

# Switching on

Enthusiastic practitioners, well-chosen equipment, and curious children were the perfect ingredients for a county-wide ICT project. *Amy Stancer* describes the outcomes

In 2008 the Lincolnshire Birth to Five service launched an innovative project to improve ICT provision in 320 early years settings by providing high-quality equipment for staff and children in each setting with a value of over £1,500.

The initiative for the programme can be summarised by Whitbread [1996]: 'Children learn by a process of actively constructing their own understandings. All the evidence suggests that a learning environment which helps children to do this will, not surprisingly, be one which challenges them intellectually and stimulates them to be mentally active.'

It was recognised by Stephanie Douglas, head of the Birth to Five Service in Lincolnshire, that it was not only the children in early years settings who would benefit from further opportunities to use ICT. The Birth to Five Service believed it equally beneficial to consider ICT provision for practitioners to aid administration and enable them to access up-to-date information.

The project was implemented early in 2009. The effectiveness of the project was aided by very good relationships with the suppliers, The Stone Group, Staffordshire, a specialist hardware manufacturer and systems designer.

The equipment, which was produced to Birth to Five Service specifications, was funded from the Early Years capital budget and was delivered to settings during January and February 2009. The package was designed to meet the diversity within Lincolnshire settings. It consisted of:

- 1 laptop with Microsoft Office for staff use
- 1 printer/scanner/photocopier
- 1 digital camera
- 1 computer within a specially designed storage trolley with wheeled castors and lockable doors
- A range of carefully chosen early years computer software

## CASE STUDY: MON AMI CHILDREN'S NURSERY

Staff at Mon Ami Children's Nursery, Alford, were keen to use the ICT resources to support transition from pre-school into reception. They used the digital camera to record images of their 'Louis' puppet using different computer software, and talked with the children about their feelings towards the new computer.

Practitioners used ideas from the Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD) document to promote turn-taking, confidence and independence when using the computer.

The children quickly became skilled with the mouse and used the 'Louis' photos to discuss which software they liked and why. When children visited the reception class, they took digital photographs of each other using the computer to share with their new teachers.

Following the session, the nursery and school practitioners discussed further development of ICT learning opportunities which complemented their previous experiences of ICT.

Launch meetings were provided to introduce the equipment and provide interactive input regarding opportunities for quality learning through ICT.

The training supported practitioners in enabling children to:

- Become proficient in problem-solving
- Be increasingly able to communicate and collaborate
- Create links between knowledge, skills and understanding
- Be motivated to learn
- Become adept at handling information
- Use technology indoors, outdoors and in the community.

Practitioners were given an overview of software on the computer to help them understand how to use it to support and enhance learning throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage. The software included programmes from Early Vision, 2simple software, Q&D and Yellow Door.

Settings were also provided with a large box of additional ICT equipment, which included a metal detector, digital video camera, remote control car and Bee-Bot programmable toy.

## STAFF AS A RESOURCE

The Birth to Five Service recognises that there is no substitute for an inspirational adult, and any resource is only as good as the person using it.

*'I think it has become accepted that technology is, in itself, a bridge to learning, rather than any kind of destination;*

**Mon Ami children explored ICT with the Louis puppet and created their own challenges with a remote control car**



Little Learners children made a control panel for a spaceship

and that a critical factor to the successful introduction of new learning tools is the intervention and involvement of a brilliant teacher.' – Lord Puttnam, Chancellor of the Open University

The training package prioritised building the staff's confidence in using the equipment flexibly and appropriately. Practitioners were excited and extremely enthusiastic at the prospect of supporting learning through 'making a smoothie' or 'making a story board for the Bee-Bot'.

## CASE STUDY: GLEBE FARM NURSERY SCHOOL

Staff at Glebe Farm Nursery School, Canwick, Lincoln, were excited to receive the provision box at the ICT Cluster Meeting. Owner and manager Sarah Owen-Jones took a key role in introducing new resources.

Staff meetings gave time to discuss resources and talk about how to intro-

duce them to the children, recognising their interests and development.

With their interest in maps, the children wanted to make a home for the Bee-Bots and selected the large paper to record it on. The adult supported the play through supporting problem-solving in pressing the forward button multiple times for long movement and physically picking up the Bee-Bot to turn it around. Later, the adult discussed how to make the Bee-Bot turn left and right by modelling holding out their arms. The children enjoyed this challenge. When they made the Bee-Bot turn in a complete circle, they decided to map a roundabout.

The children played happily, making different features on the map using mark-making resources. Some children wrote labels on the features, similar to maps they had previously explored. The children returned to the map and Bee-Bot over several sessions.

## MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on the Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD), visit: [https://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/180421?uc%20=%20force\\_uj](https://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/180421?uc%20=%20force_uj)
- Lincolnshire Birth to Five website: [www.birthtofive.org.uk](http://www.birthtofive.org.uk)

## EVALUATION

The early years consultants who visit each setting regularly are reporting back on the positive impact of the new equipment and training. There will be a formal evaluation of the longer-term impact in 2010 to ensure use of the equipment has become embedded into the practice of the settings.

Further areas for development highlighted by enthusiastic practitioners have been: embedding children's engagement in using ICT outdoors; developing creativity through ICT; and developing practitioners understanding of effective use of whiteboards in the early years.

In this 'electronic age', ICT complements and extends learning opportunities and supports the development of skills needed in later life. The Birth to Five service believes that no child should be disadvantaged through lack of resources, and that all adults working in the early years should be enthusiastic about learning through ICT. ■

*Amy Stancer is a lead early years consultant with responsibility for ICT.*



Glebe Farm children used Talking Point (right) to share learning and showed how they mapped the Bee-Bot's way home (below)

