

Integrating ICT into the classics classroomⁱ

When computers first began to appear in classrooms in the late 1970s, their arrival was greeted with a mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism by classicists, with many more sceptical than enthusiastic about the computer's role in the classics classroom. Even in the mid-1990s classicists seemed reluctant to embrace the new technologies: writing in the *JACT Review* in 1994 I commented that

The steady growth of information technology (IT) over the last ten years has not been welcomed by classics teachers in secondary schools with unreserved enthusiasm. Some classicists barely acknowledge the existence of computers, and take pride in not knowing how to switch one on. Others, while conceding that computers may have their use in subjects such as Mathematics or Science, can see no benefit in having pupils use them in classics lessons. Others again, while happy to use computers, resent the part that IT has played in the fierce struggle for space on the timetable, which has left many classics departments having to accept a reduction in their lesson allocation, especially at Key Stage 3. (Lister 1994: 20)

Thirteen years on attitudes to information and communication technology (ICT) have changed significantly. Few classicists today would dispute the fact that computers can make a positive contribution to classics teaching: they can speed up tasks (e.g. looking up words), enliven routine activities (e.g. vocabulary testing), and help pupils improve the presentation of their work. Furthermore many teachers today have very good computer skills – often acquired through hours working at the computer at home in the evenings – and are very comfortable with standard software packages to search the web for resources, word-process worksheets and put together PowerPoint presentations.

There are also many more opportunities to use ICT in the classroom than a decade ago because of the dramatic increase in the number of data projectors and interactive whiteboards in classrooms.ⁱⁱ These, used in conjunction with a computer and speakers, provide the combined functionality of a slide projector, tape-recorder, video-recorder, CD player and DVD player, making it possible for the teacher to integrate a wide range of different resources seamlessly into a lesson. And if the classroom computer has an internet connection, the teacher can also share the limitless resources of the world wide web with the class: when teaching Virgil *Aeneid* II, for instance, he or she can call up Lewis and Short onlineⁱⁱⁱ, show pupils how to pronounce the Latin correctly^{iv}, or take their pupils on a virtual tour of Troy^v.

It is not only in lessons, of course, that pupils can use these resources. Perhaps the most significant change in ICT in the last ten years has been the exponential increase in the use of computers in the home and, along with that, broadband access to the internet. Many children now have unrestricted access to a computer at home, and, once they log on in the evenings, can research their homework on the web then type it up on Word or put together a presentation on PowerPoint, all the while keeping in constant contact with their friends through MSN Messenger and downloading music to listen to later on their MP3 players.

But in spite of the sea-change in attitudes to ICT among classicists, much greater access to digital resources, improved hardware in schools, and significantly improved computer skills among pupils and teachers, classics classrooms have not seen the sort of transformation of teaching and learning expected by politicians and policy-makers in return for the massive investment in ICT. Classics is no different from other subjects in this respect: in *ICT in Schools: the impact of government initiatives five years on*, Ofsted found that although 'the combined impact of government initiatives for ICT in schools has been significant', with dramatic improvements in teachers' competence in ICT and schools' ICT resources at record levels, at the same time:

The spread of ICT as a tool for teaching and learning has continued at a slow, albeit steady, rate. This is especially the case in secondary schools, where departmental organisation can hinder whole-school progress. As yet, the government's aim for ICT to become embedded in the work of schools is a

reality in only a small minority of schools. More typical is a picture in which pupils' ICT experiences across the curriculum are sporadic and dependent on teachers; in many schools, opportunities to exploit the technology are lost on a daily basis. (Ofsted 2004: 6)

Ofsted identified two factors for the limited impact of ICT on classroom practice: first, continuing difficulties of access to computers for individual departments in spite of the improving pupil-computer ratio in secondary schools (how often have classicists found the computer suite monopolised by subjects such as technology and business studies?); and secondly, shortcomings in ICT training for teachers. One might add two further reasons: until relatively recently there has been a lack of high-quality subject-specific software and digital teaching resources specifically designed for the classroom (as opposed to electronic resources for reference and research); and teachers – and, perhaps more importantly, pupils – have yet to be convinced that ICT, for all its potential as an information tool, is necessarily an effective teaching and learning tool. This was evident in a recent study where pupils expressed serious reservations about ICT being used more in their lessons:

[P]upils were apprehensive about what they saw – actually and potentially – as a diminishing contribution of teachers to their activity... Potentially, pupils imagined teachers becoming still further removed, in a future where pupils would work independently at home. This led pupils to assert the importance of social facilitation in learning, particularly the role of teachers in regulating, structuring and supporting academic work, and the distinctively human qualities and personalising capacities that they brought to such tasks. (Deaney et al. 2003: 160)

There is uneasiness about, if not outright opposition to, a move towards a learning environment where 'the teacher's role is to facilitate learning rather than lecture' and 'students use the potential of technology to communicate, access information, learn collaboratively, think critically and take initiative in planning and implementing curricular products (Pisapia 1994: 1). In many schools there has been little or no change in classroom practice: ICT is being used to do old things in new ways rather than 'to make new things possible in new ways' (Noss and Pachler 1999: 196):

As each new technological innovation (radio, television, video etc.) has come and gone, it has left education with a feeling that something good has happened but that nothing fundamental has changed. Only a couple of years ago, hypertext and multimedia were thought to be the panacea of educational change. Yet all that has happened so far has been the translation into hypermedia of the pedagogical approaches which characterize technologies of a previous era. (ibid. pp. 195–6)

William Magrath, Professor of Classics at Ball State University Indiana, illustrates the use of new technology to implement technologies of a previous era in his description of the students' view of a typical college lecture:

The eye travels the distance to the front and seeks out the professor. He is but a shadow in the presence of "The Screen". Eight feet wide by 10 feet tall, glittering with color, graphics, video segments, fades and reveals, the screen captures the eye. Its surface is bathed in multicolored, multifont text and clever images by the same digital projector from which emanate strains of melodies and small snatches of recitation. And, weaving it all together is the disembodied voice of the instructor. (Magrath 2001: 283–4)

For Magrath, this type of multimedia presentation typifies Stage Two of the changing use of ICT in education, which he calls 'static innovation'. (Stage One, 'outside innovation', had been characterised by the use of e-mail and the Web for assignments.) What concerns him about this phase is that this use of ICT tends to inhibit, rather than promote, interactive learning, and he argues that instead ICT should be used to free up time in lectures for more active and collaborative learning. This is what he sees as the goal of Stage Three, 'dynamic innovation'. In the case of his own course on world mythology, this involved transferring much of the course content and assessment from the lecture hall to the web, thereby enabling him to develop a different kind of dialogue with his students in his classes:

...much of my talking now can be at a different level since the students have already “mastered” what I am talking about. ... I can present and analyze, or present for analysis, more complicated examples of the issues under discussion. ... I can create small groups, clustered in the fixed seating, to apply a theory and report findings without worrying about whether I have covered enough material in class for them to understand the task. ...More informed and focused discussions can ensue. (p. 287)

One could argue that Magrath has done little more than provide his students with an online course schedule and pre-session reading, and in terms of their use of ICT on his course it remains essentially passive – the students are acquiring information rather than developing knowledge and understanding – but the fact that the materials are web-based (with extensive links to other sources) means that the students can access them when and where they want to, and spend as long as they wish chasing up links and references. Magrath also makes considerable use of ICT to extend his contact with students beyond the lecture hall:

On a given day, I write comments on a student’s first draft left in my electronic mailbox; I join a discussion on a bulletin board about whether family values are stronger in our society than in Greek myths; I respond to several student e-mails concerned about their grades in a recent quiz; I sign off on the outline of a small group project; I send out congratulations to those who have done very well in their essay... (p.291)

It is the *combination* of online resources and electronic communication and their *integration* in a traditional teaching programme that marks Magrath’s Stage Three of ICT’s changing role in education. This approach, generally referred to as ‘blended learning’, has been developed particularly on distance learning courses but also has a place in a school setting and classics teachers may need to consider incorporating elements of blended learning into their schemes of work, if only as a way of increasing the amount of time they have for teaching Latin. One could move some aspects of classroom teaching online (for instance, vocabulary tests and language reinforcement exercises) to create space for aspects of the course that require whole-class interactive teaching (for instance, explaining grammar points and reading the set texts). For teachers who use the *Cambridge Latin Course* (CLC) the Cambridge School Classics Project (CSCP) web site^{vi} already provides a wide range of electronic materials directly linked to the CLC that pupils can access from home, and the *CLC Book I E-Learning Resource* (CSCP 2005) provides three different pathways through the CLC, drawing on both printed and electronic materials, that could be adapted to meet a school’s individual needs.

But there are two practical problems with adopting any form of blended learning. First, it takes a great deal of time to set up such courses; secondly, blended learning requires all learners to have home access to the internet, a position we have not yet achieved. It may therefore be necessary to explore other, less ambitious, ways of integrating ICT into classroom teaching. A good example can be found in Ruthven et al. (2005) which evaluates a number of ICT-based projects in secondary schools including a project undertaken by a Latin teacher who, within a series of three lessons on preparatory research for GCSE coursework, sought to develop strategies for helping students become ‘independent, effective, efficient and discerning electronic information gatherers rather [than] remain as serendipitous and credulous surfer-browsers’. While helping her pupils investigate their chosen coursework topic she also addressed two Key Stage 4 ICT learning objectives:

- a how to analyse the requirements of tasks, taking into account the information they need and the ways they will use it
- b to be discriminating in their use of information sources and ICT tools.
(DfEE/QCA 1999: 22)

In the first lesson the class worked were restricted to using resources from the library stock; in the second, the pupils used only materials from the internet; and in the third they were free to use either. By this simple division of lessons the teacher was able to contrast ‘the accessibility and acceptability of the highly filtered material

in the library with the diversity and unpredictability, vivacity and currency, but sometimes dubious validity, of internet material' (p. 23), and encourage pupils to think explicitly about the relative value of the library and the internet as sources of information:

And they all said 'Oh, the Internet's obviously better' ... 'Why is it better?' 'Because there's so much more information on it.' But slowly they began to get through to see the advantages and disadvantages of both... [and the need] to be much more... critical and discerning in their use of sites than they are with the book stock. (p. 24)

The teacher also sought to take her pupils beyond the gathering of facts towards more critical engagement with the material by talking to pupils individually about sites they had located and how it related to their chosen coursework topic:

... [I]f they just have a title, a topic - food, gladiators, religion - it tends to be what I call a 'bung essay' in that they just bung down random facts, and they don't actually organise the facts towards an argument which is what they get marks for. And one of the best ways of making sure that they are getting the marks... is a question in their head, a kind of exam-type question: 'How did the Romans use food to confirm status?'; something like that. And then they can marshal their facts and produce an argument... (p. 23)

By approaching Latin coursework in this way the teacher both improved the chances of her pupils performing well in the GCSE examination, and also promoted the development of key research skills so important in the sixth form and beyond; and, in terms of ICT objectives, she achieved her aim of helping make her pupils more responsible and discriminating internet users, thereby contributing to a further aspect of their education:

Mature use of the Internet is not just a question of being able to search efficiently to locate information, helpful though this skill is. It is also about helping pupils to develop the 'media literacy' which is an important facet of education for citizenship. (Haydn 2003: 23)^{vii}

I concluded my article in the *JACT Review* in 1994 by saying that 'with Classics under continued threat in many schools... information technology should be central in the development of new ways to teach the subject... Computers are not a substitute for but a complement to the classroom teacher, and if exploited to the full can play a significant part in securing the survival of Classics in schools' (Lister 1994: 21). It is a pleasure to have been able to conclude this article with a practical example showing exactly how ICT can be harnessed to meet subject-specific needs and at the same time address the wider educational agenda.

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ⁱ This article is based on a chapter from *Changing Classics in Schools*, which will be published by Cambridge University Press in summer 2007.

ⁱⁱ A survey of ICT provision in secondary schools in 2004 showed that 99 per cent of schools had data projectors (up from 82 per cent in 2002), with an average of 12.8 per school; and 92 per cent of secondary schools had interactive whiteboards (up from 65 per cent in 2002), with an average of 7.5 per school (DfES/Becta 2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lewis and Short is available on the Perseus Project site at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

^{iv} Read it Right! is available at <http://www.classicsnet.plus.com/readitright.htm>.

^v Visit <http://www.stoa.org/metis> for virtual tours of main archaeological sites in Greece.

^{vi} The CSCP website can be found at www.CambridgeSCP.com). It now has 75,000 visitors a week.

^{vii} By media literacy Haydn means pupils' ability to be *critical consumers* of all media, from newspaper articles and radio broadcasts to blogs and podcasts.

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