

Computers in Classrooms

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~ **Practical** advice for colleagues who teach or manage information and communication technology (ICT) in schools ~

From Terry Freedman

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Editorial

Web 2.0 projects

It's a safe bet that most teachers don't like to put themselves forward as doing anything noteworthy, hence the article in this newsletter about (not) sharing best practice. I'm conducting a survey to find out what teachers are doing in the way of running Web 2.0 projects with their students, ie involving blogging and all that. The survey takes 5 minutes to complete and it is not laden with value judgements about quality.

In other words, it is an information-gathering exercise to enable me to compile a list of interesting activities that teachers can look at and, perhaps, adapt to their own needs. Do have a look at the brief explanatory article and then complete the form provided, so that we can **all** benefit:

http://terry-freedman.org.uk/artman/publish/article_1155.php.

Stirring it up

I seem to have stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy by advocating a set of standards for teachers' proficiency in, and attitude towards, educational technology. Read the article and the comments here:

http://www.techlearning.com/blog/2007/09/oh_sir_you_are_too_kind.php.

Practical ICT (For leaders and managers of educational technology)

After much deliberation, we've launched a new e-journal called Practical ICT. We were discussing this, and sounding out potential contributors, over a year ago. And now, with an author-friendly contract approved by the UK's Society of Authors, we are ready to roll.

The idea is that you pay an annual subscription (currently £18 plus value-added tax, bringing it to £21.15), for which you get the publication and access to a repository of articles on the Educational Technology: ICT in Education website. At the moment there are several hundred of them.

As the sub-title (in brackets) suggests, the journal is not about technical issues but leadership and management ones. You can see that from the first issue, which was published on 3rd September 2007. That contained the following articles:

- Things to note
- Aiming high: what it means for ICT

- Starting the new term
- Back to school
- Managing a virtual team
- Making a large purchase
- Lesson observation (part 1)
- Lesson observation (part 2)

Our intention is to bring it out at least 6 times a year, but access to the website will be ongoing, and articles will be added to it anyway.

To download a sample issue, click here:

<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/cgi-script/CSDownload/forms/frmsamples.htm>. It has lots missing, of course, as its purpose is to give you a flavour of it. You will see that it's full of down-to-earth, practical advice for the ICT or Educational Technology subject leader in a school.

Roger Davies, a head of department in Cumbria, England, regards Practical ICT as an "excellent initiative". He says:

"Putting things in the context of broader educational development is often missing from practical advice, but this does it well without labouring it."

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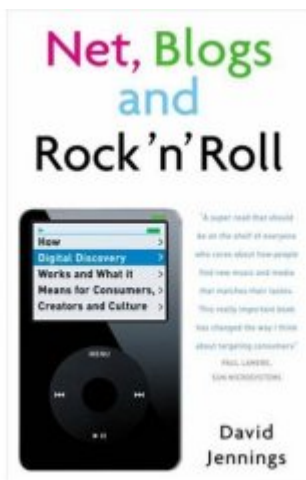
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Net, Blogs and Rock'n'Roll

On 24th September (or 14th if you order through Amazon UK), and sometime in October in the USA, a new book with that title will be published. I've been sent a preview copy. I haven't had a chance to complete it yet, but so far it is looking good.



The author, David Jennings, is a psychologist, and the book is about social networking in the sphere of music. Put the two together and you end up with a fascinating insight into the way different groups see themselves and behave.

I'm finding it really interesting, and part of the reason is that David brings a different perspective to the Web 2.0 landscape from the one we're more used to in education. Studying people's behaviour is always interesting, and this book is no exception.

I am also enjoying discovering new resources through the book, such as www.last.fm, which makes it possible for you to create your own music playlist and share it with the world. In fact, I came across this through Skype, which – in the paid-for version – has a last.fm facility for showing what music

you are listening to in the status bar next to your name. I'm not sure how I feel about that on a personal level, but I can see that if you are looking to make friends with people who share similar musical tastes to your own, that's a pretty good start.

Although I haven't read enough of the book to wholeheartedly recommend it, I would say that it is very readable, insightful and probably a useful addition to the bookshelf of the ICT (educational technology) teacher.

I do, however, have one criticism. Why is there no index of resources? I have resorted to jotting down the names of websites in a notebook as I'm reading the book. Note to publishers: if you bring out a second edition, please add a page of website addresses!

Still, there is information on the author's [website](http://www.netblogsrocknroll.com/) (<http://www.netblogsrocknroll.com/>) and in another [site](#) referenced by him:

<http://rocketsurgeon.squarespace.com/display/ShowJournal?moduleId=1376313&categoryId=117105>.

To purchase this book, which costs just over a tenner in the UK, click [here](#). Alternatively, to purchase it from Amazon USA at just under \$16, click [here](#).

Share best practice? Not likely!

One of the ways in which teachers, and schools, can improve the way they teach and use educational technology is by seeing what **other** teachers and schools are doing. Obviously, nobody wishes to emulate the good, mediocre or poor -- they are interested only in the best. For this reason, the idea of sharing best practice is held to be a "good thing".

But the very idea is fraught with difficulties, once you start to examine it.

First, how should you define best practice, or even good practice? Unfortunately, many teachers use teaching as a yardstick, whereas it should be learning and, over the longer term, achievement. The folly of this approach can be seen if you follow it through to its logical conclusion. You can imagine a scenario in which the teacher has created superlative resources, which have zero impact on their pupils' ability. But that wouldn't matter if the yardstick being used to judge the teacher's practice was the quality of the resources in a superficial sense.



So that brings us on to the second problem. Clearly, the quality of the teacher's practice should be evaluated on the basis of its impact on the pupil, but quite often this is measured in a superficial way. One of the most-frequently cited reasons for using educational technology is that it boosts children's self-esteem. Well, so would an iPod, and at a much lower cost.

What **should** be measured is how much the pupil has improved in a given skill or ability, and which can be directly attributable to, or inferred to be attributable to, what the teacher has been doing. In this approach, the teacher of a class whose average test mark, say, is 40% but which has doubled over the last year, is arguably displaying better practice than that of a teacher of a class whose average test mark is 50% having fallen from 80%.

Third, if you ask teachers to provide examples of best practice, most of them won't. They won't even do so if you ask for merely good practice. Why not? Because almost nobody has the self-confidence to put their own work forward, and when it comes to looking at their co-workers they have not been trained in what to look for anyway.

Fourth, one of the reasons that good teachers and schools don't put themselves forward as beacons of good practice is that they are too busy doing it to have time to think about getting acknowledgement for doing so.

So what is the answer? To share **poor** practice? To ignore other people's practice altogether? No, of course not. It is, simply, to share practice. Period. Let others look at what you are doing, and work out for themselves whether and how they can adapt what you do to their own situation.

To facilitate this I have, in my own small way, posted a survey online (see Editorial) calling for examples of projects that teachers are running, which involve the use of Web 2.0 applications. It will take you five minutes tops to fill in, and I'll be sharing the results with the community. Already there are some interesting ideas emerging. When will **your** one be there?

Feedback

What do you think of this format for the newsletter? Please let me know: terry@ictineducation.org.

Disclaimer

Good morning, Judge. I wasn't even there; it wasn't my fault; he made me do it, etc. Seriously, though, all the information and links in this newsletter have been checked, and offered in good faith. For the full text of the disclaimer, please see:

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