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Today, more than ever before, technology is increasingly documented as a fundamental learning tool for advancing the social, emotional, intellectual and linguistic development of young children. Indeed, the question being asked by educators and parents in the 21st century is no longer about whether and to what scope information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be utilized with young children in early childhood centers, but rather how it should be employed to achieve maximum benefits (Couse & Chen, 2010). Educators readily acknowledge the fact that keeping up with the ongoing convergence of technology for the classroom presents unique challenges to them as they come to terms with the ever growing potential of ICTs to augment the capacity of young children to learn, solve problems, and express their thoughts.

It is against this background that this essay will seek to demonstrate why computers are a necessity in early childhood learning. A wide body of literature demonstrates that preschool children are not only empowered by the use of computers, but the utilization of the new media in learning environments is central to enhancing their creativity, development of ideas, collaborative play and enculturation into the knowledge society and economy (Stephen & Plowman, 2003). This view is reinforced by Long-Breipohl (n. d.), who postulates that computers are great motivators for learning, in part, due to the fact that they encourage interaction among young children. Empowerment, enculturation into the knowledge society and promotion of interaction, in my view, goes a long way towards providing an enabling environment where young children can be able to benefit intellectually, especially in the development and conveyance of ideas.

Computers can be purposively used by preschool children to record their creative work.

This affords them the opportunity to interact with the devices – may they be desktops, laptops, tablets or iPods – to better understand at an early age how they operate for future use. Long-Breipohl (n. d.

) is of the opinion that “...the earlier a child is introduced to the use of computers, the better will he be prepared for coping with the demands of workplaces later in life and the greater is the likelihood of a successful future” (p. 1). In this perspective, the use of computers for learning in preschool age is positively correlated to a brighter future thereafter.

Computers, according to Breipohl (n.

d.), can be used to improve a child’s academic achievement. Indeed, computers and other related technologies are playing a critical role in accessing information, and it is a well documented fact that any form of learning is highly dependent on information. In consequence, it can be argued that any form of media that will afford a child the access of relevant educational content will inarguably go a long way to improve his academic achievement. Computers, when used in collaboration with the internet, link the child to a whole new world of learning possibilities. It is against this backdrop that stakeholders in the education sector have discovered the intrinsic value of computers to the learning process.

Growth and development is rapid in early childhood – a phase of individual development witnessed from birth all the way to the age of 8 years.

Accordingly, researchers and educators have highlighted the significance “...

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of the children's active use of technology in making decisions, technology resources in writing and drawing, and logical thinking programs to solve problems and illustrate ideas" (Couse & Chen, 2010, p. 76). These are fundamental concepts that must be conveyed to the child at an early age, and computers and other forms of technologies offer the needed platform for the needed impartment to take place. It should be remembered that any form of technology that enhances children's thinking capacities also affords them prospects for active control and problem solving while granting educators a much needed window into the children's social and intellectual development (Stephen & Plowman, 2003).

Inquiry-based learning forms a critical component of the education process, and the internet is being used by many educators around the world to assist young children to develop their inquiry techniques by showing them how to find content that builds on their learning interests (Hertzog & Klein, 2005). According to Wang et al (2010), "...children naturally explore and learn about their environments through inquiry, and computer technologies offer an accessible vehicle for extending the domain and range of this inquiry" (p. 381). In addition to this observation, online inquiry-based learning has the potential to broaden children's intellectual capacities in ways that traditional techniques of learning may not be able to match due to the nature and scope of information found on the internet, and also due to accessibility of diverse range of information. This observation is advantageous to the very objective of learning for knowledge accumulation. Away from issues of inquiry-based learning, Hertzog & Klein (2005) asserts that "...computers can serve as catalysts for social interaction and emotional growth" (p.

25). Social and emotional development forms a critical area for young children by virtue of the fact that they serve as basis for future development and growth, including the capacity to socialize with others, the development of self-esteem and identity, and, by extension, development of their cognitive abilities. Indeed, Hertzog & Klein (2005) opines that the use of computers by preschoolers facilitate both social and intellectual relations - each to the advantage of the other. In addition, the authors suggests that that good software facilitates children in early childhood centers to talk more about their collaborative and creative work, not mentioning the fact that they are afforded the framework to engage in more sophisticated cognitive types of play than traditional techniques can allow. Long-Breipohl (n. d.) is of the opinion that the educational software that is presently available can, to a large extent, be depended upon to assist young children in the learning process. Another advantage of using computers in early childhood centers arises from the fact that technology, when employed effectively, generates an active interaction between the child and the content. Indeed, computers should be introduced at an early age because the complexity of the mentioned interactions increases with continuous usage and the level of the child's talent. In line with the above observation, researchers and educators have noted that children who employ technology from an early age for creative and educational purposes engage in much more meaningful learning than those who basically utilizes instruction-based approach (Hertzog & Klein, 2005). What's more, computers have been found to facilitate the expression and progression of originality in the learning

process. Such an attribute, in my view, must be used to benefit young children in the development of their creative and innovative capacities.

Lastly, computers should be used in early childhood centers by virtue of the fact that they have the capacity to incorporate instructional techniques in early childhood inquiry education to, among other things, "...enrich and provide structure for problem contexts, facilitate resource utilization, and support cognitive and meta-cognitive processes" (Wang et al., 2010, p. 381). Inquiry, according to the authors, has long being advanced as the best basis for children learning, especially in critical subjects such as science, mathematics and the progression of language and literacy. Children impulsively inquire, posing questions and investigating, to better understand the world. In this respect, computers, by their very own interactive nature, should be used to nurture and cultivate this attribute because it is beneficial to an individual's life-long development (Wang et al., 2010).

To conclude, this essay has laid bare all the advantages that computers bring to the social, emotional, educational and cognitive life of preschoolers. In this day and age, computers must never be viewed as peripherals in educational and developmental needs of young children; rather, they must be used as essential tools that serve to enhance the learning experience of these preschoolers. Of course computers have their own disadvantages, especially in exposing the minors to undesirable content (Stephen & Plowman, 2003). But when used effectively, the benefits computers offer to preschool children far outweigh their social costs.

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