

No: P64
Title: Using ICT to increase parental involvement with their child's learning by encouraging Y1 pupils to take a laptop home
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Background

I am Year One teacher and ICT Co-ordinator at Willington Primary, a school in a relatively deprived area of rural Durham. The children in my new Y1 class from September had become used to using a PC which was already logged onto the network with an appropriate program running. I wanted them to be able to log on themselves, be familiar with the system, to be able to find their way around the computer and to become confident users. They had daily access to 4 PC's and 2 laptops permanently in the classroom so they soon became confident and enthusiastic users.

I wanted the children to have the opportunity to complete given homework with their parents using a laptop. Year One pupils had never had the opportunity to take a laptop home from our school, so when I mentioned it to the children it was met with great enthusiasm and delight. The parents had to agree to becoming involved because I wanted them to help their child with set pieces of homework.

On Open Night at the beginning of November I used an opportunity to ask parents to fill in a questionnaire. I read it to some less confident parents while they ticked the boxes and I encouraged them all to allow their child to participate in the programme. Before I began this initiative, I had anticipated that many parents would need some support, but I soon realised that some of the mothers in particular, had very little or no knowledge of how to use a computer so I decided to lengthen the training from one half-hour session to four one-hour sessions to enable them to learn the basics of word processing in order to help their child at home.

The initial response that night was very encouraging. All nineteen parents agreed to have a laptop at home. Nine of them were already competent users and eight readily agreed to come to the weekly training sessions. I then sent questionnaires and letters to the parents who had not come to Open Night. Two more returned their questionnaires, again showing interest in using a laptop to help their child at home.

Gathering data from my research

a) Parent questionnaires

From the parent questionnaires, nineteen were interested in working with their child at home. Fourteen said they could use a laptop and eight were interested in extra training sessions. Sixteen parents came to the initial meeting to sign the laptop agreement form and to find out exactly what I wanted them to do. Five of these parents requested extra sessions to learn more about using a laptop. All five of them attended the four, one-hour sessions and became more competent and confident. They even used the laptop at home when their children had finished.

b) My observations of the initiative

For the first week, I decided to choose six children to take a laptop home whose parents were competent on a computer, in order to give the other parents time to

learn a few basic computer skills. One mother at the first training session told me, 'My daughter said that she wished I was clever, because she wanted the laptop straight away and didn't want to wait a few weeks.'

The first week was a great success. Parents came in twice a day to return and to collect the laptops. They worked on the daily set piece of homework with their children at home and sat with them to transfer their homework onto the server and to print it. I marked the paper copy and sent it home the same day. The quality of work was better than I expected because the parent and child had worked together. Eight more children took a laptop home to complete the same set pieces of homework during the following two weeks with the same success rate.

It was very useful to meet the parents on a regular basis because we could talk about their own skills and those of their children. It was interesting to hear the parents and children give their perspectives on the experience as these three examples might indicate:

- Child A has Special Educational Needs and his homework was completed to a higher standard every night due to his mother sitting with him. He enjoyed printing his homework in colour every morning. His mother told me that he enjoyed playing on the computer after he had completed the homework. Before the laptop went home it had been a struggle to get him to complete his homework or read his book because he had said that he was tired but he worked voluntarily on the laptop.
- Child B had only been in our school for half a term and his mother was really keen to have a laptop at home. She already had computer skills so was able to help him. His work was completed daily but when asked if he enjoyed doing his home work with his mum he said, 'No, because she put some words in I didn't want there.'
- Child C's mother attended the basic training sessions with me and was anxious about taking a laptop home for the first time. She worked every night with her child and they produced some good quality work together. They discussed what to write and she helped the child with spellings and basic punctuation in written work, and with basic addition and subtraction in maths work.

c) My brief diary of the Year 1 parents' laptop training

16.11.05 Five parents attended today. They were all beginners although one had used a laptop at school and college but had forgotten most of it. They worked hard and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. I think they were astounded that they had produced a piece of work to print and take home. They typed sentences, made lists, altered text size and colour, saved and printed. They worked together, helping each other when required.

23.11.05 The same 5 parents came again today. They had remembered most of what they had learned last week. They produced a poster advertising a school fair and even asked how to insert pictures. Half of them added clip art pictures and the rest are ready to do it next week. They reluctantly logged off and were disappointed that they

hadn't a print out to take away with them. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves because it was so relaxed.

30.11.05 All 5 came again today and logged on and found work with very little prompting. I showed them how to add clip art to text, move it round the screen, resize and copy it. They also added a page border. They thoroughly enjoyed the session and proudly took their printed work to the Head Teacher. They are coming into a whole school assembly to be presented with Digital Excellence certificates.

7.12.05 All 5 came again for the final session. They quickly learned how to run a spelling check, to change the title to a Word Art object and to create a simple table.

Ofsted were in school. One inspector came into the class and talked to us. She was very pleased with the whole idea of training parents so they could help their children to work on a laptop at home. All of the parents thoroughly enjoyed the 4 sessions and all of them achieved a Gold award for word processing.

All 5 mums came into school assembly to be presented with their certificates and badges. They all bought a badge as they were so proud of their achievement. I took photos of the presentation and we printed them to take a copy home. These mums were so appreciative as to what I had done for them and they would love to come again to do something else on the laptops.

d) Child questionnaire

Fourteen children completed a questionnaire. *See appendix 1*

- All of them enjoyed doing homework on a laptop and would like to take one home again.
- All but one enjoyed doing homework with their parent because he/she had helped them and worked with them. The only one who didn't like working with his mum said, 'She put some words in I didn't want there.'
- They all enjoyed having a laptop at home because they played on Colour Magic after their work was completed.

e) My anticipated and actual outcomes.

Before I began this project I noted what I expected to be the parents' response. I have included them below together with notes of what did actually happen:

Anticipated outcomes	Observed outcomes
Only parents who are confident in using a computer will be willing to work with their child at home.	Not so. Parents who were confident in using a computer did work with their child and less confident parents after their training sessions with me.
Parents of more able children will participate.	Parents of children of all abilities joined in the weekly homework on laptops scheme.

Parents who are not confident in using a laptop will be reluctant to work with their child.	Five mothers attended the training sessions and improved their skills sufficiently to work with their children at home.
A small percentage might consider coming to training sessions.	Five out of a class of 25 attended the training sessions.
Very few parents will finish the 4 week training course.	All five mothers completed the course and were awarded a gold, word processing certificate in a whole school assembly. They all wish to do further training sessions with me at a future date.

Findings and conclusions

The standard of homework was significantly higher than if the children had been asked to do the same work on paper. There was also more work completed because they did one set piece every night for one week. The children became more confident and competent in using a computer and many of them still help their peers with small problems such as finding programs etc. All of the children who took a laptop home can log on independently and work independently, but so can all but three of the rest of the class now.

Some children who would have benefited from working alongside an adult couldn't take part because their parents did not come into school to sign the agreement. I intend to allow the Year one children to take a laptop home again in the near future and this time some more of them might be able to persuade their parents to join in.

I didn't expect the reaction I got from the five mothers who came for four one-hour training sessions. They were so keen, they enjoyed coming, learned quickly and were proud of their work and themselves! They printed their work to take home at the end of every session and came into a whole school assembly to be presented with their Word Processing certificates. They are all keen to do more computer work in the future and would like to come into the classroom to help the children. Some of the parents would possibly attend courses led by staff from the college, if they were delivered in school where they feel more secure. They may go to the local community centre or college to take courses there if they were encouraged to so.

What I would do differently next time

I am an experienced teacher but this is the first time I have ever let Year one pupils take a laptop home. I found it very difficult in the mornings when the laptops were being returned and had to be synchronised onto the server and work had to be printed. The children did log on themselves but I sometimes forgot to put the wireless card in or the laptop didn't synchronise and I had 24 other children coming into the classroom. If I do it again, I will ask the support assistant to look after the six children with the laptops while I see to the rest of the class.

Next Steps

I would also like to see courses for parents and carers on how to help their children with homework. As well as computer skills, this could be basic reading, writing or numeracy.

I would certainly like to repeat the exercise with parents and children in my future classes because it encourages the parents to work alongside their children and it helps to make learning fun!

Appendix 1

A sample of the questionnaire filled in by pupils.
An adult read the questions and wrote the answers while the child coloured the appropriate face.



Did you enjoy doing your homework on the laptop?

Why?



Did you enjoy doing your homework with your mam?

Why?



Would you like to take a laptop home again?

Why?