

7.3 Innovative approaches

READING The real value of digital tools

1 What experiences have you had of digital technology as a student? Think about when you were at school or at college, or any other learning experience.

online learning
tablets

school or student websites
video chat

2 Read the article about technology in education. Which digital technologies in Exercise 1 are mentioned in the text?

3 Read the article again. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 According to the European Commission, young people have the knowledge and ability to work in digital technology.
- 2 According to the article, European schools are slow to use new technology with their students.
- 3 Currently, computer programming is taught too traditionally.
- 4 Using new technology in the classroom doesn't always change the way subjects are taught.
- 5 Students can study a topic before going to a class if digital media are available to them.
- 6 Studying later in the day can lead to better results for some students.

4 Find these words in the article. Choose the correct meaning (a–c).

1 **recreation** (line 6)

- a education
- b leisure
- c work

2 **hardware** (line 18)

- a computer equipment
- b computer experts
- c computer programmes

3 **shortage** (line 19)

- a excess
- b lack
- c number

4 **passive** (line 33)

- a enthusiastic
- b inactive
- c uninterested

5 **access** (line 37)

- a produce
- b find
- c understand

6 **device** (line 43)

- a machine
- b page
- c system

7 **flexibility** (line 52)

- a difficulty
- b time
- c variation

8 **key** (line 65)

- a frequent
- b important
- c rare

5 Work in pairs. Discuss whether or not you agree with these suggestions made in the article.

- 1 Being able to use digital media is not the same thing as understanding how it works.
- 2 It's a good idea to teach schoolchildren how to write computer code.
- 3 Digital technology allows schools to try out innovative ways of teaching.

VOCABULARY Innovation: verbs

6 Match the words in bold in the sentences with these verbs.

enable
improve
put into practice

exploit
inspire
replace by

get round
introduce

- 1 All the old computers have been **changed for** tablets that are much easier to use.
- 2 Our school has **started** a new assessment system. Now we only have one exam each term.
- 3 The college could do better if it **used** its resources in a better way.
- 4 The headteacher wants all the students to **do better** this year.
- 5 The new school website **allows** parents to contact us more easily.
- 6 The visit to the science museum **encouraged** us to change how we teach science to our students.
- 7 Using video chat with students in Spain **solved** the problem of our students not having experience of native Spanish speakers.
- 8 Student satisfaction has gone up since we **implemented** our personalized online feedback.

7 Work in pairs. Tell your partner about three of these things.

- a way of exploiting your time to study English more effectively
- a place, person or event that inspired you to do something
- a change that has been introduced or you'd like to introduce in your work or studies
- something you learned that enabled you to do more in your life
- something you've replaced recently or would like to replace
- something you feel you have improved in

SPEAKING New ideas for unexpected problems

8 **21st CENTURY OUTCOMES**

Read the beginning of the news item. What answer do you think the teacher expected?

Teachers at Coal Hill Primary School decided to set up a school garden after a pupil answered the question 'Where do we get milk from?' with 'The supermarket.'

9 Work in small groups. Discuss how you would help schoolchildren to understand more about where their food comes from, how it is produced and how it gets to their plates. Think about what you want to achieve, how to do it and what results you would like to see.

THE REAL VALUE OF DIGITAL TOOLS

A recent European Commission event (European e-Skills Week) focused on the lack of skills in digital technology among young people. While most young people use digital media for recreation – games and social networking – they are not necessarily competent in the skills needed to work in the digital economy, according to the European Commission.



Digital technology is an increasingly familiar part of the school environment. Tablets have been introduced into many schools as the prices have dropped and versions for schools become available. Traditional chalkboards have been replaced by digital whiteboards in classrooms across Europe. In short, there's been a massive investment in both hardware and software in education. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of people who are skilled and qualified in information and communication technologies (ICT). So where does the problem lie?

For some education experts, the issue is that pupils are not taught about how digital resources work. These experts are in favour of teaching computer coding and programming in the same way as other traditional school subjects. Others point out that the potential of the digital classroom has not been fully exploited yet: in effect, the argument is more about how the new technological tools can be used to revolutionize learning rather than the actual tools themselves. One expert, Gareth Mills, points out that an interactive whiteboard might still be used with a traditional teaching style where the teacher talks to a passive group of students. This is to ignore the possibilities that putting the tools into the hands of the pupils can lead to. In Wales, a recent report recommended that, despite fears that students would be distracted if they had access to social networking sites, such sites should not be blocked in schools – they can in fact be used as a platform for sharing learning materials.

The reality is that digital media can truly inspire and enable new approaches to teaching and learning. For example, when students can view the content of a lesson

before and after the class via a computer or mobile device, this frees timetabled class time for interactive and more focused work with the teacher. Gareth Mills explains the benefits of working together on practical tasks and inter-school or even inter-country projects where students can develop problem-solving skills. This is precisely the type of skill that is needed to understand how ICT works, as the European Commission points out.

In addition, sharing learning materials can give schools more flexibility in the traditional organization of school timetables. For teenagers in particular, changing the school day so that lessons start later can have an important impact on how well they learn. One UK school ran a trial where lessons began at 10 am instead of 9 am. The exam results at the end of the year showed improvement across all subjects, with pass rates going up by 20 per cent in English and by 34 per cent in ICT.

The real value of digital tools, therefore, lies not only in the way they can deliver content to students but in the way they can change the whole landscape of classroom interaction. Events like the European e-Skills Week are key opportunities to show that where digital skills are concerned, schools need to look not only at what but also how they teach.

computer coding (n) writing in language of computer programmes
e-skills (n) the skills needed to work in digital technology
neuroscientist (n) an expert in how the human brain works
platform (n) a computer system or programme