Dear

Here’s what’s in today’s issue:

- Events, including **two book give-aways**, a **20% off the published price voucher for a new book** and some very good conferences.
- Readers' writes.
- News and views, including a comment on the state of computing in England, a **free ed tech qualifications compendium**, a **prize draw** and a film competition.
- A useful conversation, in which I sing the praises of reflective writing.
- Focus on fake news. (No, it’s true, that really is the topic in this issue.)
- Who do you think you are?
- Blast from the past.
- An article about inexpensive equipment from ICT Direct.
- Useful articles about ed tech.
- What I’ve been reading: The Secret Teacher
- Books in brief: 5 books reviewed, er, in brief, all of which are about ed tech in some way: AI, fake news, a possible dystopian future,
and others.

Enjoy!

Best wishes

Terry Freedman

**Events**

**Educate Showcase 26-06-2018 to 29-06-2018**

This is part of the [London Festival of Learning](https://www.londonfestivallearning.com), which is currently running (until 30th June) and which features several events. The information and tickets for the Educate Showcase, at which you can see up and coming ed tech products, is here: [Educate Showcase](https://www.londonfestivallearning.com/page/1348939/events-

Other events within the Festival include:

**Free book give-away**

The Enhancing Learning and Teaching with Technology: What the Research Says book will be handed out to the first 500 attendees at the EDUCATE EdWards - the first ever EdWards, in fact, hosted by Lords Puttnam and Knight, on Wednesday 27th 4.45-5.45pm. It all takes place at UCL in a giant arena in Russell Square in London. Please let John Dinnewell (j.dinnewell@ucl.ac.uk) know if you would like to attend.

**Practitioner Track and ‘Teacher Day’**

Book your place, at the London Festival of Learning, June 26.

[https://www.londonfestivallearning.com/page/1348939/events-](https://www.londonfestivallearning.com/page/1348939/events-)

The 3 day FESTIVAL TICKET including the EDUCATE Showcase is only £150:


**EDUCATE Showcase 26, 27, 28-06-2018**
The showcase registration page is here – there is no charge for just attending this event:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/educate-showcase-2018-tickets-46529225165?aff=ebdssbdestsearch

Another book give-away and a Book Launch Tuesday 26-06-2018 6 - 7.30pm

Machine Learning and Human Intelligence: The future of education for the 21st century, by Rosemary Luckin, is published on 22 July by UCL IOE Press. Paperback, £19.99. As you may know, Professor Luckin is one of the UK's foremost experts on artificial intelligence and its potential impact in education.

A FREE copy of the book will be given to the first 500 attendees. Please contact Tessa Trabue if you would like to attend. Her email address is t.trabue@ucl.ac.uk. I've been sent a review copy of this book, which is published in July. See Books in Brief, below.

STOP PRESS! If you can't make it to the book launch, fret not! The publisher, UCL, is offering 20% off to subscribers to this newsletter. Use the coupon code ML18 online at www.ucl-ioe-press.com.

Festival Day by Day programme

https://www.londonfestivallearning.com/agenda

Nesta’s Futurefest 06-07-2018

https://www.futurefest.org/programme

This event looks amazing. There are three themes this year: Alternative Visions, Alternative You, and Making Alternatives. Digging into the programme, we find sessions like:

Unequal Futures: we've all heard about how our bodies can be enhanced with technology, but what if, in the future, only rich people can afford them. Could that ultimately lead to the fulfillment of H.G.Wells’ vision of a dystopian future in which the human race is divided between those who live a utopian kind of existence and those who live a pretty grim one?
Educ-AI-tion rebooted: Artificial intelligence and learning

**CrimeForce Love team.** In the year 2050, what will crime look like? What role (if any) will AI have in solving crime? The blurb says: “Enter the mean streets of 2050s London in this choose-your-own-future sci-fi cop drama”, which sounds fascinating, because it’s being run more than once, and the outcome could be different each time.

**The geopolitics of AI:** a discussion with Evgeny Morozov and John Thornhill.

**Rewiring the collaborative economy,** with Alice Casey: Imagine if the immense organising power of tech platforms were focused on meeting social challenges like care or mental health and wellbeing.

I’ve only given you a brief taster of this year’s FutureFest. It sounds very different from most conferences, and the biggest problem will be, as ever, having too much choice! It’s running on a Friday and Saturday, so even if you can’t get time off school, do try to get along on the Saturday if you can.

**Research Ed, 08-09-2018**

This is always good for talks looking at good practice and bad practice, and for networking. This year I’ll be speaking too, on the subject of how research is (mis)reported in the news, and why that happens.


**Westminster Forum conference: Digital empowerment and young people: literacy and skills, online resilience and safety, corporate responsibility and policy options, 07-11-2018**

This looks very interesting and timely, given all the current (and ongoing) interest in fake news. Here’s the agenda: [http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/agenda/growing-up-digital-18-agenda.pdf](http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/agenda/growing-up-digital-18-agenda.pdf). And here’s the booking page: [http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/conference/growing-up-digital-18](http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/conference/growing-up-digital-18).

**Iste events**

I haven’t been able to get to the ISTE conference this year (but if you’re
going and you need someone to carry your bags, just let me know). However, there is always NotatISTE, which has been set up for those who cannot get to the conference but who would still like to participate. Head over to Not at ISTE, which is a Google Plus community, and be sure to read READ ME FIRST (on the left-hand side) first.

In fact, for a comprehensive list of opportunities to participate in ISTE 2018, read this blog post by Vicki Davis:

**ISTE 2018: WHERE I’LL BE PRESENTING AND JOINING IN THE LEARNING**

ISTE itself has further conferences planned. Look out for these, all in the USA:

- Computer Science event “ISTE No Fear Coding Lab” – October 2018
- Digital Creator event “ISTE Creative Constructor Lab” – November 2018
- Leadership event “ISTE Digital Leadership Summit” – January 2019

**Reader's writes**

This month's contribution is from 'Anon'. It refers to an article I wrote a few months ago about using the Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

"The fact that clones of the ZX computer were made in different countries probably opened up for (students) to get a head start in the early days of computer programming. I suggest this is similar to what happened the last decade with open hardware. The "Arduino" programmable electronics experiment board contributes its success in large part to open hardware where cheap clones can be made and sold by anyone and reach every market around the globe.

Arduino focus on a great user community for support and sharing code for Arduino/compatible boards. The same strategy that contribute to the UK-based "RaspberryPi" single board computers success.

Your reference to the girl who made manual calculations outside the spreadsheet made me wonder if it is the same with MicroBit as a tool in
education. Is there a missing piece or bridge between all the different tools (software and hardware) to the students' understanding of the learning/thinking that is supposed to happen? I'm not really asking a question here but rather taking a step back and thinking about what we are missing here. What is the big picture with programming and the MicroBit hardware? What was supposed to happen, and when, and how would we know?

I believe the 'ZX' context made teachers out of the students through sharing and I have seen the same learning going on around "RaspberryPi" and "Arduino". Was it the students, not teachers, learning by sharing that was the "MacroBit" of this huge project? I think it still is the whole point."

**News and views**

**Your data**

At the risk of boring you silly with a GDPR-related piece, I should just like to let you know that I've updated our [privacy policy](#). I hope you enjoy reading it.

**My books**

I'd like to tell you about the phenomenal progress I've made in getting one book ready for publication, and the other ready to send to my advance readers. Unfortunately, because of work commitments and their associated deadlines, I haven't managed to get much further. I'm hoping that the week after next will prove to be more productive in that regard. So, to coin a phrase, watch this space.

**Digital Education archive**

Having listened to those readers who kindly responded to a poll on the subject, I've created an online archive of this newsletter. Well, to be more precise, I've started the archive. I'll post the issues to the archive at
least a week, probably more, after it comes out. The reason is that there has to be a benefit to giving me your details, especially if a prize draw or some other time limited offer is included.

Computing and Qualifications in the UK

Read on for information about a free spreadsheet of qualifications.

This week saw the publication of the Roehampton Annual Computing Report. It makes for grim reading on the whole. There's a massive disparity between the number of girls taking Computing and the number of boys, as several of us predicted would happen. This was also a trend pointed out a year ago: see It Wasn't Me Wot Done It, Sir! The Depressing State Of Computing As A Subject. The subject appears to attract Chinese students especially, who are proportionately over-represented, but not as many black students, who are proportionately under-represented.. It is also perceived to be very hard.

In short, one has the very strong impression that this qualification is highly elitist. In an era when organisations are falling over themselves to promote diversity, sometimes even seeming to forget what their reason for existing is, it is at the very least morally questionable to promote such a qualification. I suppose that having an elitist qualification is fine, as long as there is something non-elitist available, which is why it was almost criminal to get rid of the ICT GCSE. If the Government does decide we need a more balanced ed tech qualification, I should like to
recommend that they take advice from people who have taught both ICT and Computing, and who are not tainted with the (in my opinion) failed brand of Computer Science GCSE.

Nobody should be surprised at the elitist nature of the course. In order to teach the subject you need, or are preferred to have, a degree in Computer Science. To teach others how to teach the subject through the Computing at Schools Master scheme, you have to sign up to a scheme whose very name is sexist, and which calls to mind the master-apprentice or guru-disciple relationship, in which the master passes on their very arcane knowledge to someone -- as long as they are found worthy enough to receive it.

The authors recommend considering a new creative computing qualification, which is right, but which also in itself shows how arid the present one is. Another indication is that I've been asked on several occasions to give talks on how to make Computing interesting, and I was recently commissioned by a magazine to write an article on the subject. Also, some of the most popular articles on the ICT & Computing in Education website are on that very topic. If you think about it, that should not be the case: computing is intrinsically interesting, so it takes some effort to turn it into something that's as dull as ditchwater. (To read some of those articles, see the following article: 6 Ideas for teaching the Computing curriculum.)

If your school is (a) in the position of having lots of students not opt for Computer Science and (b) fortunate enough to have a headteacher who is more concerned about student choice than school performance tables, you might wish to consider the International GCSE. The syllabuses I've looked at aren't too bad, although they seem to lack programming, which is a shame.

All of which leads me on to the fact that I have compiled a list of available ed tech-related qualifications for the UK. You can use it to check what's available or is going to be available. I have not included any qualifications that are going to be examined for the last time this year. You can download it from the subscribers' only page, which is www.ictineducation.org/digitaled-subscribers.
As for the Roehampton report, if you'd like to read the main findings, and download the report, go here: TRACER.

Another prize draw!

This time, Sage Publications has kindly made Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development, available. That may seem an odd choice, as it has nothing ostensibly to do with education technology. However, it is about using writing to reflect on one’s own practice, which is obviously a very useful skill. In fact, one of the reasons I was recently successful at an interview was that I, in the interviewer’s words, “clearly reflect on what I do and adapt my practice accordingly.”

Read my review later in this newsletter, but just to say for now that this would be a great addition to any educator’s bookshelves. The authors delve into numerous theories of reflective practice and learning, and include some interesting exercises.

To enter for the prize draw, please complete this form. The closing date is midnight GMT on 2nd July 2018. You may wish to use the countdown timer below to remind you of how long you have left to enter.
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:


Prize draw winner!

In the last issue of Digital Education I offered Closing the Vocabulary Gap as a prize. I’m delighted to announce that the winner was Carol Rainbow, an online tutor based in Wales. On bring informed, Carol said:

“I am constantly reading about the vocabulary gap and how it disadvantages poorer pupils who do not have the same life experiences as more wealthy students consequently missing opportunities to widen their vocabulary. This can show up very clearly as they move towards GCSE exams. I am absolutely delighted to win this book, Closing the vocabulary gap, hoping that I can learn something really useful to pass on to primary school teachers.”

Film competition

Entries for the Into Film Awards 2019 are now open, and with a new range of categories. Marking the fourth exciting year, the Into Film Awards set out to find the most talented filmmakers, film reviewers, Into Film Clubs and educators, we encourage children and young people aged 5-19 from all backgrounds, with all abilities, to get involved. It’s also designed to be a lot of fun, with famous faces and incredible talent from across the film industry on hand to present the Awards.

Film submissions are open from Thursday 21 June until Friday 14 December 2018.
This is an exciting opportunity for children and young people to showcase their work whilst developing their filmmaking, social, cultural and academic skills; inspiring them to continue creating films and learning about cinema. Nominees will be invited to attend the Into Film Awards ceremony which will be held in March 2019 at a venue in central London.

The Into Film Awards are the best place to showcase young filmmaking talent, with categories designed to highlight the large pool of young creatives in the UK.

**The Categories:**

- Into Film Club of the Year (Primary age)
- Into Film Club of the Year (Secondary/High School age)
- Film Club Member of the Year
- Best Film – 11 Years and Under
- Best Film – 12-15
- Best Film – 16-19
- Best Documentary or Film for Social Change
- Ones to Watch
- Film Reviewer of the Year
- Teacher of the Year

We will be announcing two more categories in the coming weeks.

To enter: https://www.intofilms.org/awards and we have many resources and guides to help:

The [Get Into Filmmaking guide](https://www.intofilms.org/awards) is a great place to start filmmaking, covering everything you need to know about making a successful film in just six sessions! We also have [mini filmmaking guides](https://www.intofilms.org/awards) supporting areas of filmmaking from scriptwriting and using a camera to recording sound. Using an iPad or iPhone is also encouraged – we want as many young people as possible to take part, regardless of their skills and abilities. Check out our [iPad Filmmaking Guide](https://www.intofilms.org/awards) for further support.

**A useful conversation**
I’ve always held the view that self-praise is no recommendation, yet despite my disinclination to publicise myself and my activities, I have enjoyed a reasonably successful career.

I hadn’t really thought about why that might be the case until a few days ago, when someone asked me, if I don’t much like attending networking events, how can I promote my ‘personal brand’? A fair question, which I answered by mumbling something about being a good listener and not being a bad writer, without really explaining what bearing such attributes might have on the matter.

So yesterday, I sat down in a cafe and noted down all the ways in which I have created success. It’s actually quite interesting and enlightening. I’m sure that, if I had a mind to, I could mentor new freelancers or new entrants to the teaching profession.

My main point, though, is to suggest that the act of thinking about the factors in one’s success, and writing them down, can be extremely useful. (And using a pen and paper.) I think that sort of self-reflection is important even if, like me, you don’t intend to share your findings with anyone else. That’s why I think the prize on offer in this issue is a good book to have on hand.

If reflecting in writing is something that appeals to you, I think that book could help, so do enter the prize draw. Who knows: you might win! I mean, somebody has to.

**Focus on: Fake news**

There is plenty in the news at the moment about fake news. I attended a Westminster Forum conference about Fake News in April, and I asked the panel whether the fact that reporters sometimes have to work on lots of articles a week (in one case, 500!), had a bearing on the sometimes poor quality of reporting, and the answer
came back: “Yes, I think what lies behind this is the economic models...”. I’ll be looking at this as part of my talk at Research Ed.

I asked at the same conference why there wasn’t anyone from the Department for Education there. I’m still awaiting a response.

There’s a transcript of the conference available here: http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/publication/fake-news-18, but it is not free.

**Interesting news and reports about fake news:**

At the Westminster Fake News conference I met Wendy M. Grossman, who has been writing about technology for years. She told me of her Net.Wars column, which is well worth looking at. I’ve linked to an article from that in the Useful Articles section.

**Fake news harms children’s self-esteem**

**Americans believe that two thirds of news on social media is misinformation**, according to two new reports. Read the article for the links to the reports. (As an aside, is ‘misinformation’ the same as ‘fake news’? I assumed it is, but when someone actually asked me I realised that there is a difference, or at least a potential difference.

Misinformation can be accidental, in the sense that if, say, I tell you that my next book will be ready on 1st July, but I miscalculated how long the proofreading would take, and it is ready on 1st August instead, that would be a genuine mistake. On the other hand, if I tell you that it contains an endorsement by the Prime Minister, that would be fake news. But I suppose that distinction holds only when the news is first announced or created. Once other people start spreading it as well, such as by retweeting my tweets about it, then falsehoods are being disseminated, and it doesn’t make much difference whether that is deliberate or not. There’s an interesting article on Wendy M. Grossman’s website, called Fakeout, in which several people agree to disagree on how to define ‘fake news’.

Their findings are echoed in a recently-published report by Reuters on digital news. The research found that the use of social media for news has started to decline. More information here:
Un fortunately, however, a recently-published report by The Literacy Trust found that only 2% of children have the skills to find out whether a story is true or false. More information and a link to the report may be found here: https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/all-party-parliamentary-group-literacy/fakenews/.

I attended a talk recently where the teacher speaker said that in his school they have abolished content in the curriculum in Year 7 (first year of secondary school), concentrating instead on problem-solving. I’m not sure how one can solve problems in the abstract. Even worse, he said he considers the lesson a failure if he has to explain anything to anyone. Instead, the pupils find out for themselves or ask each other. So perhaps that school has the answer to the fake news problem: get rid of any facts by which newcomers to the school might evaluate what they hear, and if they are at all unsure if what they’ve been told is correct they can ask a friend who is, presumably, just as ignorant as they are.

You might also like to read Nick Davies’ book, Flat Earth news. It’s ten years old now, but from my investigations I’d say the problems he highlights, encapsulated by the term ‘churnalism’, are even worse now. See Books in Brief, below.

Finally, last year I compiled a list of useful resources and links for teachers, including a fake news infographic. You can find that here: https://www.ictineducation.org/home-page/fake-news-resources-and-suggestions?rq=fake%20news.

**Useful tech**

**Authory**

Unlike the journalist Wendy M. Grossman, I have not kept an online archive of all my articles, much to my regret. There are thousands of them, and while most of them are stored on my computer, not all of them
are. Some, published directly onto blogs that have long since disappeared, are unavailable even on the internet archive.

I was pleased, therefore, to discover Authory, which purports to find and collate your articles from the web. Like the curate's egg, parts of it are excellent. It did a fine job of collating articles from the distant past, including some I'd forgotten about, such as those published by the TES.

Also, if you ask, you can obtain an xml file of all your articles.

However, I've found that it has not obtained articles from all of my websites. Fortunately, the staff there are obliging and will look into it when that happens, but it's not as automated as I hoped it would be.

People can subscribe to your Authory feed so that it acts, in effect, like a newsletter. I don't like the idea of having a newsletter, the names of the subscribers to which I have no knowledge.

In the future, Authory will also provide a weekly report of how your articles are doing on social media. However, apart from a free two week trial, Authory costs money: $7 a month or $70 per year. Also, it cannot collate articles that are behind a wall of some kind.

I'm giving Authory a few months, but I think in the long run I'm going to try to find the time to collate all my articles on my own websites. It's partly because of the cost, but it's mainly because of control: I know I am very unlikely to delete my own work.

**Journaling**

(See also this month's prize draw, Reflective Writing, A useful conversation, Useful articles, and What I've been reading.)

I started out writing this section with the words “I've never bothered to write a journal”, but Martine Ellis talks about the value of journaling, or writing down one's thoughts or keeping a diary, and having listened to her podcast, I realise that in my own practice I have endeavoured to achieve what Ellis regards as some of the benefits of journaling.
For example, I often start the day writing a blog post or even something that I have no intention of publishing, as a kind of warm-up exercise to get the creative energy flowing. I also have a blog called My Writes, which I update only sporadically, in which I put all sorts of writing that I don’t necessarily want to share, but which I don’t want to lose either (see the article above, about Authory).

And if you think about it, the writing activity I described in *A useful conversation* is a form of journaling.

While journaling doesn’t have to involve technology, Ellis does mention an app which I might try. The podcast isn’t too long, so have a listen or read the transcript.

**Who do you think you are?**

I’m sure you know who you are, but I don’t. I have a good sense of what subscribers are looking for in this newsletter, but I don’t know. The last time I tried to find out was at least 5 years ago, and probably 10 or more years ago.

So, I’ve set up a survey to help me find out what you want from this esteemed publication. It doesn’t ask for your name, although it does collect your IP address. (I delete that data anyway from the spreadsheet of responses.) The survey shouldn’t take too long to complete, because most of it is ticking boxes or selecting from a drop-down menu. Here it is:

**Digital Education Subscriber Survey**

Thanks in advance.

**Blast from the past**

The first computer to have a stored program was created 70 years ago in Manchester, England, took up an entire room, and was called ‘Baby’. Read about it and watch a video here:
Refurbished computers a great hit with schools across the UK

Sponsored article

Schools across the UK are taking advantage of the amazingly-priced PCs ICT Direct have on offer.

Their exceptional computers are proving incredibly popular as more and more schools realise the value for money these high quality refurbished machines offer their schools.

There are a wide range of computers available so schools can choose the right fit for their requirements.

All the PCs include a brand new Solid State Drive as standard which will provide greatly improved speeds and durability. Each PC also comes with a comprehensive 2-year advance replacement warranty plus new mouse and keyboard!

The HP 8300, 3rd generation i3 has a dual-core processor and is perfect for the school environment.

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**Useful articles**

If you **must** work over the summer hols, my article about [7 things to do over the summer vacations](http://example.com) should help.

**What are school suppliers thinking?** According to Cléo Fatoorehchi, who is the Communications and PR Manager for the [British Educational Suppliers Association](http://example.com),

“When your school buys from an education company, you do much more than engage in a simple sales transaction. Securing a new educational resource, whether it’s a piece of furniture or an edtech solution, can be the beginning of a great adventure. When it comes to the suppliers with whom you work, it’s well worth looking into why they do what they do.”
Workload is a big issue, as usual. In this article, I suggest 7 crucial questions that schools and other educational bodies can ask themselves about teacher workload.

Should women be invisible on the internet? Wendy M. Grossman says absolutely not, and I agree with her: On the internet, no one knows you’re a ....

In the light of France’s recent decision to ban mobile phones, and a British politician calling on schools in the UK to do so, this article in The Atlantic is quite timely: The dangers of distracted parenting. And for a pragmatic take on the idea, read Mike Cameron’s article, Banned on the run.

To tie in with the underlying theme in this issue of reflective practice and journaling, you may wish to read 7 Reasons educators should blog. I wrote it in 2012 but it’s still relevant.

**What I’ve been reading**

Subtitled Writing and Professional Development, this academic work is very readable. As the title suggests, the authors believe that writing can be a valuable, even crucial, means of reflecting on one’s own professional practice. For those who believe they cannot write, bear in mind that if the writing is for your eyes only then it doesn’t matter in my opinion. But also, writing is a matter of practice too. To use the authors’ words, writers don’t just sit
around all day waiting for the muse to strike. Writing is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

I can’t remember who it was, but one writer was asked how he writes, and said “I wait for inspiration.” When asked what he did whilst waiting for inspiration, he answered “I write”. It’s a painful process. Ernest Hemingway, when asked if he enjoyed writing, said “I enjoy having written”, which is exactly how I feel about working out in the gym.

This book has some interesting things to say about metaphors. For example, metaphors can be a useful means of conveying something that would be difficult to say, or for highlighting shared experiences. If you lead a team it may be worth bearing in mind that:

“A team using the same metaphor/image system for what they are doing will be harnessed in harmony, especially if it is congruent with their principles and values and with their project or activity.”

There is an extensive section on keeping a journal. Interestingly, as in many articles about keeping a journal, one of the suggestions is to use a nice notebook and pen or pencil.

As the authors point out, writing can be done anywhere. My own preference is a cafe.

The book is full of exercises, some of which are intended for private use, others to be done in a group. For example, one exercise involves taking it in turns to read out one’s writing to the rest of the class. It strikes me that many of the exercises could be adapted for use in the classroom. Indeed, I have often extolled the virtues of reading in Computing, and of having an ed tech library, but have not said very much about writing or creative writing in the context of learning about Computing. One of the exercises I used to enjoy setting my classes involved my writing a story that included technology in some way, and asking my pupils to spot all the errors and assumptions in it, or hidden references.

Reflective Practice is a rich treasure trove of theories, case studies, references, online resources and exercises. While not all of it will be relevant or easy to implement, there is bound to be something that you can use to develop your own skills as a teacher, and also something that
you try out with your colleagues. Sharing experiences or insights arising from writing a journal certainly sounds a lot more interesting to me than just discussing the school's new homework policy!

*If you like the sound of the book, then enter the prize draw now!*


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**The Secret Teacher**

This review was published on the ICT & Computing website last year.

It was somewhat disconcerting to discover this book in the 'creative writing' section of Foyles (which, for those not familiar with the name, is a bookshop chain in the UK). This probably has more to do with the section's unfortunate juxtaposition to that labelled 'Education', given the fact that a few months ago I happened upon a book on assessment in the exact same spot. (Hmm, although I don't know.)

I started reading it today, and because I chanced upon a discussion on Twitter about lesson observations (inspired by an article in TES) I read the chapters on lesson observations, Ofsted and a few others. So, because I haven't read the whole book yet, this is by way of a quick look and initial thoughts.

Like the column of the same name in The Guardian, the author remains anonymous, and although the book is based on real life, it has been fictionalised in the sense that the characters who feature in it are amalgams rather than actual people.

The chapters I've read so far seem to me to be quite accurate: the hapless teacher trying to inspire a class of children who see no reason to be inspired, getting to grips with jargon, and coming across 'rules' that one could not be expected to know about. For example, in one chapter he is told by his head of department that the vice principal has
observed (complained?) that his walk is too laid back, and that he needs to look more dynamic and purposeful.

Actually, this is not bad advice for any new teacher, but the way it is conveyed by the vice principal does not come across as supportive: far from it.

The chapter on lesson preparation for an observation by the vice principal highlights very clearly the trap of spending half the night preparing a special lesson with all the bells and whistles imaginable, and a written lesson plan, and a printer the other side of the school. I've come across schools like this before, where the senior leadership team fail in their duty of care towards staff by insisting on written lesson plans, contrary to what Ofsted expects, and not discouraging the spending of hours and hours on a single lesson, and where the technology, far from supporting teachers, almost actively conspires against them.

The chapter on parents evening is quite humorous, and reminded me of a conversation I had with a mother quite early in my teaching career:

Me: Fred hardly ever does any work, and when he does it is very poor.
Mother: But apart from that is he doing OK?
Me: Erm well, yes.
Mother: (Beaming with pride) Oh good!

The book acts as a useful reminder to new teachers that they are not alone in the trials they may be facing. What I don't like much about the book is the liberally sprinkled expletives, although I suppose they help to paint a very realistic picture.

Much better are the 'rules' found on virtually every page. These are full of sound wisdom and excellent advice, although why they are numbered in such a haphazard fashion is a mystery.

On the whole I'd recommend this book from what I've read so far. An alternative and complementary view of the hazards of inner-city teaching may be found in the book *It's your time you're wasting*.

The Secret Teacher
Books in brief

**Machine Learning and Human Intelligence**, by Rosemary Luckin. I've received a copy and had a brief look through. Professor Luckin proposes an intelligence-based curriculum. It's full of references to research, as you’d expect, and is bang up to date. For example, it mentions the fact that under the new General Data Protection Regulation people have the right to question decisions made automatically by an algorithm.

**Technically Wrong**, by Sara Wachter-Boettcher. This is a very timely critique of apps and algorithms that embed the biases of the people who coded them. Many of the examples of built-in bias will make you cringe. There’s an research programme in the USA that will look at ways to create algorithms that explain themselves. Also, as mentioned earlier, under the GDPR people can challenge automated decisions and ask to be informed of the data which was used in the process, and for the decision to be reviewed by a human being. It really is no longer acceptable to not only not know how an AI program arrived at a decision, but to think that that state of affairs is ok.

**Bad Choices: How Algorithms Can Help You Think Smarter**, by Ali Almossawi. I highly recommend this very readable book to teachers who are new to the subject of computing. It looks at everyday kind of problems, such as sorting the post or fixing a broken necklace, and demonstrates a logical, algorithmic way to tackle them. If you know someone, perhaps a colleague, who finds programming terrifying, give them this book.

**New dark age: technology and the end of the future**, by James Bridle. This, too, is timely, and relates to both fake news and artificial intelligence. From the blurb: “We live in times of increasing inscrutability. Our news feeds are filled with unverified, unverifiable speculation, much of it automatically generated by anonymous software. As a result, we no longer understand what is happening around us. Underlying all of these trends is a single idea: the belief that quantitative data can provide a coherent model of the world, and the efficacy of computable information to provide us with ways of acting within it. Yet the sheer
volume of information available to us today reveals less than we hope. Rather, it heralds a new Dark Age: a world of ever-increasing incomprehension."

I have literally received it just a couple of days ago, so I'm unable to comment about it very much, but it sounds fascinating, and I like what I've read so far. Here's an excerpt:

“If we do not understand how complex technologies function, how systems of technologies interconnect, and how systems of systems interact, then we are powerless within them, and their potential is more easily captured by selfish elites and inhuman corporations.”

Precisely.

Incidentally, Verso, the publisher, has a great policy, which I wish other publishers and booksellers would adopt. If you buy the printed version, you get the ebook free.

**Flat Earth News: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media**, by Nick Davies. Journalism has changed, and not really for the better. These days, according to Davies, a better term would be ‘churnalism’: turning out ‘news’ based on press releases and often not even checked for accuracy. That’s more to do with economics than ethics, but the result is that newspapers are filled with articles which may or may not be accurate or unbiased. It’s no wonder that many people distrust traditional news media, although the recent report by Reuters, mentioned earlier, suggests that things are improving in this regard.

**Finally...**

That's it for now.

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