

# MAPE



## Beyond the School Gates

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**NEWMAN COLLEGE with MAPE**

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# Beyond the School Gate

## Editorial

### The digital divide or the digital coming together?

**Barry Wake**

*Hollywood, Worcestershire*

Anita Straker famously wrote that computers could be used to support the current curriculum, enhance and improve what is on offer, and extend or even change the curriculum (1989, p. 8). Indeed:

‘... whole areas of the curriculum will come to be re-evaluated and perhaps even replaced. We will not only change how we teach, but what we teach.’  
(p. 270)

No doubt, if she had been writing today, she would have added: ‘... *and even where we teach, and where children learn.*’

The recent DfEE Consultation paper ‘Curriculum Online’ (DfEE 2001) also notes the key role of ICT in motivation and empowerment, and that:

‘It has the potential to transform the way education is delivered and to provide new opportunities, enhancing scholarship and investigation ...’  
(paragraph 2.3)

The advent of the new technologies such as the Internet and email have already begun to change the social and educational dynamics between home, school and the work place, and beginning to reduce the barriers between all three. The school walls themselves have become ‘permeable and transparent’ (Fullan, 2000). Questions are being asked about why children need to be taught the same thing, at the same time, in the same place, with other children of the same age (Papert, 1998). Who would have anticipated the rapid and widespread growth in virtual schools, virtual teacher centres, colleges and universities, virtual shops and banks, museums and art galleries, and even virtual communities?

Yet the developments in ICT have certainly not been even or fair. There remains a huge inequality of

access and provision, a great digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, both here and globally. On top of that, the lack of standards and the anarchic state of the Internet can mean invalid or unreliable sources, inappropriate, inaccurate or simply out of date material. It is becoming increasingly important for teachers and all educational practitioners to offer guidance and caution to those involved in online self-study. Learners will need to take ever more responsibility for questioning the validity of the learning materials they want to use.

Uncertainties, questions, challenges, problems and promises abound. Hype and crystal ball gazing is everywhere, and there is a constant need to recall the words of Gabriel Goldstein’s Law of the Bandwagon:

*‘the noise of the bandwagon is in inverse proportion to the certainty of its direction.’*

(TES online, March 9, 2001, p. 5)

At the moment of writing, there seem to be wagons heading off in all sorts of directions. Some have been travelling some time already. There are millions of people around the world who already don’t know how on earth they ever managed before the arrival of ICT. The Internet and email have become an integral part of their existence.

In this MAPE Focus, the spotlight falls on educational activities that are supported, enhanced and transformed by the newer technologies of ICT, taking place beyond the more formal setting of the four walled classroom. The authors are examples of a few of the current explorers, tentatively trying to find new and better paths through the digital unknown, and setting up a few signposts on the way. Some are active explorers themselves, others are

watching explorations that are happening or are about to happen.

The issues that are raised in the articles focus on new ways of teaching and learning, of improving links between home and school, of the impact of educational ICT on the wider community. One of the strengths of this particular edition lies in the wide range of styles and approaches, from classroom practitioners taking advantage of the new technologies, to the more theoretical aspects of building 'e-learning' communities, and the some arresting insights into current research.

One reception teacher describes some of the unanticipated effects of using email with her children. Another teacher illustrates the way children make good use of the Internet at home. Two more take us through the stages of developing their school web site which helps to foster home/school partnerships. Children in hospital are seen video conferencing, and Traveller children make increasing valuable use of the Internet. A nursery school utilizes a digital camera to support their activities and records of achievement. Adults and children at another nursery provide the focus for the way they work together using computers. Approaches to using multimedia CD-ROMs are described, as well as ideas for using the Big Books on the MAPE web site. There is also current research evidence into how children use computers at home and at school, and a case study of an online learning community for primary schools. An account of a commercial organisation that sets out to develop ICT skills for

both children and adults is given. A new research project examines specifically the use and good practice of implementing ICT for home school links. The importance of health and safety issues in the home is not forgotten. And a list of some suitable web sites for parents is included.

Finally, a few words of many, many thanks: first of all to Spark Learning for sponsoring this edition and supplying images of the characters that appear; secondly to all those who for whatever reason were unable to make this edition (there's bound to be other occasions); and lastly, a very, very sincere thankyou to all those who have set aside time and effort to make this such a useful and significant publication. Hopefully it will be of immense interest and value to MAPE members and others, and play at least a part in bringing learners of all ages closer together – wherever and whenever they meet beyond the school gate.

May 2001

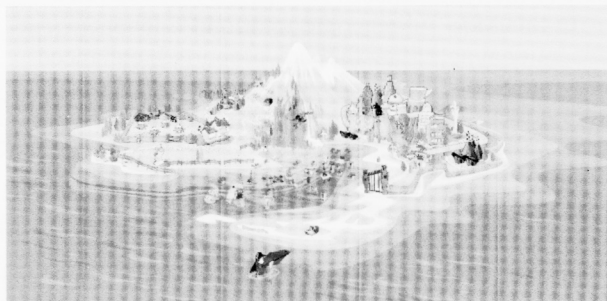
### References

- DfEE (2001) Curriculum Online – a Consultation Paper. Online at <http://www.dfec.gov.uk/>  
 Fullan M (2000) *The Three Stories of Education Reform*. Phi Delta Kappan, no longer available online  
 Papert S (1998) Let's Tie the Digital Knot. *TECHNOS Quarterly For Education and Technology* 7(4), Winter  
 Straker A (1989) *Children Using Computers*. Blackwell

## Spark Island – a world of education adventure online

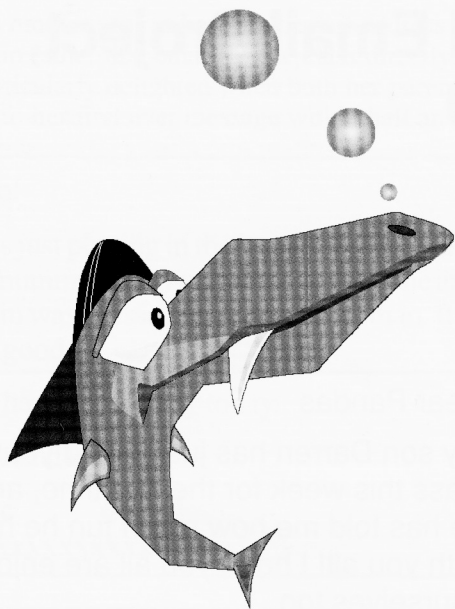
Following the very successful launch at BETT earlier this year – Spark Island continues to go from strength to strength.

[www.sparkisland.com](http://www.sparkisland.com) helps children aged 3–12 succeed in Early Years, Key Stage 1 and 2 subjects, initially Maths, English and Science – in a unique,



interactive and character-led environment. It also provides a range of curriculum-based resources and information for teachers, and in-depth support and advice for parents.

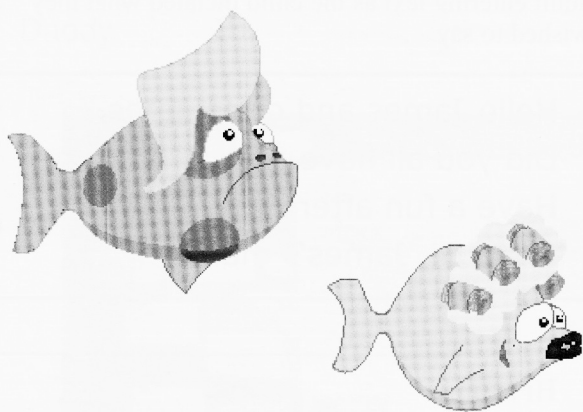
Spark Island has been developed in conjunction with an advisory board of practising teachers and education experts, and Spark Learning is confident that Spark Island will be used by more than half the



country's primary schools within the next three years. This will be largely due to the depth and breadth of its unique and immersive content that is linked to both the English National Curriculum and Scottish guidelines. The activities and games on Spark Island have been designed to be accessed in three different ways – by teachers, parents and children – and are updated and added to on a regular basis.

Access to many parts of the site is free, although the Spark Island learning activities are subscription based – teachers are currently able to register for a free 3-month trial, after which they can subscribe for an average of £1 per pupil\*/year/school; parents can obtain a free 1-month trial and then subscribe for £49 per year/home.

The activities in Spark Island have been trialled with children, parents and teachers in homes and classrooms. In more detail:



\*Based on the number of pupils in a school: Up to 100 pupils = £100 +VAT; Between 100–300 pupils = £200 +VAT; 300+ pupils = £300 +VAT. Register for your free school trial by 30 September 2001 and receive a 25% discount on your first year's subscription – exclusive to MAPE members – simply type 'MAPE2001' into the box marked 'Promotion Code' on the registration form at [www.sparkisland.com](http://www.sparkisland.com) or telephone 0207 659 5458 during normal office hours.

### *For teachers*

The site provides teachers with a range of supportive, original and relevant online content spanning all primary years, with curriculum-based classroom resources, lesson plans and helpful links to educational sites. To make lesson planning efficient and effective, Spark Island's Activity Finder provides a unique database for identifying specific activities by subject, by year, by learning outcome. Whilst in the near future teachers and parents will also be able to chat and share ideas online with each other, via the unique Spark Island community facilities.

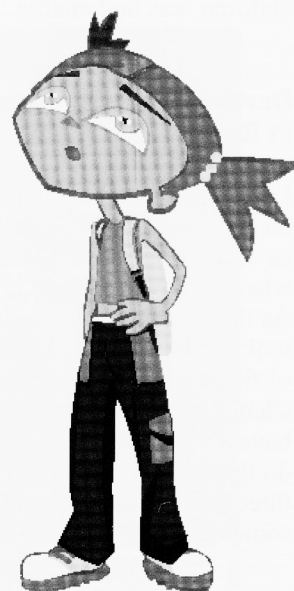
### *For children*

Spark Island has a very targeted approach for its different age groups. The site consists of three unique environments: *Spark Park* for 3–5 year olds, *Sparklantis* for 6–8 year olds and *Sparkopolis* for 9–12 year olds. Each area is filled with engaging characters and storylines that guide children through tasks in a highly immersive and adventurous way. The activities on the site, which will be continuously updated and expanded, provide a balance between open-ended and more closed learning styles. Equally importantly, Spark Island provides opportunities for children to explore, discover and create, using their imagination. As well as finding fun and self development, children will also be rewarded with a virtual Spark Island currency – the Megahop – which they can redeem in the bazaar to buy things like character e-cards.

### *For parents*

Spark Island assists parents to help support their children succeed at school by providing a range of information, ideas and discussion forums. There will also be detailed buying guides recommending the best educational books, toys, and software for different age groups. In fact Spark Island is totally complementary to classroom teaching and is considered a tool parents can trust. The forthcoming community areas will enable parents to communicate with other parents and teachers to organize the school-run, find out about homework assignments, school trips and share advice.

*For further information,* please contact [www.sparkisland.com](http://www.sparkisland.com), c/o Spark Learning Ltd, 28 Bruton Street, London W1X 7DB



# Camelsdale First School Email Project, Reception, Autumn 2000

**Veronica Carter**

*Early Years Co-ordinator, Camelsdale First School  
www.pavilion.co.uk/camelsdalef*

At Camelsdale First School, in West Sussex, we have had first hand experience of how ICT can open up new channels of communication between home and school with all those involved learning from the experience.

## Background to the project

Last year a Year 3 child was absent for three weeks due to an accident. During this time, regular email correspondence took place between him and his classmates and, as a school, we began to realise a little of the potential of such school/home communication. In the first newsletter to go out in the new academic year we asked parents to let the school have an email address, if they have one. They could write it on a reply slip to be handed back in at school, or better still, they could email their child's class so that we would know their address from the message received.

In my YR (Year Reception) class of 4 and 5 year-olds this developed into quite a project and proved extremely enjoyable and worthwhile. I had thought that collecting parental email addresses might prove useful to me when needing to communicate with parents but I had not planned to use email with the children themselves. However, things developed somewhat differently to that and the value to the children was undeniable.

## Development of the project in Pandas Class (YR)

Last September I had just one, somewhat elderly PC on the school network and that was able to receive emails. This machine faces onto the carpet area where the class gathers at different times of the day. As the first messages began to arrive from parents, I took to checking the email with the children as part of first registration and during our regular 'Snack and Chat' session immediately after first break. I now have a system whereby the class helpers for that day do this for me, enabling all to have a turn over each three week period. The following are examples of some of these early messages:

Dear Pandas

My son Darren has just joined your class this week for the first time, and he has told me how much fun he has with you all! I hope you all are enjoying yourselves too.

I have included a picture of Thomas the Tank Engine. He has a web site <http://www.thomasthetankengine.com/>

Perhaps Darren or the class would like to send me an email sometime.

Have a lovely day and say hello to Darren for me.

Robert Hodgeson

P.S. I will have a look at your web site later on today . . .

The next obvious step was for the children to reply to the messages they received. We did this by having an adult entering text as the child dictated what they wished to say.

Hello James and classmates,  
Did you all have a good lunch?  
Have a fun afternoon.  
From Di, James's mum

Hi Mum  
I'm having a lovely time. Its fun. There's a lot of bricks. I got a sticker on my jumper from Mrs Palmer because I did a picture of the whole city waking up.  
Love from James

Rosie's mother sent in her work email address on the reply slip rather than emailing the class directly. Rosie was particularly delighted when both her parents replied to her first ever message within half an hour!

Hello!

I was just playing in the home corner. I was the mummy. Jenny was the five year one and Gavin was dressed up as the policeman. It was good.

I've had a lovely day today.

Hugs and kisses

Rosie

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear Rosie

Hello - it's mummy here. I've just got back to my desk and found your letter. This is the nicest e-mail I have had today and I am very happy to hear from you!

I will see you later - remember I will pick you up from Mandy's house

love Mummy

Rosie

Nice to hear you've been having fun on the computer

Daddy

## Messages from abroad

The next development came when Paul's Dad went on a business trip abroad:-

Hi Paul and all you Pandas

Daddy here, working very hard down here after an 11hr long flight over.

Yesterday we saw some whales, what a fantastic sight to see !!, They were SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALES apparently and one was only 100 yds from the beach!.

More news later, hope your ear is now well.

Love from

Daddy

PS and hi to Mrs Carter too!

Paul says thank you for writing, Daddy.

My ear is nearly better. We are going to get changed and do PE later.

Have a nice day,

Love from Paul

The children naturally wanted to know where these messages were coming from and so I introduced them to the globe which I always have hanging in my classroom. There was a delightful moment when a new message was received from abroad and one of the children instantly swung round to look at the globe, with an excited call of, 'Show us where it is!' I have now bought a small globe to keep beside the computer and we place a 'smiley face' sticker on this globe to show the places we receive emails



from. We have now received emails from various family members in South Africa, Switzerland, Florida, Australia, Hong Kong and several from different parts of the USA. These messages from around the world have also led on to discussions of time differences and how come it is night time in some places when it is day time for us.

One mother who does not have Internet access herself gave the class email address to her sister in Australia:—

Hello, Naomi - Hope this makes it as I don't know if I got your address right - mummy didn't tell me if it was big or little letters.

Lots of love, Aunty Teresa.

Hello Aunty Teresa

Are you having a nice time at Australia at your house?

I'm doing maths activities now - I like doing the multilink bricks best.

Love from Naomi

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Other relatives have sent emails to the class when away on holiday in place of the more traditional postcard. The class is very proud of all the stickers on their globe!

### Messages within school

To make sure that every child could feel part of this work we were able to have children sending emails within the school, either to the headteacher, or to one

of my classroom assistants who does clerical work at a networked computer in the staffroom during some afternoons. In this way, by half term every child had sent an email. Here is an example of such an interchange between the class and the head:—

Dear Pandas,

Thank you for your letter and for the lovely picture.

Perhaps you could draw a picture of this week's assembly music.... a clown dancing in clogs at a ballet~ how funny!

From Mrs Palmer xx

Hello Mrs Palmer

I have done you a picture of the clown with the clogs. Shall I bring it to you tomorrow?

Love from Emma

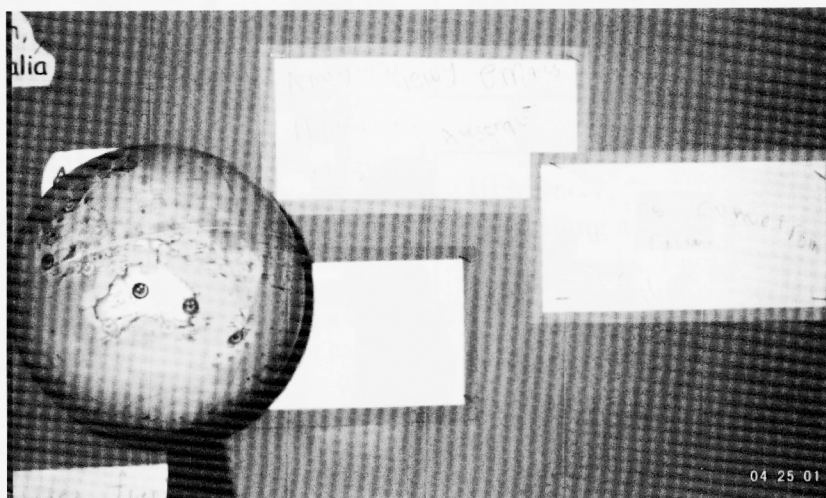
Dear Emma,

I would love the picture with the clogs. Please bring it to me. I am glad you like the music.

From Mrs Palmer

### Latest developments

Gary, a pupil, has taken to emailing the class from home, especially when there is something very important that he doesn't want the class to forget!



Hello every body. When you read this it will be Friday  
13th October and it's my Birthday! I am 5 years old.

I think I am the oldest in the Pandas class. Am I right?

From Gary

Parents are also beginning to use this method to communicate with me about other issues such as letting me know why their child is not in school that day, making appointments for parents evening, confirming after school arrangements for their child etc..

One child in the class has arrived at school with particularly well developed literacy skills. The email project enabled her to 'write for a purpose', and by sometimes allowing her to write independently and sometimes giving her support she clearly made progress with her writing even during her first half term at school:—

Hello mummy and daddy i love you.i have been  
playing.lovesophie.aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa  
aa  
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaalkjhgfds\sssfj  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Hello Tom and Daddy and mummy  
the pandas have Been working all day  
love from Sophie.  
(PS From Mrs. Carter — don't believe a word of it!!!)

To Muma I am having good time  
I am playing With Rachael  
Love From Sophie.

When a parent sent in an email with photographs included within the body of the email I asked how that was done and received a tutorial by email the following day. Recently, when a father of one of the children was on a business trip in the States he sent his daughter an email to the class including a photograph he had taken that day, using a digital camera, of himself stood next to a six foot high flowering cactus plant with the Grand Canyon in the background. I printed the picture out and the little girl carried it around with her for the rest of the week periodically wanted to know if Daddy would be awake or asleep or having his breakfast by now and so on.

One mother was proud to send us her first ever email, having decided that, if her 4 year old could do it then so could she!

The children themselves are coming up with their own ideas of how to use email. One little boy had spent considerable time entering the name of his

favourite book into a word processing package. He observed me go into clipart and he chose a suitable image to add to his work. I saved and printed his work with him watching but he obviously was still not satisfied, something was wrong. I asked him what he was thinking and he replied, 'Well, it's just, um, couldn't I send it for Mummy to see?'. Of course he could! He watched me copy and paste his writing into an email and write a covering note, then he clicked on Send. Just an hour later his mother greeted him in the playground at the end of school with, 'My, but that was lovely writing you had done on the computer!' He was beaming from ear to ear as he nonchalantly replied, 'Yes, it was, wasn't it!'

Another example of how email is now being used by the children is given by the boy who has become fascinated by doubling numbers. I took to setting him a nightly 'challenge',  $10 + 10$ ,  $20 + 20$  etc. Having worked through all the multiples of 10 I asked him to find out what  $25 + 25$  would make. This had him stumped for several days but one evening I checked the email just before going home to find the following message:—

**hello teacher**

**the sam challenge          it was 50**  
**from**

**sam sam sam**  
**sam sam sam**

I recently received an email from a parent by way of a thank you. He had downloaded from the school website ([www.pavilion.co.uk/camelsdalef](http://www.pavilion.co.uk/camelsdalef) under Teaching Ideas) some *PowerPoint* presentations that I had put together for teaching phonics and numeracy and then put on the website so that parents or other teachers could have access to them. This parent is now making regular use of these files with his son in order to reinforce at home what his boy has been learning at school.

### Evaluation of the project

This project has evolved rather than having been tightly planned, but it has been well worth finding the time for within a tight timetable. Benefits can be seen within three separate Foundation Stage Areas of Learning.

- In Language and Literacy it has provided opportunities for children to observe the writing process on a computer, to decide upon what they want to say in a message and to be involved in the reading of messages received. It has provided Sophie with

a most enjoyable way of practising her early writing skills on the computer, and one that has kept the interest of one so young for week after week.

- In Personal, Social and Emotional Development the children are aware of their parents' interest in their school activities and that their parents are still thinking about them even while apart. The continued contact with parents who have been away on business trips has served a very real purpose in keeping the children in touch with the absent parent and parents have expressed appreciation that they are able to keep in contact in this way when absent from home.
- In Knowledge and Understand of the World there has been the purposeful introduction to the globe as well as all the ICT learning. There is a developing understanding of the process of emailing which I have described in terms of the creation of a message on our computer, the sending of that message to a bigger computer called a server, the collection of that message by the recipient when they check their email. They have no more problem accepting this than they do with using a telephone to talk to granny. A wealth of computer language has been introduced to them: double click, select, scroll down, space bar, shift key, return key, Send and Receive etc.. The children have taken to adding strings of kisses to the end of their messages (very Early Years!) and so have experienced the fact that if you hold a key down it continues to repeat its action. This will undoubtedly

help these children with their early word processing as achieving just one output for each key hit often proves quite a hurdle to be overcome.

I shall certainly continue to look for opportunities to use email in my reception class. Communicating with parents has proved particularly worthwhile and effective. I believe that one reason why this may be so is that the communication is very real and meaningful to the children. Also, the parents know how to talk to 4-year-olds and do not expect too much from them by way of a response. Often the parents will ask a simple question in their message so that the child has a starting point when trying to think what they might say in their reply. Parents of 4-year-olds understand what 4-year-olds are like!

ICT moves on at such a rate that we all have to be open to continually learning more and adapting to continual change in this area. With this project there has been clear evidence that the children, the parents and myself have all found opportunities to learn.

#### *Postscript*

For those thinking of setting up email projects for older children, the following sites may prove useful:

<http://www.eun.org>  
<http://www.col.org/cense>  
<http://www.wotw.org.uk>  
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk>  
<http://www.epals.com>

## **‘Look what I did today!’**

### **Using digital images for communication between the nursery and home**

**Diane Mavers**

*Manchester Metropolitan University*

**Ian Lakin**

*Madeley Nursery School*

For a long time teachers have been using a range of methods to record those significant moments in learning: written observations of what was achieved and how, verbatim quotations and samples of work. Photographs are not new as a means of recording those often highly transitory moments, the here and gone. However, it may be that digital imagery enables something new in the process of recording achievement.

At one nursery school, the use of digital cameras is an intrinsic aspect of the process of record keeping alongside other more ‘traditional’ methods. The capturing of noteworthy moments by adults is a means of

drawing children’s attention to their achievements and demonstrating the merit of what they have accomplished, thereby contributing to a sense of worth and self-esteem. Children’s own use of the digital cameras to record their successes or involvement in the act of data capture also engages them in the process of making decisions about what is of significance in their learning.

Each child has an electronic folder containing information, including digital images. Some children have as many as 20 or 30 images in their folders. The nursery computers are networked so that access can generally

be almost instant. The children's folders provide an electronic record for reference by staff, enabling them to add another valuable tool to the process of tracking individuals, evaluating progress and revising day-to-day plans accordingly. They also provide evidence for inspection.

However, they are also often used in the process of feedback and review with the children themselves. Images can be a powerful reminder; a means of bringing to mind experiences which talk alone may not be able to accomplish. During just one afternoon, various children and adults used the computers to revisit and explore learning, conversation openers including, for example, *'Do you remember the shoe shop?'*; *'Are you going to show M what you did?'*; *'Do you want to look at your kaleidoscope?'*. Thus adults and children can reflect together on past events, possibly as part of a sequence or in relation to other experiences, to think about what has been learned and where next. Such conferencing can enable children to participate in the educational process and to take some ownership of the nature and direction of their learning.

The technology in the nursery is being used almost transparently for record keeping. These young people are experiencing purposeful use of digital cameras and are picking up technology-related terminology, skills and knowledge almost incidentally. One child, watching carefully the procedures of accessing her file asked, *'Are you getting my picture?'* Explanations of procedures, almost incidental, provide situated contexts for appropriate use. For example, one member of staff commenting to a child *'I'm just going to put this picture of B's into this file, then we can have a look at it'* demonstrates how the technology is an intrinsic part of daily activity.

Digital images are used on a day-to-day basis in the nursery to share experiences and achievements with parents and guardians. A real benefit here is in the immediacy of access. Parents and carers can often see what has been done that very day either as a finished product or in the act of doing.



On one level, this communicates the range of experiences provided by the school and a flavour of what

children are learning. For example, the children's chalked swirls on the playground were soon lost in the rain but the digital images provided evidence for parents (as well as the children's records). However, images can also be highly meaningful for individuals in particular circumstances. For example, for a child who is having particular behavioural difficulties, an image of this child cradling someone's foot as s/he puts a shoe on it is highly significant. Similarly, the achievements of children with special educational needs can be shared positively through visual evidence.

In this way, images can communicate in powerful ways which verbal description and explanation are not always sufficient to reproduce. They can provide a forum for two-way discussion between parents/carers and their children or staff and parents/carers, or a three-way conversation involving child, parent/carer and nursery staff. Thus the images are not just a way of showing and seeing but also a means of enabling interaction. As well as invitations to view images, parents and guardians also download this information so that they can have their own electronic copies. If parents/carers do not have the necessary technology at home, hard copies are printed for them.

A new child had started at the nursery the day I visited. During the afternoon, he and one of the staff explored using the camera to capture images of situations in the nursery. This led to taking a picture of the child, downloading it onto the PC and printing it. The same image instantly provided a means of generating a name card, providing a picture of the child for the school record book and adding to the gallery of 'our group' in the shared area. Of immense benefit was that this child was rapidly made to feel part of the life of the school. By the end of the afternoon, his printed image being displayed alongside those of his new colleagues signalled to him, the other children and his mother his membership of the group and his inclusion in this community. The advantage of digital technology over traditional photography here was again in its immediacy.

Underlying such effective use of digital cameras to record children's achievements, however, is a shared staff commitment to its efficacy and value. This entails both policy decisions and agreed organisation and management procedures, as well as individual ICT capability. The implications of this are that all nursery staff have agreed on how, when and why images should be captured and their purpose and meaning communicated to colleagues, as well as the manner in which image capture should be undertaken in the day-to-day running of the nursery.

Digital images are deemed to contribute to the recording and communication of achievement in highly significant ways and as part of a broader record keeping policy at the nursery. As one aspect of record keeping amongst many, the images help to contribute to providing a meaningful but concise picture of children's achievements and to tell a story about their progress.

Developments are still at an early stage and very tentative. Yet the work at the nursery demonstrates the power of digital images in encouraging dialogue within the nursery and between school and home. It is not only a matter of the meanings the images themselves can communicate but the communication between children and adults that they can engender that is significant.

# Adults and children at the computer in the Nursery

**Julian Grenier**

*Deputy Head of Woodlands Park Nursery Centre*

**Mary Lou Thornbury**

*ICT Advisor*

In the Sunday Times recently (Leake and Robbins 2001) a researcher in Early Years, Kathy Sylva was reported as expressing disquiet that computers could restrict the development of creativity with young children. A key finding in her research had to do with toys (including computers) being used as a distraction:

There is a complex relationship between children's progress, the type of toys they are given and the time parents spend on them. When they have a large number of toys there seems to be a distraction element, and when children are distracted they do not learn or play well.

The issue is the quality of attention brought to the 'play' activity. If children have strong relationships with responsive adults their attention and persistence in tasks is greater. In our study we looked at the *joint attention* of children and adults at the computer. This is a long-term study at a nursery centre in the West Green area of Tottenham in London, which is an area of great social mix. It is an area where many children receive free school meals and where there is a rapid turnover of families moving in and out. It is a multicultural, multilingual neighbourhood with many refugee and asylum seeking families.

When two laptop computers were introduced into the Woodlands Park Nursery Centre the purpose was to allow parents to take home the computers to use with their children as an aid to their learning. We aimed to redress some of the disadvantage in our inner city community, supported by evidence of literacy gains in the Docklands Project in East London:

community and parental involvement in the schooling of inner-city children is an important factor in raising standards of achievement.

In talk about educational computing there is sometimes the impression that a new generation can be inducted into the 'technological revolution' without reference to their parents. We thought that a more powerful model of learning is one in which there are intergenerational partners.

The two laptops were provided by Research Machines and the report on the Centre's experience reflected on the software used as well as on the parent-child interaction.

The computer is ideal for adult/child dialogue as the screen makes for shared ownership. There are two stages in the learning: the first when parents or centre staff use the computer with the children, and the second the way the children move on in their learning, scaffolded by those features of computer programs which provide feedback and reinforcement.

## Teacher's observations

The introduction of the two new laptops into our early childhood setting involved as many of the interested adults as possible. One of the teachers in the nursery did a series of observations of young children's behaviours at the stand-alone computers which already existed in the classrooms. These observations revealed the children's attentiveness and cognitive advances, that playing at the computer had not been 'random' time-filling, but was consistent with the learning promoted by other Centre activities. This teacher writes:

Some staff feel very negative about it, that there are some children just sitting round watching and others stay on the computer for too long. But when I looked more closely, I found that lots of the children who were watching were learning too. P ... spent a long time watching two children pointing to the words in *Just Grandma and Me*, and then later I saw him matching the words on the screen to what he was reading with the computer. Another child who has Down's Syndrome was ordering objects by size on another program, even though some staff felt he was randomly pressing the keys. I saw lots of children making decisions, talking about their choices and learning actively.

## The literacy class

In our setting there was already in place a literacy class for parents and this was to be the vehicle for the introduction of the new computers; the parents in the literacy class were learning at their own level about the English language and they were also learning how to support children in class.

The parents realised that they wanted computer skills both for themselves and so that they could use the computers with the children at home. They did not want to be seen as helpless with the technology. Margaret Lally writes:

(We) have increasingly recognised the need for children to see adults using their skills and knowledge.

Over the course of the year, one parent in our Centre became very confident in her own computer skills:

Actually we only took it [the laptop] home once or twice; since then I've [acquired] a computer myself. Having one myself gives me more opportunity for myself and also for the children to benefit from being able to use the computer.

..... we had a slight windfall on the lottery so we decided to, we had been thinking about it for a while, because his older brother uses computers at school and J.... uses computers here and life,..... as life goes on, a lot of it will be computerised. I feel that by having a computer at home you have more opportunity to be able to do things...

### Playing with the computers at home

This parent shows a great awareness of the learning of her children. She had had very little schooling herself and had gained her skills only when she joined the Literacy group at the Nursery. In gaining her literacy skills she had reflected on her own learning processes. As a result when she comments on how her children use the computer she is observant of detail which exemplifies her son's learning, details like identification of initial letters. She had been through these stages herself; now she could observe them in her children. The following quotation shows how the family members interact in this learning; in this case they were using a commercial program (*Barney*):

Behind the clouds, it shows you a word behind the clouds and then an umbrella on the beach, say, and underneath it there'll be something like a pig or something, underneath the thing, and to start off with at level one it will show you the letters and you have to match them. And he'll pick the letters out... it'll show you the letter then he's got three different letters to choose from.. so he matches them...

He matches the letters then once he's done that.. now he can actually do it without seeing the letters first so he knows some of his alphabet. He's only four but he knows some of his alphabet; that's a lot to do with his older brother because he'll encourage him.

Her son also plays some of the school computer programs with his mother. She is confident enough to use the program in a playful way; they are involved in the sequencing game of dressing a teddy bear (*My World*):

We played Dress Teddy and instead of putting them (the items of clothing) in the right places I put them in the wrong places and J. said, 'No, that's not right, silly Mummy' and he put it in the right place and I thought, 'That game has encouraged him' because J.'s poor co-ordination with his pen and paper skills . . . and for J. to use the computer and to dress Teddy for himself is quite difficult for him because his concentration is not very good as well, so for him to, sort of, spend 10 minutes on something like that is really good.

Another parent's report shows how once children become familiar with 'talking books', they start to make choices about which page they want to start with and whether they want to hear the story or interact with it. The family is bilingual in Punjabi and English and her son is four and a half.

Mother: *He listened and changed the page as well. [the 'talking book' was Grandma and Me]*

Interviewer: *...and could he read some of the words as well?*

Mother: *Yes, yes, repeated them, not properly but some words he repeated*

Interviewer: *Which words are the ones he repeated?*

Mother: *...like 'mum's going to a beach'*

Interviewer: *So words like 'beach'...*

Mother: *... 'beach' and 'tree' and 'sand'. He enjoys that story.*

This child is taking the opportunity to make choices and experiment. This child also used the computer at home with his brothers and cousins in a way that was conditioned by their more adult expectations of the technology. The family felt that it was a tool to use for introducing the four year old to learning tasks. They used it to give him an advantage:

Interviewer: *So how much did W.... use the computer? What did he do with it?*

Mother: *Read the story and typewriter as well.. write name and some words in English like 'book' and write a letter as well.*

Interviewer: *So he knows his letters and when he got the computer he knew what the letters were on the computer?*

Mother: *He knows alphabetic, A to Z so he knows how to spell little words like 'school' so like typewriter he print those words. I tell him like this when the typewriter is on, spell him 'look', spell him 'book', little bit name of sisters, name of M..., name of father, he knows to spell.*

### Conclusion

The parents are now moving on to gain initial computing qualifications for themselves and they are more

confident in playing with their children at home rather than leaving the computers in the hands of others with expertise. The laptops have now become a feature of the exchange between parents and the Nursery.

Our interest in the possible impact of using computers was originally given great impetus by the findings of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's Competent Children Project (1996, 1998). *Six Years Old and Competent* makes a clear statement on the value of computers to children at the age of five:

Regardless of family income, having a computer at 5 made a difference for scores on mathematics and invented spelling at age 6 – particularly for children in the lowest income families. Having a computer at age 5 also made a small difference for curiosity and individual responsibility, and an even smaller one for social skills. Once again, this shows the importance of having a resource in the pre-school years. Computer ownership at age 5 continues to make a difference after the child starts school.

It is this advantage that we hoped to give the children of Woodlands Park Nursery Centre.

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- Scott D, Hurry J, Hey V, Smith M (1998) Developing Literacy in Inner-City Schools. *English in Education* 32(2), 32. National Association for the Teaching of English
- Lally M (1991) *The Nursery Teacher in Action*. Paul Chapman
- The program *My World* can be obtained from TAG and also *Grandma and Me* which is part of the Living Books, Broederbund series. *Barney* was a commercially produced toy with a computer program that could be obtained through toy stores.

## Developing the home–school partnership using ICT

**Rosemary Smith and Jinnie Payne**

*Leas Infants School*

[www.leasinfants.ne-lines.sch.uk/](http://www.leasinfants.ne-lines.sch.uk/)

The scene could be any staffroom at lunchtime. You are multi-tasking – eating your banana, mentally running through your list of 'jobs to do', listening to a colleague's concerns about a pupil, trying to remember what was in your planning for the afternoon when a voice is heard to say, '*How about the school having its own web site?*' This was the throwaway question that sowed the seed, which germinated and finally grew into [www.leasinfants.ne-lines.sch.uk](http://www.leasinfants.ne-lines.sch.uk/).

It would have been relatively easy to buy into a commercial web site building package but we like a challenge. We wanted to produce a web site with a content that was personal to the school. By creating the web site ourselves we felt we would have control of not only its content, but would have the enthusiasm to promote its use in school. Two years down the line, we can say creating the web site has been a huge challenge with our learning curve nearly shooting off the scale!

The Leas Infants school is situated in the village of Waltham, near Grimsby in North East Lincolnshire. It opened as a school in its own right in September 1979. There are 240 pupils on roll, nine full-time class teachers, four Teaching Assistants and one Nursery Nurse. The school is semi-open plan in design with two teachers and two classes of children sharing a unit. The school has four teaching units, a

mobile classroom, a central hall and library area. In addition, there is a separate ICT suite and the whole school, including the mobile classroom is networked.

Our present level of ICT equipment is: 10 iMacs in the ICT Suite; 12 iMacs in classrooms; 2 Macs in Library; 1 iMac in foyer for parental use; 6 iBooks on wireless network for enhancing provision in classrooms; and Powerbooks for the senior management team.

Our own background is that we are both KS1 teachers, sharing an enthusiasm for developing the use of ICT both in school and home. We have been concerned with devising practical uses for ICT in the classroom and not the acquisition of an in-depth understanding of the technicalities of computers. Megabytes and gigahertz are still a mystery to both of us. We found that our technical knowledge and skills increased rapidly as we became involved in the creation of the school web site.

To create the web site we needed to develop our own ICT skills. We attended web site authoring courses together. The courses were held on four separate days where we learnt the individual components needed to build a web site. These were the use of web authoring software, the scanner and the digital camera. Even though the courses equipped us

with new skills it was the many hours of trial and error in our own time that resulted in our first attempt at the school web site. We are continuing to use these skills as we update the web site termly

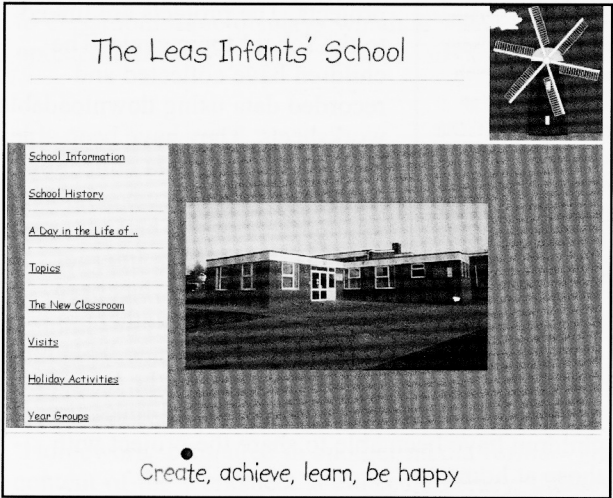
The decision to train two members of staff in web site building has been extremely beneficial to the school. It has meant that the web site has been created more quickly and is updated more often. Also we have appreciated the support we have been able to give each other in this new area of ICT.

At the same time as developing our knowledge of creating web pages, using digital cameras, scanners and reading numerous handbooks we began to plan, with our headteacher, the content of the school web site. At this stage we shared our vision of the school web site with the governing body. The governors received the idea with enthusiasm seeing the potential that the web site would have in celebrating the successes of the school.

After consulting the governors and the headteacher, we decided that the main audience for whom this web site was being created was the children. It was necessary to provide a 'child-friendly' site with lots of visual material. We wanted the web site to celebrate the children's work through a different medium and to be used as a learning tool. We also wanted the web site to provide information for other audiences, such as present and prospective parents and carers. At this early stage, we sought parental permission for children's work and photographs to be used on the web site. Emphasis was placed on anonymity of all children.

Primarily, we saw the site as enhancing the children's in-school ICT provision but soon realised it would be an ideal tool to extend the home-school partnership. We have sought to gain the parents' interest in the school web site, so that the children learn in partnership with parents. We recognise that every parent or carer will not have a computer or Internet access at home. Therefore the school has made the ICT suite available to parents. There is also a computer in the foyer of the school that gives parents access to the school web site.

This is the front page of our school web site.



Each section of the web site provides opportunities for home-school partnership.

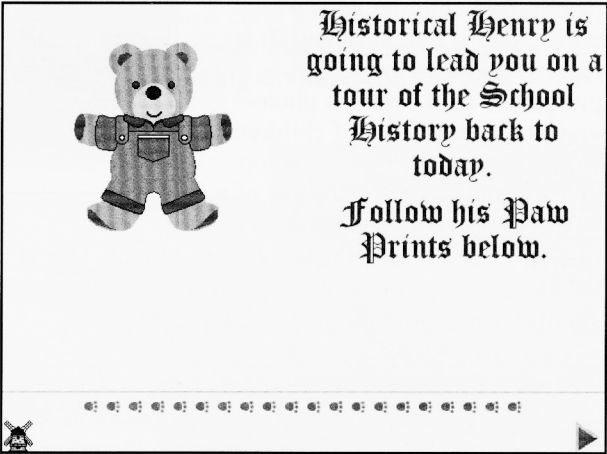
**School Information**

'School Information' provides the parents with a copy of the school brochure, the all important holiday dates, a school events diary and the end of term newsletters. Parents and children can see photos of the teaching and non-teaching staff and read brief details about each member of staff. This is useful for parents to show new children who their teacher will be and for children to share with relations and friends:

*'Come and look at the teachers at my school, grandma.'*  
*'I think I recognise her. I am sure she was your dad's teacher when he was at school but she looked a lot younger then.'*

**History of the School**

This is a recently developed section that has proved to be very popular. Historical Henry (a teddy bear) leads the children on a tour through the history of the school.



This section of the web site has recently been used in a 'Time Morning' organised for Year 1 children to develop the concept of time. The parents were invited to work alongside their child. One of the activities during the 'Time Morning' was for parents (using a support sheet) to access the School History section of the web site. They worked with their child looking at the photographs and reading the information. The activity was transformed from being informative to meaningful and relevant to the children as they recognised some of the buildings in the photographs. Some parents and grandparents attended the school when it was located in a different part of the village. The children thought this was wonderful and asked them questions, for example, 'Are you in the photograph Grandad?' 'Did you



*wear braces to school?* The adults enjoyed it too as some of the old photographs brought back school day memories.

### A day in the life of . . .

'A Day in the Life of' shows parents and children what a typical day is like at school. It is more visual than the school prospectus as it contains photographs and examples of children's work. We are hoping to develop this section further by the use of a newly purchased video camera to capture short clips of the children in school. This is the section we particularly recommend to prospective parents to look at with their child.



How many people do you think would be able to travel in a bubble car?

Do you think a bubble car would be able to go very fast?

Why do you think it was called a bubble car?

appreciated this shared time, as they are able to spend quality time with their child, looking at stimulating and interesting information.



### Arriving at School

We walk to school with our mum, dad, a carer or a friend. We enter the school by a door close to our own year unit. We remember to bring our book bags. We wear our school uniform which consists of a green sweatshirt or cardigan with the school logo on it. Our book bags also have the school logo on them. It has a windmill on it because there is a windmill in the village of Waltham.

Under the Topic section there is a link to <http://www.learning-lincs.com>, an Internet site which has enabled the children to take part in global educational projects. The projects are linked to the school topic cycle. The children have collected and recorded data using downloadable worksheets. They have been able to compare their data collection results with those from schools around the world. Through participating in such Internet projects, topic work has been

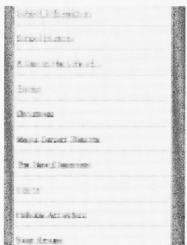
enhanced and enriched by the use of another teaching style. It has allowed ICT skills to be taught in context, thereby adding meaning to the learning process. It has developed home-school links, as children have been able to share the project with those at home.

### Topics and visits

These sections of the web site relate to educational visits the children have made and topics they have been involved in at school. Through the use of


www.leasinfants.ne-lincs.sch.uk

**On the school website page find** →



**Click on** → **School History**

**and read all about the history of the Leas Infants School.**

**When you have finished click on** → 

**to go back to the front page of the school website.**

*An example of a support sheet.*

### Current interests

There are some sections of the web site that are pertinent to the school at a particular time and are therefore located on the front page of the web site for easy access. These sections give every parent the opportunity to share and celebrate school activities. The sections will change as one event supersedes another. For example, we are having a new classroom built and its progress can be monitored in 'The New Classroom'. There is a section related to classroom topic displays which is updated termly.

### Holiday activities

The development of this area of the web site is ongoing with new activities being added each time the web site is updated. The activities are in the form of printable worksheets that combine text and graphics to make them visually attractive to the children.

The worksheets support classroom based activities. They provide the children with access to 'Homework' presented in another media format. The content of the worksheet is either numeracy, literacy

or topic linked. Differentiation of the content and style of the worksheets enables all the children to use them at their own level. Some are designed for adult and child to use together.

### Year groups

This section developed in response to frequently asked questions from parents concerning numeracy and literacy. For example, it contains a list of the 150 high frequency words which children are expected to know at the end of Year 2.

### Conclusion

The seed has grown and flourished into a school web site that is being used and celebrated by children, parents and teachers. Although originally we thought of the web site as being mainly for the children, we now recognise the value it can have in fostering home-school partnerships.

These partnerships do not just happen. They need to be initiated and nurtured by the staff through invitations to parents to work alongside their children in school. The parents' role in supporting their child's learning also needs to be valued. We have seen that these partnerships create an excellent working environment. It allows children



**The New Classroom**

A new classroom is being built. It will link with Blue Class and the Hall.

Orange classroom is being extended and Orange and Blue toilets are being doubled in size.

Find out here how the building work is progressing.

to have one-to-one attention from their parent and take part in well planned, purposeful activities – two key ingredients to ensuring maximum potential is gained from a learning situation. It's like having a class full of teachers, one for each child! What more could a class teacher ask for? Every child is on task as he or she is being guided by intrigued parents through the activities. The conversation that can be heard is that of an excited buzz of activity related chat.

We now identify opportunities for home-school partnership activities in our ICT planning. Through regular updating and evaluating of the content of the web site, we hope to ensure a continuing enthusiasm for the use of the web site by children, parents and staff.

# Schools without walls – the use of targeted URLs as homework to extend learning

**Leon Cynch**  
ICT Co-ordinator

A few years back I put up my termly class newsletter and planning online for parents, or anyone, who wanted to see:

<http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/allsouls/parents/parent.pdf>

Of course no-one read it and the paper version was far more popular!

In those days very few people had Internet access and it was more of an interesting experiment and a kind of alternative to a school prospectus rather than a practical proposition. So I did a survey of computer ownership at our school. Very few pupils, if any, had access to computers and if they did they were, in the main, games machines.

Since that time we have managed to get a 15-station network room up and running – it is used more and more frequently. Despite the usual problems of setting up and keeping machines running we have started to use one or two core Internet sites to support learning in the curriculum. Slowly but surely we are rolling this content out in small targeted 'bytes' to supplement learning.

As ICT co-ordinator I'm lucky in that I get to teach most classes from Reception all the way up to Y6 and I have begun to notice a shift in attitude as more and more children get access.

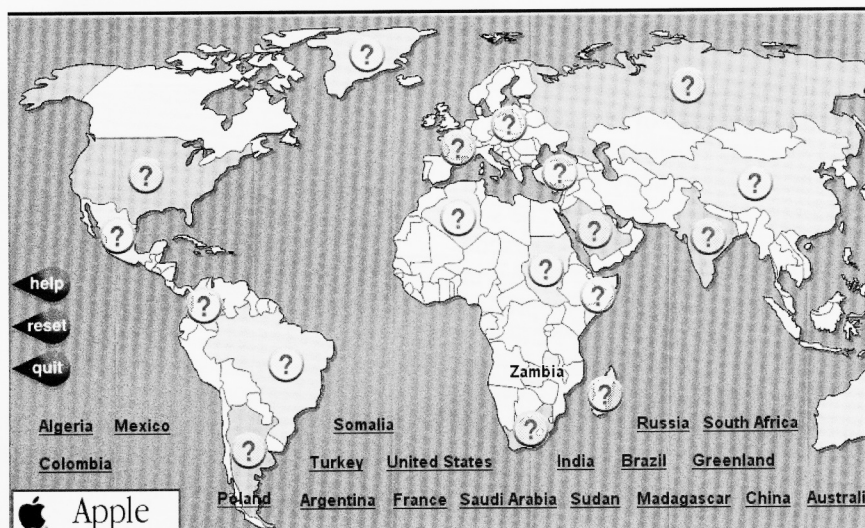
I have yet to do a comparable survey of computer ownership but I have begun to notice from straw polls taken in each class that an increasing number of children are not only getting a computer but going on the Internet as well.

There could be numerous reasons for this – computers are beginning to drop in price; a number of 'free' or evening and weekend Internet access packages are being introduced for a fixed rate payment. The computer suite has a high profile in the school and is very popular so children pester their parents to get one once they have started to build up

their own personal skills. Someone somewhere in the family now has one. In London cyber cafés are now really cheap and a good afternoon out for older children. I won't know for sure about how things are until I conduct the next survey in the near future.

With this as a background, I targeted a class of Y2 children. Their topic that half term was based on countries around the world. We went to the Apple Site 'Know Your World' (<http://www.apple.com/uk/education/schools/startower/xstartower/world/index.htm>). As part of a lesson on learning the names of countries we agreed terms for using the computers: who would operate the mouse; who would make the main decisions; when to discuss ideas and when to change over roles.

The site, written by Mike Matson for Apple's *StarTower*, cleverly uses JavaScript. The children have to use their cursor to point and click at the names of countries and then match these to a world map.



I'd done quite a bit of work with the children away from the computer previously, using jigsaws, atlases and all the other usual paraphernalia associated with acquiring these facts.

The lesson went well although I thought I could have done with a video projector or large screen monitor to teach some of the discrete skills necessary to operate the mouse.

I made one departure from my usual way of doing

things – at the end of the lesson I gave the children a handout of details of the web site and specific URLs; I suggested that those children who had Internet access give it a try with their parents and those that didn't, try going round to their friends' house if they could.

The next time I came to monitor their progress was in two weeks time when we went over the same activity again and added a few more countries. I was surprised to see that a large group of children had made an amazing leap in terms of mouse control and knowledge of countries. When asked how they had done this, they replied 'Oh we went to the web site and had a go!'

What was even more interesting, and again I would have to do far more rigorous research in terms of numbers, it seemed a very high proportion of children had done this specifically with their fathers in tow!

Today more and more schools are approaching the moment whereby the curriculum can continue at home. I have just personally invested in a extremely fast (and expensive!) computer and full time Internet access so that my 14-year-old can look at practice and revision sites online and my 6-year-old can use multimedia learning CDs (well, that's my excuse anyway!).

With the advent of broadband and DVD recorders, it will soon be possible to take advantage of video seminars and high quality online resources that will complement learning in the classroom. You'll be able to search for the information you need on the Internet, get a specific film about that topic, skill etc. then jump to the precise part you need to help you learn – all within seconds.

And a moment that I had anticipated over four years ago happened recently. A child working on a multimedia file emailed their work home as an attachment and finished it there before emailing it back next day.

Of course there are still extremely big issues here: what about those children who don't have access or the money to afford this technology? Who chooses the content? Some parents will start to buy in

electronic supplements to online learning and a whole host of services will begin to spring up. It's already happening.

Other issues are: inappropriate use of materials; teacher moderation; what could be done better face to face, using another medium or not at all!

I think the best we can do as teachers is to ensure we have an interested but knowledgeable eye on the whole business. Until there is fairly near universal access and whole communities connected up, there's little we can do to change the process other than be wise observers and interveners/enablers of this revolutionary process.

For me the teacher's role will change in the next five to ten years. It will have to anyway, even if no more technology is introduced into the classroom, because those children and communities at home who have the means will buy into increasingly more sophisticated equipment and content.

The process of using online tools to inform parents of what's happening in schools is already underway. Below are a few links to places you can visit to see how the process of a school without walls might be managed in the future:

<http://www.nicenet.org>

<http://www2.eboard.com/eboard/servlet/IndexLoginServlet>

And a teachers' version:

[http://www2.eboard.com/eboard/servlet/BoardServlet?ACTION=BOARD\\_SHOW&SITE\\_NAME=Destination&BOARD\\_NAME=demoteacher](http://www2.eboard.com/eboard/servlet/BoardServlet?ACTION=BOARD_SHOW&SITE_NAME=Destination&BOARD_NAME=demoteacher)

So the next time you set some homework why not include a carefully targeted URL and see what the response is – you never know you might be pleasantly surprised!

[*Editor's note:* Mike Matson also manages the current MAPE web site: at <http://www.mape.org.uk>]

## Promoting family learning

**Geoff Turrell**

*Headteacher, St. Peter's CE Junior School, Harborne, Birmingham,  
seconded Director of the ATHENA Small Education Action Zone*

Six out of ten households now have a PC. A quarter of these homes have two or more computers in them. Ninety percent of these computers are being used on a daily basis, the majority of the time to access the Internet and send emails, and nearly half the time for children to 'do their homework'. That's a lot of computers, being used a lot of the time ... and all of it out of sight and sound of a classroom.

Increasingly more and more attention is being paid to the potential that the time children spend away from school has, for being a powerful learning experience. After all, up to eighty percent of a child's year will be spent outside the confines of the school. To really add value to this seeding educational practice, schools would be wise to look again at harnessing this potential and ensuring the home

learning experience complements and supports the school's educational diet in a structured fashion.

Already, commercial companies are lining up to step in where schools may fear to tread. Witness the growth in websites luring the parents of potential juvenile consumers with free webspace, email accounts and cheap access, all with tales of unsurpassed educational content. Watch the growth in SATs priming materials, on-line 'aptitude' tests, and even the virtual private tutor. It's beguilingly attractive, it's 'edutaining' and if the claims are to be believed, it works wonders.

So just what are those legions of net-happy children doing with their computers when they get home, and what can a school do to ensure the potential educational content can be harvested?

At St. Peter's CE Junior School in Harborne, teachers, SENCOs and Learning Assistants have been exploring some of these issues through a project developed through the State/Independent School Partnership Scheme. The project has a number of interesting features, including placing a video conference computer (together with ISDN line connection and call charges) into the homes of children with special educational needs. Over a year, the school developed a series of activities for the children that were designed to develop their communication skills, social interaction and confidence. Each activity took place outside the normal school day and required each of the six children to video conference with a partner.

Early on in the project, parents took part in some initial training relating to the use of the video conference equipment, as well as being fully informed about the nature and scope of the activities, including the built-in facility to access the Internet at ISDN broadband speeds. From the beginning, the parents' interest and commitment was complete. Not only were they enthusiastic about the potential the equipment had for impacting on each child's individual needs, but they were eager to explore the application of the technology and to help shape and direct the learning experiences.

One of the chief characteristics of the project became the family involvement in each activity. Once the equipment was installed in the homes (usually the child's bedroom), and the very first video connection was made from one home to another, the whole family became unwittingly signed up to the project aims. For an hour or more, the television became redundant, the play stations were reduced to silence and no one answered the telephone. Everyone crowded round the computer and became involved in the immediate educational challenge that had been set.

The activities were structured at first to introduce the families to the software applications. Video conferencing is more than merely being able to see and talk to someone on the computer screen. The software applications enable families to share virtual whiteboards, use chat facilities, send still pictures

and documents, and to share software packages. At its most creative, it enables pre-prepared camcorder footage to be shared across the connection, for remote access between the computers (the 'host' computer taking control of the 'remote' computer and its software), as well as multiple users to connect at once, from anywhere in the world.

A sample list of some of the activities gives a flavour of what took place:—

- **Talking to Santa**

An early exercise encouraging children to use the equipment and to feel comfortable with talking across the connection. At this point, the children refused to speak with Father Christmas, and instead asked that adults relate their requests to him.

- **Squiggle**

This early exercise was designed to get children used to using the virtual whiteboard facility. One household would draw a random 'squiggle' on the computer whiteboard, the other household would then take over the drawing and gradually change the squiggle into something meaningful. The activity became one of the children's favourites and encouraged concentrated use of language.

- **Mapping journeys**

The children loaded up a scanned map of the local area onto the whiteboard and used the virtual highlight pens to describe graphically and verbally their journey between the connected locations. This exercise was extended as it developed to make journeys that included posting a letter, buying food, and going to school etc.

- **Collaborative writing**

The children shared word processors to create a story for infant children. This became an extended writing activity as children sought to develop the story further and include illustrations, content pages and titles. The activity had many extensions including the potential to collaborate across all the project families to create a desktop published joint magazine.

- **The holiday brochure**

This involved exploiting the fast Internet connection. Each family was required to produce a brochure for a family visiting Birmingham, using information collected from the Internet.

- **Biographical buddies**

A number of video conference networks exist, albeit on an *ad hoc* basis, across the country and within countries. The children were able to take advantage of these from time to time, including meeting children from a school in Dorset. The children were required to select three objects each that illustrated something they wanted to share about themselves with the child from Dorset.

- **Global Leap 2000**

This unique event, set up by Arbour Vale Education Action Zone and Pictoretel, enabled the

children to take part in a series of activities connecting them with children and specialists around the world. The day involved talking to 'Amy Johnson' at the Science Museum in London, talking to Captain James Cook in Scarborough, singing to up to twenty schools around the world, and taking part in a demonstration of didgeridoo playing from Australia. The culmination of the day was when the children, from their bedrooms, were able to speak to a NASA official about global warming issues, while also hearing from divers diving on the Great Barrier Reef.

The range of activities gave the children a very rich learning experience which they were encouraged to share with other children and their families. In turn, they have been involved in a number of conferences around the country, where they happily answer questions and talk about what they have experienced and learned – a dramatic contrast with the children's reluctance, shyness and hesitation when the project began.

The effect of such concerted and regular activity on the children's confidence, communication skill development and academic achievement has been marked. Evidence from teachers, parent diaries, tests, and the children themselves consistently provide a picture of great increases in confidence, enthusiasm for learning and ability to explain, discuss and interact with others.

Comments from parents include:

'C—— said he felt able to talk more to people and that he felt more confident.'

'There is an astounding improvement in our child's level of confidence. He is able to take a lead role in activities that he would have previously found difficult, if not impossible. His enthusiasm for video conferencing is continuing as it has provided him with a skill that he can use in many situations'.

The children say:

'It's excellent – now I've got used to it I know how to do it. I've enjoyed it and I know how to do it. It has helped me with English and Maths – it has helped me with words and spellings.'

'I found I couldn't speak many words at first – I was quite shy. I have got used to it now and I can talk to people now.'

'I think video conferencing is the best thing in the world. I've learnt to describe things and it is helping me to improve on describing.'

'It has helped me with speaking and not being shy. I try to speak louder in class now as well. It has helped me to make new friends and to speak to new friends as well.'

As part of the on-going evaluation of the project, parents and staff involved in the projects were asked to keep a diary that would be used to record any changes, or anything of significance.

One thing is certain – the children in this project continue to be very clear about how useful their home computer is to their family as a valuable learning tool, and a source of stimulation, conversation, friendship and . . . fun!

## Video conferencing at a hospital school

**Dave Hampton**

*Head of ICT, James Brindley School, Birmingham*

**Ann Hill**

*Head of English, James Brindley School, Birmingham*

Our kids are not necessarily ready for education between 9 am and 3.30 pm, so the availability of ICT is 24 hours a day. Not many children have watched a lion undergoing a vasectomy in South Africa or talked to an underwater diver as he swims along the Great Barrier Reef, but the last thing the children at James Brindley School need is traditional education, particularly those here at The Diana, Princess of Wales Children's Hospital.

Staff in the school believe in the power of ICT to engage and motivate sick children to learn, and utilize it in a wide and very creative way. Digital cameras, video diaries, scanning and internal email are all used to encourage the children to try and put their illnesses to one side and focus their energies in a productive manner.



*Taking part in a live video link.*

One of the most innovative benefits of ICT is video conferencing. Pupils who cannot come down to the main classroom can be video linked to a teacher and become part of the group. Children in isolation due to their illness can easily become very depressed and lonely – video conferencing offers a chance to not only learn, but also socialise and make new friends.

The video conferencing system we use at the school is called 'LiveLan H323'. It is supplied by PictureTel, the worlds most advanced video conferencing company, and maintained by Multisense Communications, which were our suppliers. Back up and support from these companies has been superb.

Our system has five multi point cameras which can be placed anywhere in the hospital as long as there is a network data point handy. The system runs through our PCs. To gain access to a video link you must dial the number of the conference holder. Once the link is up and running, an icon of a phone shows you that the handset is in use.



*An American teacher in California discusses 'Earthquakes'.*

Control of the video conference is by voice activation. While one person speaks the other people must have their systems on mute. To take control of the conference you take your system off mute and begin speaking. It takes a little practice but you get into a routine after a while. To end a conference you replace the Icon receiver back into its holder, just like a normal phone. The link is then finished.

Pitfalls are common; it is still easy to forget to mute the system while in conference and cause mayhem! The quality of the ISDN line has much to do with the quality of the conference. The system itself is fairly easy to use, and you don't have to be a technical wizard to get to grips with it. Our system does have a whiteboard attachment for interactive written question and answer sessions, or for sending an animated presentation such as *PowerPoint* anywhere in the world.

Video conferencing is not only used for 'lessons'. The Carol Service at Christmas was linked all around



*A link to mission control, NASA.*

the hospital to children who could not physically make it to the chapel, as well as to a special school in Slough. They could not only watch the service but could interact by joining in the readings and songs.

One of the greatest benefits of video links is that we can communicate on a global level. This was clearly illustrated when we were able to link a young Kosovan refugee who had lost both her grandparents and her younger brother in the Balkan conflict, with friends from her home town of Pristina – the first time in a year that she had had this opportunity. The physical and emotional benefits of this kind of 'education' are beyond measure.



*Talking to friends in Kosovo.*

We at the Children's Hospital owe a huge debt of gratitude to Maureen James at PictureTel and Peter Romeril and his team at Multisense Communications, whose help and expertise have enabled us to be at the cutting edge of technology.

James Brindley School operates on 12 sites throughout Birmingham and caters for any children who are unable to attend mainstream school due to medical reasons. Our hope is to link all 12 sites via video conferencing and enlarge the ICT family for all our pupils.

# Using ICT to improve access to the education system for Traveller children

**Claire Bayley**

*Sure Start Project Worker*

Attend school, gain an education: a civil right which many of us regard as being important to our children's well-being if they are to succeed in life as adults. By the time they are five, and often before, the expectation is that children will be attending school full-time, and although there may be many agonising decisions which take place before, during and after the leaving of the nest, and some school days missed due to illness, holidays, etc., we often anticipate that they will continue to attend school more frequently than less, for at least the following eleven years. We expect the pitfalls, but we also expect an education for our children.

For many Traveller children, this rite of passage to prepare them for adulthood is not easily accessed and can often be a fragmented, bumpy road, with many potholes and rivers to cross, in order for them to gain access to the education system, receive schooling on a continual basis and remain with their families. For example, some Occupational Travellers e.g. circus and fairground families, move at least every fortnight for seven months of every year.

## Traveller children and school

Travellers are not a homogenous group as the word Traveller is a generic term which encompasses many groups, each having their own culture, values and beliefs. Thus the term includes a diverse 'community' of people, but they all have one thing in common, which is that they are or have a history of being nomadic.

It is this lifestyle which makes access to the current education system very difficult, because it reflects the structure and needs of the population majority, which are static and not nomadic in their movement. This factor is increased by further obstacles which have evolved from it and from the attitude that society has had towards Traveller groups throughout history. The obstacles faced by many Traveller families include fears of discrimination at school by both parent and child, parents' concerns that their children will be disadvantaged educationally and emotionally by frequently changing schools, and eviction from sites resulting in fragmented attendance and education (Ofsted 1996).

Regardless of these obstructions, the need for Traveller children to be educated is reflected in both the law and by Travellers themselves. Legally,

Traveller children are required to attend school for at least 200 sessions per year. Local authorities are to provide and support this, and Traveller parents have a duty to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school.

Travellers have also expressed a need to receive education. The National Gypsy Council has called for improvements to access to mainstream schooling. They suggest that this will help to break down barriers between Traveller groups and the static communities, provide Traveller children with equality of opportunity, and enable them to gain skills to help them find employment as adults. The latter point becomes more and more important as social and economic change means increased mechanisation and the erosion of traditional work roles of many Travellers (West Midlands Education Service for Travelling Children, WMESTC 1994).

From the points raised, the need for schooling is fundamental to providing Traveller children with opportunity in adult life, but how can the current education system support this and enable Traveller families to retain their identity and lifestyle? To access the system and have continuity of schooling, some Traveller families have been 'forced' to assimilate into the static community, thus denying themselves their lifestyle and being at the threat of losing their culture and identity. But without doing this, the chances are their child's education will be very fragmented and incoherent.

So what is the solution?

## Distance learning projects

One way which local educational authorities facilitate the education of Traveller children is through paper-driven distance learning. This form of education provides continuity and gives support to parents, who, as mentioned above, have the responsibility to provide for the education of their children when they are not in school.

An example of such a scheme is offered by WMESTC. Distance work is provided for Occupational Travellers when they are away from their winter site and school. Each scheme of work is individual for each child and helps to provide continuity and links with him or her and the school. It thus enables the children to retain their lifestyle and remain with their family.

The concept of learning outside the school walls, free of physical attendance has been taken nearer to realisation through the amalgamation of ICT and distance learning. This is because through using elements of ICT such as videoconferencing and email, the transactional distance between student and teacher is reduced, since communication is increased, when compared to distance learning through the medium of postal correspondence.

Moore (1993) explains that the distance between learner and tutor is not only geographical but also psychological and communicative because of the physical separation. It is this space which he refers to as '*transactional distance*', and which can affect both the teaching and the learning. He goes on to suggest that in order for effective learning to take place, the transactional distance needs to be crossed, and this occurs through dialogue between teacher and student. By increasing the frequency of dialogue the chances are that the learner will be more motivated and stimulated and the teacher will have a better knowledge of where their student is at, and what immediate support is required.

### Three Pilot Schemes using ICT

The notion of using ICT to facilitate distance learning has recently been explored by the European Federation for the Education of the Children of Occupational Travellers (EFECOT). They have developed three pilot schemes; Topilot, Flex and Trapeze, which the WMESTC has been taking part in. The results so far are quite exciting, and if the projects prove to be successful, perhaps a more flexible pedagogy could be found in the 21st century, to support the education and lifestyle of nomadic Traveller families.

#### *Topilot*

This completed project commenced in 1996 and finished in 1999, lasting for 34 months. The aim was to develop a low-cost multimedia service for distance learning for Traveller children, including pre-school and primary.

The learner workstation was a CDI (Interactive Compact Disc) player connected to a television, together with a mobile (GSM) modem. The latter was to provide communication and overcome the difficulty of limited access to fixed telephone lines by Travelling families. The project designed interactive multimedia learning discs, which included one named 'Rollerball' for early years children aged 4 to 6 years. The exercises on this were aimed at developing reading, writing and numeracy skills.

The learners' work was sent to the tutor via the telematics network, as well as messages between the learner and the teacher and vice versa. The teacher workstation included a modem to access a database, containing children's work and any messages, via a website on the Internet.

#### *Flex*

The aim here was to develop a computer based learning environment, with one course targeting early years education. It started in September 1998 and finished in August 2000.

The learner workstation was composed of a laptop computer, a mobile (GSM) modem and a Digital Video Broadcast Receiver (Mediaspot). Communication from teacher to learner was via satellite and from learner to teacher via the mobile network. A library of multimedia teaching materials was developed, and took the form of a database with a website interface, which the teacher could access and contribute to. The purpose of the database was to enable the teacher to select appropriate material, which was broadcast via the one-way satellite link.

#### *Trapeze*

The objective is to build a satellite tele-education service. It is a one-year project working with the European Space Agency, which started in November 1999. In England the children included are of the age range seven to ten years.

The learner workstation is a personal computer, and the interface is to be kept as simple as possible to provide a user friendly and effective learning environment. A library of learning materials will be stored on a web site database, as in the FLEX project.

Two-way communication via satellite using the KU-band will enable large information files to be transmitted as well as received by the learner.

### Points to consider

There are, though, some considerations to be made relating to these projects. Firstly, the success of these projects, especially where young children are concerned, is dependant upon the involvement of parents, because they are needed to facilitate the learning which takes place on the screen with actual concrete experiences. The projects do include support and training for the parents involved, but as the projects grow and more Traveller groups are accessed, so will the training have to be increased, especially where communities with poor literacy skills are included. Hopefully the cost of this support will not deter the projects from being developed and realised for all Traveller communities, so that they are provided with a choice of how they access effective education for their children and possibly even for themselves.

Secondly, through being educated outside the school walls, the integration of the static and nomadic communities is limited and therefore opportunities for the breakdown of discrimination is reduced. Or is it? The communication links provided by ICT are ever developing, with email and video-

conferencing enabling children to communicate with each other the world over. Through projects such as Trapeze, it may be possible to develop friendships with not only fellow Traveller children but also with children from the static community which attend the base school.

The Trapeze project currently links several Traveller children together once a week through using audioconferencing to provide an opportunity for collaborative work. This could be extended to include non-Traveller children at the base school, so that the children could interact with each other, work together, and hopefully form friendships, and possibly the notion of learning together, living together could be actualised.

The advantages and disadvantages of using ICT to facilitate distance learning to support the education of Traveller children are yet to be evaluated, but the

fact that such projects have been implemented suggests that a more flexible school system may be soon be seen.

### References

Further details on these projects and resource materials are available from the EFECOT website: <http://www.efecot.net>

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## Future Kids

**Rhona Dick**  
MAPE

### Have you heard of Futurekids?

Quite possibly not, but then how many people have heard of MAPE? The interesting coincidence is that both MAPE and Futurekids are about the same age; if you are being pedantic MAPE is slightly the senior organisation.

### Do MAPE and Futurekids have anything else in common?

In a sense, yes, as we both believe in using ICT across the curriculum, and work with adults as well as children, but at that point most similarity ends.



### So what is Futurekids?

Futurekids is a commercial organisation that aims to develop ICT skills not only among children but in adults. The organisation exists world-wide in some 75 countries; in Britain it is still small and coverage is patchy. Franchises currently exist in Glasgow and Edinburgh, Tamworth and Birmingham, and rather more in the South-London, Sevenoaks, Purley and Southampton.

### How does it work?

Children's existing skills are assessed before they are assigned to a group, Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum. The groupings broadly match Key Stages but students' individual needs are more important than age groups, although this could have social consequences in some circumstances. I've no doubt this is taken into account. Weekly classes throughout term time last for an hour. In addition to this, holiday classes are held. I saw a display of the work produced by three different holiday classes; it was of a high standard and it looked as if the children had enjoyed themselves!

Groups are no larger than 12, and in fact the two groups I saw working were considerably smaller than that.

A programme of study is provided and detailed lesson plans ensure that teachers deliver the same curriculum. Rachel, one of the teachers I met, called it her 'bible'. It is certainly comprehensive; I do like the way that the skills teaching is delivered through topics that will appeal to children. There are six modules each year, each having an 'Academic Focus' as well as an ICT focus. Other aspects of technology with impressive names such as 'operating environments, programming, applied technology and telecommunications' are delivered throughout the modules.

Delivery of the lessons is on a three yearly cycle, thus ensuring that those students who stay on for more than one year are not just repeating the previous year's activities. Lesson plans can be licensed to schools.

**Handout A.3 Gold:****Self-Assessment****Stop the Presses****Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_**Favourite Project:** \_\_\_\_\_1. This is my favourite piece of work from *Stop the Presses* because:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. This project included the following technology areas:

- |                          |               |                  |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| ▪ Applied technology     | ▪ Graphics    | ▪ Spreadsheets   |
| ▪ Databases              | ▪ Multimedia  | ▪ Internet       |
| ▪ Desktop publishing     | ▪ Programming | ▪ Wordprocessing |
| ▪ Operating environments |               |                  |

3. What was the most challenging skill you had to learn to complete this project? Why was it challenging?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What skill was the most fun? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What was the most useful skill you had to learn? Why was it more useful than the other skills you learned?

\_\_\_\_\_

**What does each module consist of?**

In Unit 1 students use a DTP to create an up-to-date technology magazine. Language and the arts are the curricular foci here.

In the second unit databases are tackled. Students must investigate the claim that a pill has been developed that will eliminate the need for everything healthy – I can see that one having particular appeal for many children!

In Unit 3 students use word processing and graphics in a TV Weather context; Geography being the curricular focus.

I saw some children working on part of Unit 4. They were using spreadsheets to analyse the audience of a radio station; as you might expect, this unit has a Maths focus.

The fifth unit uses multimedia. Children have the opportunity to incorporate video clips that have been provided as well as pre-recorded sound clips in a *PowerPoint* presentation. I saw two that had been done last year by KS3 pupils; the first made use of all the options; the second was a much slicker presentation, giving careful consideration to transitions and colour combinations.

The final unit is the web challenge. In this the children look at existing games before they get to

‘create an online game of skill’ of their own.

These can only be general descriptions, as clearly the units are not suitable for every age group – Sarah told me their youngest student was 3½. She was at pains to point out that with all their students, but with the very young in particular ‘FUN’ is a high priority. The teachers believe that fun is a great motivator and enables them to deliver value for money, she said. The children I saw – there were only nine altogether in the two classes – seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Students have passports that are stamped to show their attendance and rewards are offered in the form of ‘megabytes’ that can be exchanged for small gifts, tangible evidence of their achievements.

**What technology is provided?**

The students work on networked machines. In the room I visited the room was partitioned into a large and small space. There are colour printers and a flatbed scanner. Children have access to a digital camera that saves images direct to a

floppy disk – no messing around with cables to transfer images.

**What about the software?**

Older students and adults make use of the MS Office suite of programs. Younger children use software more suited to their needs and interests. *Story Weaver*, a writing frame, and *Cruncher*, a spreadsheet program, spring to mind. There seems to be only one LOGO program, and unfortunately I couldn’t see anything that children had done using that as the files had been deleted. It would have been good to see some programmable toys used with the youngest children – that would have been fun.

There is no provision for monitoring, either, although this would have been an excellent application to use in Units 2 and 3.

**National Curriculum**

Although I was assured that the programme of study mapped the National Curriculum, and certainly it seemed to, strangely enough there was no reference to it in the lesson plans.

The Lessons

Each lesson begins with a review of the previous week’s learning. The objectives of today’s lesson are then detailed before the teaching begins. Questioning is an important part of learning and I was pleased to see that the technique was put to careful use during the lesson I saw. I’m not certain how much opportunity students have to evaluate their own or others’ work. Perhaps time is a constraint here as there certainly seems to be a lot to get through in an hour.

As the sessions are planned and delivered as lessons I found it difficult to remember that they are not lessons in school as we understand them, and that I mustn’t have the same expectations in terms of curriculum coverage and development of non-ICT concepts. Rachel is a well-qualified and experienced primary teacher, a former IT co-ordinator, but parents should be aware that the tutor may not be a qualified teacher.

It was evident that even in those small groups there was a clear difference in ability levels. If it is hard to cater for different abilities in small groups this only serves to emphasise the enormity of the task facing teachers in schools. We sometimes feel threatened when parents resort to any type of complementary education for their children, as if it is a personal attack on our professional skills. While many primary schools are struggling to cope with the ICT curriculum using inadequate hardware perhaps we should be grateful for all the help we can get. Do organisations such as Futurekids exist because parental perception is that schools are failing their pupils?

If you would like more information about Futurekids, either as a parent or carer, as a school seeking additional training, or with a view to taking out a franchise, visit the website [www.futurekids.co.uk](http://www.futurekids.co.uk).

Ideas for using MAPE’s Big Books

Heather Govier  
MAPE  
[www.mape.org.uk](http://www.mape.org.uk)

- Look in KidsMAPE for the Big Books.
- Read one of the Big Books, *Bluebell Time* or *Muddy Time*.
- Answer the questions about the story you have read.
- Only Katie-Lee has ever seen the monsters
- so we do not really know what they look like.
- Draw what you think the monster looks like.
- Put the flowers from the story in your picture.



What is the name of Katie-Lee’s dog?	
What colour is he?	
What flowers are in the story?	
What is the name of the monster?	
What colour is the monster?	
Did Mum believe that Katie-Lee saw the monster?	
What did Katie-Lee show Mum to try to make her believe?	
Do you believe Katie-Lee? Why?	

## Notes for teachers

### *Monster Tree Stories*

The Monster Tree stories all have a common format, which makes them ideal for studying story structure and comparing texts by looking at similarities and differences. [*National Literacy Strategy Text level work.*]

All are set in the same woods and involve the same 'real' characters – Katie-Lee, her dog, Lido and her mum. [*Discuss story settings – discuss and compare story themes – identify and describe characters.*]

All begin by looking at aspects of the natural history of a certain time of the year (when they are all available, there will be one story for each month). There is focus on the weather and a key feature of the natural environment and these are portrayed by photographic illustration. [*Compare and contrast stories with a variety of settings.*]

In the middle section, each of the stories has a fantasy element, set within the trees where one of the two monsters is encountered. The monsters have distinct characters – very different from each other – and are illustrated as cartoons. [*Identify and discuss main and recurring characters.*]

Each story ends with a discussion between Katie-Lee and her mum about what happened under the

monster trees. Katie-Lee always has some evidence to show but mum always disbelieves her account. [*Predict story endings/incidents – discuss character's feeling and behaviour.*]

All the stories involve description, questions and dialogue and could thus also be studied at sentence level.

### *Other Big Books*

*Where do hedgehogs go?* and *The Red Engine* are suitable for younger children.

*Where do hedgehogs go?* by Celia Burley has minimal text and beautiful watercolour illustrations. Hard copies of the book are available from MAPE.

*The Red Engine* has a cartoon format and an environmental theme. All the pages have appropriate music and narrated text.

### *Future development*

MAPE plans to add more Big Books and would be interested in feedback from teachers who have used the existing resources in class. If you have any comments on any of the books please contact me, Heather Govier, Chair of MAPE at hgovier@CHALKFACE.NET or by snail mail at 219 Oswald, Courtwood Lane, Croydon, CR0 9HG.

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# Multi-media information programs which can be used with young children

**Mary Lou Thornbury**  
ICT Advisor

It is not necessary for parents to have a great number of CD-ROMs; they are expensive and having a great number can be 'distracting'. It is better to get one or two and explore them with young children so that they will take up the exploration themselves. Besides 'talking books' there is a range of software which motivates children and assists in the acquisition of pre-reading skills. It is multisensory with sound and music, graphics and animation, photos and video.

The pattern of use of these programs is interesting. For the first few times young children want to be sitting on an adult's knee or close beside them, or maybe they will stand in the background watching other children. They observe the program and quite often command the adult to make the moves, pointing to the screen or asking for directions. They become familiar with the program and explore its possibilities: will the pig in the corner or the little girl, Fat Controller or Noddy figure help with the

task or explain where to go next? Can the child make any number of choices, can she click anywhere, or is the exploration limited? To avoid frustration children need to know what these limits are. When all this is known they will explore a section of the program on their own, often coming back and back until the supporting skills, like the different uses of the mouse for a particular operation, are established.

One little girl, sitting on my lap, was quite impatient with a shape matching program. She wanted to explore the more 'interesting' or demanding sections of the CD-ROM. However when she asked to use the computer by herself she went to the shape matching and repeatedly played it until, having relearned for herself the sequence of operations, she could also click precisely. Only then did she move on to the game involving clicking and dragging which, when played with an adult, she declared to be 'the best'.



Alice and her mother laugh at the dancing spoons!

An observer might suggest that the child is making no progress but the challenge to the adult is to observe the necessary reinforcement and how the program supports it. When they revisit the program the children are also in the company of the programmer, a more shadowy presence than an actual adult but one who provides transitional help towards independent play. The children need to be supported to move on to different levels. In the company of an adult they will discover what else the CD-ROM has to offer.

An exciting example of such software is *My First Incredible Amazing Dictionary*<sup>1</sup>. The thoughtful selection of images for this CD-ROM combines photographs and drawings, stills and animations. The images of children are inclusive, the use of a range of voices includes higher pitched children's voices, which, combined with the avoidance of gender stereotypes, suits it to most 3–5-year-olds – and older. It is also refreshing in this CD-ROM to have images of real children and adults.

The most popular feature with one 3-year-old was the sound game, *What's That Noise?* The child clicks on a door; behind the door is a sound. The child listens carefully and clicks on the object that makes the sound: dolphin or tambourine, cricket or lorry. This is a very important age for the development of listening skills because only if they are fully developed will the child come readily to listening to the sounds of words and letters. Phonic awareness develops later than, and is dependent upon, the maintenance of pitch recognition. This game has many frames and can hold the attention of most young children; in fact if they are really keen they will learn mouse skills of location and clicking (not dragging) with this game alone. Little children find it difficult to screen out surround sound so for this activity the computer is best set up away from other activities which generate noise.

Another feature shows associated groups of words. One 3-year-old's mother had had a new baby in hospital. She asked for 'ambulance' and then for

'hospital'. At the bottom of the page is a square which leads to all the words to do with 'At the Hospital'. We clicked on all the pictures, looked at them and listened to the definitions over and over till all the words were thoroughly absorbed and then we went off to another part of the dictionary to find some 'reptiles'.

The idea of grouping words and objects is associated with the beginning of understanding of generalisations. Vygotsky calls these groups 'heaps' because they may be generic groups like 'reptiles' or groups by association like 'at the hospital'. The ability of children to see and make categories is important in their marshalling of the multiplicity of information about the world around them.

One other feature of this program is the 'footprints'. If you click on them you can go back over the subjects you have looked at and return to an earlier train of thought. We used this to go back to the hospitals again.

This program with 3-year-olds is less a dictionary than an exploring of the world, but one delimited and imagined by a skilful programmer.

### The importance of sound

With more recent computers the sound quality has become clearer. One magic CD-ROM allows you to listen to and memorise bird-song. *Garden Wildlife*<sup>2</sup> shows pictures of the animals, insects and other beasts in gardens, parks and buildings. It caters for young children's interest in the world around them and their early ability to learn the 'big' and correct word like 'millipede'. A wonderful feature is the recording of bird song which enables identification of most garden and park birds. Again, it is great for listening to and remembering even quite long sequences of sound.

But *Garden Wildlife* does not have a speaking facility. If it is used it with pre-schoolers the adult needs to read and endlessly re-read the descriptions, and explain them. The language is precise and correct: we learnt that the young dragon-fly is called a 'nymph'. But the ideas are accessible and if we read them often enough they will be remembered. And the little biologist will then return to the video knowing what it represents (a dragon-fly nymph eating a fresh water shrimp!).

These are the simplest form of information sources for young children and they return to them again and again. The CDs are well organised and attractively presented and their appeal outlasts the matching games and jigsaws which proliferate for the pre-schooler and her parents.

<sup>1</sup>(1994) Dorling Kindersley

<sup>2</sup>Anglia Multimedia

# Children using home computers: bridging the gap between home and school?

**Cindy Kerawalla**

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Is the domestic computer turning into an important link between home and school? Judgement about this depends on knowing what children are doing with it. Our research at Loughborough University has been looking at how KS2 children from 33 families actually use computers at home. The project is unusual in that it makes use of software to log actual patterns of computer use moment by moment. However, the research also looks carefully at the way this technology gets 'fitted into' families – thinking of the home as a kind of ecology. To create a useful contrast, we have also studied ICT use in the five primary schools that represented the catchment area for the participating families.

It is clear that the reason families own a personal computer has a lot to do with aspirations for their children's progress at school. Interviews reveal that 73% of parents bought a computer to support their child's education, and that over 60% of the software available in these homes was of a kind that would be appropriately found in classrooms. Moreover, the ethos of school is probably very much in mind when parents think about incorporating computers into family routine. When deciding where to place it, issues such as parental supervision, having a quiet or serious place to work and ensuring equity of access to all family members, were commonly raised by these parents.

Yet in spite of all this investment, monitoring of computer use shows that the most common activity for children was playing non-educational games. In a somewhat disheartening manner, parental aspirations for computer use seem not to be met. This was the case even though we furnished each family with six new educationally-oriented CD-ROMs.

We were interested in finding out more about this shortfall between aspiration and reality. One issue must surely be the extent to which parents get involved themselves in their children's activity. Our logs show that most computer use was solitary and parent's involvement was very limited. In interviews, parents admitted this and cited reasons such as lack of time and confidence. But many parents (72%) referred to a feeling that their intervention and guidance was not particularly welcome: children may sometimes resist the tutorial role when adopted by adults close to them. Obviously, this is in direct contrast to the social environment surrounding computer use in primary schools where much use will be collaborative and where adults are

on hand naturally to adopt the tutorial role.

This study also investigated general parental attitudes towards children learning at home. Whilst most parents recognised the importance of their children pursuing their learning at home, they were also concerned not to be seen as parents who might 'pressurise' or 'hothouse' children. Often they see school as a long and focused day – something finding a release at home. Despite the modest role of parents in managing *computer* experience, all parents still claimed to provide help and support for their children's general homework. There is perhaps a proper feeling of responsibility for supporting tasks that have been formally brought home from the classroom.

In evaluating these tensions, it is important to focus on classrooms and homes as two different environments. Our study suggests a certain gulf. Classroom computer use is curriculum led and children have shared knowledge of this agenda. Peer collaboration is possible and adult guidance is always on hand. Homes however, have a different kind of ecology. Activity is diffuse, improvised and not always co-ordinated among family members. Moreover, importing the formal role of 'teaching' from classroom to home may violate something of what children normally expect about their domestic relationships. It is important to remain conscious of this cultural organisation and not suppose that simply furnishing a new and powerful technology will allow a simple side-stepping of the contextualising that organised and purposeful learning often needs.

Yet we do not wish to promote a dispiriting story from this project. It is true that with older children in our sample, computers were often implicated in preparing homework assignments. Moreover, in our observations we found some children some of the time engaging with computers in truly creative ways and sometimes taking this work into school. What is needed is a fuller partnership. Most of the parents participating in our project had little sense of what their children were currently doing in class and virtually no conception of how or to what extent classroom computers supported this. Our findings may be sobering, but if there is a good lever to operate on the home-school interface, this technology probably is still a strong candidate.

If you wish read the full research report from which this article is drawn, a draft is available at <http://devpsy.lboro.ac.uk/psy/ckc/papers/cindyD3.htm>

# Building online learning communities for teaching and learning, which integrate online multimedia

**Tony van der Kuyl**

*University of Edinburgh*

**Allen Thurston**

*Northern College, Dundee*

## Introduction

Those who teach must espouse and exemplify in their professional activities and their teaching the values and environments that underpin their students' learning today and in the future. International, national and local technology initiatives have rapidly developed the role of ICT in all areas of learning and teaching. Teachers, schools, authorities and universities must develop strategies to build on-line learning communities that enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

## On-line learning communities

The creation of on-line support systems for teaching and learning needs to:

- compliment and enhance present teaching and learning in a variety of ways;
- facilitate communication between peers (staff to staff/ learner to learner) and students to staff;
- provide access to and delivery of quality resources both in content and type; and
- interactively support the construction and access to learner resources created during the teaching and learning process.

Reflecting Bruner, it is important that in this process learners have an element of ownership of the community.

Given scope of the WWW, the context of learning is vital when designing online communities. The process must be scaffolded and resources supported by contextualised communication. A framework for both learning and development should be available containing signposts, and feedback given in a transparent and open way, available to all involved in the community.

## ICT and Learning

As educators we must be clear that these on-line communities support a context of external learning how ICT enhances internal dimensions of learning

outcomes is the scope much needed research (see case studies below).

For learners to be successful in online communities a process view of learning, as the ability to manipulate information, is crucial simply because of the amount of information available to learners is increasing exponentially. The World Wide Web today has 1.6 billion pages growing at a rate of 10 million pages per month. Simply transmitting information for collection is now meaningless: deciding the 'how' and 'where' to search is the essential process. The skills of handling must be supported by an understanding of the structure and organization of information categories in order to be able to make sense of them. This process of understanding helps us form concepts which we manipulate as symbols during the thinking process. ICT information systems support the acquisition of 'procedural knowledge' improving opportunities for cognition.

ICT information environments developed by teachers therefore provide the 'scaffolding' to support and enhance learner problem solving. It is in this capacity of supporting the learner to plan, select, refine and present that ICT is most useful.

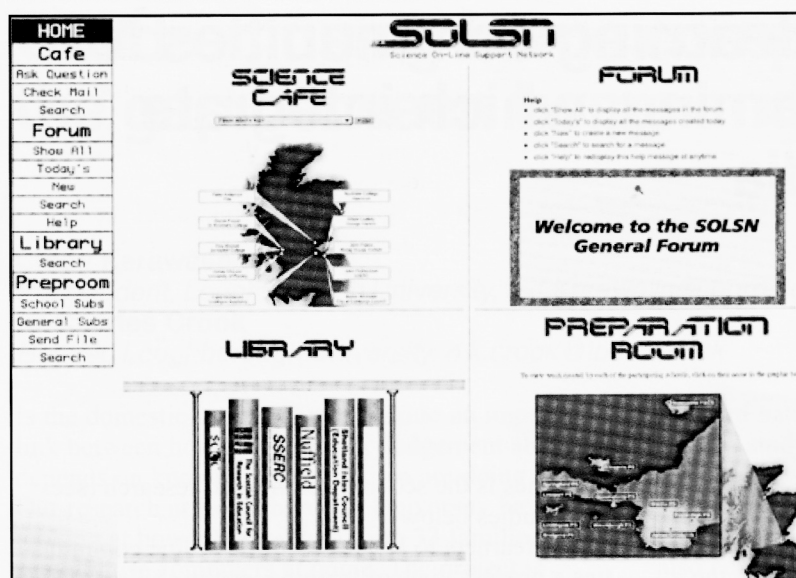
The advent of ICT investment and its development means that the requirement for new teacher training policies forces all educators to reassess the direction of their teaching and learning. It is essential, particularly in teacher development, that the use of new technologies is established to both enhance present learning environments and create for learners an opportunity which develops their process of learning through the use of ICT.

## Features of an ICT teaching and learning support system

*Science Online Support Network (SOLSN)*

Communications:

- a) *Cafe*: helper's environment, learner access to appropriate expertise on-line, personalised responses, depersonalised Frequently Asked Question banks created and searchable. The map would reflect staff involved graphic of campus.



- b) *Forums*: open unstructured and thematic focused forum having with threaded response environments e.g. ideal for tutorial preparation all forums searchable

#### Resources:

- a) *Library*: quality libraries mediated by staff containing variety of media i.e. on line searchable texts, digitised video, focused URLs etc., all downloadable and accessible
- b) *Preproom*: student and staff generated resources to facilitate peer evaluation, support student refinement, provide exemplification of standards, allow the upload material to staff. The map would reflect staff involved graphic of campus.

### Case Study – New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT Training for Primary School Teachers

Applying the principles of what constitutes a good quality on-line learning environment has been the cornerstone of the Scottish Teacher Education Consortium's (STEC) approach to the design of materials for delivery through the Scottish Executives (UK Government) initiative. This funding makes ICT training on the pedagogical application of the use of ICT available to teachers.

The materials produced by STEC try to emphasise the importance of:

- Interesting presentation
- Ease of use
- Flexibility in time and place of use
- Inclusion of examples
- Opportunities for choice
- Peer and tutor support

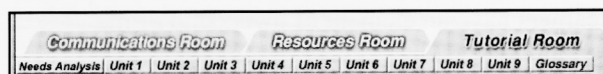
[Murdoch (2000)]

The Scottish Teacher Education Consortium is composed of staff from Scotland's three largest

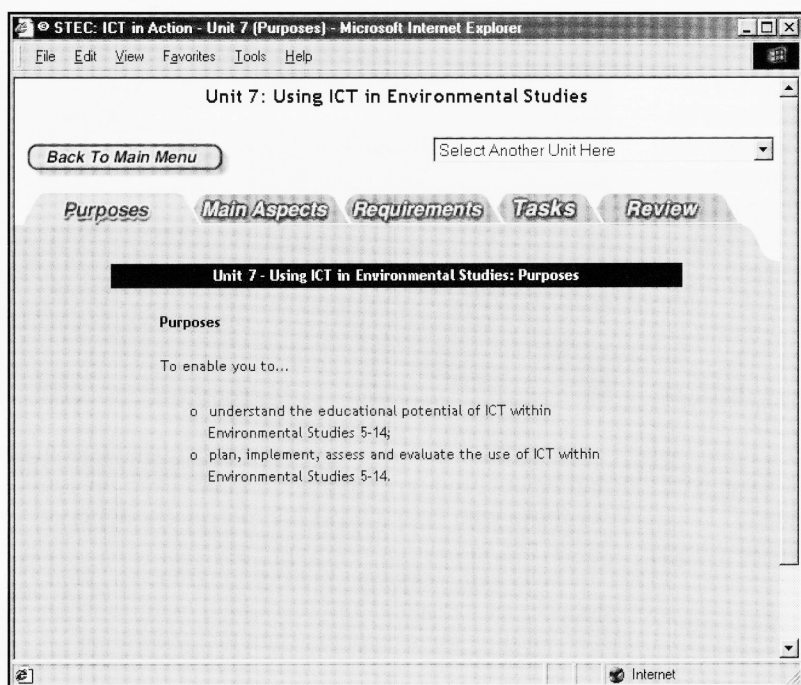
Initial Teacher Education providers: Moray House (Edinburgh University), Jordanhill (Strathclyde University) and Northern College of Education. In designing the NOF materials the Consortium has tried to embrace a philosophy of 'learning in and learning through the use of ICT'. To this end the training course tries to present the 'medium as the message' and delivers the NOF training as a computer based course. The materials are presented via an on-line learning environment, a CD-ROM housing a copy of the tutorial materials. This has proven essential to allow flexibility of access to the training materials for teachers who do not have internet access either at home nor work. Further flexibility is

afforded by the provision of paper copies of the tutorial units. Not every learner will wish to sit in front of a computer to read materials and the prospect to some of reading the materials whilst sitting on the sofa with a cup of coffee after the kids are in bed may be the most viable option for learning.

The on-line version of the materials has three key components: the Communications Room, the Resources Room and the Tutorial Room. Each Room has a colour theme allowing a user to know which of the Rooms they are in. Graphic designers worked on the site layout to enhance its aesthetics. Graphics icons and careful selection of layout style was utilised to further enhance the look of the site. Large 'Tabs' across the top of the screen allow easy navigation for inexperienced users. Hyperlinks from these 'Tabs' open up in new windows that have limited toolbar functionality. A user can always return to the main Tutorial Room window by closing down the window that they are in. The functions of each of the Communications Room, Resources Room and Tutorial Room will be discussed later in this paper.



Teachers undertaking NOF training with STEC are assigned a tutor. In the first instance the participant completes an initial needs analysis and sends a copy to their tutor. This is important as it presents both the tutor and the learner with information allowing them to negotiate an Individual Study Plan. The Individual Study Plan takes account of the fact that teachers have different entry points with regards to their present capabilities in ICT. The tutor and participant also negotiate a Course Schedule suggesting the rate at which the participant will wish to work through the course materials. This facilitates differentiation allowing a variety of entry points and study strate-



gies to be adopted by a learner reflecting the individual needs of participants. A good example of this is in the curriculum based tutorial units where participants will look at case studies and undertake development work in relation to the needs they have to supplement their classroom practices.

The materials have been designed to cater for the different learning styles of participants. The tutorial sections are written in compact blocks. This allows participants to dip in and out of the materials when they have time during a packed and busy working day. Video and audio clips are used to vary how the participants interact with the materials. Encouraging participants to reflect on their own practice in relation to issues raised by the course materials facilitates interactive learning. It is expected that participants will address these issues in the context of their own classrooms.

The study units have the following foci: Orientation, Planning, Implementing, Assessing and Evaluating, Using ICT to support ES, Using ICT to support Maths, Using ICT to support English Language, a classroom based Mini-Project and these units culminate in the formulation of a Personal Development Plan by each participant. Each unit of study has a similar structure detailing the purpose of the units, identifying its main aspects, detailing prerequisites for undertaking the unit, unit tasks and allowing the participants to give feedback on their learning and the quality of the teaching and learning materials presented in the unit. The unit tasks are split into manageable sections designed to allow a flexible approach to working with them.

The materials draw on case studies of good practice in the use of ICT selected from Scottish Primary Schools. A case study generally includes information from the headteacher, class teacher and

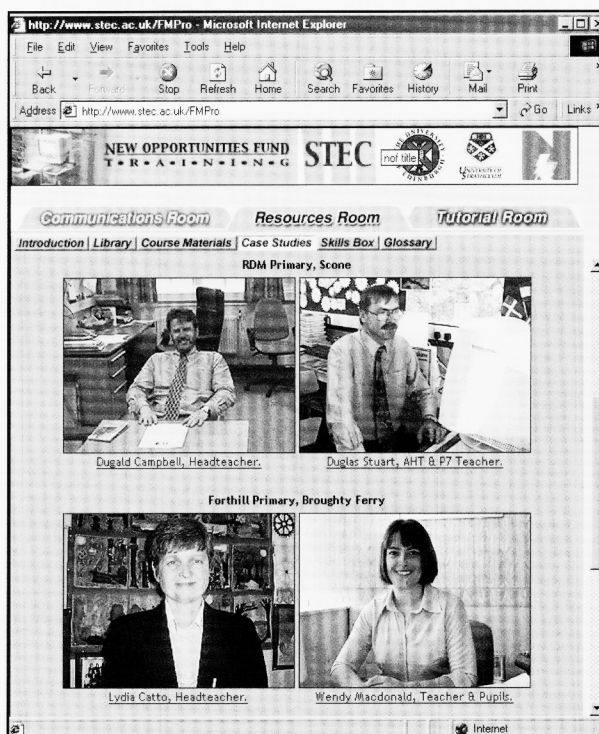
pupils from a school. It may also include School Development Plans, class teacher's forward plans and pupils work products. This contextualises the materials for learners.

Below are examples of the case study from Forthill Primary School, Broughty Ferry and RDM Primary Schools, Scone. The case study includes audio clips from the headteachers of the schools (Lydia Catto and Dugald Campbell), class teachers from the schools (Wendy Macdonald and Douglas Stewart) and pupils from classes at the schools. The school development plans from each school are also included in the tutorial materials as are sample pupil products.

Whilst there is a natural progression within the site from Units 1-9 a learner has ownership in the way that they approach the materials. If a

learner requires they can independently view materials from various parts of the site selecting how long they wish to spend on a particular topic. There is also a facility for the learner to work relatively independently on the site by accessing materials via the Resources Room. Here all audio clips and case study materials are grouped according to school. There is also an area where there is a large bank of educationally useful web-site links searchable by subject area and key words.

Support for learning is a particularly strong feature of the materials. As previously mentioned



each participant is assigned a tutor. In addition to help in formulating the Individual Study Plan and Course Schedule the tutor provides additional support. The on-line materials have a communication facility. This allows each participant to request help from both their tutor and their peer group. The latter is an important aspect of the on-line materials. It allows the participant access to a wider community of learners who can help and support the learning of each other.

Participants access this help through the Communications Room. In this area they can send messages to a peer or a tutor via their Message Box. They can also post a message up onto a News Board that has public access. There is also a facility for the tutor to run threaded discussions on an ICT related topic where participants will discuss a relevant issue with both the tutor and peer group whilst on-line.

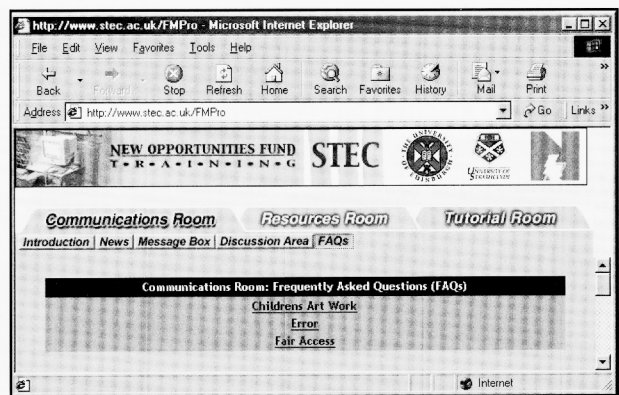
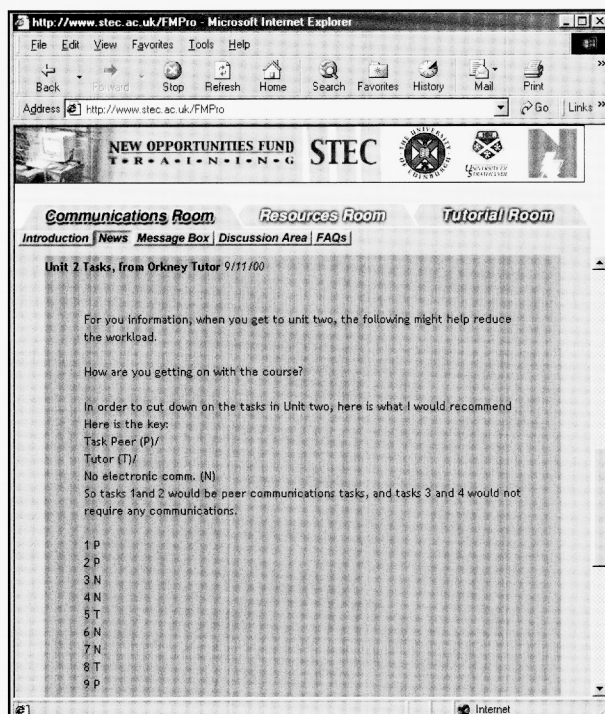
Pritchard (2000) reports that use of a communications facility in such a way lead to ...

‘a valuable exchange of ideas, information and experiences ...’ and participants in such an environment ‘benefit from the moral support provided by such exchanges.’

The presentation of learning materials in a format that allows peer support and an on-line learning community to form is referred to by Hiltz (1994):

‘Most distance learning has taken place using an individual or self study strategy. ... However, computer-mediated communication is especially well suited to collaborative or co-operative learning strategies.’

All communications that take place here can be added to a bank of frequently asked questions. Hence, if a learner searches these first they may find an appropriate response to their point already there!



In addition to these support mechanisms telephone and letter communication is available from the tutor for those who do not have internet access either at home nor work.

Davis and Denning (2000) in reference to their analysis of the social and learning dynamics of on-line learning environments state that they hope ...

‘the on-line world can be a powerful learning environment that demands effective and challenging facilitation. ...’

We hope to have echoed some of that sentiment in the on-line learning environment that we have created.

*Further information can be found online at*

Reading the Reader

<http://sitc.education.ed.ac.uk/projects/readingthereaderonline.html>

Raising the Standards

<http://sitc.education.ed.ac.uk/projects/raisingthestandard.html>

Demonstration of how online exemplification of teachers and learners supports learning and teaching.

[http://sitc.education.ed.ac.uk/projects/case\\_studies.html](http://sitc.education.ed.ac.uk/projects/case_studies.html)

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# Computer safety

**Joanne Almond**

*The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents*

Using a computer is not generally thought of as being one of the most hazardous activities to engage in. Yet health and safety risks do exist for both adults and children.

## Physical hazards

Accidents involving computers are increasing year after year as more people use computers both at work and at home. In 1998 around 1500 people in the UK went to hospital as a result of an accident in the home involving a computer<sup>1</sup>. To give some examples:

- a 6-year-old boy suffered burns after a fire caused by spilling a drink on a computer
- a 9-year-old boy suffered a head injury after a computer stored on top of a wardrobe fell on him
- a 9-year-old girl was treated for bruising after falling down the stairs while attempting to move her computer
- a 15-year-old boy needed treatment for cuts after he threw his arms up in the air after winning a computer game and then brought his arm down on a glass on the desk
- an 18-year-old man suffered the effects of an electric shock whilst setting up his computer
- a 38-year-old man suffered a sprained wrist after playing computer games for five hours

Computers should not be seen as toys but as items of electrical equipment to be treated with respect.

## Tips to minimise the risk of a computer-related accident

- site your computer near an electric socket to avoid trailing wires across the floor; if you use an extension cable make sure it doesn't overheat and nobody can trip over it
- take care not to overload electric sockets; use trailing multi-socket units rather than plug adapters
- always follow installation and service instructions in your computer guidebook closely. If in doubt, leave it to the experts
- electricity and water do not mix – keep drinks and plants well away from computers
- regularly check all electrical equipment for damaged plugs or frayed cables
- computers are large and bulky pieces of equipment, move them only if you feel confident in doing so, and with care, especially up and down

stairs. Use a trolley and a lift and ask for help. Do not allow children to move computers

- do not allow children to play on or with computer swivel chairs
- make sure the computer is sited in a position where you have plenty of room to move and to get out of the room in an emergency

## Health risks

There are a number of health risks from using computers, most of which can be minimised or eliminated by awareness of the risks and by following advice available.

### *Repetitive strain injury (RSI)*

RSI results from performing repetitive movements, e.g. using the mouse, for a long period of time. The following tips are among many that will help you to avoid RSI:

- organise workloads to avoid using the computer for extended periods of time
- your screen, keyboard and mouse should be directly in front of you
- using document holders avoids having to lean over and bend your neck while looking at paper-work
- make sure the space underneath your desk is free from clutter and your legs have room to move
- use your mouse as close to the keyboard as possible
- adopt good posture while at the computer
- know how to adjust your chair to the most comfortable position
- minimise head and neck movements by altering the height of your monitor
- small people and children should use footrests
- wrist rests are not for use while typing, but for resting the wrists between spells of typing

### *Strained eyes*

Working for long periods of time on the computer can strain your eyes or can worsen existing eye conditions. Symptoms include eye discomfort, headaches, itchy eyes and difficulty in focusing. It is important to rest the eyes while working on the computer. Regularly look at more distant objects, e.g. use thinking time to look out of the window, and take frequent breaks from computer work. Visit the

optician for regular eye check-ups and make sure you tell them if you are a frequent computer user.

### *Stress*

Computer work can be stressful. Take frequent breaks and avoid work overload.

### *Epilepsy*

Although this is a small risk, epileptic seizures can be triggered by computer work, usually through excessive screen flicker. Know what to do if a child has an epileptic seizure.

Further information is available from the National Society for Epilepsy, 01494 601300, <http://www.epilepsynse.org.uk>.

*For further information on safe and comfortable computer use refer to '14 steps to safe and comfortable computer use – the practical ergonomics approach' by Robert Down of Ergonomos Limited, ISBN 0-9539071-0-4.*

### **Internet safety/child protection**

While the Internet serves as a wonderful educational tool, it is an unregulated one, and teachers, parents and children should be aware of the inherent dangers of using the Internet. Caution needs to be exercised

to ensure that children do not access unsuitable adult material on the Internet:

- home/school Internet contracts should be in place
- preview Internet material to be used for school-work
- computers should be placed in public areas and screen content should be visible to everyone
- teach children how to use the Internet safely and warn them of the potential dangers of unsuitable sites and chatrooms
- advise children never to give out personal details on the Internet
- have clear penalties in place for misuse of the Internet
- monitor children's time spent on-line
- purchase filtering software

Many schools now have their own website. Within the school website ensure that no individual child could be identified and subsequently contacted by visitors to the site.

*For further information on Internet Safety refer to the DfEE's 'Superhighway Safety Information Pack' – <http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk>*

*For advice for children, parents and teachers concerning using the Internet safely, go to Childnet – <http://www.childnet-int.org/>.*

<sup>1</sup>Home Accident Surveillance System, 1998, Department of Trade and Industry.

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## **The ICT and Home School Links Project (ICTHOS)**

**Diane Mavers**

*Manchester Metropolitan University*

The ICT and Home School Links Project (ICTHOS) has recently been set up by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Based at the Research Centre at the Manchester Metropolitan University the project is led by Professor Bridget Somekh with Cathy Lewin and myself. It is a small-scale project of nine months duration, running from January 2001 to August 2001.

Increasing access to ICT resources and networked technologies both in homes and schools, in addition to workplaces, libraries and other locations, affords potential for a variety of communication possibilities between teachers, parents/guardians and pupils for a range of purposes. The web enables unmediated access to a plethora of educational resources for parents and pupils published by schools, LEAs and

government bodies and increasingly by other providers in the form of support for schoolwork (for example BBC Bitesize, Homework High). The ICTHOS research is looking primarily at schools' use of email and the web for communication between teachers and parents and between teachers and pupils, and on home use of the web by parents and pupils for a range of purposes, as well as use of portables between home and school.

The ICTHOS project aims to gather information on existing content, organisation, management, structure and use of electronic resources for home-school links along with evaluation and exemplification of good practice. Through description of models in different schools it will identify similarities and contrasts, thus informing policy makers and providing a data source for dissemination to practitioners.

The project's specific objectives are to:

- examine the various ways in which the relationship between the school and home is potentially strengthened by the use of ICT;
- identify both the types of technologies being used and the various models of use being developed in a range of home school initiatives (including both established practices and special short-term projects);
- identify the particular benefits that may result;
- investigate the ways in which these benefits may relate not only to teaching and learning but also to the way schools are managed and administered;
- consider a range of software and web based content that is available in the home that might support home learning;
- consider the implications of these developments for decision makers, schools, LEAs, students and parents;
- consider issues associated with the implementation and management of ICT to support home school links;
- consider any further potential benefits of using ICT for home-school links which may accrue in the near future as the technology develops.

The first phase of the project includes a process of knowledge mapping where national and international key informants are providing information on related issues and current initiatives in schools. We are also seeking information from commercial companies. This information, supplemented by literature review findings, is helping us to identify approximately 200

primary, secondary and special schools throughout England where innovative practice in the use of ICT for home-school links is either in place or in the process of development. In order to build a profile of practice we are asking each of these schools to complete a questionnaire. A later phase of the research will entail case studies in a small number of schools which have introduced a range of contrasting practices.

At this stage in the research process, we are continuing to seek schools which are either just beginning to explore the use of ICT for home school links or which have established or developing models. Maybe your school would like to be involved. Participation would entail completion of a four-sided questionnaire which should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. An addressed pre-paid envelope is provided for its return. Should it be preferred, there is also an electronic version which can be sent as an attachment via email. All information is treated confidentially and all data will be anonymised. Schools completing the questionnaire will be sent a copy of any publications produced by DfEE as a result of our work, should they wish it. This opportunity for schools to share their development of the use of ICT for links with the home is an important means of representing a picture of current work in schools and disseminating exemplary practice.

We appreciate that teachers are very busy. However, if your school would like to contribute to this important research by completing a questionnaire, please contact Di Mavers on [d.mavers@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:d.mavers@mmu.ac.uk).

## Some useful web addresses

**Bob Fox and Barry Wake**  
*University College Worcester*

All the URLs given below were accessed at the beginning of May 2001. There is no guarantee that they will still be available at the same address at a later date.

### *1. The BECTa Information Sheet on Parents and ICT can be accessed via*

<http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/parents.html>

You can download a 10-page Acrobat file (dated September 2000) containing useful background information, advice and links to other relevant sites. Its stated aims are to provide: an introduction to the ways in which ICT can be used to support children's learning; some guidance on the role parents could

play in children's computing; advice on censorship issues, computer addiction and video games; help in selecting, purchasing and using computer hardware and software at home; relevant sources of further information and support.

### *2. The DFEE Parents Online home page*

<http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk/>

This site develops and alters to reflect current initiatives. Its aims are 'to strengthen home-school links and help parents support their children's use of information and communication technology' and 'to demonstrate the diverse and exciting range of educational content available on the Internet today'.

'Let's show parents

- how children use the Internet for their education.
- the safest way for children to access the Internet.
- amazing sites full of educational content and new places for children to learn.
- how easily they can be part of the high-tech world their children inhabit.'

### 3. Parents Information Network (PIN)

<http://www.pin.org.uk/>

'Parents Information Network (PIN) is an independent service for parents who want to know more about the educational benefits of computers and the Internet. The PIN site provides information and advice for parents with children from pre-school age through to eighteen.'

This extensive site is packed with very good advice on home computer use, information about ICT in education, internet safety information and independent software evaluations. Really worth a visit.

### 4. Cyberkids

<http://www.cyberkids.com/lp/index.html>

This lively site is American, and some of its content is only marginally applicable to a UK context, but it also has a strong international flavour, with links to resources all over the world, and there is plenty of useful material here. Overall it exudes a sense of good-natured worthiness, and rarely descends into glitzy triviality. Parents might find it helpful to read the mission statement at <http://www.cyberkids.com/we/html/parents.html>

### 5. The Hugo Meynell Primary School 'Links for Parents' page

<http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/40903026a/parentlks.htm>

This contains some useful links to a range of websites of potential interest to parents, though these are not specifically ICT-related.

### 6. The Walt Disney Internet Group is at

[http://disney.go.com/investors/wdig/legal/safety\\_tips.html](http://disney.go.com/investors/wdig/legal/safety_tips.html)

WDIG has a lot of useful information and Internet safety tips for both children and parents, guidance on filtering software and good links to other children's sites. It is an American-based site, and is characterized as such by its language and focus. Nonetheless, the little adventures such as *Surf Swell Island* and *Cybernetiquette Comix* that Mickey and his other Disney friends have offer valuable lessons to children about Internet safety and online awareness.

### 7. And finally, for busy parents and teachers, an everything-in-one-place site

<http://www.teacherxpress.com/>

TeacherXpress have pulled together links to over 1000 web sites in categories such as Libraries, Museums, Newspapers, Magazines, Reference, General Info and including hundreds of Education Web Sites, covering SEN, Maths, English, Science etc. Apparently it's all done by robots (see the About page) which may explain why the MFL section is still to come? Otherwise it is a really useful online compendium.



## PARENTS GET SMART ABOUT INTERNET CHAT

Launch date 24 May 2001 — not under embargo

Parents are launching a new campaign calling for action to make children safer in Internet chatrooms. The initiative aims to give parents in the UK an opportunity to make their voices heard in the growing national debate about child protection on the net by clicking YES to child-safe chat.

The Manifesto, which is accompanied by comprehensive guidance on the dangers of Internet chatrooms, is the brainchild of Parents Information Network (PIN) — the national organisation set up in 1994 specifically to help parents understand and support their children's growing computer usage.

PIN is publishing the Manifesto and guidance on a new web site, designed to encourage all parents to be 'smart' when it comes to Internet chat. The site — [www.smartparent.org.uk](http://www.smartparent.org.uk) — will grow to cover a whole range of Internet safety issues and concerns.

Jane Mitra, Internet Safety Adviser to the SmartParent campaign, comments:

*'Some of the information on the **SmartParent** site is not comfortable to read. The dangers of Internet chatrooms are clearly spelt out. It is every parent's nightmare to be powerless to protect their child but the only way to become powerful in the face of child abuse is to find out the extent of the problem, when it is likely to happen, what strategies can be used to avoid it, and how to teach their child to read the danger signs. This website is where smart parents can get up to speed with child-safe chat issues.'*

The campaign's Manifesto contains three core demands for action:

**GIVE PARENTS THE FACTS** Parents should be aware of the availability, dangers and benefits of online chat so that they have enough knowledge to be able to advise their children — government, the computer industry, schools and regulatory bodies must find ways to inform parents effectively.

**GIVE PARENTS A REAL VOICE** Parents should have a voice in any consultation and policy making which will affect their children's safety online — there are currently no parent organisations represented at the highest level in this important national debate.

**GIVE PARENTS A SAFE CHOICE** Criteria should be established for a model child-safe chatroom including clear rules of use and clear sanctions against anyone in breach of those rules.

Jacquie Disney, Director of **SmartParent** points out:

*'Whilst there is a great need to make the Internet, and particularly chat, as safe as possible for children, the dangers will never be totally overcome. It is therefore vital that we do not simply rely on a solution being found through legal and other preventative measures, but that we also equip children to keep out of trouble. This can only be achieved if those who care for them understand all the issues and dangers.'*

Jane Mitra of **SmartParent** added:

*'Parents are the most important group of people when it comes to Internet safety for children. However, you can't make a difference if you're not properly included in the debate. You can't make smart decisions if you don't know the real facts. At last here is a campaign where parents can get involved and be counted. Child safety is parent territory and now parents can reclaim it.'*

Summary of **SmartParent** site contents:

- What is online chat?
- How does online chat work?
- How many children chat?
- How could online chat be dangerous for my child?
- What happens when a child is targeted in a chatroom?
- How will I know if my child is at risk?
- Where can I go to report an approach by a suspected predator?
- What can I do to protect my child?
- What is child-safe chat?

### PRESS CONTACT

Anyone wanting further information, or wishing to interview Jacquie Disney or Jane Mitra, should contact Dr. Maggie Holgate on 07770 635880, email: [post@pin.org.uk](mailto:post@pin.org.uk)

**Be a SmartParent when it comes to chat**

# MAPE



## Beyond the School Gates



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