



A. Konobeyev, PhD, "Computers for Education"

Using ICT for Teaching English and Professional Development

The abbreviation ICT stands for information and communication technology and is an umbrella term that covers both the electronic information-processing devices and technologies of *finding, storing, retrieving* and *using* information with their help through the traditional computer-based technologies (like typing texts, creating spreadsheets, presentations etc) and the digital communication technologies (communicating and sharing information digitally). The importance of ICT lies not so much in the technology itself as in the access to information and communication that it provides.

In ELT (English language teaching) using ICT means expanding the boundaries of the classroom by adding new functionality to accessing, evaluating, integrating information and assisting teachers in getting this information across to their students.

In this article we will explore some of the basic uses of ICT for teaching English at school more effectively as well as supporting teachers' professional development. Such areas as use of the internet, including finding free information, audio and video resources, use of digital communication tools for teaching and professional development, use of digital teaching materials developed by teachers and use of learning software are covered.

Using the internet as a source of information

The internet is probably one of the richest sources of information which is readily available just a search or two away. One can find practically any information in online encyclopedias, dictionaries, articles, blogs, news archives, online versions of newspapers, journals and virtual libraries.

However, this availability means that the information comes from all sorts of sources and needs to be thoroughly checked before using it in the classroom.

First of all, if you decide to use a website for teaching, it needs to be checked for *credibility*. Normally, there is a big difference in the degree of credibility between an article on language written, say, by the world-renown expert David Crystal and the views of a tourist expressed in a travel blog. Some information can be biased depending on the views of the owner of the site. Thus, some websites are used to promote the views of a religious, or a financial or a political group

and therefore may not be acceptable for teaching children. Finding out who owns the website always helps to determine whether you want to spend your time exploring the website or you'd rather find another one where the information is less likely to be biased by the site's owner's views. To find out who the owner of a website is you may look for copyright notices at the bottom of the page or the owner's contact information.

Even when the information on a website is edited publicly, there are chances that its credibility is not so well-established. Wikipedia — the publicly-edited online encyclopedia — can be used as a good example of this statement. Since the information in Wikipedia can be edited by any of its readers who wish to do so, every article can undergo minor changes at any time. Although research shows that most of the information in Wikipedia is fairly accurate, some articles are sometimes influenced by views and opinions that are currently in fashion. Sometimes an issue described in an article still causes much controversy. In this case a message like this:

"**The neutrality of this article is disputed.** Please see the discussion on the [talk page](#). (February 2009) Please do not remove this message until the [dispute is resolved](#)."

can appear above the article, but with smaller issues such messages do not appear. Depending on whether the article is published in the English-language section of Wikipedia (which in February 2009 had 2 731 000+ articles) or its Russian section (358 000+ articles in February 2009), the degree of detail and knowledge can also vary greatly. For example, the references under the heading "Russian" are distinctly different in the English-language section (Russian From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia):

- Russian refers to anything related to [Russia](#), including:
- [Russian language](#), an East Slavic language
 - [Russians](#), the ethnic group primarily associated with Russia
 - [The Russian](#), a villain from The Punisher comics
 - ["Russians" \(song\)](#), a song by Sting
 - ["Russian"](#), the tenth movement of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells 2003* album
 - [RSFSR](#), (a Soviet Land)

and in the Russian-language section:

Русский (значения)

Материал из Википедии — свободной энциклопедии

Русский — многозначный термин, входит в состав многих сложных терминов.

- Русский — относящийся к России, к их жителям, к русскому народу, россиянам (гражданам России) и Руси (чаще с уточнением „древнерусский“, „западнорусский“ и т. п.)
- Русский — то же, что русский язык (в разговорном употреблении)

Содержание

- 1 Русский народ
- 2 Русский язык
- 3 История и политика России
- 4 Культура России
 - 4.1 Жанры и направления искусства в России
- 5 Персоналии
- 6 Топонимы
- 7 Названия растений и животных
- 8 Организации
 - 8.1 Религиозные организации
 - 8.2 Общественные организации
 - 8.3 Компании
- 8.4 Учреждения культуры
- 9 События и мероприятия
- 10 Книги и серии
- 11 Периодические издания
- 12 Фильмы и телесериалы
- 13 Многозначные сложные термины из разных областей
- 14 Питание
 - 14.1 Напитки
 - 14.2 Мясные блюда
- 15 Другое
- 16 Примечания
- 17 См. также

In some articles not only the details are different, but also the attitude to those details is influenced by the attitudes of those who wrote and edited those articles. Therefore it is always a good idea to check this information in other sources like Encyclopedia Britannica or others. Of course, even biased or one-sided information can be used for arranging discussions in the class, but it shouldn't be taken at face value by students.

Reliability is another issue to look for in information from the internet. Even though the source of information itself is credible, the information may not be very reliable simply due to the fact that it is outdated. For example, if the information on a website has not been updated for 3–5 years, it may already be too old to be reliable. So looking for the date of the last update to the website is always a good idea.

Apart from checking a website's credibility and reliability, the information needs to be selected according to how suitable it is for the class on *conceptual*,

linguistic and pedagogical levels. If the information is too complex for the students to understand the ideas, it would hardly be suitable to use in class unless some preliminary work is done by the teacher. Likewise, a piece of information can be too difficult linguistically for the students to understand, or, although seemingly interesting, will not add much to the flow and the overall objectives of the lesson.

Still, even if some piece of information is too difficult conceptually and language-wise but can be useful for reaching the objectives of the lesson, there are some techniques that a teacher can use to easily work with this information.

There are some differences in arranging classroom work with information when it is printed out from a website and in working with information online. In the following table possible ways of overcoming the conceptual, linguistic and pedagogical difficulties of information from websites are enlisted:

Issues	Work with printouts	Online work
Conceptual difficulty	Using pre-teaching, explanation of concepts before starting work with the texts, using warming-up to relate the ideas from the texts to the students' personal experience and interests.	Using pre-teaching, explanation of concepts before starting work with the texts, using warming-up to relate the ideas from the texts to the students' personal experience and interests, providing links to online encyclopaedias.
Linguistic difficulty	Breaking the text into smaller chunks, numbering paragraphs and designing tasks and exercises for each paragraph, designing tasks for different types of reading, using a glossary to help students understand difficult words without having to learn them by heart.	Providing links to online dictionaries and encyclopedias, asking questions on certain bits of information from the webpage, illustrating new words by providing links to pictures online, assisting students with internet search.

Issues	Work with printouts	Online work
Pedagogical difficulty	Presenting the information as a fun activity, something which is interesting to learn about even if not directly related to students' personal goals, using the information to arrange a reading for pleasure activity or as a time-filler, focusing on ways of organising information inside the text rather than working with detailed understanding of information from the text.	The goals of the lesson shift from working with information to understand it and pick up new vocabulary and grammar as well as ideas to working with the internet as a source of information, for example: "On this webpage you will find information about... Find additional information to complete the table on the handouts" — an exercise based on information gap may help students to build information literacy and help us in our further work with the internet.

So, as we see, the methodology of working with on-line information versus printouts is slightly different, although essentially it serves the same purpose and alongside with the main work on building language proficiency, allows us to develop students' information skills.

Audio and video resources from the internet

Audio resources on the internet

Finding reference, articles and other texts on the internet is only a tiny part of what could really be done with the wealth of resources that the internet provides. Let's explore how we can get practically as many audio and video materials for the classroom as we need from the internet.

One of the possible ways of finding audio recordings is through searching for each specific recording via a search engine, for example, by typing "The Queen's Christmas message" in the search field at www.google.com, www.yahoo.com or any other search engine. In all likelihood you will find a number of references both to audio, texts and videos of many of the Queen's Christmas messages. You can narrow down your search by adding words like "mp3" (an audio file format) or "listen" so that the search engine will bring only the results containing these words. However, such searches are difficult to do on a regular basis and very often the search will lead you to such audio resources that can only be streamed (i.e. you can listen to them online but you can not save them in the memory of your computer), which makes you dependent on having a good internet connection for the lesson. A more convenient way is finding a **podcast**.

A podcast is an audio recording — or a series of recordings — dedicated to a certain topic and available as mp3 files both for listening online and for downloading (saving in the memory of your computer). What's more, the copyright holders of most podcasts allow their podcasts to be downloaded and used for non-profit making purposes, although one must always check the

copyright and permissions requirements before using the podcast by looking for permission or the copyright holder's notice explicitly stating the possibility of such use.

There are podcasts that are purpose-made for teaching / learning English, and regular podcasts for native speakers. For example, most of BBC radio programmes are available for listening and downloading on the BBC website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/>. A teacher can always find something useful in the wide range of radio programmes on politics, history, current affairs, culture, education, science etc. The Voice of America website contains not only radio programmes for native speakers, but also a large Special English section at <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/index.cfm> for those wishing to learn the American variety of the English language. The British Council produces a series of podcasts for learning English, which can be found at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts.htm>. On this site you can find podcasts sorted by language level, topic and type of recording (i.e. songs, stories, discussions etc). The podcasts also include a text version of each story, which can be read on the screen or printed out.

One way of downloading podcasts is going to the website regularly and directly downloading the ones you want. To download the files, right-click on the title, choose "Save target as", and select where you want to save the file. Another way is to use a podcasting application (a special programme you can download from the internet). Most applications are free, like the iTunes music player (downloadable from <http://apple.com/itunes/download>). You can use iTunes to automatically download the podcasts you need. You will still need to go to the podcast website to find the podcast you are interested in, click the "Subscribe" or the "iTunes" button to subscribe to the podcast. Such subscriptions are usually free. Normally, iTunes downloads new podcasts from that site as soon as you run the programme and connect to the internet, but it is automatically set to delete the previous podcasts. If you want to keep all

the downloaded podcasts on your hard drive, in your computer's memory, make sure you turn off the "automatically erase" function in your iTunes player.

As said above, there are many audio files (podcasts) on the internet. It would be impossible to give links even to the major podcast sites, but you can easily find them by searching for EFL podcasts with any search engine.

Video resources for ELT on the internet

As well as audio recordings, there are ELT video materials on the internet. Videlectures, videos with ready exercises, tasks or complete lesson plans can be found at www.teachertube.com as well as at www.teachers.tv and www.teflclips.com. These websites are free, but if you are prepared to pay, there is a number of other sites that contains videos for teachers too.

Another source of video resources for your classroom can be found at www.youtube.com. However, here **one must be very careful to make sure that no copyright law is infringed**.

As a rule, all the files on youtube are for watching online. But if you want to download a file, you may go to www.savevid.com, copy the file's address on youtube from the address box at the top of the page and paste it into the "download" box on www.savevid.com. Click the "Download", select the folder on your hard drive where you want to save the file — and the download will start immediately.

Digital communication for ELT classroom

The most popular ways of using digital communication for English language teaching are:

- Blogging
- Microblogging
- E-mailing

Blogging for ELT

A blog is a journal, or a diary, that you keep online. It has its own web address and can be accessed by other

people, who, if your settings allow it, can leave their comments to the entries you post in your blog. Blogging can be used for teaching English in several ways. First of all, it takes some workload off the teacher's shoulders. Instead of giving tasks to students, collecting those tasks and minding the deadlines, a teacher can just start a blog, post tasks there and write by what date and time the response has to be given. The students post their responses online, and the teacher can easily see the date and time of their response. In this way teachers can save themselves and the students the trouble of writing their response on a sheet of paper, handing it in, carrying it home and bringing it back to school when checked. Also, a student's work cannot get lost in this way.

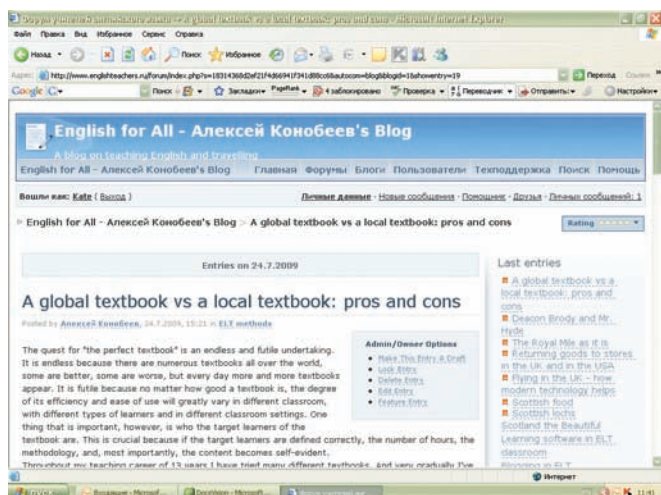
Grading student's work becomes easier through a blog. A teacher just posts a response in the blog entry and can include in the response the phrases that have mistakes in them or just need to be paraphrased or corrected in any other ways.

Students can take part in peer correction or working on a topic / project together by collaborating online by posting comments to a blog entry and responding to them. Such an online discussion has the benefit of students having extra time to think, collect and present their arguments in a logical manner, and the teacher can easily assess each student's work as everyone contribution is visible and written down. By working with a blog each teacher can collect portfolios for her / his students without having to mess around with paper and cardboard or plastic folders.

Privacy may be one of the issues here. A teacher can screen or unscreen (make them visible or invisible to other users) any comments to any posting in the blog at any time, thus making some of the writing visible or invisible as the lesson plan requires.

Blogging is a good way of making studies inclusive for students who are on a sick leave and cannot attend the class. We have been increasingly creating and developing materials for our lessons with computers, so it is just as easy to put some materials online for the students as well as bring them to the class.

Of course, not everything is perfect in this world. To be able to use blogs, both the teacher and the students need to have a regular access to the internet. However, more and more students have such access these days and they are normally more motivated to do something on the internet rather than write anything by hand. Of course, the bulk of teaching still has to be done in class and sometimes in one-on-one lessons, but nevertheless, a blog can be an interesting expansion of the classroom work both for the teacher and for the students.



Here are some possible suggestions of what can be done using a blog:

1. *Project work.* Each of the students has to do his or her own part of the project. The task is to put it online in the blog. The students do research, find materials and publish them as comments to the blog entry. In this way the teacher can easily see how much of the project has already been done, and the students can see what else needs doing. Then as a separate entry, the project is put together and published online for every student to see it.
2. *Written assignments.* The teacher gives an assignment (e.g. "write a letter" or "write an essay") with detailed explanation of what needs to be done, and the students post their responses as comments to the blog entry.
3. *Discussions.* Some students are very reluctant to participate in discussions in class, and some of them just haven't got enough time for it as they need more time to formulate their arguments or put their ideas in good English. Therefore a teachers can ask his / her students to present their arguments as comments to a blog entry. Each of the students can be asked to give only arguments for or arguments against. True, this is very much like what we do in class ever so often, but this "delayed" conversation gives students more time to think and do their research and deals with the stress of having to speak in front of the class. Besides, arguments can be edited at any time, thus leaving the way to perfection (or at least improvement) open for the student. Some of my colleagues who keep educational blogs, tell that this activity very quickly becomes a favourite with older students, and younger students like it because it allows them to be as creative as they like since this can be used as a preparatory stage for a big classroom discussion.

Microblogging for ELT

While blogging is more suitable for larger on-going projects, microblogging can serve the purposes of socializing and teaching writing on sentence-level. A popular microblogging tool is www.twitter.com. Each registered user can post a "twit" (a short, usually one-sentence, 140-characters long message) to tell what he / she is currently doing or what he / she is interested in, what the weather is like etc. Every user can become a reader of anyone else's microblog or microblogs and post in response or send messages directly to other twitters. Although the primary purpose of twitter may seem to be socialization, it can be used for teaching writing on sentence level, posting short messages on a given topic, making micro dialogues at the same time practising writing, and getting in touch with foreign

peers to start corresponding. The microblogging format is less demanding for students as it is easier for them to write one or two sentences than a whole letter. An advantage of such exchanges is that their history is kept on the website and can be printed out for analysis and error correction. The following tasks can serve as examples of work with Twitter:

1. Go online and write what you are doing now / what you plan to do at the weekend.
2. Find someone who has similar plans for the weekend. Write to him / her a personal message to ask if you can do it together.
3. Discuss when and where you can do the planned activity.
4. Print out students' discussions to analyse and correct errors. Peer analysis is possible as well.

E-mailing for ELT

E-mailing is a wonderful option to build up students' written communication skills. As a study activity, e-mailing can be used with varying degrees of control, ranging from very controlled messages on a given topic with a set of structures and vocabulary to use, to free correspondence with foreign peers. Naturally, the more controlled e-mailing is, the more involvement on the teacher's part it presupposes. The most controlled activities may involve students writing to their teacher or to each other to practise certain vocabulary and grammar issues as well as peculiarities of e-mails as a genre of writing. In case the teacher needs to check how well the students have been doing in their e-mails, he / she can either ask students to forward some of the e-mails to him / her (at least the parts which are not too personal and the students feel comfortable about sharing) or just print out some of the e-mails to analyse them in class.

The task may look like this; "Write a short (50–80 words) e-mail to N to suggest going out together at the weekend. Tell where you would like to go, why you think this will be interesting, how long the event will last. Ask if N likes the idea and if N has other suggestions".

A task can also involve a series of e-mails to discuss a certain topic and reach a consensus. In this case the task may look like this: "Your grandmother's birthday will be next month. You want to make a present for her together with your cousin who lives in a different city but is coming for the occasion. E-mail to find out what your cousin's plans are, discuss a present you may get together and decide on what present it is going to be".

Another possible option could be setting a project for the class and require that students prepare for the project, discuss its contents etc via e-mail, copying their

messages to your mailbox. The overall grade may depend on their linguistic accuracy in the e-mails, or you can help them correct their bits of texts for the project via e-mail and thus help them build up their error correction skills.

Free e-mailing can involve finding pen-pals abroad for your students. No matter whether the pen-pals are native speakers of English or EFL students from a different country, such correspondence will give your students an opportunity to use English as a tool for everyday communication with their peers, expand their cross-cultural competence and increase background knowledge of the world. References to free pen-pal services can be found at www.englishteachers.ru/forum. A school link project that is currently running is accessible at www.englishteachers.ru/forum in the "A living city" section of the forum.

Webquests as a learning experience

Finding information and communicating on the internet can become highly-motivating for students if it is brought together as a webquest. A webquest is a type of activity, a process that can be described as a search for information on the internet as part of an "adventure". In a webquest students are allowed to choose roles. For example, they can be journalists preparing to write an article on an interesting topic, or archaeologists, discovering a certain historic period, or scientists researching the ecological situation in a certain part of the world. To achieve the ultimate goal of their mission, the students need to find relevant information on the internet, arrange the information found in a certain order and present it as an article, presentation or another type of project as the result of the webquest.

A well-designed webquest may contain a selection of missions for students, complete with necessary background information (often as direct links to relevant websites), search tasks, recommendations or steps for arranging the information collected and requirements for the final outcome. The teacher designing the webquest can decide whether all missions or only certain tasks need to be completed, and whether these tasks and / or missions need to be completed individually or in groups, thus allowing enough flexibility to adapt the webquest to different classes, student abilities and needs, and different educational goals.

As a brief example of a webquest one can consider the following:

Mission 1. You are a journalist preparing to write an article on the mysteries of Russian history. The editor suggests that you write either about the mysterious city of Arkaim or the legend of the city of Kitezh.

a) To decide which city you are going to write about go to this site to read about Arkaim (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkaim>)

and then to this site to read about Kitezh (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitezh>).

- b) Now that you've chosen the city, here is the list of points you need to cover in your article:
- When was the city inhabited?
 - Who lived there?
 - Who threatened the city?
 - What happened to the city eventually?
 - What other 5 major events were happening in the world in that century?
 - What influence did the story of this city have on artists / musicians / writers?

To cover all these points you need to search for additional information on the internet.

- c) Write an article about the city you've chosen. Try to find pictures on the internet to illustrate your article (Hint: to search for pictures via Google, first click on "Pictures" above the search box, then type in the name of the picture or the object you are searching for and click the search button). Save the article and bring it to the class to print it out and share with your friends.

Mission 2. You are an archaeologist who wants to prepare a lecture for school students on the daily life of people in a certain historic period. The children at school are now studying medieval England and medieval Russia.

- a) To decide what you are going to write about go to this site to read about daily life in 14th-century England (http://www.britainexpress.com/History/Feudalism_and_Medieval_life.htm) and then to this site to read about daily life in 14th-century Russia (<http://www.strangelove.net/~kieser/Russia/>).

- b) Now that you've chosen the country, here is the list of points you need to cover in your article:
- What type of houses did people live in?
 - What food did people eat in those times?
 - What clothes did people wear?
 - What famous people lived then in the country?
 - Who ruled the country at that time?
 - What other 5 major events were happening in the world in that century?
 - What new inventions / works of art / sights / books etc were created in that period?

To cover all these points you need to search for additional information on the internet.

- c) Write an article about the country you've chosen. Try to find pictures on the internet to illustrate your article (Hint: to search for pictures via Google, first click on "Pictures" above the search box, then type in the name of the picture or the object you are searching for and click the search button). Save the article and bring it to the class to print it out and share with your friends.

Webquests are useful for teaching in several respects, mainly because they expand learner autonomy, boost the borders of project work, allow to teach students work with information and lead to good, but not very predictable results as the students' choice of internet sources of information is limited only by their fantasy and common sense. Plagiarism is usually not a big issue in such webquests as a teacher can easily check whether a student has created a text of his/her own or just copied a text from the internet by searching for bits of the texts produced by students via Google or another search engine.

The internet as a learning environment

The internet provides a number of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), both free and fee-paying, that can be used to put up learning materials as distance learning courses. While at present such VLEs are less relevant for secondary schools, where most studies are supposed to be done face-to-face (f2f), they are rather relevant for universities looking for ways to deliver learning content without using the actual classrooms, and for teachers who would like to undertake a distance professional development course without having to stay away from their classes, homes and families. Let's consider how a distance learning course can be used for teachers professional development. As an example we will be referring to Moodle which is a free VLE.

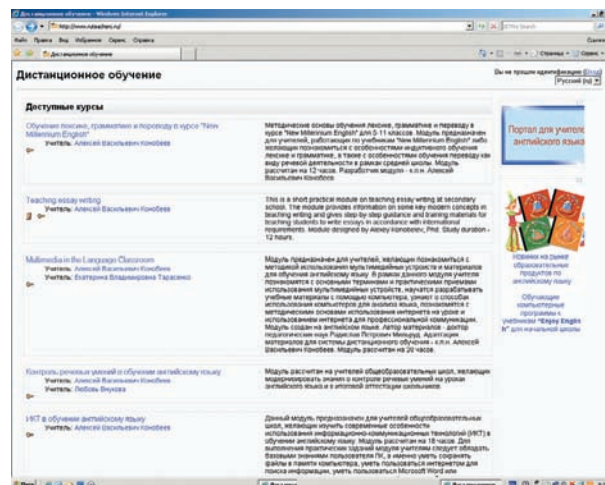
A distance learning course can be organised according to the calendar (when a participant needs to do certain tasks and assignments by specific dates within the duration of the course), usually on a week-by-week basis, or according to the course content (where the participants can choose themselves when and at what pace they will be doing the assignments, provided that all the assignments are completed by the course deadline).

A distance learning course can include both asynchronous (each participant working at the time that suits him / her) and synchronous (participants have to go online simultaneously to do chats or other activities together) tasks. Course materials can be presented as articles, presentations, audio, video and other types of files, exploration tasks, chats, tasks requiring individual input to write and edit online encyclopedia entries, tests with various question types (such as multiple choice, yes/no questions, questions requiring one-word or numeric answers), tasks, in response to which the participants need to type a long answer, write an essay, or submit a file with their presentation or other material.

The teacher (or tutor) on such a course can check how much each of the course participants has done, when they were online last, how many times they have viewed a certain article or file, what percentage of a test

has been done correctly, and also download the participants' papers to grade them and comment on them.

A course participant can do all the coursework at any time that is convenient, without having to leave home to attend the f2f classes at a teachers' professional development institute. A teacher wanting to participate in such a distance course can also select the courses which are most interesting for him / her. A range of such courses can be seen at www.ruteachers.ru.



Convenient as such courses are for both the participants and the course teacher (tutor), there are a number of rules to be remembered before enrolling on such a course:

1. Independent studies online require good time-management skills on the part of the student due to their flexibility. This means that since a student can choose himself when to do the tasks, it is very easy to miss the deadlines as suddenly there may appear to be too much work to be done.
2. Most of the work will have to be done independently, with consultations from the tutor available only via e-mail.
3. Meeting deadlines is essential on such courses.
4. Written responses to course questions often take longer to prepare than oral ones and require a greater degree of argumentation and explicitness.
5. Managing an online course, a tutor will need almost as much time as for f2f teaching, considering the amount of reading, writing and evaluating that tutoring such a course involves.

Currently many professional teacher development institutes are either planning or developing their own distance learning courses. Assistance to institutes as well as ready-made courses at www.ruteachers.ru can be provided by "Computers for Education" and by the author of this article.

Продолжение статьи в № 4(28) / 2009