

a book and CD. It will include packs of high-quality ready-made electronic assessments and will give teachers flexible reporting. It is also child-friendly, so kids can do their written answers online and there is a learning log where they can self-assess.”

A & C Black is also venturing online in a bid to add value to its print products, including free online teachers’ notes to accompany its new high-interest, low reading level non-fiction series, Extreme Science. Parsons explains: “We didn’t want to fill the books with science, as that can make them boring for children. But the online notes will show teachers how to springboard the science out of the high-interest topics.” Next year, the publisher is also setting up, as part of its children’s website, a new resource bank for teachers which will include a mix of free material and paid-for content. For example, its Singing Express product will be supported online with extra downloadable songs, with notation, lyrics and an embedded music chip to play.

Another potential growth area of digital educational publishing picked up by the BESA research is e-books. By 2011, 13.3% of KS2 teachers expect to prefer e-books as a resource. Barker says he found that result particularly interesting: “It was quite surprising that it was on their radar.” He adds: “Publishers are seeing that as a way forward, but no one has really cracked it yet.”

Parsons agrees: “We find e-books a bit more difficult at primary because it is mostly colour or illustrated titles, so it is not practical yet, but technology is changing so quickly.”

Controversial news just in from the US certainly sets out an interesting proposition. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California, has outlined a plan to scrap print textbooks in the state’s schools in favour of e-books in a bid to cut a budget deficit. He wrote in local newspaper: “It’s nonsensical and expensive to look to traditional hard-bound books when information today is so readily available in electronic form.”

There is a long way to go before that is an accepted attitude in the UK, where both publishers and teachers continue to recognise the role traditional books play, but the digital shift is underway. Barker says: “Books are here to stay, there is no argument about that, but digital is becoming more popular and in the future publishers probably won’t be able to sell as much of their printed material.”

The full BESA Primary Resources Review, which also includes foundation and KS1 teachers’ responses, is available at www.besa.org.uk.

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Research digital with digital

As teachers’ digital needs evolve, **Mary James** says online technology can help publishers to identify them

As technologies develop, teachers’ needs are changing. One teacher said recently: “We don’t want a textbook any more, we want an entire teaching package.” Another added: “Students will end up with a grade C if they only use one book.”

Obviously the package of resources teachers want will vary depending on their personal preferences

and their class, but, something all teachers have in common, is that they need to engage a variety of abilities. “The majority of students are not high flyers” said one geography teacher, while a PE teacher explained: “Students range from the excellent to the ‘can’t be bothered’.”

Engaging the reluctant student who does not value reading very much and is likely to work harder on their social life than their revision is the big challenge for teachers who need get the right league table status. Most realise they have to meet students halfway with their teaching style.

Consequently, as a consultant, I frequently hear requests for digital media and for specification content to be broken down into mixed media bullet-point lessons on PowerPoint. “It is the diet they expect—and they can learn so much from animation and hearing it again and again,” said a teacher. And that is where publishers can help.

As well as producing products to help teachers engage with their students’ needs, publishers’ main goal should be to save teachers time, by helping to keep their lessons up-to-date. Many secondary subject teachers—including those of business studies, geography and political studies—draw on current examples in today’s news. One teacher who uses print resources says: “[Content] is in date the year you buy it, but I have to be up to date all the time.” Therefore to provide the comprehensive service teachers are after, publishers need to offer email or online updates to back up print products.

Understanding teachers’ changing needs has always been tricky for publishers who have to work with little cash and even less time; discovering



the digital resources teachers want presents even more of a challenge. Publishers are often having to research a digital product that even the market does not know about yet, or they are trying to meet teachers’ needs even they do not know they have.

Interestingly, where digital tools can help teachers, utilising online survey facilities

like Survey Monkey can make publishers’ research easier and more cost-effective, helping them to reach a greater volume of respondents faster and more cheaply.

In a virtual group, respondents are encouraged to answer a question much as they would an online questionnaire, with each response being visible to the next participant who is invited to comment. Conducted over a time-defined period, it allows publishers to add in visual stimulus or probe for more details as in a face-to-face group. But, the added privacy renders participants more likely to open up and air their views frankly. It also means the more quietly spoken are not shouted down.

Teachers who are not yet web savvy will obviously not be recruited easily, which means publishers should complement their research with another technique. Talking to your market, either over the telephone or face-to-face, is a must for any piece of research. Even then, online technologies can help. With a Skype number, you can record your discussion electronically and—with the right tools in place—get a transcription delivered straight to your inbox.

Online tools are creating communities of doers, people who want to be involved—and teachers are no different. They may lack the time, but not the enthusiasm, and more often than not are flattered to be consulted. One primary teacher commented: “I’m amazed that publishers actually want to know.”

Mary James works as a “market sleuth” on research projects to help publishers identify what teachers want to buy. See www.innovated.co.uk.