
BOOK REVIEW

Learning to Teach Using ICT in the Secondary School. A Companion to School Experience

Learning to teach using ICT in the secondary school. A companion to school experience, Marilyn Leask & Norbert Pachler (eds.), 3rd edition, Abingdon: Routledge, 260 pages, 2014, ISBN: 9780415516525

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First published in 1999, this is the latest edition of a text-book in the wide ranging “companion to school experience” in Routledge’s *Learning to Teach Subjects in the Secondary School Series*. This is designed for teachers in training or involved in developing their technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) in a UK context. The vast majority of contributions are from experts with a teaching and research background at senior university level. A number of chapters are jointly constructed with senior teachers and educational and learning experts. This diversity, together with the relevant case studies that inform each chapter, makes it an appealing and accessible text for both novice and more experienced readers.

Each chapter provides a distillation of current theory, research and practice into teaching and learning with ICT, and includes a judicious selection of web-based resources, suggestions for further reading and a comprehensive reference section with a range of sources. The case studies, ‘objectives’ and tasks that are included throughout might support both self-directed learning (e.g. more experienced subject teachers getting to grips with developments in pedagogy and ICT) as well as more formal learning as part of a teacher education, training or professional development course. The exact current status of both the term ICT as well as its place in the secondary school curriculum is being challenged. Michael Gove initiated a consultation into an order to replace the subject of ICT in the National Curriculum with Computing. This extract from the Government’s response report has not been updated since its 2013 publication date;

“The Government, supported by a wide range of industry stakeholders and experts, believes that ICT as a subject name carries strong negative connotations of a dated and unchallenging curriculum that does not properly serve the needs and ambitions of pupils. Changing the subject name of ICT to computing will not only improve the status of the

subject but also more accurately reflect the breadth of content included in the draft programmes of study.”

Leaving aside the question of whether this text-book might smell any less sweet for using the term ICT, the subjects covered here include a wide range. Topics covered in the 17 chapters and ‘underpinned by the latest theory and research’ include theories of learning with ICT, effective pedagogy for ICT, linking home and school, special needs & e-inclusion, e-Safety and tools for professional development. The topics not present in the 2006 edition have resulted in 5 ‘brand new’ chapters for this updated version. These encompass mobile learning, literacy & new literacies, multi-play digital games & on-line virtual worlds, supporting international citizenship through ICT and tools for administration & monitoring of pupil progress. The global dimension appears to be one of the newer focuses.

One of the original, but updated chapters, Pedagogy with ICT, outlines decision-making during teaching and planning challenges in this area for the student teacher, who will be simultaneously involved in the observation of and reflection about their own and others’ teaching with ICT. This chapter includes practical ideas and strategies for approaching online research with useful ‘future-proofing’ pointers towards areas of developing research that are seen to be relatively fast paced, with an international outlook. The book is worth buying for this chapter alone, if working in teacher development or training in this educational context (secondary, face to face). The pedagogy, and not the technology, is the unifying principle echoed by all contributors.

Another of the original chapters (7; Using the interactive whiteboard to support dialogue in the whole class context) highlights the disconnect which currently exists between some national examinations and policy strategies and others (e.g. inspection), here, in relation to dialogic pedagogy (p 102). This charge might equally well apply to pedagogic approaches referred to in other chapters, in some regions and schools challenged by current curriculum, assessment and testing or national requirements. Discussion around, and inclusion of a range of case

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studies or tasks focusing on more recent school initiatives (in the UK) such as the whole school adoption of class sets of tablets, or BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) are somewhat underrepresented overall.

One of the new chapters (mobile learning chapter 13) is perhaps not quite as up to date, cohesive or comprehensive as some other sections, which may reflect the speed and pace of change in this area of ICT, the number of authors involved (4), and the gap between the writing and publication of this book. The case study featured, (with accompanying tasks on p106–7) are based around the use of iPad and IOS apps, a bias perhaps to the US context of use, where it such initiatives have been established for longer. That said, this will not make the reader owner of other makes of mobile devices (or none) feel included. A checklist provided for evaluating apps for educational use (p199) is a useful starting point. However, there are some gaps around concerns such as the use of different devices and operating systems, connectivity, and the use of personal data. A discussion around the “uninformed consent” sought by app and device developers (typically 20 plus screens of Terms and Conditions in obfuscatory language to read and agree to) is needed in this context, and I would add that expecting good educational apps to be “free” is perhaps undesirable as well as unrealistic. Discussion around and reference to the use of native mobile device features (such as the image/sound recording) is a slightly surprising absence from this particular chapter.

One way in which readers might use this textbook would be to create a personal development portfolio (e.g. as a complement to teaching practice). This could be scaffolded by the selection of relevant tasks chosen from different chapters, which largely prompt reflection in a meaningful way, largely based on planned or future practice. One example (p51) asks the training teacher reader to research their placement school’s policy on the use of social media in relation to staff use, and to identify and critically reflect on what they discover about their own and colleagues’ digital footprints. This feeds into the design of an action plan, with a timeline, “on the things you need to do to create a digital identity that is appropriate for your role as an educator” as well as “selecting appropriate tools” for this job.

My initial motivation for reading this book in 2014 was to try out some of the tasks and ideas during EU-funded Comenius CPD (continuing professional development) courses, for use in sessions with English and Modern Foreign Language teachers and a CLIL implementation course in a secondary school in Croatia. I found that the tasks implied a level of familiarity with the affordances of participants’ own devices (where they actually each owned, or had borrowed one) that simply did not exist for the vast majority of my particular groups (crucially, they were often hyper aware that many of their students owned such devices). The pedagogy featured in this book implies teacher ownership of a Wi-Fi enabled smartphone or tablet and access to an interactive whiteboard, as well

as the use of a laptop or desktop. Many teachers of ICT in the UK are not equipped by their schools with mobile devices, and most are prohibited from using their own devices in class. There is also an assumption that teachers will have the necessary technical expertise to engage fully with tasks, which may well be the case in the context of most UK secondary teaching, but unfortunately is not the case in all (or, arguably, maybe the majority of) other High School teacher environments. The use of this textbook in international contexts will mean a cautious consideration of the available technology, as well as the pedagogical assumptions.

I feel that this book might play a very useful role in helping to inform and provoke debate, critical reflection and practice among and between stakeholders, (including school leaders, exam boards, educational materials developers) and more experienced teachers as well as those learner teachers with subject specific considerations it is aimed at. In 2015 I will be drawing upon ideas contained within while preparing to work with “Effective Use of Technology in the classroom” courses, for a range of EU teacher groups of all subjects at secondary and primary levels. This is just one case where this publication may be used outside the group for which it is intended, (noting the earlier caveat regarding prevailing pedagogy and availability of technologies locally). I would highly recommend the book to anyone involved in the professional development of teachers in a (mainly) face-to-face environment. It is also worth consulting as a repository of information about current practice and resources for educators in this educational context.

It is worth remembering that in England, (though not yet Scotland Wales or Northern Ireland) schools are being encouraged to retain their pupils for a further 2 years; the requirement to attend some form of education until the age of 18 is a recent one. Effective pedagogy along with a developing range of digital literacies and competencies is now more than ever before, a requirement for all teachers, as well as their pupils. This volume is a timely and practical addition for teacher educators, and perhaps the next edition will be in the form of an e-book with navigable links to web-based resources and multimedia to accompany the case studies. Video, in particular, would enhance the processes involved to gain further understanding into the why (and address the how) of teaching with ICT.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Reference

School leaving age 2013 Consultation on the Order for replacing the subject of ICT with computing . Available at <https://www.gov.uk/know-when-you-can-leave-school>, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205921/ICT_to_computing_consultation_report.pdf

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