iBook revolution

Werkgroep 54

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This workshop focussed on the strength of the iBooks. The majority of educational publishers offer some sort of electronic learning environment and/or digital version of their material: 'SchoolTas' for example. The functionality of most material is relatively limited. Participants in the workshop described what was currently on offer as little more than a colourful pdf. Some refer to this sort of material as "a book behind glass". The iBook strength is its functionality. We looked at a number of iBooks written by myself and colleagues at my school.

You can drop photos and films into an iBook and in such a way that your students are not dependent on an internet connection. You can create photo-galleries and add text to 'tell a story'. You can build in quizzes: multiple choice, matching with images and text, matching with images and images and more. I did this for a quiz about the solar system: drag the names to the respective planets. You build the answers into the quizzes so that the quizzes check the answers for you. You can build in checklists so that the students can tick-off what they've done. In addition, because of the iPads own functionality on selection of a word or text, it is possible to look up definitions of the words and even to have the text read out for you. Participants had iPads and were able to experience the iBooks strengths for themselves. I think it is fair to say that everyone was impressed with the possibilities.

Creating your own iBook: 'writing' your own iBook is not to be taken lightly. It is not simply a case of copying existing material into the iBook. First of all you need a mac – you can't create an iBook on a pc. The program used to create an iBook is free: iBooks Author and it is very easy to use. That is my opinion, but in the past I've messed around with music and edited films so maybe it is not for everyone. The functionality is adding using "widgets". iBooks Author has its own widgets, but you can import widgets from other organisations relatively easily (see Bookry.com and LearningApps.org). I tried to show participants how easy it was to add the functionality, but am not sure that I managed to convince them that it was in fact easy. This was due primarily to the lack of space on my desktop. At home I have a second screen, there are lots of pop-up help windows. On a large screen or with two screens you can work quickly and efficiently – you have a good overview, you're organised. On one screen which switches to another resolution when attached to a beamer it is difficult to retain that overview.

You have to enjoy editing and being creative because it is very time consuming. Teachers writing iBooks at school were equipped with a MacBook and given 30 hours to create their books. The books we were/are writing were for use in second year science lessons, 4 times 45 minutes per week for 7 weeks per book. Again it is not just a case of copying and pasting, because you build in quizzes, media, feedback which you would otherwise do yourself during the lessons. I had a total rethink on what I wanted to do with my students, so spent much longer writing my iBook. I am also a perfectionist, so my iBook looks good, but is not finished. A colleague needs to add more functionality and touch up his iBook, but his is finished! Once again don't underestimate the task.

Don't forget that iBooks require iPads, you need to be an iPad school to make it worthwhile. iPads are exciting because they are new, they are fashionable, and as a result there are still masses of new developments. We are looking at the App Trello to patch up the missing connectivity of an iBook. With 'SchoolTas' a teacher receives feedback on how far the students are. The iBook can't do that yet, but the word 'yet' is very significant. Even if it takes a while before a student's iBook feeds back to the teacher with the iPad that connectivity is only a couple of finger-taps away.

Finally, the school has to invest if they want their own iBooks in the classroom: teachers need to be equipped with MacBooks and compensated for their time. We've put in a lot of time on our iBooks and are still working on them, but we have no regrets.

It is not possible to mail our iBooks or put them on a WND DVD, but if you contact me then I'm sure we can work something out.

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