

TALKING TECHNOLOGY

Rachel Ager explains how best to approach the observation and assessment of ICT in early years settings...



about the author

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If we are to observe and assess technology in the early years we need to develop an ethos and a learning environment that not only supports children's use of technology, but enables and empowers children to demonstrate their understanding of the technologies they encounter. We must create an environment within which technology is readily available wherever and whenever it is needed, and we need to develop a culture in which expectations of learner achievement are high and children are affirmed as proficient users of technology.

Firstly, when introducing a piece of technology it is vital that the children are allowed the time they need to 'play' with it and to explore it for themselves. Practitioners should be available to support this process through the use of open-ended questioning, and to answer any question the children might ask them. However, they need to resist the temptation to 'teach' the children how to use the technology, and should refrain, at least initially, from dictating a purpose. This approach will enable children to demonstrate their interest in technology and their desire to learn about it, and it will empower them to develop as confident and competent users of technology.

Continuous provision

Once the children have worked out how to use a technology, it should become part of

the setting's continuous provision. Practitioners need to provide sufficient opportunities for children to use technologies within a variety of contexts and across a range of purposes, so that children begin to understand when, and how, they can be used to support learning. In particular, practitioners should ensure they model the decision-making process, articulating why they have decided to use a given technology for the task in hand.

Children should not only have access to real technologies but also pretend technology, which should be an integral part of all role-play scenarios. Role play provides children with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the function and role of the technology without actually having to make it work. Involving children in the process of deciding which technologies to include within the role-play area, and in the making of models of some of these technologies, will afford the children further opportunities through which they can reveal their understanding.

To achieve the early learning goal for technology children must be able to demonstrate that they can select and use technology for a purpose. They will only be able to demonstrate this if they have easy access to a range of technologies across the learning environment, if they understand each technology and if they feel empowered to make the decision to 'select' it. The last

point is crucial. Children will only choose to use equipment if this is proactively encouraged and there is an expectation that they will do so.

Recording learning

If we are to produce records that accurately reflect children's learning about technology, we need to record not only the final outcome or product of that learning, but also the understanding and decision-making process that led to that outcome. What better tool to use than technology itself. Through the use of technology we can not only enhance our record keeping but also model purposeful use of technology, so that the children further develop their understanding of its value. Digital cameras, video cameras or MP3 recorders can all be used to capture and record the learning process. Photographs, video footage and sound recordings of the children's learning can be reviewed, so that both children and practitioners have the opportunity to reflect on the learning journey they are to document. Through involving the children in the process of evidence gathering and in the creation of a meaningful record we will not only be providing them with a valuable opportunity to reflect on their own learning but may also empower them to articulate further an understanding of the technology they have been using.

Electronic 'books' could be created using software such as 2Create a Superstory, Tizzy's First Tools, PowerPoint or Clicker 5/6. Photographs can be organised within the software and sound recordings added directly onto the 'pages' to provide a commentary on the learning that has taken place. Video footage can be reviewed and edited to produce short films. These books and films can be shared not only within the setting but with friends and family too, allowing the children to celebrate their achievements. They can also be made available to the children as part of your setting's continuous provision, so that they can revisit their learning whenever they wish

