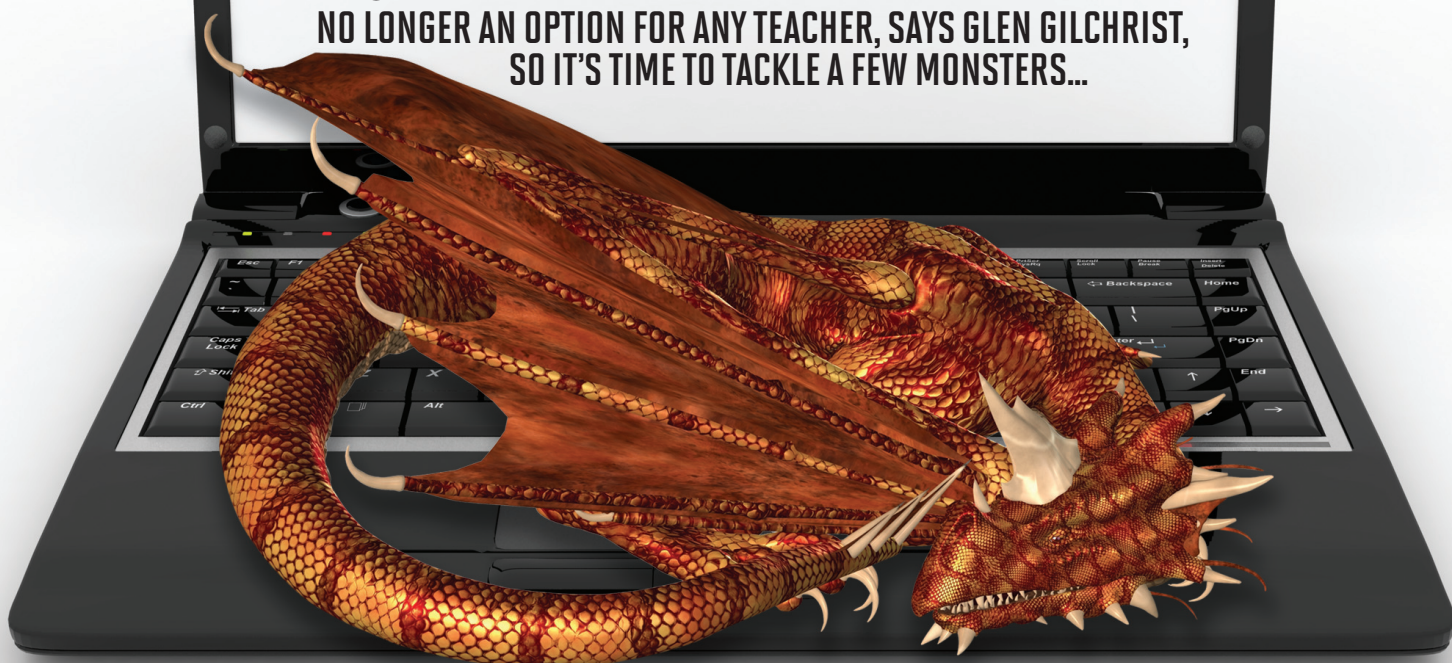


THE GOOD FIGHT

📌 TREATING ICT AS SOMEBODY ELSE'S RESPONSIBILITY IS NO LONGER AN OPTION FOR ANY TEACHER, SAYS GLEN GILCHRIST, SO IT'S TIME TO TACKLE A FEW MONSTERS...



* ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Glen Gilchrist is head of science in a secondary school in Wales.

Currently he is seconded to the Welsh Government working on digital content for the Hwb, National Learning Platform. He can be found slaying dragons at glengilchrist.co.uk and @mrgppg

As a middle leader I'm responsible for debriefing teachers after peer observations and today, I want to introduce you to... well, let's call him George. He's a second in faculty who has been teaching for nine years. All schools have a George.

George: It's not fair that that I only got a 2 for this obs. I think it was outstanding. I planned well; differentiated; used targeted questions of

named individuals; I was all over behaviour; the class made significant progress – it was totally awesome.

Me: What did the Head say to you?

George: Well that's it – he said, "I didn't make appropriate use of ICT." That's nonsense. I knew this was an observation, so I plucked up my courage and got the laptops out. They researched the Learning Aims whilst I was taking the register. The lesson notes were via

“They researched the Learning Aims whilst I was taking the register. The lesson notes were via PowerPoint, and I used Excel to draw a graph. What more could I do? I'm a chemistry teacher after all, not an ICT expert!”

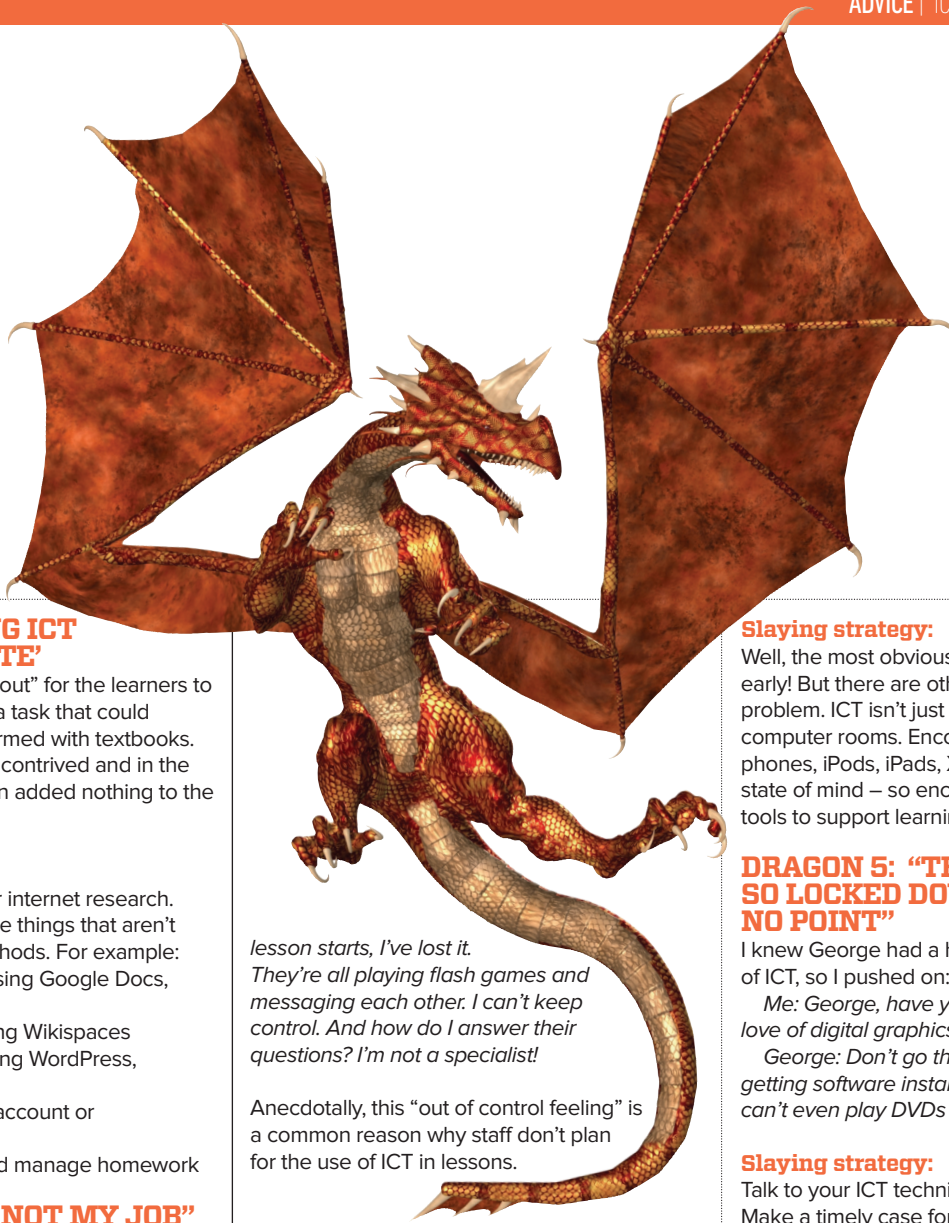
PowerPoint, and I used Excel to draw a graph. What more could I do? I'm a chemistry teacher after all, not an ICT expert!

Encapsulated in this exchange is a sentiment that reverberates throughout teaching. Literacy is taught by the English department, numeracy by maths, and ICT by the IT team.

But things are changing. With poor PISA performance, teachers have begun to act upon the requirement that we are “all teachers of literacy and numeracy”. Indeed many an SLT will consider a focus on literacy and numeracy to be the first requirement of his or her teaching staff.

However, this blurring of subject demarcation has yet to make a significant impact on ICT.

And this brings us back to George. He's courageous and he's keen, but – unbeknownst to him – he's surrounded by dragons that are preventing him from taking his teaching to the next level. So, because you can't tackle a foe you can't see, here are my top five ICT dragons... and how to slay them.



DRAGON 1: USING ICT AS A 'SUBSTITUTE'

George "got the laptops out" for the learners to "research" something – a task that could equally have been performed with textbooks. The use of ICT here was contrived and in the format of George's lesson added nothing to the learning outcomes.

Slaying strategy:

Don't swap textbooks for internet research. Instead, use ICT to enable things that aren't possible using other methods. For example:

- Work collaboratively using Google Docs, SkyDrive or Pebble Pad
- Create a class wiki using Wikispaces
- Create a class blog using WordPress, Tumblr or Blogger
- Create a class Twitter account or Facebook page
- Use Edmodo to set and manage homework

DRAGON 2: "IT'S NOT MY JOB"

After discussion with George, it became clear that his exercise did not quite work as expected, anyway. "The kids can't use Google to find stuff," he told me, "so I don't know why I bother." Common to many teachers, George did not see the lack of internet searching skills as an opportunity for him to break off into some focused ICT work. In his world, that was a job for the IT department.

Slaying strategy:

First of all, it's important to understand and accept that these days, teaching about and with technology absolutely is the job of every educator. Using generic tools such as Excel, Word or Google in a subject specific manner is our role and we can't delegate this to the ICT team. Plan lessons where the Learning Aim of that lesson is subject specific ICT, and work with the ICT team to develop a range of cross-curricular interventions

DRAGON 3: "THE STUDENTS KNOW MORE THAN ME"

As we discussed the lesson, I asked George about his feelings towards using the laptops.

Me: You told me that you "plucked up the courage" to use the laptops. Why do you feel like that?

George: Well, normally, as soon as the

lesson starts, I've lost it. They're all playing flash games and messaging each other. I can't keep control. And how do I answer their questions? I'm not a specialist!

Anecdotally, this "out of control feeling" is a common reason why staff don't plan for the use of ICT in lessons.

Slaying strategy:

OK, it's time to be realistic. Some of the students probably do know more than you, yes. But instead of fixating on that, try to rephrase the problem in your head: You know less than the learners and feel uncomfortable – so do something about it.

- First, remember that learners often appear to know more than they do about ICT matters, because they are more confident or willing to make mistakes.
- Ask students what they know – and let them use those skills.
- Lean on your schools' digital leaders.
- Use the learners who do know more as "experts" in class, helping out their less confident peers.
- Use Twitter for CPD – follow subject-specific hash tags (#asechat, #mathchat and #ictchat) for tips and to ask burning questions.

DRAGON 4: "YOU CAN NEVER GET INTO AN ICT ROOM"

As George offloaded his angst over not being an ICT teacher he pronounced that it was all a waste of time anyway, as he struggled to ever use the technology in the first place. According to him, the same classes are in the computer suites, week in, week out, and he never gets a look-in.

Slaying strategy:

Well, the most obvious suggestion is to book early! But there are other ways around the problem. ICT isn't just desktops, laptops and computer rooms. Encourage the use of mobile phones, iPods, iPads, Xbox, PS3; ICT use is a state of mind – so encourage the use of digital tools to support learning away from class, too.

DRAGON 5: "THE SYSTEM IS SO LOCKED DOWN, THERE'S NO POINT"

I knew George had a hobby that used a fair bit of ICT, so I pushed on:

Me: George, have you tried to bring your love of digital graphics into your lessons?

George: Don't go there – the chance of getting software installed on the system is nil. I can't even play DVDs or print stuff.

Slaying strategy:

Talk to your ICT technicians and head teacher. Make a timely case for why you need Facebook access, rather than hitting a brick wall five minutes before you need it. Also, explore online Web2.0 alternatives to installed software:

- Google Docs and SkyDrive for Office Applications
- Prezi for online presentations
- Pixlr, FotoFlexer for image editing
- Slideshare for sharing presentations
- Evernote for sharing notebooks
- Dropbox for file sharing
- Infogram for infographics
- Weebly to make simple website
- Wordle to make tag clouds
- Voki to make animated, 60 second videos

Ultimately, the biggest thing for all the Georges out there to remember is that ICT across the curriculum should be seen as an enabling tool, not the reason for a lesson in itself.

It's important to think about what ICT allows your learners to do that is beyond what they could achieve with paper and pen; you don't want to recreate your lessons digitally – that's a pointless exercise. Instead, you should aim at transforming, improving and evolving the learning opportunities for young people.

And then – as your next observation will no doubt record – you will be using ICT effectively in the classroom.