

The value that ict brings to early years



When researching in depth the value of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in early years, I realised that the concept of ICT is not really all that new, but rather it is the practitioners views of ICT that are new.

The Stevenson report 1997 (in O'Hara, 2004: 13) states ' many teachers have expressed concerns over their own level of skills and knowledge needed to make effective use of the technologies'

The aim of this paper and presentation is to hopefully high light the value Information Communication Technology brings to early years and demonstrate how it enhances learning.

Having specialised as an ICT HLTA and my own interest in information communication technology I fully appreciate how young minds can benefit from using technology.

I have observed children from a young age use ICT resources to enable them to communicate, pupils with global delay syndrome, using a talking version of text tease to help her pronounce words. Using software and programmes I have devised and developed interactive activities to encourage literacy development, enthusing young learners into wanting to participate.

I observed the installation of smart boards within my previous setting and watched as practitioners preconceived ideas evolved. Using my own knowledge of ICT, and daring creativity, I devised an activity that would encourage our pupils to identify with their emotions, and then display these on the smart board. In turn supporting the development of fine motor movement, word recognition and visual identification of emotional

responses, all supporting children to explain to adults how they were feeling. The response from the teachers was immense and they began to lose their uncertainty of the smart board.

Five years on; I am embedding ICT into my own lessons. Teaching level 2 and 3 support assistants how to effectively use Information Communication Technology within their own setting. Explaining and demonstrating that ICT is not the high tech environment some people believe it to be, and can enrich the environment of early years if used correctly.

I encourage and support all learners to use the smart board and other programs , demonstrating with various tools how to include it within everyday lessons, including accessing websites that promote early year's activities. I point out and highlight various pieces of equipment that contribute toward ICT.

Digital camera

Mobile telephone

Calculators

Bee-bot

microscopes

Interactive toys (walk talkies)

Smart board

CD players

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Software

Role play toys

Facilitating discussions about individual pieces and how they can be used to develop early year learning goals, these are all important factors that I believe encourage confidence within practitioners and provide them with the motivation needed to master ICT skills. I encourage assistants to observe the children they support, and identify areas where they believe ICT will enhance learning, and then develop different activities to support their idea.

Telephones placed into the role play corner contributing toward communication, language and literacy, digital camera placed in a wild life area helps develop knowledge and understanding, allowing children to investigate outside spaces, when the weather does not permit outside activities, programmable toys support problem solving, counting and spatial relations and planning. There are incessant ways to incorporate ICT within early years using innovation and creativity to sustain interest and enhance learning.

The purpose and benefit of this activity allows assistants to see the importance of ICT, encouraging them to participate within planning and implementing activities which contribute toward learning. Encouraging assistants to see the importance of their role and the role they play within the setting. I believe it also contributes towards highlighting the importance of including ICT but also promotes and emphasises that adult facilitation and interaction is still a very important factor and that one needs to run alongside the other in order for achievement and success.

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Research shows that most children enter foundation stage with some experience of Information Communication Technology, having already established experiences within the home, such as operating DVD players, television remotes, programmable toys and telephones and now with the support of OFSTED and BECTA, practitioners can use ICT to develop young minds and expand knowledge.

In BECTA's contribution to the Rose review (BECTA, 2009) it states ' Use of technology in primary schools can lay the foundations for lifelong learning – but only if it is supported by an appropriate pedagogy'

Pedagogy truly begins in early years, where the foundations of all basic academic skills are formed and early introduction to Information Communication Technology can only enhance learning. As already stated children begin using ICT within the home, watching television, inserting and watching DVD's. It has been a long standing argument of many theorists and parents; that television can have negative effects on the developing mind.

Marsh et al (2005) asked 524 practitioners in 104 EY settings about their views and use of media and new technologies. They found that the vast majority (92 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that children learned from television. (Dahl, 2008)

Government and practitioners need to demonstrate that positive effects can also be achieved through the correct use of Information Communication Technology.

In January 2006 the Department for Children, schools and families (DCSF) launched 'Using ICT in EYs Project' examining and researching the effects and contribution that ICT brings to early years. The project used a number of LA settings and gave specific aims. The conclusion of the research found that 'the use of ICT was seen as valuable in supporting children's learning and for encouraging the sharing with parents and even their involvement in documentation' (The Department for Children, Schools and Families., 2007)

Through personal experience I have found that ICT enhances childrens learning in a number of ways. I incorporated Information Communication Technology into a design technology lesson, providing opportunity for children to design and create their own music disc. The children used music software to identify which songs they wanted, they then designed their cover label, transferring their design to the computer using various software to support them (RM colour magic and texttease). The children used a disc printer to convert their design onto the cover of the disc. The result of this activity demonstrated that the children had more ICT skills than previously thought, working out from a list of options which one would provide the template for the disc, and which function key to press. When I asked them how we could record our progress to show other classes, they suggested; writing about it, using photographs or using the digicam, asking then if we could put the film onto disc. These ideas suggested and demonstrated to me that the children were quite ICT savvy.

The lesson also opened various other gateways, as the children communicated among themselves, demonstrating their problem solving skill, likening what we were doing to the music shops in the shopping, linking

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technology to society. They worked out how the printer transferred their picture onto the disc watching as it printed, linking terminology to ICT. The lesson not only provided opportunity to learn new skills but incorporated early learning goals (cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and physical). Encouraging the children to work out problems (connecting the disc transporter to the printer) and promote use of fine motor skills (using the mouse and keyboard) whilst promoting literacy skills (speaking, listening and writing) or typing as the children corrected me. The activity produced more than I had anticipated, and whilst it took time and supervision I felt it was a valuable learning curve.

Whilst I support the benefits that Information Communication Technology can bring to early years I have also come across situations when the more traditional method of teaching was required. Children participated in an activity using a bee-bot (floor robot), developing skills and understanding toward teaching control, directional language and programming.

Some of the children were finding it difficult to grasp the concept of the activity, struggling with identifying their left and right, without this basic knowledge the children found it difficult to manoeuvre the floor robot (bee-bot) and complete the exercise, in order to sustain interest and confidences I returned to a more practical pedagogical approach. I removed the small group of children from the activity and created a similar floor map, using coloured floor mats, the children became the bee-bot whilst other children gave instructions to move left or right. This activity took time but interest and confidence was sustained the children soon picked up left and right, returning back to the bee-bot the following lesson the pupils achieved their

objective of moving the bee-bot across the mat. The pride they felt was obvious in their response to being able to program the robot.

This verified that whilst ICT is beneficial to children and does support early years, adults are needed to help scaffold the lesson and first hand experiences are still essential to support the development of children.

As more and more technology arrives into the early year's curriculum the role of the teacher and support assistant transforms. It is this point that concerns me; teaching assistants are more involved in whole class teachings than ever before. Different assistants perform different roles, and assist and support different abilities. It is part of my role to ensure that they are competent within this field. To ensure competency across the board I now incorporate teaching Information Communication Technology skills to my learners. Teaching them how to use resources to promote learning, develop activities to sustain interest and promote inclusion, through the use of equipment, software and smart board.

Early year's children benefit in various ways from using Information Communication Technology, various interactive activities provide children with the opportunity to explore areas they could not otherwise safely explore (safely crossing roads).

In deprived areas of community many children have never visited the seaside, listened to the waves as they crash against rocks, CD's, DVD's and the internet can all supply these experiences; allowing children to develop and strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the world, they can

use the internet to investigate sea creatures and explore the world, all from the realms of a safe environment.

Using various software and programmable equipment gives children the opportunity to develop and experience many skills. Using everyday objects can promote independency and work towards developing adult skills, creating a shopping role play area, leaving an operational check out till, microphone and labels provide the children with the opportunity to use their imagination and imitate events. A dance mat placed in the music corner can encourage and promote development of motor skills, co-ordination and interaction skills.

Information Communication Technology enables more inclusivity for SEN (Special Educational Needs) children in far more many ways than practitioners thought. As more schools become main-stream and inclusive more children with SEN are increasing, ICT provides ways to meet their needs. A purpose built computer and roller ball mouse can enable a child with a physical disability to produce a written piece of work through using a keyboard/ roller ball rather than a pen, and programmes make it possible for the child with sight impairment to hear a talking book.

Children are motivated, excited and enthused by ICT, using creativity and innovation to produce activities to enhance learning can give children different avenues to explore and often leads to easier comprehension of the activity. Practitioners who embrace Information Communication Technology create different ways to promote literacy and numeracy, printing words and letters from the computer so children can identify areas of play, providing

children with pictures of characters in reading schemes and then encouraging them to use the pictures to make a sentence, creating word walls to enable word recognition are all varied ways to support and promote ICT.

However, as ICT brings positivity into the classroom it can also bring in negativity. Many practitioners feel their own skills lack in this area, they are unconfident with their capabilities and often see technology as no more than a free time activity rather than a learning resource. The fear of technology taking over their role is often at the forethought and concerns over safety often prevail, dissuading many practitioners from exploring the benefits of using ICT.

These are factors that hinder the progression of Information Communication Technology especially within early years practice, but these are all issues that can be overcome with the provision of ICT training. Encouraging, supporting and providing practitioners with the time and training they feel they need in order to efficiently and effectively teach ICT to their pupils with confidence. Providing children with the fundamental formations they can take into adult life.

As O'Hara (2004) suggests ' ICT has become an increasingly prevalent feature in many aspects of life' this is shown in recent reports showing that employers are actively turning away prospective employees who lack ICT skills ' a lack of basic ICT skills will be a disadvantage in both finding and securing a new job' (Morris, 2009).

Logic then tells me that to introduce and promote Information Communication Technology into the early years foundation stage is a positive way forward, giving the children of today the technological skills they will need for tomorrow. To turn away from the technology is to deprive children of their future. Whether society agrees or disagrees technology is here to stay, therefore is it not better that as practitioners we use every available resource to ensure that ICT starts at the earliest possible stage? Giving children within all abilities and localities the skills they will need throughout life, not only to succeed but to survive.

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