

# FOREWORD

Julie Wood and Nicole Ponsford have given a wonderful gift to all the teachers out there who experience daily apprehension—even guilt—about their reluctance to enter the digital teaching age. What’s the gift? A manual that will help them overcome their feelings of inadequacy as they learn how to transform technology from an enemy into a friend—a friend capable of helping any teacher achieve that elusive goal of helping students enhance their learning, thinking, and language skills on the way to deeper disciplinary knowledge.

As such, this is a book that meets head-on the challenges presented to U.S. teachers by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts. We know that these standards put skills and strategies to work in the quest for acquiring deep disciplinary knowledge of the sort inscribed in the domains of literature, science, and history. We know that the odds-on favorite framework for promoting CCSS thinking, reading, and writing is project-based learning. We know that technology is featured in the standards and in the assessments being built to measure their mastery. And finally, with this book, we have a theory, a set of principles of practice, and some well-developed cases to show us how to manage the kind of pedagogy and assessment that will promote progress toward the CCSS.

But the real genius of the book has nothing to do with these new standards. That’s just a side benefit stemming from the book’s serendipitous appearance in 2014. That’s not why Julie and Nicole wrote the book. Instead, they wrote it to inspire all teachers, from the reluctant neophyte to the self-proclaimed nerd, to avail themselves of the affordances of the ever-expanding set of digital tools that is increasingly available to teachers AND, even more important, to students in today’s schools. Let me underscore the phrase, **to students!** The fact

that today's students arrive in our classrooms as digital natives means that those of us who aspire to be teachers don't really have the option of focusing exclusively on traditional media in our subject matter courses. As important and useful as books and paper are as tools of literacy and learning, we do our students a disservice if we don't assist them in learning how to negotiate that subject matter within the new media available in today's world—and with the new literacies that come with those new media.

Of course, there is a certain irony in Julie and Nicole's effort—communicating to the rest of us about the virtues of the digital journey through the medium of conventional print! But we'll forgive them that self-contradiction because we know that they would not have been able to reach a large part of their teacher audience if they had chosen to convey their message in a digital medium. Why? Because the very teachers Julie and Nicole most want to reach might not ever find the information they need to make the transformation if it were available only in a digital format.

Print on paper is about the only thing conventional about the book. It possesses some wonderful affordances that make Julie and Nicole's message all the clearer and friendlier. First, they convey all their "information" in a decidedly and cleverly narrative style. In fact, they create three fictitious teachers, Melissa, Zayid, and Jasmine, each representing a "composite" teacher with a dramatically different stance toward technology—the reluctant neophyte, the user, and the technophile, respectively. We meet these hybrid personalities in each substantive chapter, and we learn how each of them meets the challenges and issues that are the focus of each chapter. How does each transform her or his best conventional lesson to a digital environment? How does each incorporate language, thinking, and problem solving into a digital experience? And so on. The characters might be fictitious, but not their experiences. They ring true because they are based on a rich set of experiences that Julie and Nicole bring to this book, both as teachers who have made the transformation themselves, and as coaches who work constantly to guide others through that same transformation. Another narrative-like feature of the book that you will encounter

in each chapter is the direct voices of the two authors—Jules and Nic, they call themselves in this role, no doubt to give these cameo characters a friendly face. They read like advice columns and appear in sidebars as comments on their own text! Very “meta”! And, more to the point, very useful to teachers as tips in meeting challenges they will encounter along their journey into Techno-Teaching (the term that Julie and Nicole use to distinguish their approach to teaching with digital tools).

We meet each of these distinctive characters (we even learn a bit about their personal lives and food preferences!) as they meander through the agonies and ecstasies of various stages of use—starting out, jumping in, hunkering down, stretching, branching out, and reflecting on the journey. This is a useful literary device, precisely because we get to see what that part of the journey looks like from the decidedly different perspectives of Melissa, Zayid, and Jasmine.

If the tone of the book is teacher friendly, then the focus is decidedly practical. Lots of direct advice about how to think through plans, implement technologies, assess how well students are making their way on the journey (lots of great stuff on formative assessment woven through each chapter), and cope with the novelty of it all. But just because it is practical doesn't mean it isn't grounded in research and theory about teaching and learning. It's clearly grounded in work emanating from the use of technology in the cognitive sciences, and it has many “principles of good teaching” sprinkled through most of the chapters. My favorite principle in the entire book: to make technology work in the classroom, it's not a matter of *using* digital tools but rather a matter of *integrating* the technology into the fabric of the curriculum. It may sound, on the surface, like a minor distinction, but it's not. When technology is integrated, it changes from being a device to get the work done and becomes synergistically related to the curricular goals. You could not imagine achieving the curricular goals without the technology.

Who's the audience? That's pretty transparent from the very beginning of the book. This is written for any and all teachers, regardless of their level of technological comfort, who are about to take the plunge into the world of

TechnoTeaching. And it will be equally useful to elementary and secondary teachers. The examples and the three composite teachers span the entire K–12 continuum.

I've read a lot of professional books on using computers in the classroom. And I always find them a little flat in affect. I don't come away from them just dying to transform every classroom in America into a digital laboratory. Not so with this book by Julie Wood and Nicole Ponsford! I left my reading of it ready to sign on the dotted line and become an advocate for the kind of teaching and learning they describe in the book. Read it! I bet you will be ready to sign up too.

—P. David Pearson

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