

Primary schools and ICT – learning from pupil perspectives, by Neil Selwyn, John Potter and Sue Cranmer, London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, 192 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-85539-578-7

In writing about technology and education, the debate is often centred on the expectations and hopes for ICT in schools; whether suggesting ICT could and should be transformative or whether reflecting on the lack of fundamental change in spite of such widespread enthusiasm. The authors of this book engage with the debate through talking with and listening to children and by doing so they have been able to provide a much needed space in the discussion where children's experience and views can be heard.

The book is based on the findings of a year long research project using a range of methods to ascertain children's thoughts on the use of ICT in both home and school. The research was carried out across five different schools in London and the West Midlands and consisted of four main elements: the use of pupil questionnaires; pupil led and researcher led 'focused group discussions'; online elicitation of pupils' views and an analysis of pupil drawings. The findings are sometimes surprising – the lack of expectation of change children expressed when asked to consider future uses of technology in school is unexpected, but in drawing together data from all aspects of the study, proposals are outlined for the kind of change that might be both effective and possible. The authors state that:

... above all we wanted to use this book to explore the ways in which ICT use in school could be improved, re-imagined and reinvigorated so that children and teachers no longer see the classroom as technologically inferior to the rest of their lives. (xi)

Although the book is not aiming to provide a 'how to' guide on the use of ICT in the primary classroom, the focus of Chapter 9 on suggestions for changing primary ICT does put forward realistic ideas that provide a real basis to consider ways forward.

In allowing primary pupils to speak for themselves about ICT, a sense of the familiar divide between home and school does emerge. The researchers report that the children talked at length about their uses of ICTs outside school; the fun aspects, the social side of computer use and its role as a distraction. School uses were generally more restricted and, as the authors note, not unsurprisingly focussed on supporting 'work' such as through the use of word processing or data handling applications. However, the children also mentioned the 'disappointments of using ICT at home'; things did not always work, they could be expensive and unreliable, not living up to expectations or not being accessible in the ways hoped. Throughout the book, the idea of children being a cohesive group of 'digital natives' is questioned and a clear sense of the varying range of experience and opinions amongst the participants of the study emerges. The authors found 'primary pupils' actual use of ICTs to be more limited in scope than many adult commentators would like to suggest' (148) and they note that 'creative and collaborative uses of web 2.0 applications were not especially prevalent either inside or outside school' (70). Even where web 2.0 applications were in use, the involvement of the children usually focussed on the passive consumption rather than active production of material. In contrast to the suggestion that children are living a 'toxic childhood', Selwyn et al note that even where children reported considerable experience and use of 'high tech' applications, these were not dominating or damaging the children's lives.

One of the most revealing aspects of the book is its consideration of the pictures that over half the children chose to draw as a way of answering the question 'what do you wish that you could use ICTs for in school in the future?'. Some of the drawings are included in

the book, providing insight into both the research process and the children's thoughts, enabling the reader to create their own interpretations alongside the analysis given. The children did not uniformly feel that more ICT was necessarily desirable, one even explicitly stating 'I don't think it's a good idea' alongside a drawing of a frazzled looking boy standing beside a desktop computer (107). The authors note that 'the children's perceptions of future forms of education were remarkably mundane, rooted in the present-day context of the classroom and constrained by school rules, regulations and expectations' (110). The slightly unimaginative nature of the responses is suggested to demonstrate that the 'ICT-savvy' children are also 'school-savvy' with a strong awareness of how difficult it is to effect change in school environments.

The final chapter draws from the findings of the research project as a whole to make recommendations and suggestions for change. The authors advocate a 'think small' approach, making adjustments that fit more closely with the realities of pupils' experiences of primary education. In contrast to other proposals for change and more technology led initiatives, Selwyn et al do not see a need for primary schools to buy new equipment or for subject teachers to receive yet more training, they suggest that 'instead the answer to changing ICT use in school for the better could involve something as simple as changing the ways that schools talk about technology with their pupils' (156). The authors' proposal has five distinct elements: to establish a dialogic approach to ICT; to encourage a democratic approach to ICT; to encourage a 'loosening up' of ICT use wherever possible; to empower teachers to act as orchestrators and managers of pupils' ICT use and to develop children's 'critical digital literacy' alongside their 'media literacy'. Each of these proposals is outlined in some detail in the chapter which contains concrete suggestions on how practitioners can develop the ideas.

In this book, Neil Selwyn, John Potter and Sue Cranmer have been able to share the differing perspectives of over 600 primary pupils in considering the place of ICT in their lives. The detail provided on the children's current uses of technology, combined with a realistic sense of what could be possible, ensures the book meets one of its key aims – to reinvigorate the debate and reimagine ICT in school. In the current educational climate where the curriculum for both primary and secondary schools is under review in the UK, it seems vital to take into account the perspectives of the learners who are most affected by any change. By listening to and recording the experience of children from a range of backgrounds, this book provides a major contribution in developing that understanding.

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Education today 2010: The OECD perspective, by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, OECD, 2010, 86 pp., £21 (from www.sourceoecd/education), ISBN 978-92-64-09061-3

It is unusual to find a single book that aims to say something about every aspect of education, from early years, through primary and secondary, to tertiary education, and then on to lifelong learning, while covering cross-cutting issues such as rates of return, equity, and knowledge management along the way. To find a book that attempts this task across 30-odd