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# UKLA

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We have entered a highly globalized world of reading and learning, and *Using technology to improve reading and learning* leads the way. This is the first book devoted to classroom instruction, in both traditional and cutting-edge literacies, that has been written in collaboration by leading scholars from different nations - Dr Bernadette Dwyer from Ireland, and Dr Colin Harrison from England. Most importantly, both of these authors are also profoundly talented teachers with many years of experience. They speak with a knowledgeable teacher's voice from the classroom.

The Internet and other technologies are a profoundly shifting force, regularly altering many elements of society. These technologies are also transforming the nature of reading and learning as we shift from page to screen, where new tools continuously appear, calling for new skills and strategies in reading, writing and communication. Moreover, the new literacies now required to read in our world are not just new today, but as the latest tools for reading, learning, and communicating are introduced, they each necessitate the acquisition of new skills, strategies, dispositions, and social practices. How we adapt in this changing world of reading and learning will define how well our students are prepared for their future.

Collaborations like the one in this book enable us to succeed in our classrooms during challenging times. Bernadette, and Colin have provided us with a highly readable and, most importantly, teachable volume to guide us into this modern world of classroom literacy and learning. We are able to obtain the very best instructional ideas from changing classroom contexts in two nations that have both been leaders in technology in education.

You and your students will be transformed and energized by the ideas in this book; I was. The authors have shown us a path that will enable our students to become the highly literate and knowledgeable citizens the world now demands.

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Finally, to our families and loved ones, thank you for your support. We couldn't have done this without you.

## Using technology to make the teaching of literacy more exciting

### In this chapter you will learn:

- how this book can help you become a more confident and more effective teacher
- why the authors are confident that this book will be helpful for you
- three ways in which you might use this book.

### After reading this chapter you will:

- understand that the authors of this book do not believe that technology will solve every problem, and
- understand that developing students' critical Internet literacy is one of a teacher's most important jobs.

### Why you need this book

The aim of this book is to help teachers improve their students' reading, writing, and communication skills, and particularly to help teachers become more confident in using technology to make the teaching of literacy more exciting, more engaging, and more effective.

Do you want to develop the following in your students?

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • literacy               | • engagement             |
| • vocabulary             | • autonomy               |
| • comprehension          | • planning skills        |
| • fluency                | • team work skills       |
| • critical thinking      | • Internet criticality   |
| • skills in synthesizing | • collaborative learning |
| • creativity             |                          |

Do you feel you need to know more about how technology can help you to achieve these goals? If the answer to both these questions is positive, then this book is for you.

Computers have been in classrooms since the 1980s, but in many schools the use made of technology to enhance learning and empower learners has hardly changed since those early days. Yet in other schools, in economically disadvantaged districts as well as rich districts, teachers and students are using computers and other devices in every lesson, and students' learning and their achievement have been transformed. How can it be that while there is broad agreement about how to teach reading, there are massive differences between how teachers in different schools use technology? National and local policies drive the reading curriculum, and therefore the teaching of literacy is delivered using materials and approaches that are broadly similar, but this does not apply to teachers' use of technology.

What we know from research is that different teachers have completely different professional experiences when it comes to professional development and support in using new technologies. And we also know from research over thirty years that it's no good simply presenting teachers with computers, tablets, electronic whiteboards, or video cameras. If they are not given support and professional development, teachers won't use them.

But the picture is changing, rapidly, and in two very significant ways. First, many teachers who say "I'm not really a technology person" are in fact increasingly competent with technology: they own and use a computer every day, they use other devices such as a phone and digital camera, and they already use technology in their teaching, at least some of the time. Second, teachers' access to support has changed radically. Research into teachers' use of computers in the 1990s showed that those who had access to informal networks of support (for example a close colleague who could show them what to do, or a partner or neighbor who was knowledgeable) learned more, and became more confident than those who only received professional development from experts in a more formal school setting (Harrison *et al.*, 1998). But teachers today have access to many more sources of ideas, guidance, and informal learning. To begin with, their students - collectively, at least - often know more than their teachers about how to use the

Internet, how to share files, and how to make and edit multimedia. But the other key resource for informal and just-in-time learning is the Internet itself. The 25 billion pages of the Internet contain tens of thousands of lesson ideas and thousands of videos for teachers. At the time of writing this chapter, a Google search for the phrase ‘videos for teachers’ offered over ten million links, of which seven million were videos.

This book will help you learn more about what resources are out there to support your teaching. However, resources alone are not enough. Teaching is a social as well as a cognitive activity, and as a teacher you need to know how to organize your students and their learning in order to make best use of technology. Every teaching idea in this book has been used, and used successfully, in day-to-day school contexts, and mostly in schools in economically challenged areas. The authors are classroom teachers who became college professors, but both of them have continued to spend part of their year in classrooms, teaching and evaluating new software and hardware, and road testing new ideas. They know how to engage those students who are the most challenging to teach: the weaker readers, those who lack the confidence or social skills to work collaboratively, those whose language skills are only emerging, and those whose learning needs a good deal of scaffolding.

Nearly every teacher these days can use PowerPoint® in her teaching, and that’s a good thing. A digital presentation requires planning, organization, and the ability to connect hardware and software to a data projector, and a good presentation can hold the attention of a class (at least for a while!) and may be the focus for a brilliant expository lesson. But some teachers have used the phrase ‘Death by PowerPoint’ to describe lessons in which the PowerPoint presentation is used in no more creative a manner than a blackboard was a hundred years ago - to present a sequence of text book pages for copying as the teacher simply reads the text aloud, and this can leave the students bored and disconnected from any engagement with the material. It is this approach that Tom Fishburne tried to capture in the cartoon found in Figure 1.1. We know we can do better!

Finally, but very importantly, this book is necessary because the skills that students need to acquire are new, and teachers need to learn what these new skills are and how to develop them in their students. Twenty years ago, every school textbook went through a dozen stages of editing and adoption before it came into the classroom, and textbooks would be replaced in a regular cycle by newer, more authoritative editions. Today, schools in economically advantaged nations are buying fewer textbooks, and at the same time students are relying more on Internet sources. This creates a serious problem because, while textbooks have the authority of established authors and publishers behind them, anyone can publish on the Internet. In this brave new postmodern world, students, and especially younger learners, can be at serious risk. They don’t know that [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) is a white supremacist hate site.

Figure 1.1 *We Know We Can Do Better!*

