Hi

I think perhaps the word 'action' in the heading might be considered an exaggeration. But it's definitely packed!

Here's what's in it:

- Events coming up.
- Case study: Knights Templar School.
- Prize draw winner.
- What I've been reading.
- Another four prize draws, for two books.
- Competition.
- Staying cybersafe: how can schools protect themselves from attack?
- Microsoft hardware and software under the microscope.
- Articles that may be of interest.
Useful resources.

Amazing ICT.

Marking time, or how I became more efficient at marking and got my life back.

Focus on... Disconnectionism, or Why I've eased off social media.

Last word.

In the last newsletter I said that the next 'Focus' would be on leadership. That proved to be a somewhat rash declaration. I had intended to include a round-up of reviews of some useful books on the topic. What I hadn't quite appreciated was how many books on leadership there are! I'm working my way through them, so I'll 'Focus' on leadership in a future issue. Sorry about that.

Enough of this persiflage! On with the newsletter.

Terry

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**Events coming up**

**Worldwide conferences**

For a searchable directory or a pdf of conferences around the world, see the collation by Clayton R. Wright, here: [Worldwide conferences](#). It seems to be mainly geared towards Higher Ed.

**UK conferences**

The following conferences are all taking place in London. If you have details of education technology conferences going on elsewhere, do let me know. I can't promise to include them but they stand a better chance of being included if I know about them.

**BESA/PA conference**

28 November 2018

This is the annual conference jointly organised by the British Educational Suppliers Association and the Publishers Association.

[PA/BESA Conference tickets](#)

See [PA/BESA Conference programme](#) for programme
Always useful, the conference's themes this year are:

State of play - Performance, procurement, sustainability.

Autonomy vs control - The independence of MATs vs DfE procurements, curriculum fund, resource approval

It includes a keynote by Professor Becky Allen of the University College London, on:

"Applying scientific understanding to education. Money has a poor track record when it comes to raising educational standards. Money certainly changes the way that education feels to those involved, but that is a different thing to say it affects how students learn. This talk presents the evidence on why money doesn't always improve education and talks about how to manage school improvement without access to new funds."

Plus a Q & A session with Caroline Wright, Director of BESA, on:

"The use of evidence and data to inform teaching and school performance, quality drivers, and value for money in schools."

**Learnit**

23 January 2019 -- 25 January 2019

This is a new conference -- or at least, I have never heard of it before. It's not only going on at the same as Bett (see below), but it's actually being promoted by the organisers of Bett (who are not the same as last year). For more information about this collaboration, see [Bett announces co-operation with Learnit](https://www.bett.co.uk/). In the meantime, here's their website. It looks pretty interesting, but not all tickets are free.

[https://www.learnit.world](https://www.learnit.world)

**Bett**

The largest ed tech event in the UK, and possibly the world in terms of number of attendees (over 30,000 apparently).

23 January 2019 -- 26 January 2019

**Inside Government**

12 March 2019

[Delivering outstanding computer education in schools](https://www.inside-government.org/)

**Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar**
Next steps for education technology - developing resources to aid learning, opportunities to tackle workload and improving supply

25 April 2019

Technology in Education

"Attendees will examine latest trends in the use of technology in schools including the challenges that schools face in engaging with edtech and how industry can support schools in embracing technology, and spread best practice.

"They will also consider developments in the use of technology in reducing teacher workloads, particularly in administration processes, following the government announcement of measures to support teachers in their workloads."

Announcement

I'm hoping to have the third edition of my book about how to get the most out of education conferences out pretty soon. Do look out for that!

Ed Tech Predictions

An opportunity to say what YOU think is going to happen in ed tech in 2019

Last year I invited companies to reflect on what might be coming up in education technology during the year 2018, and what the challenges might be. I received quite a good response, which I compiled into a useful resource on my website at Ed Tech Predictions 2018. Nearly a year later, it’s still one of the most-visited areas of my website, with hundreds of unique visits a month.

I thought I’d repeat the exercise for 2019, and my intention is that as well as publishing the responses on my website I should like to compile them into a free ebook, if there is a big enough response. (Otherwise, I’ll publish the responses as individual interviews, so your time won't have been wasted.)
I think it's always interesting to see what people think the developments and concerns will be, and I've timed it to coincide with Bett in order to maximise publicity for any companies that respond.

If you think this might be of interest, please do take part, and I'd be grateful if you could let your colleagues, clients, suppliers or readers know about it where appropriate.

The survey is here: Ed Tech Predictions 2019 survey and the deadline is 14 December 2018, to give me time to collate them all.

Thanks in advance!

Sponsored article

Knights Templar School expands ICT provision through savvy purchasing

There are many factors which play a role in a school’s purchasing decision, particularly when investing in ICT equipment. Criteria such as quality, reliability, support and price are usually top of the list in the decision making process.

It’s important to shop around and understand what’s available to schools as product choices, machine specifications and prices can vary considerably.

The Knights Templar School in Hertfordshire, a secondary school and sixth form with a rich and interesting history dating back to the 1930s, did just that. They utilised the highly respected IT forum Edugeek to seek advice and expert knowledge on ICT equipment specifically for the school environment.

That’s when they discovered ICT Direct, suppliers of high quality ICT refurbished equipment to schools.

ICT Manager Andy Field at The Knights Templar School commented, “We are always looking for a good deal and tend to shop around with several
suppliers. No other supplier come close to offering the 24-months gold warranty for free that ICT Direct offer. The majority of other suppliers of refurbished equipment only offer 12 months warranty and none of them are as comprehensive as the one ICT Direct, so this was a massive plus for ICT Direct.”

Over the past 2 years The Knights Templar School have been so impressed with ICT Direct that they have purchased around 150 Computers, 25 Monitors, an Apple iMac, plus several accessories and believe they have saved around £30,000 by buying refurbished equipment through ICT Direct.

These considerable savings of course provide massive benefits to the school.

Andy continued, “Making these huge savings has allowed us to change our equipment at a much faster pace and improve our ICT provision across the whole school. We are now in a position where we can make great savings on our ICT budgets moving forward and knowing that all the computers are covered for at least 2 years means that we don’t have to worry about a large maintenance budget either!”

So many ICT companies have a reputation for poor customer service, but that isn’t the case at all with ICT Direct. The Knights Templar School have only had a couple of issues from their vast shopping list and these have been dealt with swiftly and without question. Even when one computer made a little more noise than the others due to one of the fans, a quick call to ICT Direct meant a replacement fan was in the post for the next day.

People are nervous about purchasing refurbished equipment and that is understandable, however the ICT equipment supplied by ICT Direct is from highly reputable brands such as HP, Dell and Lenovo and are business grade machines, making them a higher specification and more robust than standard consumer grade machines that schools use.

Andy concluded, “Only a couple of years ago I would never have imagined that when looking for replacement hardware that I’d consider refurbished equipment. Having tried a couple of suppliers in the past I’ve always purchased new. Refurbished equipment wouldn’t prove cost-effective as things would go wrong. With reduced warranty periods what you would save on the initial procurement would soon disappear in the maintenance. Fast forward to today and even with a new building due to open at the end of the year I’m thinking what deal I could get from ICT Direct. Their service is exceptional, always friendly, knowledgeable and efficient. The equipment is fantastic, the support is fantastic and the whole company is fantastic – I would recommend them to any school looking to purchase ICT equipment and have
already done so!"

These cases are perfectly simple and easy to distinguish. In a free hour, when our power of choice is untrammelled and when nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure.

**Prize draw winner!**

[Image of cartoon characters with drinks]

**Machine Learning And Human Intelligence, By Rosemary Luckin**

I reviewed this book in August 2018. If you missed that, you can download it from the [archives](#), or read it in the Digital Education Supplement of the ICT & Computing in Education website. (If you're asked for a password, it's diged123)

The prize draw for this book was won by Zahid Husain Khan, of Delhi. He says:

"Currently I am a Vice-President of Ibn al-Haytham LHiSA International Society, Paris (France) and Member of the Governing Committee, Zaheer Science Foundation, New Delhi (India). Also, I am associated with Buniyaad (India), a NGO involved in improving quality of education in schools.

"In the past, I have served as Professor of Physics and Director of FTK Centre for Information Technology, Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University), New Delhi, where I established a state-of-the-art ICT Centre and promoted ICT in Education and e-governance.

"Due to my keen interest in ICT in Education, I have been delivering invited talks in International conferences and keep myself updated in the field.

"I am very pleased to have won the book, which will help in making IT more interesting to school children, especially at the secondary level."

Big congrats to Zahid! There are more prize draws in this issue of Digital Education, so be sure to enter.

**What I've been reading**
Among the mountain of books I’ve been reading over the last few months, one in particular stood out as being potentially extremely useful for teachers. That one is the 2018 edition of The Teacher’s Guide to Tech.

Compiled by Jennifer Gonzalez, the voice behind the Cult of Pedagogy podcast that I featured in a round-up of useful podcasts, this PDF manual features over 200 apps, websites and so on over the course of 329 pages.

It contains advice for those who might be a little scared of using ed tech, but it’s also good for old hands. What I especially like about it, apart from the plethora of programs referred to, is that it is highly readable without being patronising in any way.

I worked out, in a sort of back-of-the-envelope calculation in my head (if that makes sense) that if the book saves you around 45 minutes of searching time then it would have paid for itself.

It’s an interactive pdf document, with a menu system and internal hyperlinks. I tried converting it to the Kindle format but although it’s possible to read the book on a Kindle, you don’t get the full functionality. Therefore if you buy it (or win it -- see below) I strongly recommend just keeping it as a pdf.

Another useful feature is that similar tools are grouped together. For example, you can very easily compare Evernote and Google Keep.

Each application’s page contains information about what it does and what it can be used for, which operating systems it can be used on, and how much it costs (mostly free).

I count myself as quite well-informed, but the book features quite a few applications that I’ve never heard of.

The price for a single licence is $25, but Jennifer and her team have kindly offered me two 100% discount coupon codes for free copies of the book to give away to subscribers, so do enter the draw in this newsletter. That's open
Living in a digital world: Demystifying technology

The author, Mark Baker, has achieved something rather extraordinary with this book: he has made it both useful and readable.

It's useful for several reasons. First, it covers a lot of ground, delving into the mysteries of such things as what algorithms are, how programs work as expressed in pseudocode and flowcharts, computer networks, the internet, barcodes, qr codes, even satnavs.

Secondly, it is easy to find the information you want because as well as a summary table of contents there is also a much more detailed one. This is just as well, considering that one of the chapters bears the rather uninformative title: How some stuff works. In addition, there is a good index.

Thirdly, there are some very useful appendices, including a computing timeline and a glossary.

Finally, each chapter contains a self test and a list of key learning points.

What about the readability of the book? That's achieved through having a decent sized font and book size, the easy way in which the book has been written -- the author's voice really comes through -- and the inclusion of plenty of illustrations and photographs.

This is a book I would definitely recommend, both for teachers who find the subject somewhat arcane, and for students.

Mark has kindly offered two copies of the book for inclusion in a prize draw, so do enter (see below). However, the draw for this book is open to UK residents only. If you would like to buy the book, it's available on Amazon.

Prize draw!
Two copies of the Teachers' Guide to Tech, and two copies of Demystifying the Digital World are available in this issue's prize draw!

To enter, please fill in the details in the Google form (the link is below). You can specify a preference either or both books. However, Demystifying the Digital World is being offered only in the United Kingdom. The closing date is midnight London time on Sunday 2 December 2019.

https://goo.gl/forms/eyF8aP9ZX...

Win an IT upgrade!

A great competition, and a weekly draw

ICT Direct and Edugeek have teamed up to present a great competition. According to the Edugeek website:

"We’ll be offering lucky winners upgrades to their current hardware which should, in theory, give you a little more respectability in the personal office tech stakes.

There will be a grand prize to be won in week six in addition. A lovely HP Z420 workstation for one lucky winner to show off all their technical prowess on."

The competition ends on 21 December 2019. For details and rules, please see Upgradeathon.
Staying CyberSafe – how can schools protect themselves from online attacks?

With cyber attacks an increasing worry for schools, John Jackson, CEO at LGfL a not-for-profit community of over 3000 UK schools, discusses what senior leaders can do to keep schools cyber safe and protect themselves online...

In just 30 years the internet has transformed the world more than anyone could have predicted. Educationally, it has changed the way children learn and interact.

The downside to this tool comes when it is abused by malicious individuals. Grooming, cyberbullying and extremist recruitment are well documented examples of darker ways the internet has been used. Recently, headlines have covered the rise of cyber attacks in the education and public sectors with the Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on the NHS last year and more currently hoax bomb phishing emails demanding money from schools.

In order to protect themselves from these threats, schools are finding it necessary to step-up their online protection. However, with increasingly tight budgets and numerous demands on funding, knowing the right tools and software to invest in is not easy.

To help schools protect themselves, we at LGfL have increased our offering with added software, training and resources provided to our schools at no additional cost. For more advice, take a look at the following tips for an overview of some policies you can put in place to help your school remain cybersafe.

Assign responsibility

Attributing responsibility for cybersecurity to one lead member of staff is the first step to becoming cyber-savvy. This person can then evaluate the school’s current solutions, upgrade systems and determine the need for additional protection.
Putting one colleague in the driving seat of this initiative is more efficient than sharing responsibility jointly across your senior leadership team who are too time-pressured to manage security to the standard required.

**Challenge your provider**

Ensure your external IT supplier has the skills and capacity to support you. Your cybersecurity lead should challenge your provider to supply you with the most up-to-date protection available. This includes the level of fire-walling companies have in place and the anti-virus and anti-malware software they provide. All internet providers should have proactive monitoring in place so they’re able to alert you to any attacks on the school. Providers should also deliver effective training and full-time support to ensure that you’re utilising the technology fully.

**Patching policy**

With security vulnerabilities discovered daily you must have a patching policy as part of your school IT network management. Patch management involves ensuring that your network is constantly updated with the latest patches, updates and security fixes. If done effectively a patching policy will ensure attackers aren’t able to exploit security holes in your IT system. An effective policy to manage patches should cover the time period they must be installed, who is responsible for installing them and monitoring exceptions (such as devices which rely on precise software versions). Having these processes in place will help to make what may seem overwhelming manageable.

**Unsolicited emails**

All staff must be encouraged to report unsolicited emails. Email providers should allow you to report emails as spam. Commercial organisations have an obligation to allow you to unsubscribe to marketing or promotional material. If you are receiving a large amount of unsolicited messaging, contact your provider and ensure they prevent this. There are numerous examples of viruses which have spread through email and of hoaxes committed by individuals attempting to extort money from unwitting recipients so this is an obvious but important point to remember.

**Invest in your staff**

You should ensure you’re making the most of your number one asset – your staff! This means making certain all staff with any responsibility for cybersecurity have access to high-quality training and CPD. At LGfL we’re aware that technology may fail to deliver the intended benefits as expected,
generally due to an absence of support for the necessary changes needed in leadership, skills and pedagogy.

To counter this we’ve teamed up with world leaders in education pedagogy Microsoft and Google to deliver training and develop professional networks where teachers can effectively support each other. We’re also identifying champion schools to stand as leaders and examples of best practise for other schools who wish to improve.

External CPD does need to be underpinned by support in school so that the benefits of off-site training can assist practise within the classroom. To support our new CPD initiatives we’ve created our ‘LGfL TV’ portal which is designed to support senior leaders in the necessary change management processes needed to instigate progress.

Pupil awareness

As well as educating teachers, it’s crucial we also train our students about the importance of cybersecurity. One great way to start conversations with pupils is with the LGfL TRUSTnet ‘Cyber Security’ resource. The ‘Data to Go’ video from module one makes a striking point about how human behaviour constitutes the biggest weakness in any system and demonstrates to pupils how easy we can make it for criminals to access our personal information.

As cyber attacks become more common and sophisticated, the UK government has stressed the importance of interesting children in subjects such as Computer Science in order to train more cybersecurity industry professionals. With the National Crime Agency reporting a rise in the number of teenagers becoming involved in cyber crime, it’s essential that we equip young people to be capable users of technology and understand the consequences of their online activity.

Collaboration

Working together with other schools is an essential way of promoting best practice. At LGfL we have developed Cyber Protect, our groundbreaking initiative to create an online Centre of Excellence for school cybersecurity. The new centre, which will sit within LGfL’s existing site, will provide the best possible protection from increasingly complex and sophisticated cyber threats though collaboration, threat management and partnerships with schools, industry and government leaders.

Finally, keep in mind that cybersecurity isn’t something you should be losing sleep over. There are numerous policies in place as well as software available to help protect you from differing levels of threat. The most important thing is
to make sure that your IT provider is ready to work with you to mitigate the risks and that you have internal policies to help manage your IT security.

For more information on LGfL and keeping your staff and pupils safe online, please visit [www.lgfl.net/](http://www.lgfl.net/)

**Microsoft hardware and software under the microscope**

What impressed me was that the laptops have been designed with schools very much in mind -- not just the software, which of course could be installed on any laptop, but the hardware. This is important. Even with the best will in the world, the most draconian policies in place and the best behaved pupils anyone could wish for, schools are not really computer-friendly places.

To read more, and to download a free comparison and evaluation pdf, please read this article:

[Microsoft Laptops And Software Evaluation](http://www.lgfl.net/)

**Articles that may be of interest**

**School was out for me for a long time, until...**

You may not have realised this, but I was failing miserably at secondary school -- until a teacher got me back on track. This article has nothing to do with education technology in itself, but if it hadn't been for that teacher I would not have ended up teaching or writing about computing. A few years ago I decided to seek him out in order to thank him. This article relates what happened:

[A single report comment turned my life around](http://www.lgfl.net/)

**A library with a difference**
The University of Texas at San Antonio has more than 2 million titles in its library system, and lately it’s been building a collection that most students—and future teachers—might not even know exists yet. Read more here:

**An Augmented Reality Library Comes to Life for Aspiring Teachers at UT San Antonio**

**Using your school's information management system**

Some schools have found that sending parents text messages, emails or even postcards about their child’s attendance and other recorded data can lead to better outcomes. This is an application of so-called ‘nudge theory; – a process of prompting someone to do something without specifically instructing or threatening them.

This article was written with senior leaders in mind, but knowing what can be done with a decent school information management system is useful for leaders of Computing, Ed Tech and ICT as well:

**Why Your Management Information System Can Do More than You Think**

**Mathematics teaching with Purple Mash**

Whether you’re looking at minibeasts, trying to solve a problem or simply wanting some mentally stimulating entertainment, maths is at the heart of it. As the Programme of Study for maths says:

“A high-quality mathematics education ... provides a foundation for understanding the world...”.

As you’d expect, there are plenty of tools in Purple Mash to help you teach the different aspects of the maths curriculum, such as number bonds, fractions and so on. And there are also tools that you can use to help children think mathematically right across the curriculum.

**5 Ways to magically embed maths across your school with Purple Mash**

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**Useful resources**

**Resources for learning programming**

EU Code Week has been and gone, but the resources associated with it are still available. Go on and treat yourself:

**EU Code Week Resources and guides**
Printing properly

Have you ever spent a jolly half hour trying to print out an article on a website whose pages are completely printer unfriendly? I have, and that's mostly been on my own website! Squarespace says it can't be helped:

"The technology behind our templates doesn't translate well into a printable format. For this reason, we don't support printing Squarespace sites, and pages from your site aren't always printer-friendly."

They can say that again. However, there's a solution that works an absolute treat. It makes printer-unfriendly web pages printer-friendly, and has put the smile back on my face:

Print friendly

Podcasts and videos

If you teach in a primary (elementary) school, you may find this collection of podcasts useful.

If you're a secondary (high) school teacher, check out this collection of video channels and podcasts.

Research summaries

"There are several superb summaries of educational research that have been compiled into easily accessible websites and articles in pdf format that can be read online and shared with staff."

Tom Sherrington, aka @teacherhead, has done a superb job of collating these summaries. Want to know what cognitive load theory is? Or Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction? Look no further.

Teaching and Learning Research Summaries: A collection for easy access

Amazing ICT

A few years ago I was invited to give a talk on the subject of how to make Computing interesting. This was around the time that the new computing curriculum had been launched in England and Wales. It might have been better had not so many people insisted on referring to it as 'coding', with all the pointlessness, tedium and difficulty that that might imply to anybody for whom the very mention of the word 'technology' is enough to cause night terrors.
I put together what I thought was a good set of proposals, but they were so outlandish in many respects that I thought I'd discuss my ideas with someone. It so happened that Richard Smith was in London, and I asked him if he could spare a bit of time for a coffee and a chat.

I'm glad I did, and I'm glad he said "Yes". I've known Richard for many years, and a nicer fellow you could not hope to meet.

Not only nice, but knowledgeable too. Richard and I had a great discussion about the anxiety that many previously completely competent and confident teachers were feeling about the impending curriculum. That was intellectually stimulating, of course, but Richard also told me about some resources and examples of projects I hadn't heard about. He also said he liked my ideas, and as I respect his opinion I was pleased to hear it.

Anyway, I've never had the chance to repay Richard for his kindness and time, and it suddenly occurred to me that I could give his business a bit of a plug here. It's called Amazing ICT, which sounds a bit retro but don't let that mislead you. He teaches programming to primary school children and teachers, and does brilliant things with them involving robotics and other exciting stuff.

I've seen several of his presentations, and examples of the work his pupils have done.

So, if you're in the UK, do check him out. His website is Amazing ICT, and you can read testimonials about his work there too.

Marking time, or How I Became More Efficient At Marking And Got My Life Back
Personal Preservation

You want to do the best by your pupils when it comes to marking their work, but it’s important to reflect that your own sanity is important too. Like many teachers, I spent several years lugging exercise books home to mark. The only thing worse than feeling tired but knowing you have to mark 30 books by tomorrow morning is that feeling of ennui at 5 o-clock on a grim Sunday evening when all you want to do is curl up with a mug of tea and watch a movie, but having those exercise books smirking back at you.

At some point, probably in 1995, I decided I had to have a more sustainable lifestyle, and was determined to try and not take any work home with me at all. My compromise, if that is the word I am searching for, was to arrive in school at 8 and stay till 6. I realise that that is not possible or even sensible for everyone, and to be honest there were (of course) times when I had to take work home in the evenings or at the weekend. Nevertheless, I was able to spend more time at home and, importantly, more quality time at home.

In case it is helpful to someone, here are the things I did in order to achieve this happy state of affairs.

Introduced Project-Based Learning

I happen to think that project-based learning (PBL) is a good way of teaching. I won’t go into the reasons now, but if you’re interested I set out the advantages (as I see them) in my article 8 reasons to use project-based learni
PBL doesn’t reduce the amount of assessment you have to undertake, but it helps with marking for three reasons.

First, with PBL, all the lesson planning has to be done up front. While that constitutes a challenge in itself, once it’s done, it’s done, and that leaves you more time for activities like marking once work on a project has started.

Incidentally, one of the ways I reduced the workload associated with lesson planning, both for myself and the rest of my team, was to introduce a system by which we each took responsibility for one 6 week project, a process I’ve written about here: Computing: whole-team schemes of work.

Second, PBL very much lends itself to oral feedback in the classroom rather than just written marking.

Third, while most pupils are getting on with their project work, you can take pupils aside individually and mark their work while talking to them about it. This also has the effect of making the assessment something you do with pupils rather than to them.

**Used A Range Of Assessment And Marking Techniques**

I’ve written in detail about that here: My 10 point marking strategy. However, here is a taster of the kind of approaches I used, in addition to the ones alluded to above:

- Set self-marking tests. These are great for what have been dubbed ‘lower order teaching skills’, although I don’t fully agree with that description. I refer, of course, to such things as terminology. However, they can also be used to test ‘higher order skills’ like how good pupils are at recognising errors in a section of code.

- Peer marking.

- Whole class feedback.

- Shorthand codes accompanied by an explanatory sheet, for errors that several pupils had made. For example, the number 3 in a circle might mean “This concept needs to be explained in more detail, with an example”.

- Stickies. Rather than write “I really like this because...” a dozen times, it’s easier to use a smiley face stamp with a brief note like “Good explanation” or “Well spotted!”
• Student-response systems, for getting a sense of how well the class as a whole understood the work, while at the same time generating data on each student, in the background. For more information, see 10 ways to use voting systems.

I used others, but that at least gives you some idea of my general approach. For more detail, read My 10 point marking strategy.

It’s worth bearing in mind that when I started using technology for automating test marking the tools available were not as sophisticated as they are now. These days there are apps like Socrative, and great strides being made in text recognition and AI, paving the way to much more accurate automated marking of pupils’ work.

**Automated marking?**

Since writing this article a teacher called Sarah Ledger tweeted a link to a Dragons Den clip featuring a teacher who has invented a marking machine. In case you're unfamiliar with the programme, it involves people who have invented something going to a panel of potential investors and telling them -- and half the world -- what it is, how it works, and why they should invest a load of money to develop it further.

This marking machine involves dictating your feedback into a machine, which then prints out a sticky label, which you can then stick into children's books. He asserts that he can mark 30 books in 30 minutes with this device.

There are several problems with this, as I see it.

First of all, it may take next to no time dictating your comments into a machine, but to actually read a piece of work, evaluate it, and think about what you want to say about it usually takes some time. It can be done in one minute, but in my experience it's so concentration-intensive that you can't do it for more than half an hour without taking a short break. So from that point of view I'd question the implication that you could scale it up and mark several sets of books in just a couple of hours using this method.

Secondly, is the feedback stored in the machine, or is it cloud connected? Is the data stored at all? If it isn't, that is useless for record keeping. If it is, there needs to be pretty good data security in place.

Thirdly, given the amount of nonsense my phone sends out when I use the mic to record a perfectly rational message, you'll forgive me if I'm less than optimistic about this new device. In fact, there's a humorous article about this by Sarah Ledger, called I tried out *that* Dragon’s Den feedback tool. What h
appened?

Fourthly, how does this approach fit in with marking computing work online or on a computer, or the idea of a paperless school?

If something like this actually worked, it would be brilliant. But I'm not holding my breath.

**Further Reading**

In addition to the links to my own articles related to this topic (natch!), I highly recommend the following as well:

[Rethinking your grading practices](#), a very useful article by Caitlin Tucker.

[Hacking assessment: 10 ways to go gradeless in a traditional grades school](#), by Starr Sackstein (Amazon affiliate link).

**Focus on...**

**Disconnectionism, or Why I've eased off social media**
If you follow me on social media you may have noticed that in the last few months I’ve been conspicuous by my absence, or at least a much lesser presence.

The reason for this is that I realised, with something of a shock, that I was finding it very difficult to read. Either I'd lose concentration after about three minutes, and start checking Twitter or email, or making a list of ‘urgent' things I had to do there and then, or I’d find myself skipping entire paragraphs and having to go back and (re)read them.

I love reading, I'm an avid reader, so this state of affairs was no good. I decided to do the following:

First, I limited, and still limit, the amount of time I spend on social media. Generally, just a few minutes a day.

Secondly, I changed the balance of reading from mainly digital (on a computer or Kindle), to mainly paper, that is, 'proper' books.

Thirdly, I made a conscious -- some would say "mindful" -- effort to read each paragraph. It's possible to skim read -- I do so a great deal -- but approached properly that means looking for key words and phrases, not omitting whole chunks.

I’m happy to say that my reading is back on track now, even when reading digitally, and my concentration is back to normal.

Interestingly, while thinking about this, I came across a term I'd not heard of before: disconnectionism. It refers to the act of disconnecting from the connected world. I have to say, some are rather more extreme, both in their philosophy and implementation, than I was.

It makes for interesting reading, though, and I’ve found three articles on the subject that you might enjoy reading.

I have to warn you though: they are all online.

The Disconnectionists

Against the 'digital detox' metaphor

The Disconnectionists (Unplugging, and what it really means)

Last word

Hope you've enjoyed this issue of Digital Education. Do tell all your
friends and non-friends about it! The subscribe page is here: Digital Education.

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