Another bumper edition!

Dear

I hope you enjoy this issue. Here's what's in it:

- Website and personal news (1 minute read)
- Blast from the past (4 minute read)
- Conferences (2 minute read)
- Teacher workload (3 minute read)
- Readers' writes (2 minute read)
- Useful tech (4 minute read)
- Focus: Privacy (1 minute read)
- Prizewinners (2 minute read)
- Prize draw (1 minute read)
- New area for subscribers (1 minute read)
- Beta readers (1 minute read)
- 7 Articles you may have missed (2 minute read)
- What I've been reading: Closing the Vocabulary Gap, by Alex Quigley (6 minute read).
- Even more reading!
Blast from the past: the homework excuse management system

One year, I managed to ensure that nobody handed in their homework late, or not at all. I did so by the simple expedient of handing out a list of excuses at the start of the year, and telling my classes that if they didn't feel like doing their homework on occasion to simply let me know which number excuse they'd like to use. I would note that down in my markbook, and they needed to keep a record as well so that they didn't inadvertently use the same excuse twice.

The ruse worked so well that I thought I'd digitise the system. The screenshot shows the Excel spreadsheet version. If an excuse was entered twice for the same pupil, a sad face would appear.

Behind the scenes were some quite complicated formulae, which if anyone is interested I'd be happy to share (if I can find them). The astonishing thing was that I was able to make the spreadsheet work without using any programming (in those days I employed Visual Basic for Applications a lot).

Somehow or other, HEMS came to the attention of an education writer for The Guardian newspaper. He wrote something along the lines of:
"And who can doubt the brilliance of the Homework Excuse Management System?!

Very nice, to be sure, but there's a larger point to be made here I think. I developed HEMS for a laugh really. I know it's *de rigeur* to encourage pupils to find worthy problems that need sorting out, and to get on with sorting them (I advocate that myself). But in my opinion there's nothing wrong in creating or finding frivolous 'problems' that challenge pupils to really think about how best to solve them.

In the case of the HEMS, I *could* have used VBA, but I wanted to see if I could achieve the same result with no programming at all. It was a good exercise, because it really helped me to learn about a few kinds of formula and functions that I hadn't encountered before, and required a fair bit of research at the time.

Another advantage was that once I had worked out how to make the HEMS work, I was able to adapt and apply the formulae I used to other, more serious problems.

A great illustration of the fact that problem-solving, no matter how unimportant the problem, is never wasted.

**Newsletter and personal news**

Here's a quick update. First, I've changed the company I use for sending out this newsletter. I had been using Aweber, now I'm using Mailerlite. Aweber is great, but Mailerlite has some really interesting features and is based in the EU.

The only thing Mailerlite doesn't have is an online archive, which means I'll have to create my own. So I have a question for you, which will take just a few seconds to answer: should the archive of past newsletters be available on open access, or to subscribers only, that is behind a password? I've set up a poll for this. It has one question with two options as answers. You can leave a comment too if you wish. Although there's a box labelled 'Name', you don't have to fill it in. I should tell you that the
poll collects respondents’ IP addresses, which it uses to check for multiple answers, but I don't analyse them, and in fact I delete them from the spreadsheet before scrutinising the results. You can access the poll by clicking here:

Should the archive of Digital Education newsletters be openly available or not?

Thanks to a group of great volunteers who helped me test Mailerlite before making the switch:

Anna
Bill
Carol
Charlie
Gavin
Mark
Mike
Rachel
VDG

Secondly, I’m still adding bits to my privacy policy, the latest update having been made a couple of days ago. If you want the gist, in plain English rather than legalese, read the first part of the policy. If you’d prefer it in a single sentence, then here it is: I respect your data I and don’t send you targeted advertising or marketing. Don’t forget that you can unsubscribe to this newsletter at any time simply by clicking on the Unsubscribe link at the bottom.

Thirdly, I was invited to teach a one day course on assessment in Computing. Unfortunately, I had to decline because the dates didn’t work for me. I hate turning work down, but what can you do?
2018 ITTE/Mirandanet Conference: Raising aspirations for digital education

The programme looks good. For example, there is a debate about enhancing learning and teaching with technology, which I’ll be taking part in. Also, there’s a conversation between stakeholders about ed tech policy. It takes place in Winchester, UK, on 7th/8th June. http://itte.org.uk/wp/conference-2018-winchester/. For what it’s worth, I have an interest in this from the point of view that I’m on the ITTE Committee. ITTE, by the way, is the Association for IT in Teacher Education.

Society of Authors’ Educational Writers Group Spring Seminar

This takes place in London, UK, on 9th June, and promises to be an informative day. There are sessions on English Language Teaching, using textbooks in classrooms, generating income online and optimising the author-editor relationship. Details here: https://www.societyofauthors.org/Events/Events/EWG-Seminar-Day. Another disclosure: I’m on the EWG committee — but I’d promote the seminar day anyway. They are always worth attending.

2018 National Computing at Schools Conference for Teachers of Computing


ISTE 2018 Conference

24th-27th June, Chicago. Nearly 1200 sessions to choose from. Fortunately, you can filter the programme by subject, format, day and time. I’ve been to two ISTE conferences, and they were brilliant. https://conference.iste.org/2018/

ResearchEd Conference

This takes place on 8th September in London, UK. As always, it is a
packed agenda. This is a conference at which research and myth-busting are very much on the agenda. Here's the link: https://researched.org.uk/event/researched-2018-national-conference/.

If none of these conferences are suitable, for example not in your country of residence or at an inconvenient time of year, have a look at Clayton R. Wright's huge list of conferences coming up all over the world.

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Teacher workload

I'm sure we all have horror stories about the things teachers have to do which add to their workload but add little or nothing to pupils’ learning.

For example, despite the fact that in England we no longer have ‘Levels’, some headteachers insist on teachers assigning them. This either adds to the workload or results in teachers gaming the system. One teacher told me that he teaches the hard topics at the beginning of the year, and the easy ones at the end of the year, so the grades look like they're going up. My solution? I came up with several: 6 Ways to respond to requests for pointless data. Disclaimer: use these at your own risk.

Another example: I overheard someone on a train telling her friend that her headteacher asks for huge amounts of data that she is almost certain he doesn't look at. As it happens, I had a lecturer at university who I was also sure never read the essays, because no matter what rubbish I wrote he would always award a comment of “V.Good” against each paragraph, and a grade of B++ at the end. I decided to test my theory by inserting a paragraph along the lines of:

“You’re not really reading this, are you? You’re just putting a tick and a “VG” against each paragraph regardless of its content.”

Sure enough, that merited a “VG” and a B++.

If I worked in a school and thought my headteacher never read the data I gave her or him, I'd use one of the methods referred to in the article
And then there’s so-called deep marking. You mark a piece of work, give it to the pupil, who responds to your comments, and then you respond back. Personally I don’t see why the process should stop there: it could go on ad infinitum.

One more example. One teacher I know says that in his school, the headteacher has banned the use of textbooks, so that teachers create all their materials themselves. As if that wasn’t bad enough, they also have to create their worksheets in Quark, a high-end desktop publishing program used for producing commercial magazines. And in case that isn’t enough, the staff don’t get any training on how to use Quark.

I recently had the opportunity to talk about workload with Damian Hinds, the Education Secretary in England. I asked him what he thought of the idea of headteachers being held to account by Ofsted, through the simple device of being asked what research they have based their demands on, or what research they are undertaking to find out if their approach actually benefits pupils, and what the cost is in terms of teacher retention (or lack of it). His answer was that anything like that would in itself add to workload. Well, maybe, but surely it would only add to the headteacher’s workload. I don’t mind people having per theories — I have a few myself — but they should at least be prepared to evaluate whether their theories work in practice, and if they do, whether the benefits exceed the costs. That’s not too much to ask, is it?

Related:

**Do we really need more innovation?**

Also related:

My diatribes against the idea of marking with different coloured pens. There's a video (see below), and an article that mentions the report I referred to in the video: [Marking with different coloured pens? Don't make me laugh.](#) I also wrote an article called [My 10 point marking strategy.](#)
Readers' writes

Giles Hill sent me an email with the subject line, “Greetings from a fellow mud-slinger”. He wrote:

“Just been perusing your website and enjoying the fact that your views appear very much aligned with my own. Train-wreck of the new Computing curriculum, 1:1 schemes in schools going down the toilet. It's rather reassuring to hear my views expressed from elsewhere.

I'm on the Primary School teaching and training trail down here in Cornwall with this:

http://www.aspireacademytrust.org/494/digital-learning-cornwall-1

Yet I retain links with publishing up in London, and just wrote this:

https://www.theregister.co.uk/2018/03/30/apple_ipad_education/

That article is well-worth reading. It discusses Apple’s missed opportunities to make the iPad really usable as a school tool from an administrative/management point of view.

I also received a nice comment from Helen Padgett, PhD. Helen is an
ISTE Past President. ISTE is the International Society for Technology in Education. Helen wrote:

“I’m an avid reader of your newsletter and often pick up ideas about books and strategies that further inform and inspire our work.”

Thanks, Helen!

Incidentally, you can find more testimonials, about the newsletter and my work, on the Testimonials page of the ICT & Computing in Education website.

Useful tech

Google sheets

I use Google Sheets a lot, so I was pleased to see that there is now an option to record macros. In case you’re not familiar with the term, a macro is a small program that carries out a number of steps. You can create a macro by recording it, or by writing a script for it. The Script Editor may be found in the Tools menu, just above Macros.

I’ve been putting the Macros function through its paces, and I’ve discovered a couple of things.

First, the default option is to record a macro using an absolute cell reference. Doing so would mean that the macro would work only in the cell or cells you’ve carried out the operations in, not any others. For example, if you record a macro in which you change the colour of row 10, when you run the macro it will only work on row 10. So you have to change the setting to relative cell reference if you wish to use it on any row in future.

Secondly, the macros are tied to the sheet in which you record them. This is a big drawback, and not as good as Excel, which lets you store macros in a general worksheet that all worksheets have access to.

Thirdly, if you use the Script Editor to look at the code behind your
recorded macro, you will see that the structure is very similar to that of Visual Basic for Applications. Analysing the code is a good way to learn how it works, and to tweak it.

For further information, visit the guide at https://developers.google.com/apps-script/guides/sheets/macros.

**Online word counter**

I sometimes need an online word counter. I know that all the word processors I use — Word, Google Docs and Pages — have a word counter. I also created a souped-up word count macro myself for Word. But it’s still quite handy having a word counter online for those times when I’m using an application that does not have a word counter (like some notepad applications I occasionally use).

I’ve discovered a nice word counter here: https://smallseotools.com/word-count-checker/. This is a word counter on steroids. It includes data such as reading time, unique words used, and other stuff. Well worth a look, methinks.

**Blue ray glasses**

I recently went for my annual eye test, and was delighted to learn that my eyesight has improved! I’ve always maintained that if you rise at 5 am each morning, do a ten mile run, eat a frugal breakfast of fruit and grains, and go to bed at 7 pm, everything is bound to improve, including your eyesight. So I’m not sure what the explanation is in my case, because I don’t do any of those things.

Anyway, I decided that I might as well buy myself some reading glasses (the ones I use most of the time are varifocals). One of the options on offer was blue-ray lenses. I assumed they were designed to enhance one’s viewing pleasure while watching movies on Blu Ray disks, but I was wrong. They have a slight yellow tint (see the picture above) to counteract the effects of blue light from digital screens. They seem pretty good in that regard, although I still think closing down all such devices by 7 pm is a good idea.

**Automation comes to Google forms**
If you like using Google forms for creating tests for your pupils, I think you’ll like the latest developments. They include autocomplete for questions, and automated marking. More information here:

6 ways Quizzes in Google Forms are getting smarter

Focus: Privacy

This issue’s special focus is Privacy. Here are a few articles and tips you may find useful in the light of the recent scandal involving Facebook and Cambridge Analytica.


The Atlantic’s take on it: This story is so much bigger than Facebook. “Data misuse is a feature, not a bug.”

Also, the article I wrote before the Facebook news came out: Focus on... Surveillance, in the last issue of Digital Education. I have republished the article here:

https://www.ictineducation.org/digedsupplement#/focus-on-surveillance/

Practical steps you can take:

- Find out what Facebook thinks it knows about you, using this Chrome extension.
- Read How to protect yourself and your friends on Facebook, in the New York Times.
- Use a web browser that protects your privacy:
  - Epic
  - duckduckgogo
- Install the browser extension Ghostery, which gives you control over the data collection trackers on the websites you visit.

See also this article about who is tracking you.
Prizewinners

In the last issue of Digital Education I ran a draw for two books. Here are the winners:

Chris Sear, Deputy Director of ICT, bagged a copy of the Official MicroBit Users Guide. (To read my review of it, download this issue of Teach Secondary: https://www.teachwire.net/free-copy/secondary/digital.)

Chris says:

“I am delighted to have won a copy of the Official MicroBit Users Guide as I am currently using MicroBit’s with my Year 7 classes and up until now have limited myself to the Block Editor. I intend to use the arrival of my new book to explore the Python and JavaScript programming options and to begin using them as well. The reviews for the book which I have read are very favourable and I am sure that I will get a lot out of it which I will be able to use to inform and improve my teaching.”

Martyn Wilson, IB Theory of Knowledge co-ordinator and Teacher of Computing, won a copy of How to Fix the Future.

Martyn says:

“I’m looking forward to reading it because I intend to live in the future - for a few more years, at least.”

I will be reviewing that book soon. In the meantime, why not enter this issue’s prize draw? See the next item for details.

Prize draw!

The prize on offer this week is Alex Quigley’s Closing the Vocabulary Gap. That may not sound like it has much to do with teachers of Computing, but it does, at least in my opinion. I’ve written a longish review of it (see below, under What I’ve been reading, for the url).
To enter, please complete this entry form:


The closing date is midnight GMT on 28th May 2018, as shown in the countdown timer below.

In the meantime, if you’re interested in how we run competitions, and how we protect your data while doing so, you can download a pdf describing the process by clicking on this link:


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**New area for subscribers**

I’ve created a new, exclusive, area for subscribers. There’s not much there at the moment, but give me a chance: I’ve only just created it! The url is [www.ictineducation.org/digedsupplement](http://www.ictineducation.org/digedsupplement). You’ll find the password at the top of [www.ictineducation.org/digitaled-subscribers](http://www.ictineducation.org/digitaled-subscribers). Erm, you’ll need a password for that too, which you’ll find in the Welcome email that you will have received on subscribing, and which I sent out recently again to everyone on the list.

Incidentally, I recently uploaded to that page an infographic I created on how to evaluate research reports. It’s in pdf format. I hope you find it useful.

The recession I started the new area is that many of the subscribers who responded to my survey about format indicated that they would prefer shorter articles with links to longer ones if they wanted to read further. Although I already created articles for subscribers, that area is set up slightly differently. The new one has an automatically created index as the front page. It’s more visually attractive too.
Beta readers

I dipped my toe in the water of asking for beta or advance readers in the last issue of Digital Education. Several people said they would, and I’ve had some fantastic feedback and suggestions. I’ll be sending those readers a copy of the finished product in their preferred format.

If you’d like to be a beta reader, please fill in your details in the prize draw entry form. I used the same form to save you from having to enter your details twice. You can become a bat reader without entering the prize draw, and vice versa. I’m currently working on another book as well as beefing up the Education Conferences book. After that, I have a few other books in various stages of completion.

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7 articles you may have missed

As a bit of a wordsmith myself (you may have noticed), I love the idea of pupils creating newspapers or magazines. Fortunately, Shelly Terrell has collated 9 tools for doing just that:

9 web tools for creating digital magazines.

I always carry a notebook and pen with me wherever I go, but I’m not as ‘old school’ as you might think. In Digital Note-taking I look at three different devices for making notes. They bring the notebook and pencil into the 21st century!

If part of your job involves encouraging teachers of other subjects to use technology, you’ll like this article:

Some of the best ed tech websites for teachers and educators.

It lists 32 websites, for teachers of mathematics, science, social studies, history and other subjects.

Should multi-academy trusts be centralised or delegated in terms of their schools’ autonomy? The answer partially depends on what a recent report called ‘break points’. Read about it here:
MATs: Centralised or delegated?

During the week I’m going to be reading out an article of mine at a literary event. The article is about a deputy headteacher of the secondary (high) school I attended. More details here:

I’ll probably regret this, but...

In my review of Alex Quigley’s book Closing the Vocabulary Gap (see below), I mention the ‘30 million word gap’ that becomes apparent by age three. It seems that a similar gap may be found when it comes to being digitally proficient:

“The bit of being digital that is set in stone from age three is the absolute awareness that being connected aids their learning, and that connectedness is highly visual and aural, as well as being textual, and includes connection with people as well as information. They have probably also internalised that they can interact creatively with the digital environment and everything in it, to aid their learning.”

From Digitally connected and proficient at three, by Mal Lee and Roger Broadie.

Fascinating stuff, and somewhat reminiscent of Marc Prensky’s idea of digital natives, at least superficially. My understanding of the article is not that 3-year old children are proficient in using ‘the digital’, but that they are already acclimatised to it and regard it as a natural way to undertake their learning.

Steve Wheeler, aka @timbuckteeth, has done the odd speaking gig in his time (250 events in 35 countries over 18 years, apparently). He’s given his top tips for a good talk:

12 tips for great speaking.

Well worth a read. I do everything on his list except share my slides through Slideshare. I’ve tended to make them available through my own website, but thinking about it, Slideshare makes a lot of sense.

What I’ve been reading
Closing the Vocabulary Gap

This book by Alex Quigley is very handy, and I’d recommend it. You’ll find my review of it here:


More book reviews next time. If you simply cannot wait until the next issue comes out, please visit the ICT and Computing in Education website for more great content.

To ensure that you don't miss it, and also that you don't miss out on the incredible freebies for subscribers, make sure you subscribe to Digital Education in your own right! Here’s the place to make that happen:

Subscribe to Digital Education.

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Even more reading!

As we're coming up to half-term in some parts of the world, here is some extra reading for you, from the ICT & Computing in Education website:

**Raising aspirations for digital education**

Join us for what is looking to be a great conference: discussion, debate, disagreement — what more could one want?! Read on for details.

Read the full article

News & views, Professional development • 2018-05-21 • Terry Freedman

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What is shadow IT, and is it a problem or something to embrace?
Shadow IT is the name given to the situation in which employees use their preferred software rather than the officially-approved software. This article is written from a business perspective, but I've included it here because I think it highlights many of the issues involved, and provides an interesting perspective. Much of what is said could be applied to an educational environment.

**Automated assessment: a blast from the past**

There's nothing wrong with automated marking. Indeed, there is much to commend it.

**Education technology predictions for 2018: how are we doing so far?**

Just before Bett 2018 I invited ed tech companies to suggest what was likely to be on the horizon in 2018, and what the main challenges would be. Now that we're over three months into 2018, how are those predictions standing up to scrutiny?

**5 rules for speakers**

If you want to make a good impression on teachers, here's what you
should bear in mind when giving a talk.

Read the full article

News & views • 2018-04-19 • Terry Freedman

End bits

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