

Why Shouldn't I Google It? A case for the use of internet tools in education

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It has become second nature: when a question arises, the first thing we do is reach for our phones and access one of the plethora of internet platforms, where we may reliably assume that we will find an answer within seconds of scrolling. In many ways, this use of technology has become the defining change in modern society. Where previously, our own or others' knowledge or reference materials would have aided us in solving a myriad of queries, we now have every answer conveniently at our fingertips. In this blog post, we argue that children within Primary education in England should be mentored in skills that will aid them in gathering information online.

While the majority of [Millennials](#) and [Gen-Zers](#) in the UK have grown up with ready access to the internet, one thing that is often overlooked is that it is not a static resource. Internet research has come a long way since the days of 'Ask Jeeves'. 'Googling' is now characterised by the practice of using a process of 'digital short cuts', which enable the user to move artfully between the links conjured up within search results. The speed with which users can navigate large amounts of information in this way becomes ever more refined with frequent use and familiarity, as well as the support that Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Copilot offer.

The arguments regarding the purpose of education are well established, and while there are still differences between settings, the existence of a [national curriculum for primary education in England](#) and an assessment system that stresses the importance of product over process, suggests that there is an overarching environment of conformity within English education (Neumann et al., 2020). Primary education promotes the importance of remaining seated and raising our hands to speak (Hallworth, 2022). This is commonly reinforced by a regimented and often inflexible learning programme which leaves little room for individual learning preferences (Hargreaves et al., 2023).

Platforms such as YouTube provide valuable resources for learning, offering a comprehensive range of tools, addressing all manner of interests, and providing users with accessible information to suit a range of learning preferences and abilities. Indeed, the platform provides opportunity for users to partake in a process of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), whereby they are taken beyond the classroom and into a meaningful learning environment which is inclusive and relevant. But this is only true when we all work together to ensure that skills such as criticality and a thirst for new knowledge and new solutions are present. So, we call upon more schools to recognise

that the use of Google, YouTube and the multitude of Generative AI tools available provide an important and relevant method of research, allowing pupils the space to pursue interests in an open-ended fashion, employing increasingly sophisticated methods of ‘[fortuitous searching](#)’, which can be engaged in an informal manner and can be used to foster imagination and freedom of thought.

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Fast forwarding to adulthood and the scenario presented at the start of this blog post. The emphasis in many aspects of life at work and home is on independent problem-solving, using one’s own initiative and a lack of reliance on other people. In many ways, this is the reverse of what has been taught through formal education, and so the question we pose here is: Why aren’t we doing more to encourage children to make use of new technology to problem-solve within the classroom? Perhaps increasingly sophisticated digital search tools present an unwelcome third party to the traditional teacher/student dichotomy, posing the risk of subversion and questioning on a deeper level. Perhaps the teacher/curriculum leaders/educational specialists don’t have all the answers ... but nobody does. Perhaps instead of working on the assumption that there is always a right answer and it can be found, however, we can nurture generations of forward thinking, critical and autonomous learners.

References

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