

BOOK REVIEWS

TEACHING WITH TABLETS

Reviewed by Gurmit Uppal

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Authors: Helen Caldwell and James Bird

London: Sage 2015
ISBN 978-1-473-90679-2

With the increased deployment of tablet devices in the primary classroom, Caldwell and Bird aim to provide much-needed direction and a range of practical ideas on how these technologies can be used to transform teaching and learning. In this text, Caldwell and Bird's own expertise is complemented by contributions from several experienced school-based computing leaders, academics and specialists.

Teaching with tablets is a well-researched text and makes reference to a number of tried and tested tablet applications. As is the case with other titles in the Learning Matters series, each chapter is clearly structured with defined aims, links to the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education (DfE), 2013), the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), detailed case studies, short activities, ideas for further reading and useful links. Links to theory are strong throughout each chapter, providing secure grounding for the teaching approaches under discussion and maintaining a firm focus on the transformative potential of technology.

The case studies are particularly useful in providing practical examples of how tablets have been used in different settings and subject areas, along with explanations of the pedagogical approaches which have been deployed. The use of these practice-based case studies provides valuable contexts to

support any trainee teacher, in-service teacher or subject leader looking to develop their use of tablet devices in the classroom. In addition to the case studies, each chapter also provides a list of suitable tablet applications which can be utilised to support the teaching and learning approaches under discussion. It is noteworthy that there is no specific platform bias and many of the tablet applications discussed are available on various operating systems and devices. Whilst this book does not set out to provide masterclass tutorials in the use of specific tablet applications, it certainly provides a strong rationale and detailed examples which would spark sufficient interest amongst readers to explore the applications further.

The content of the book covers various broad themes, including manipulating media, digital storytelling, talk and collaboration, using technology outdoors, computer science and the use of iPads in the early years. In addition to the specific content focus of each chapter, there are additional links made to areas such as assessment, differentiation, e-safety and pupil-led learning, where deemed relevant. The book provides many practical examples across a range of different subject areas and teaching and learning approaches. Whereas, traditionally, similar texts may be broken down into subject-specific chapters, the approach taken here is more holistic and theme-based, which

is appropriate due to the flexibility of the tools under discussion and provides an emphasis on transferable skills. Whilst the index certainly suffices for anyone looking for subject-specific content, some readers may still be appreciative of a curriculum map to navigate to subject-based ideas.

The authors recognise that whilst many schools have purchased tablet devices, they are not necessarily being used to optimize or transform teaching and learning. With this in mind, it is somewhat surprising that the text does not delve deeper into discussions around implementation issues, such as multiple device management, content sharing and information technology infrastructure in schools. Nevertheless, the text is highly accessible and technical vocabulary is clearly explained throughout. Despite the obvious focus on technology, all ideas outlined in the text are undoubtedly examples of high-quality teaching and learning which will appeal to many teachers. In summary, this timely book would be valuable for any new or experienced teacher looking to develop their understanding and use of tablet technology in a meaningful manner. ■

ACTION RESEARCH IN EDUCATION (2ND EDITION)

Reviewed by Warren Kidd

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Authors: Vivienne Baumfield, Elaine Hall and Kate Wall

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This is the 2013 second edition of an already well-established book on educational action research. The text, and the authors, genuinely appreciate the benefits, pitfalls and difficulties of action research in general, and these are specifically applied to the contexts of professional learning and the professional practice of those in education. This applies whether they are qualified teachers undertaking action research for continuing professional development, or student teachers undertaking action research as part of an Initial Teacher Education qualification.

To support both potential readerships of the book, the authors offer a practical yet highly theoretically informed step-by-step approach which is easy to follow and readable yet packed with important information. I currently use this text with my pre-service teachers undertaking action research assignments and they find it to be highly accessible whilst offering a depth which underpins both theory and context. The book positions teachers and student teachers as 'practitioner enquirers' and as such offers a wide range of different models, or, as the authors put it, different 'ways of being'. There is a strong connection running all the way through this book which links together action research, teacher learning, pupil impact and pupil voice. While this might be expected from texts of this nature, this book tackles these aspects particularly well, especially in chapter 5 'Taking account of learner perspectives in your enquiry'. The themes covered here are sometimes either omitted or glossed over in other books on this topic.

The book starts with a careful consideration of what 'enquiry' is, before teasing out and identifying both the links between teacher and student enquiry and their benefits. The very first sentence, 'Teachers are problem solvers,' sets the scene for the rest of the book, which sees teachers as active agents who seek to create their own authoritative knowledge and make claims about their practice which are both rooted in methods of enquiry and linked to pupil voice.

After a brief history of action research, the book settles down to explore the action research cycle which is often conceived as a series of action steps following questioning and fact-finding. The focus is always on the practice of action research to inform the practice of learning and teaching. As such, the book always underpins its discussions of research within a conversation about the links between practitioner enquiry and pedagogy. In my opinion it does this convincingly without falling into the trap of making unsubstantiated claims about the power and worth of practitioner enquiry. In this regard, the book is both realistic and inspirational.

After the opening chapters, the book explores how practitioners might develop a research question (chapter 3) and then moves on to finding an approach that meets the needs of the context and professional learning in question (chapter 4). Chapters 5–7 variously discuss the stakeholders in educational contexts and how their needs and positions can be incorporated into practitioner enquiry. The final chapters (8 and 9) explore concluding the research and ensuring it has impact. This last point – impact – is

crucial, and one that this book does well to explore and develop, which again is something that singles this text out from other books in this field.

As already noted, I currently use this book in my teaching. My students, as a professional learning audience, really appreciate the case studies. They feel these studies bring 'alive' the world of possibilities that this approach can provide, in a concrete and meaningful way. In fact, I think this is frequently the problem, not just with books on practitioner enquiry/action research, but with the process itself in more general terms, and that knowing what to do, why and what the possibilities are is something very daunting for professionals in practice. This can often be the case particularly when encountering and studying books on this type of research activity for the first time. The tone of this book, its coverage and practical application are certainly useful in helping readers to move away from the paralysis of choice that this research approach can often seem to provide.

To conclude, this is an excellent contribution to an increasingly crowded field, but one that certainly in my own teaching I have come to really value. In Chapter 2 of the book the authors suggest that a way to explore the quality of research is to assess both its 'rigour' and also its 'warrant'. Using this as a tool to think about this book and its role in the market place of other action research titles, its quality and usefulness shine through. ■

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: A CREATIVE APPROACH (2ND EDITION)

Reviewed by Rebecca Bannocks

ex-University of East London, Primary PGCE

Authors: Patricia Driscoll, Andrew Lambirth and Judith Roden (eds.)

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The editors of this book have over 50 years' experience of teaching between them. The book has 13 chapters, each being an introduction to a subject taught at primary school. The majority of chapters, though not all, provide references for further reading. The references and suggestions for further reading at the end of the English chapter are not as up to date as those in subsequent chapters. As English is such an integral part of the primary National Curriculum (2014) it would have been beneficial to the reader had the author considered recent literature on the teaching of English. However, I am interested in this book mainly for the chapter on mathematics, so this review focuses on 'An introduction to mathematics'.

The author of this chapter, Gina Donaldson, has 11 years' teaching experience, a degree and MA in Mathematics and Education and is now a senior lecturer and Primary Mathematics team leader at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her wealth of experience in mathematics is evident throughout the chapter, as she is able to explain complex mathematical ideas in a way that is accessible to not only experienced teachers, but newly qualified and trainee teachers also.

The chapter's aims are clear and well laid out (as they are in all the chapters), namely to provide new teachers with a framework to understand and critically evaluate experiences of mathematics and to challenge one's own principles of what good practice in mathematics is, based on an understanding of theoretical ideas and research findings. In my opinion, Donaldson achieves these aims.

She does so by encouraging the reader to reflect on their own experience of being taught mathematics, in particular, what the focus of mathematics was. I found this particularly useful, as Donaldson explains that 'the staging of the [curriculum] content is based on the view that mathematics is a set of knowledge and skills, which is generally hierarchical ... [H]owever, mathematical learning might not always develop in a linear fashion' (p. 30). She goes on to explain that an alternative way to consider the content of the mathematics curriculum is with regard to the skills of problem-solving and mathematical reasoning. I found this particularly useful as, whilst reading this chapter, I experienced some training on mastery in mathematics and I found that Donaldson's explanation of mathematical reasoning, instrumental understanding and relational understanding really helped me to understand how I can develop mastery in mathematics in the children I teach.

Throughout this chapter the author makes strong links between research and the Early Years Framework and the National Curriculum. Points raised by Donaldson are also consistently supported by a range of sources and case studies. Furthermore, Donaldson's classroom experience is evident as she highlights the various difficulties teachers face when teaching mathematics and she provides insightful and helpful suggestions to support teachers.

A great deal of information is presented throughout the chapter, and it would have been even better had some sections, such as learning through play and assessment, been covered in more detail. However,

this chapter is only an introduction to mathematics.

This book is a valuable resource for trainee teachers, newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers who want to reflect upon their experiences of learning and teaching mathematics. I intend to continue using it to develop my practice across all areas of the primary curriculum. ■