to be followed up with real guarantee of appearance (through parental confirmation for example). Or the online system needs to be entirely replaced with a real location-specific booking system.
 - Facilitators need to be made aware of the level of skills of the attending delegates in order to better plan their sessions. This can only be achieved through communication with the delegates themselves. Workshops need to highlight learning aims and outcomes during each session so that the delegates can leave with a tangible understanding of what they have learnt. In turn, this will promote the event to teachers and parents who will be more willing to continue a relationship with *BBC Blast* if they witness beneficial learning outcomes. Short taster sessions should continue to run, but with a reduced claim regarding outcomes. The best a 45 minute session can achieve is a vague understanding of some elements of the creative process. Sessions should clearly outline

level of skill required, learning outcomes and depth of involvement into the creative process. This will allow delegates and schools to better plan which session to attend.

- Event organisers clearly need more time to devote to each workshop. This is not only an issue about planning each event; it is also an issue about the legacy of *BBC Blast*. Event organisers who are not BBC employees do not have the autonomy to continue good relations with schools or delegates beyond their event. Although event organisers are loyal to their particular event(s), this does not necessarily transfer to the BBC or *BBC Blast* brand. Event organisers need to feel valued by *BBC Blast*, and they need have knowledge about all of the *BBC Blast* products available. This is clearly not possible with short term contracts and no guarantee of re-employment for a particular location the following year. In turn, each location then has to establish new relations each year between *BBC Blast* and schools or youth groups rather than being able to productively build on existing and developing relations from previous years. The short term contracts also mean there is little continuity between events and the permanent truck team have additional responsibility of providing that continuity.
- Finally, if an element of *BBC Blast* is to ensure the legacy of *BBC Blast*, then working with the schools and youth groups is crucial. Delegates who leave with unfinished work need facilities and support to continue to work on their creative product. Schools need to be supported to offer these resources and understand the creative and pedagogical benefits of *BBC Blast*.

Although the research project has found a huge potential for learning through *BBC Blast*, many of the potentials are not being realized. Providing resources and facilitates is not enough to encourage participation, and the teenagers involved in this project clearly need incentive to produce and to attend at every stage. It is not sufficient to assume that teenagers will utilize resources by themselves. As the tour demonstrates, **word of mouth** remains the most powerful incentive, and the final day of any tour event is always better attended by both returning and new users. The website also needs word of mouth support which will only be achieved through better knowledge and awareness about *BBC Blast*. Once awareness is increased, however, the look and feel of *BBC Blast* also needs to be improved into order to maintain interest and support for **all** levels of creative practitioners. As Pask's and Laurillard's models demonstrate, an ideal learning environment is one where the user or participant has control in discovering knowledge, but the discovery is then supported and scaffolded by extra guidance functions and interaction. This is the model which *BBC Blast* should aim to emulate through both the tour and the website.

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The AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme is led from within the BBC by the Innovation Culture team. Innovation Culture provides a central support resource for a wide range of BBC divisions, making it more effective to undertake collaborative work. It forges partnerships outside the BBC as well as internally enabling the transfer of ideas, knowledge and prototypes into the business. By encouraging best practice across the whole of the BBC's Future Media and Technology (FM&T) division, of which BBC Research and Innovation is part, the team brings a strategic overview to a range of innovation techniques. It also drives forward a variety of early stage research projects in key strategic areas, bringing a user-centered design approach to emerging technology practice.

Beebac is the online knowledge network for the BBC and academic community, where you can find projects you want to be involved with, explore areas of mutual interest and exchange ideas and resources with like-minded individuals.

The **KEP blog** is the place to go for any new announcements, outputs or musings from the KEP team. There will also be posts from project partners involved with the current round of funded projects.

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