

Computers in Classrooms

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

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http://www.ictineducation.org/db/consultancy/doc_page17.html

17 October 2007

In this issue...

EDITORIAL	1
NEWS	1
FLASHMEETING IN EDUCATION	5
BORING THE KIDS INTO SUBMISSION.....	8
WHAT'S IN A NAME?	9
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WORSE THAN BEING TALKED ABOUT, AND THAT'S BEING TALKED ABOUT TOO MUCH.....	9
FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY – ICT IN EDUCATION WEBSITE	10
MAKING IT FUNKY – RE, IPODS AND MP3S.....	11
FROM COAL FACE TO CHALK FACE!	12
K12 ONLINE 2007: OFF TO A FLYING START	14
NEXT ISSUE	17
FEEDBACK.....	17
DISCLAIMER.....	17
PASS IT ON/HOW TO SUBSCRIBE	17

Editorial

There's lots of good stuff in this edition of Computers in Classrooms, with articles by several guest contributors, a prize draw, reviews of the first few K12 Online Conference presentations and the opportunity to ask your students to take a survey about their social networking habits.

If you're reading someone else's copy of this, why not subscribe in your own right? See the end of the newsletter to find out how.

News

Social networking: what do teenagers think?

I'm carrying out a bit of research into this area. I have compiled an online survey, which was scrutinised and amended by some teenagers via Google Docs before it was turned into an online questionnaire. If you would like one or more of your classes to take part in it, please let me know by emailing me at terry@ictineducation.org with the subject line "Social Networking Survey". In fact, if you click on that link and then send the email, you won't need to type anything at all. However, if you don't work in a school, please state in the email how you will get teens to complete the survey.

When I give feedback from the survey, I won't include identifying details of the pupils. Indeed, they don't even have to give me their name or email address if they would rather not. We have a Privacy Policy on our website (see <http://www.ictineducation.org/about.html#privacy>) and our company, Terry Freedman Ltd, is registered with under the UK's Data Protection legislation.

So, I hope you will be able to put one or more of your classes through this survey. Most of the questions are of the checkbox, menu or radio button variety, so it doesn't take long to complete. Ideally, I'd like to have the results by the 25th October, but the end of October would be fine if the 25th is impossible for you.

Web 2.0 projects again

Thanks to everyone who completed the survey form. Just as a reminder, and for recent subscribers, I am attempting to gather details of projects that people are running with pupils which involve Web 2.0

applications, like blogging. I am not interested in “best” practice so much as just practice. At the moment, much of what is going on is experimental, so there is no judgement involved. The idea is simply to share ideas.

I am also hoping to add more resources to the “Further reading” section of Coming of Age (see the next item).

So, please head on over to:

<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/cgi-script/csFormbuilder/forms/frmWeb20Projects.htm> and complete the form.

As an extra incentive, I’m offering a prize draw of a free subscription to the Practical ICT eJournal for one year. If you have already submitted the form you will be entered automatically. However, to satisfy the UK’s law on lotteries, entries will only be put in for the prize draw if they are genuine. So, entries which have virtually no information or incorrect information won’t be entered.

The draw will take place at 7pm GMT (London) on 1st November, so please submit your entries before then. Multiple entries are fine, as long as they relate to different projects.



Coming of Age

“Coming of Age: An Introduction to the New Worldwide Web” is a good introduction for teachers to blogging and all that. You can find out all about it, and how to download it, from

<http://www.ictineducation.org/db/web2>, and you can join an online community, where we share all sorts of interesting stuff, at <http://comingofage.ning.com>.

A second edition will be out shortly. If you would like to be kept informed of developments, and be first in line for the new edition, sign up to the Coming of Age eBulletin, which is free. If you already subscribe to Computers in Classrooms, simply log in at:

<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/member.php> and select Coming of Age from the drop-down list. That’s all you need to do: no completing of forms or anything like that. Otherwise, pop over to <http://terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/signup.php> and take it from there.

Thanks to Jennifer Wagner for the cool button graphic ☺. Visit her website at <http://www.technospud.com/>.

K12 Online



The K12 Online Conference has now started for the second year running. I’ve been involved behind the

scenes, chairing a professional development committee.

Last year I privately expressed some misgivings about universities giving credits for taking part in the conference, because I thought it was a way of their increasing their “pulling power” without spending any

“No crisis too small”



Computers in Classrooms is published by Terry Freedman Ltd. We’re an independent educational ICT consultancy specialising in ICT leadership and management advice and writing.

Recent assignments include drafting visions for Local Authorities, bid-writing for a group of schools, and producing case study material. #

We also advise private companies on educational ICT issues.

Why not contact us to see how we can help you?

HElaine@terry-freedman.org.ukH, subject header “Consultancy services”.

money. I still think that to some extent, although I can see that the arrangement can be beneficial to some teachers too.

Anyway, having expressed doubts, I couldn't really turn down an invitation to chair the committee. For a start, I can't stand people who are happy to moan from the sidelines but do nothing themselves. But even more importantly, it was an opportunity to widen the scope of the accreditation, potentially, and to develop a self-reflection tool that would work well even outside the parameters of accreditation.

You can see the results of our deliberations here: <http://k12onlinecredit.wikispaces.com/rubrics>. If you look at the "More info" page there you will see who was involved in the committee, and if you go here: <http://k12onlineconference.org/?p=161> you will be able to listen to my dulcet tones, and others', waxing lyrical about it all, courtesy of Voicethread.

I intend to use a variation of the rubric in Coming of Age. I think it's pretty good, but I'm interested in your opinion, as always. Email me at terry@ictineducation.org with the subject line "Accreditation rubric".

Further on in this newsletter I evaluate the first 5 presentations. But do visit yourself: <http://k12onlineconference.org/>. It's a great resource on the whole, and if you're interested in Coming of Age then you will be interested in this.

Practical ICT

Practical ICT

For Leaders & Managers of Educational Technology

03 September 2007

Vol. 1, no. 1

ISSN 1751-2832 (Online)

We've started a Ning community for subscribers to Practical ICT, which is an e-journal that comes out at least 6 times a year. There are some interesting

discussions going on at the moment, based on some previously-published "premium" articles (of which there are several hundred).

Recent articles include one about quick wins, and how to generate them; comments (which I've reproduced below), audience, and one man and his donkey (which is one of the articles that has generated some discussion in the Ning community I mentioned a moment ago).

To obtain a free sample of the journal, or to sign up right away, simply log in at:

<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/member.php> and select Free Samples from the drop-down list. Again, that's all you need to do: no completing of forms or anything like that. Otherwise, pop over to <http://terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/signup.php> and take it from there.

Why subscriptions?

The reason I've set up these subscriptions, in the way I have, is to save people time. Under the previous system, you submitted a form to obtain free samples, then if you liked what you saw you would complete another form to subscribe. This way, it's the same form for everything, and as soon as you complete it once, your details are stored in a database, meaning you don't have to enter the information again.

Website changes

A few changes have been made to our website. First, we've got a new advertiser, which sells Thesis, an e-learning product that converts teachers' materials into learning objects. Do pay them a visit, preferably via our website – the advertisement is at the top of the page. Incidentally, if you wish to talk to us about sponsorship or advertising, please contact us: Elaine@terry-freedman.org.uk, subject header "Sponsorship".

Next, look out for a new front page any time now. Hopefully. Well, once I've got the time to do it. Most of the website will stay the same, but we want to experiment with a portal approach, because there is so much on the website that it can be a little daunting.

Now, to make things somewhat easier, we have removed some of the "clutter" from the left-hand side of the website, and expanded the yellow menu. You can find pretty much everything through the menu, but if you can't then use the Search facility (listed on the aforementioned article as "Search this site" – we're nothing if not logical!).

And that is the final change we made: we tweaked the search engine so that it absolutely zips along now. Give it a spin. And see the article in this newsletter entitled "Finding your way around the Education Technology – ICT in Education website".

Face time better than Facebook

OK, I have taken a bit of poetic licence here because I thought the headline sounded good! But as a general principle, it stands scrutiny. According to a recent article, meeting up in real life is better, in the world of business, than meeting online. Personally, I think you need both, but there is nothing quite as good for cementing – or finishing – a relationship than actually meeting the person.

Anyway, the news item, which I picked up from a recent Naace (<http://www.naace.org>) newsletter, is here: <http://www.itpro.co.uk/news/126547/facetoface-still-tops-tech-communication.html>.

IT technicians and schools for the future

If you thought that underground accommodation is something that went out with the cold war, perhaps you just haven't been keeping up. Apparently, it is not unheard of for schools to park their ICT technicians underground. I don't think that is actually part of the design specification.

One thing that seems to be, however, is the absence of a computer suite altogether. This is a move which is advocated in order to embed technology into the curriculum. I have always thought that this was a completely misguided move. It's all very well saying that you don't need such facilities when we have wireless laptops, but I believe there are strong pedagogical and managerial reasons for retaining computer labs.

What's **your** opinion? Email me at terry@ictineducation.org with the subject header "Computer Suites".

School 2.0: Food for thought

I love stuff that makes me **think** about what schools might look like, as opposed to simply telling me. Ray Myers and his Director, Tim Magner, work in the Office of Educational Technology in the US Department of Education, and have put together some really interesting materials. What I especially like about them is that they do not purport to give you "the" definitive answer, but are designed to be starting points for discussion.

What's more, although the materials are available for downloading, you can ask for them to be sent you by snail mail, even if you live outside the USA. It's an incredibly generous offer, so do check it out: www.school2-0.org. Say you found out about it through Computers in Classrooms!

198 targets and counting

Colleagues in the UK will be delighted to learn that the number of Local Government targets has been reduced to 198. To read more, go here:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator?version=1>.

For subscribers to Practical ICT, I have annotated the document and emailed it out. I've highlighted where I think teachers of ICT, as well as local government officers, can contribute to the targets. As for non-UK residents, you may find it interesting to see the sorts of targets we have to achieve. Anyway, you can find the annotated version here, under the inspiring title of 505713-annotated.pdf:

<http://www.ictineducation.org/edownloads>. Other freebies for Practical ICT subscribers are listed here: http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/landingpages/doc_page3.html, and for newsletter subscribers here: http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/landingpages/doc_page2.html.

Google and video copyright

Google launched a new system recently whereby it will not be possible to upload videos without the owner's permission. Read the full story here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/16/business/16video.html?_r=1&ref=technology&oref=slogin.

Joost messing about

On the subject of video, another service has come along to make it even easier to waste time. From the purveyors of Skype, Joost enables you to create your own playlists from TV shows and films. Absolutely brilliant, and absolutely free. You just require a small download to get started. See <http://www.joost.com/> for details.

FlashMeeting in Education

By Paul Harrington

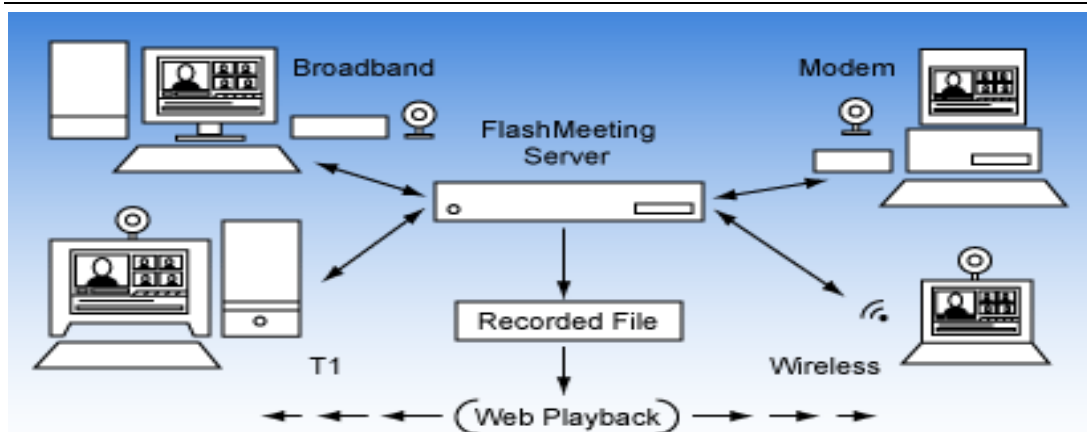


What is Flashmeeting?

Flashmeeting is technically an application based on the Adobe Flash 'plug in' and Flash Media Server. Running in a standard web browser window, it allows a dispersed group of people to meet from anywhere in the world with an internet connection.

Originating at the Centre for New Media at the KMI research centre at the Open University in 2003, FlashMeeting is still in development and users can contact the Flashmeeting Team if they have any suggestions for improving the product. (KMI also offers Flashvlog which allows you to record and embed your own vodcasts <http://www.flashvlog.com/>).

This shows how a basic Flashmeeting is organised



Reproduced Courtesy of <http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/>.

To the user, Flashmeeting is a free and easy to use means of carrying out video conferencing in a way which does not cause bandwidth problems, which some VOIP Conferences have.

This is because in a Flashmeeting only one person can talk at a time, keeping Bandwidth to a minimum.

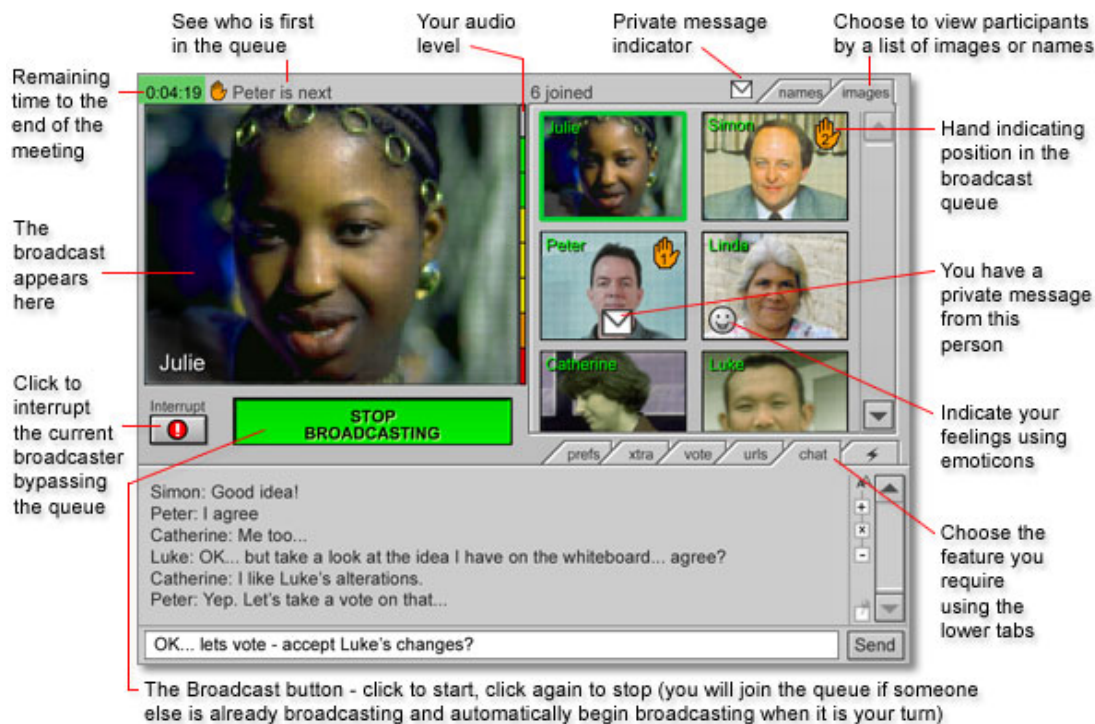
In educational use there are usually only 2 to 4 participants, although there can be up to 25 participants in a Flashmeeting, if required.

Flashmeeting also has other elements to aid its use in both education and business:

- Video and Audio broadcast over a network or internet.
- No download and installation – it works in a web browser with Flash 8 (or greater) “plugin”.
- Easy to use - click the Broadcast button to start - click again to stop!
- Indicate your intention to speak with a simple queuing system.
- Public Text chat – chat to others while watching the broadcast.
- Private Text chat – send private messages to individuals.
- Share a URL – open a web page on all remote machines.
- Shared whiteboard available to share text, drawing or photographs.
- Vote and ‘Emoticon’ options – share your opinions and feelings!
- Countdown timer shows time remaining.
- View participants either as a list of images or names.
- Simple booking procedure to manage your meetings.
- Secure and private meetings.
- Low-data friendly (one broadcast stream at a time).
- Record the meeting for easy web replay.

Once the meeting is over the meeting replay is available using the same URL as the original event. This also includes a full transcript of the meeting, data on speakers participation, and Carbon Footprint data (they look at where attendees are from and work out how much Fossil Fuel was saved by holding the Flashmeeting rather than travelling to meet.)

What a Flashmeeting screen looks like



Reproduced Courtesy of <http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/>.

Ways in which you can use it

Flashmeeting has been used to date for academic meetings, seminars and presentations on a global scale, there has been move over the past 12 months to use Flashmeetings for E-Twinning video conferencing between European Schools. It is ideal for this as it allows classes equipped with computer and web cam to have face to face discussions, Flashmeeting can be used for :

- Peer to Peer Discussions – example Q&A sessions between classes.
- Webcasting – where one or two presenters moderate discussions.
- Interviews – interviewees could come from anywhere around the world.
- Seminar – where a provider can give their presentation, and then take questions.
- Video Lecture – provider can record their presentation for syndicating to their audience.
- Moderated Meeting – Where one moderator leads discussion between the participants.

How to set yourself up with a Flashmeeting

To take part in a Flashmeeting you do not have to be signed up, you can enter as a guest. You enter the meeting by following a URL link which takes you to the meeting page. (as a guest you cannot fully access all aspects of a Flashmeeting)

The person who books the meeting (Booker Account) is solely responsible for giving out the URL to the participants, this gives the meeting security as only people with the URL will be able to access the meeting.

You can register with the Flashmeeting Team for sign-in and booking rights at support@flashmeeting.com.

Once you have booking rights you can fully set up your meeting including:

- Meeting length (up to 6 hours maximum);
- Number of attendees (up to 25);
- Type of meeting;
- Public syndication of the meeting.

Once the meeting is over The Booker is also able to edit the meeting video, here you can remove any pauses or interruptions very easily leaving a cleaner final presentation.

Practical issues of organising a Flashmeeting

Organising and moderating a Flashmeeting is very easy, meetings are timed and you can readily see the order of speakers. It may be a good idea at the outset to introduce the features of Flashmeeting to the users to make sure they get the most out of their experience. Participants speak in turns, you can interrupt if necessary, but it is better to let the discussion flow. It is advisable for someone to take responsibility for the chat window, in case anyone in the meeting has any issues which can be brought to everyone's attention.

How does Flashmeeting compare with other video-conferencing ?

FlashMeeting has some advantages over other VOIP/Video Conferencing programs, the main one being the fact that no download is necessary, as all Flashmeetings take place through a host server. (Organisations can also purchase their own Flashmeeting server, thus not having to rely on the Open University servers)

There are also issues with some VOIP programs and bandwidth, as if you have a high number of people in your Conference Call and the conversation allows many to speak at once it can be a high demand on your computer memory.

The quality of audio can be compromised if there are a high number of users on some VOIP services. But this is much less of an issue for Flashmeeting as only one person speaks at a time.

Help and Advice on Flashmeeting

<http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/> is the home of Flashmeeting.

An example of the public replay of a recent Flashmeeting – <http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/fm/3568b1-9578>.

Flashmeeting Video Tutorials – <http://ddraig-goch.blogspot.com/2007/08/today-i-will-attempt-to-take-you-on.html>.

Contact Jeff Howson (E2BN) at jeffreyrichardh@gmail.com. Jeff is helping promote the use of Flashmeeting in Education. Tell him you read about it in Computers for Classrooms.

Paul has been teaching at Cefn Fforest Primary School for 18 years, and has been IT Co-ordinator since 1997. He got into the new Read/Write web with blogs, podcasts and wikis about 18 months ago, using them to give pupils “their own voice” to a “real” audience. He currently teaches a class of 30 Year 3 pupils. His aim with all of the classes that he teaches is to broaden their horizons by introducing them to other children of their age around the world, allowing them to see other cultures and ways of life.

Want to try Flashmeeting out? We’ve organised a meeting for 8pm GMT on 30th October 2007, to discuss ways in which to reduce or at least manage workload. Go here for details: <http://flashmeeting.e2bn.net/fm/8b2c7b-2062>. Please note that only 25 people can be accommodated.

Boring the kids into submission

Are your students enjoying your lessons too much? (Symptoms include opting for extra classes, doing extra homework, coming in early, wanting to stay late, etc etc)?

Well, you can put a stop to it right now. My book, “Go On, Bore ‘Em” How to make ICT lessons excruciatingly dull” explores in depth ten – yes, ten! – tried and tested ways of boring your kids to tears.

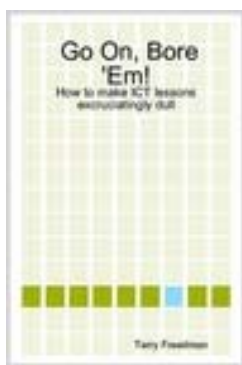
For example, try the “too much pain, no gain approach”:

“Let’s take the scenario in which the teacher is attempting to teach the students about legislation. This is a rich field for ineptitude.”

Or if that doesn’t work, try talking at them for 90% of the lesson:

“It’s easy to see why the teaching profession might appeal to a lot of people: in how many other walks of life do you get the chance to talk incessantly to a captive audience?”

Some comments about this book:



“I think this is an excellent mirror for all ICT teachers. It has already made me think about and reflect on my own work in schools, I know I can talk just a little too much.”

“Packed with really good practical and useful hints and tips, backed up by sound observation from Terry. It's the sort of guide that deserves a wider audience.”

“Two of the points really struck a chord from my own experience. One, the fact that students prefer to have a structure which guides them rather than just allowing them to develop their own free-form approach. The second was the issue of teaching on a need-to-know basis.”

To buy this wonderful book go to <http://www.lulu.com/content/542015>, where you will be asked for the princely sum of £4.99 (approximately \$10 US) plus postage.

What's in a name?

By Cilla Pickering



Hello. Cilla here again.

I thought I'd blog just like a lot of other people. I thought it's time to bore you with the minutia of my daily life. No, really what this article is really about is labels. Yesterday, (here's the minutia) I indulged in a bit of e- learning, then when on to v-learning and then b- learning.

What's she rambling about? Well, I am fascinated by the label that those in the industry give to learning using a computer ie e-learning. Why did we never give the label b-learning to learning with books? Is it because learning from the written word has been around for hundreds of years? Before anyone thought it was necessary to show that we are learning using a different medium?

I am not saying that using a label to differentiate the tools we are using for our learning isn't necessary. What I am asking is why do we do it? Is it helpful? Or does it divide the learning activities using technology from those that have been around for longer?

(Oh, by the way V-learning = visual learning: I watched the television. B-learning = I read a book. E-learning = I used the computer.)

There's only one thing worse than being talked about, and that's being talked about too much

By Terry Freedman

Is it really our job to reduce education to a kind of "X Factor" or "Pop Idol"?

Introduction

Forgive the misuse of the well-known Oscar Wilde quotation, but why is it always assumed that the more comments there are on a student's work, the better? We need to consider the management overhead, and the implications for the impact on learning, of a multitude of comments.

Here is the context of this article: if you go to a conference or a presentation about Web 2.0 in education, it will only be a matter of time before a speaker says something along the lines of:

"How many people see your students' work? Maybe 30? Perhaps 50? Look at this!! My students' work was viewed by 200,000 people, and this one here has received 5,000 comments! Think how useful and great that is."

I think that this is a rather superficial approach to say the least, and here are my reasons. I've divided them into two sections, impact on learning and management overhead.



Impact on learning

1. The only point in doing **anything** in education is for its impact on learning. You may wish to define that learning in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, such as "ability to collaborate" rather than "Level 5", but that doesn't change the argument. If an activity has no impact on learning and achievement, it should be dropped.

Does having 5,000 comments on a piece of work have an impact on learning? Well, only if (a) the student reads them and (b) if they are useful in themselves. Comments like "Mega" are not known for their capacity to help students improve on their work.

2. Let's suppose all the comments are useful. Is reading 5,000 comments likely to have a greater impact on learning than reading 4,000? Or 1,000? Or 10? Put another way, how many variations of a particular comment can there be?

3. Let's suppose that not only all the comments are useful, but they are all unique in terms of what they say (ie not just the way they say it). Are the benefits of reading 5,000 comments likely to be worth the cost, in terms of time?

4. Suppose you agree with me on these issues, yet still believe that having 5,000 comments is a "good thing" on the grounds that having such a vast amount of feedback is good for the student's self-esteem. All I can say is that I disagree with encouraging such narcissistic tendencies. We live in an age where people want to be famous for being famous. Is it really our job to reduce education to a kind of "X Factor" or "Pop Idol"? In any case, we should be trying to get students to understand that what matters is not feedback from as many people as possible, but from the people one respects, or whom one **could** respect. For example, a comment on a student's chemistry experiment from a scientist, say, is surely worth more than a comment from a history professor or a plumber?

Management

If I have failed to convince you that more does not necessarily equal better when it comes to comments, there are still the management aspects to consider. Taking the point of view that the students should respond to any comments they receive (on the grounds that not to do so is impolite), we need to consider the following.

1. How long does it take to read 5,000 comments? I have carried out a back-of-the-envelope calculation. Suppose each comment takes 10 seconds to read. That works out to almost 14 hours – and even that assumes that literacy is not a problem. Fourteen hours, and we haven't even allowed for responding. It works out to 3 days in terms of school time. Where is that time going to come from?

2. Are you going to moderate the comments? You should. So far we have been talking about one student. If you have a class of 30 students, and they each receive 5,000 comments, we're talking about 150,000 comments. Do the 10 second calculation again, and we're talking about over 17 days – 24 hour days, not working days which would, in effect, double or even treble that figure.

The point is this: having 5,000 comments is simply not manageable. We should be encouraging students to value quality over quantity, not pandering to their need for ego-fulfilment.

This article was originally published as part of the Practical ICT eJournal subscription. If you are interested in having access to this sort of no-nonsense approach to current educational ICT issues, sign up now.

If you already subscribe to Computers in Classrooms, simply log in at:

<http://www.terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/member.php> and select Practical ICT from the drop-down list. That's all you need to do: no completing of forms or anything like that. Well, apart from authorising payment, of course.

The cost is £21.15 per year (or the equivalent in your own currency) including tax. Otherwise, pop over to <http://terry-freedman.org.uk/amember/signup.php> and take it from there. We can also accept purchase orders. Contact us for details: Elaine@terry-freedman.org.uk, subject header "Practical ICT subscription".

Finding your way around the Educational Technology – ICT in Education website



There are a number of ways of finding things on the website:

- To find articles, use the search engine (click on "Search this site", which is inside the top layer of the menu on the left-hand side.)
- Another way of finding an article is to browse through the category you think it might be in. The categories are listed on the left-hand side of the website.
- To read the latest articles in any particular category, look through the headlines on the right-hand side of the website.

- You can find all the other stuff, such as podcasts, books for sale, freebies and everything else by looking through the menu.

Making it funky – RE, iPods and MP3s

By Paul Hopkins



Walking along the street singing to yourself is not a sign of madness these days but more likely to signify that the singer is the owner of an MP3 player, the most trendy of which is the iPod. Sitting on the train on the train recently I was able to spot half a dozen fellow travellers sporting the identifiable white earplugs which signified that they were the owner of an iPod – the “must have”, cool MP3 technology.

So, are you a podder? Do you have that fashionable rectangular cuboid of hard plastic nestled in your pocket or purse? The chances are that your students have an iPod, or a similar MP3/4 player, in theirs. What is your schools attitude

to these “must have” items? Is it to welcome these into the schoolyard and the classroom or do the cries of “bannem” ring out? There are some good reasons why the Religious Education (RE) department should be welcoming these devices.

Firstly, RE is a multimodal subject and sounds form, for most religions, a major part of the religious experience. The opportunity for students to be able to access a digital bank of religious sounds and spoken text should be seen as a definite yes. You can find suitable stuff on-line in a variety of places, both as downloads and as podcasts. If you are not sure what a podcast is, or how you can get access to them see <http://www.ipodder.com> or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>.

The range of material that is available is quite extensive, as a search will quickly find out. If the students have access to a video iPod, or equivalent then you might be able to source video materials for example from <http://www.youtube.com> or <http://video.google.com> that can be shared with the students. Be aware when sharing audio and video materials with the students of the copyright limitations. See <http://schools.becta.org.uk> for more information on copyright and IPR.

Having given students access to materials produced by someone else what about producing your own? Podlearning allows students to be using audio files that you have created, or if they have access to a video iPod or equivalent to narrated video or narrated PowerPoint turned into movies. Ideal for reinforcement and revision as well as making missed lessons available to students. To learn about voice narration in PowerPoint see <http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/downloads.html>.

Think also of the ethereal nature of much of the discursive work in RE. For your iPod an attachment called iTalk will allow you to capture, digitally, the students’ oral work. You might extend this to capturing presentations and assessed work and making these available as podcasts. Remember that you will need students and parents permission if you are going to record in class and you should consult with the school leadership team.

Lastly, can you encourage students to produce their own audio podcasts? Many students, If not most, are more orate than they are literate. Could you set homework that involves students recording their own voice rather than committing words on the page? Many computers now come with a built in microphone and recording package but a nice piece of free open source software is Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) [available for Windows, Apple and Linux platforms] or Photostory3 (<http://www.microsoft.com/photostory3/> [just Windows] which allows recording, editing and duplicating of sound files [Audacity] and video files [Photostory]).

So what are you waiting for? Sound is the new writing! Get your player, check your OS software, download Audacity and get recording. I would



love to hear of any projects that are happening contact me via paul@paulhopkins.org.uk.

Paul Hopkins has been working in education in the UK since 1992. He has been a teacher, head of department, senior teacher in schools and also a lecturer and researcher in Higher Education. He has experience in Initial Teacher Education and has both lectured and mentored ITT students. A pioneer in the use of ICT in the RE classroom, he has widely lectured both nationally and internationally on the use of ICT. He has published CD-ROMs, books and many websites on the use of ICT. He has, and continues to, run many courses up and down the country on both education and IT matters and has been a consultant to the DfES (DCSF), QCA, TDA (TTA) and BECTa on educational matters. He holds degrees in Physics, Theology and Philosophy and Education. Visit his website at <http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/mmisite/index2.html>.

From Coal Face to Chalk Face!

By Nigel Willetts



Introduction

If anybody had told me at the height of my coal mining career that I would eventually become a Housemaster and academic head of department at Independent boarding schools in the UK, I would have seriously questioned their sanity! Such a suggestion would have been unimaginable at the time and completely as far removed from reality that you could possibly get!

Yet, I now enter my ninth year of teaching ICT in UK boarding schools, four of which were spent as a Housemaster, leading to a professional qualification in boarding education. I now lead the ICT department at my current school.

During a recent conversation with Terry Freedman, I mentioned how I felt that my experiences as a coal miner were extremely valuable to me in my teaching career. Consequently, I sit here at the behest of Terry reflecting upon my experiences, and how they provided an invaluable training ground for the second career that lay in wait for me.

I embarked upon an apprenticeship with British Coal at the tender age of 17. The aim of the four year apprenticeship was to groom me for a senior managerial position underground at a colliery in the Lancashire coalfield. What followed was an amazing journey of personal development and academic rigour that provided me with hands on experience and professional qualifications to successfully complete the apprenticeship.

Shift in attitude towards academic study

The early part of my apprenticeship was divided into a two day attendance at a Technical College and three days at British Coal's training centre in Lancashire. It was my experience at the Technical College that reignited my appetite for learning. I had a variety of good quality lecturers, with different styles and personalities who certainly whet my appetite for learning. Combined with the practical experiences of the training instructors at the training centre, learning became more enjoyable and rewarding, as opposed to the compulsory experience called school.

The importance of character and personality within the classroom environment I suppose was instilled in me during the early stages of my apprenticeship and throughout the remainder of the course. As a result, I have always attempted to bring a little humour and plenty of enthusiasm to my lessons, to engage my students.

No man is an island!

With my training at the centre completed, I was ferried to Bold Colliery, in Lancashire, which employed over 1,000 men. When not attending college, I was allocated to the many specialised departments at the colliery to gain experience of how their particular roles contributed to the successful excavation of coal deep underground. Such an experience reinforced the concept of team work and cooperation to succeed in

a common aim. Such a concept had a major influence in my role as Housemaster, tutor and boarding tutor. No man is an island and you are only as strong as your weakest link!

Laughter in the face of adversity

With my apprenticeship complete, I had to repay the considerable financial investment from British Coal. I undertook employment at the coal face and finished my career working as a tunneller, two of the most dangerous and physically demanding roles at a colliery. There were times when the going became extremely demanding, both physically and mentally, and we were often expected to work long hours to meet production and tunnelling targets. Throughout it all, laughter played a major contributing factor to getting the job done! Whether it was making light of a difficult situation, jokes or playing pranks on each other, such humour often took our minds off the arduous task ahead. The sense of camaraderie is something that schools would benefit from. Keeping a good sense of humour and not taking life too seriously underpins all that I now do. I have my hard working colleagues to thank for this attitude.



Take me to your leader!

I was fortunate enough to work for some amazing inspirational leaders of men. For such leaders to bring out the best in their men, often in the most hazardous of conditions, was testimony to their skills and experience. They knew the men in their team, their strengths and weaknesses and what made them tick. Subsequently, they used a variety of tactics and approaches to get the best out of their team. After all, the team's financial bonuses depended upon every man performing to their optimum capacity. The respect that such leaders commanded from their men was truly rousing. Remember my previous comment about a team only being as strong as its weakest link? I remember vividly a verbal criticism levelled at the perceived incompetent management techniques at a school where I worked being compared to that of "lions being led by donkeys"! Such a comparison would never be used or indeed justified within a coal mining environment. Virtues that I brought with me to teaching from such experiences were respect, leading by example, straight talking and honesty.

1984!

No, not George Orwell, but the famous Miners' Strike. It is difficult for me not to become too emotional recalling my experiences of the twelve months that I stood shoulder to shoulder with my colleagues during the 1984 miner's strike. I must have witnessed almost every human emotion during this most difficult time. Integrity, a sense of social justice, principles, unity and comradeship are my memories of that particular aspect of my time as a coal miner. Hardly characteristics that you would attribute to belonging to the "enemy within", as described by a certain politician during that time!



Coal-mining and teaching

Thinking more specifically to how my experiences relate to my role as ICT teacher, I suppose that the most relevant one is that of community and networking. It was usual for communities to be created around collieries, with the special camaraderie found underground extending to such communities. There was a sense of belonging. Could such

camaraderie be recreated within an online community so prevalent today? Could a coal mining community perhaps be recreated by second life? Now there's a thought!

Through my further study at University, I have used extensive social networking tools such as First Class. Whilst such software was able to create a sense of belonging and teamwork, with the capability to share thoughts and ideas, I do not think that it could recreate a twelve hour stint in a coal mining environment! However, I was certainly more appreciative of "virtual communities".

Even though my coal mining career finished in 1990, technology was used to good effect underground. For example, we used laser beams to keep our tunnels straight! Communications between the underground coal faces was a testimony to the communications technology available at the time. I do wonder how today technology would be used today to improve safety and coal production underground

One trait that has served me well is the ability to improvise! Very often underground, we would be required to complete a task whilst waiting for the appropriate tools to arrive at the job. Occasionally, there would be times when we had to stop the coal cutter because there was a problem with the conveyor belts. Yet, we could not sit idle. There would be other areas of our roles that we could pay attention to. This is where good leadership comes in! Improvisation plays such a vital role in the life of an ICT teacher. What do we do when our system is down? We improvise!

My mental attitude towards teaching has been shaped by my time spent underground. I am much more appreciative of the clean, bright, air conditioned environment that I now call my work place. Eating my lunch in a pleasant refectory is something new to me. As well as the bliss of being able to use a toilet during my working day.....

I feel blessed to have worked in what was once regarded as the flagship of British Industry. Coal mining is a skilled operation that produces a rare breed of person. It is hard for people not to have experienced the vibrant life of a community that exists beneath our feet 24/7, to appreciate the amount of pride and respect that I have for my colleagues during my ten years spent underground.

Finally, I remember reading a comment made by one of my referees for a job application. When referring to my personal characteristics, he stated that "as a person who cut his teeth at the coal face, you can rest assured that he will not have any discipline problems in the classroom".

Nigel has taught since 1999 in the UK's independent schools sector. He is currently Head of ICT at Sutton Valence School, in Kent, England, a member of the British Computer Society (BCS), a member of the BCS Education and Training Expert Panel and an external examiner for the OCR Awarding Body.

K12 Online 2007: Off to a flying start



Terry Freedman evaluates the first five presentations.

Before starting I ought to make a few things clear. I have no patience. I admit it. In England, the BBC News is always preceded by a countdown lasting 60 seconds to the accompaniment of dynamic-sounding music. As far as I'm concerned, that is wasting a total of 6 hours a year, by my calculations. That's almost a day's work, or 4 articles, or 6 pretty decent TV shows, 12 comedies or quiz shows or 2 gripping films. I don't need to have my time wasted by the BBC: I can think of more creative ways of doing so myself.

So it will come as no surprise to learn that, when watching these and other presentations, I sit with one hand grasping the remote, fingers twitching, hovering over the fast-forward button. If the presentation doesn't grab me in the first minute, I'm a lost cause – but I always try to persevere in order to give the presenter the benefit of the doubt, and myself the chance to pick up a few gems.

Also, of course, the way to engage with these presentations is not the way one might engage with a TV programme. I should recommend downloading one of the rubrics mentioned earlier (<http://k12onlinecredit.wikispaces.com/rubrics>) and spending time looking through the questions and doing some advance thinking:

1. What do I **hope** to get out of this?
2. What do I **think** I may get out of this?
3. Will I be able to find ways to bring some of this into my practice?



Also, I would thoroughly recommend sitting down with at least one other person. We learn from thinking, bouncing ideas off others, finding out how they see it, perhaps from a different perspective. In my case, Elaine and I watched these together and discussed them as we went. Well, as far as one can when, in some cases, only a few minutes were viewed.

Another point to note is that several people involved with the conference have contributed to the Coming of Age e-book. For example, David Warlick, Clarence Fisher, and three out of four of the conference organisers. I mention this only in case anyone thinks that gives me a vested interest in some way. It doesn't.

The last thing I ought to point out is that for some reason, no doubt the onset of some sort of collective insanity, the people who evaluated proposals for the conference rejected mine. All three of them. So I am conscious that if I start to come down hard, some might say it's a case of sour grapes. Nothing could be further from the truth. I did object to certain aspects of the selection process, but I expressed my views privately and undertook to send Darren Kuropatwa, one of the organisers, some of my thoughts in more detail once the conference is over. As far as the final selection is concerned, it looks exciting, and I'm looking forward to seeing some people I have never heard of before.

The pre-conference keynote

The conference began with a pre-conference (what a strange concept!) address by David Warlick. Now, I feel a little churlish in saying so, but I didn't find this as engaging as the Warlick keynote of 2006. I suppose I didn't think he was saying anything very new. Nevertheless, it is still worth watching. First of all, he makes the effort. He gets out and about, and draws some interesting analogies.

Also, like last year, I personally found it interesting to see where he works and where he goes for his Starbucks fix.

Furthermore, he is engaging. Unlike some presenters, he doesn't drone the audience into submission. He keeps you alert.

And, of course, what he has to say is only "not new" if you have heard it before. If you have it will, by definition, be new.

Like many other presentations, this keynote is iPod-ready, and you can download it from here: <http://k12onlineconference.org/?p=144>.

The theme of the conference is "Playing with boundaries". Warlick demonstrates that the traditional boundaries are no longer there. But everyone needs boundaries. It sounds like a dilemma, but to an extent it's now possible to create our own.

There are some aspects of his talk that would stand being shown to students. I was struck in particular by the fact that he never imagined he would do anything except teach. Neither did I when I entered teaching, over 30 years ago. I've reinvented myself, as has Warlick, as has, to take what is perhaps an even more dramatic example, Nigel Willetts, who describes in this newsletter how he used to be a coal miner.

So, there's a lot to reflect on, and much to keep coming back to.

A trip to China

Silvia Tolisano's "Travel through Space and Time" (<http://k12onlineconference.org/?p=151>) seems promising: "The presenter took over 400 students and their teachers along...virtually...as she travelled physically half way around the world to China. Learn how, through the power of web 2.0 tools, she seamlessly combined a blog, podcasts, photos and videos to educate students about cultural universals, while addressing curriculum standards."

I have only listened to it a few minutes so far, because I found the presenter's voice somewhat monotonous. I did tell you I have no patience. Anyway, it was late, and I was tired, so I will give it another whirl soon. The subject matter seems worth it, and if you're going to try something like yourself it is always good to learn from other people's mistakes: it leaves room for you to make your own, different, ones! Which is, of course, what learning is all about.

It's for you

"Cell phones as classroom learning tools", by Liz Kolb, is something which more people need to be looking at. Such a pity that Ms Kolb didn't cite my article on the subject, published in September 2006 in Technology & Learning, from where it was picked up by Podcast for Teachers. The article is here if you'd like to read it: <http://www.techlearning.com/showArticle.php?articleID=192700197>. In fact, it's there even if you would **not** like to read it.

Anyway, the content of this is great, but after a few minutes I gave up watching because it seemed to consist, visually, of nothing more than slide after slide crammed full of bullet points. I will return to it, but I may select the audio format next time.

The coolest of tools

On to Alan Levine and friends, and "More than cool tools". Now, I really found this difficult to listen to. Some time was wasted, in my opinion, by bits of personal biography at the start. I always apply the "so what?" test: how does X benefit me in terms of the current activity? In this case, the answer was "Who knows?". But I endured that, and the tendency of one of the presenters – Alan Levine himself I think – to end bits of the presentation with a kind of mumble of diminishing volume.

However, once we started to look at the tools, I learnt quite a bit, and have made several notes to self about stuff to explore. I will be returning to the video and attempting to reach the end, because I think it's worth it. You may also be interested in Levine's exploration of 50 cool tools:, which is such a brilliant idea that I can't stop kicking myself for not having thought of it first. Oh well. Check them out here: <http://cogdogroo.wikispaces.com/50+Ways> and <http://cogdogroo.wikispaces.com/StoryTools>.

Where do you think you are?

The last one we watched was Clarence Fisher's "Classroom 2.0 or You live where?". Brilliant. It was interesting, engaging, clear, thought-provoking – we didn't agree with everything he said but that is part of what made it interesting. And humble: Fisher is actually the **only** person I've heard thanking the suppliers of tools like Flickr for making it possible for us to effectively get rid of the classroom walls.

I also love the way Fisher starts as he means his students to carry on. None of this stuff like "In term 3, after the exams, we will do X", so that X is seen as a kind of treat and not work at all. In Fisher's classroom, an international Skypecast has been arranged for the third day into the term. Good for him. And his students. And well done to the powers-that-be in the school and the School District that enables this sort of stuff to be done.

Concluding remarks

I will be looking at the other presentations in due course. Although I have been somewhat unkind about some of them, I do admire the dedication of the people concerned. It's nice to know there are plenty of people out there willing to share their knowledge and time with others. For that reason alone I will be revisiting the presentations, even those I didn't like much, because it would be disrespectful not to. And if I change my mind about some of them, I'll eat humble pie and say so.

Also, bear in mind that the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts. This conference is, in terms of the amount of knowledge being gathered in one place, a fantastic resource. Hats off to the people behind it: Wes Fryer (<http://www.speedofcreativity.org>), Lani Ritter Hall (<http://possibilitiesabound.blogspot.com/>), Darren Kuropatwa (<http://adifference.blogspot.com/>) and Sheryl Nusbaum-Beach (<http://21stcenturylearning.typepad.com/blog/>).

I asked Sheryl (via Skype) why anyone should bother to “attend” the conference. Her response was:

“To build their own personal learning networks.”

Now that’s as good a reason as any.

Next issue

Amongst other things we look at a new book on assessment for learning in Information and Communication Technology, the all-purpose lecture, and the NECC 2007 Conference. If you have a burning desire to contribute, please get in touch: terry@ictineducation.org, with the subject header “Contribute”.

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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