Are Teachers Redundant?

By Marc Ratcliffe

Yes and No. In a sense the traditional concept of "teacher" is one which has diminishing impact. The notion of what a teacher is and does is changing and being increasingly replaced and extended by the role of guide and mentor. More than "redundant", teachers are at risk of becoming irrelevant. No longer are teachers the bastions of knowledge and harbingers of a single, right way of doing things. Moreover, learners are not looking for that structured, linear style of learning either. In a Post-Google world, learners are wired to use networks and search engines to find answers quickly. If they want to know something, they will look it up immediately, rather than waiting until the teacher plans for it. And with one in two Australians owning Smart Phones, they are doing it in increasing volumes than ever before.

Textbooks, centralised-curricula, and even the educational system itself are the products of a mechanistic past. The empirical reality is we are living in an age of networked-learning and the sooner we embrace this, the quicker the transition will be to effective facilitation of learning. The fact remains that teachers are necessary in supporting and driving learning. However, rather than focusing on the function of teaching, and assuming learning will happen, it is important to focus on the mechanics of learning and the individual learning needs of participants.

When e-learning took shape over a decade ago, there was a concern that this would replace the need for teachers. However, it really it only changed the skills teachers required. Further to this, in spite of the e-learning explosion, face-to-face training has continued to flourish, largely in part to the learning generated through the connected-ness of groups. The ongoing challenge for educators will be effectively combining the connections both in and out of the learning environment.

In summary, the future will not be so focused on how much we know, but how much we are willing to grow to meet the expectations of learners and the networks with which they rely. Ultimately, success will be measured on how willing we are to adapt to these technologies and communication tools and how quickly we can seamlessly integrate them into our own training.