

P.15 Exploring how the Digital Blue Camera can improve Special Needs children's communication and listening skills in the Year 1

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I am a trained Nursery Nurse, currently working as a Classroom Assistant with Y1 children in Hunwick Primary School in the Durham area.

In this project I worked with groups of three children who required special support over a two-week period during the Autumn Term 2004. Many of these children are reluctant to participate in Literacy due to poor communication skills, low self-esteem and lack of confidence

Background

The Digital Camera allows children to make their own movies. They can direct and record video and audio images while at or away from the computer as this device is also portable. They can also edit the movies with the software package, which is included.

An added bonus of the camera is that it enables children to add their own special effects, animation, titles and credits. A large number of stills can be taken and edited into an animated scene. Any completed movie can be transferred onto a class white board, enabling whole class viewing. They can also be stored on the computer and e-mailed for use in other schools. As the camera is easy to use, it is suitable for all age groups from reception children onwards.

Some children using this equipment for the first time will have had little or no 'hands on' experience with technology. Groups of three that I worked with included a mixture of children who had used Digital Blue before and those that had not. The groups also included SEN pupils

The Digital Camera provides an excellent base for them to collaborate and learn together, therefore increasing their interest and knowledge in technology.

Focus on a Literacy Lesson

The Digital Blue Camera was used in a Literacy lesson to re-tell the previously told story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears in their own words.

Children sequenced the events with the use of a story sack (a collection of resources such as model beds, chairs etc to illustrate the story. They worked together in mixed ability groups of three to allow pupils to encourage one another with speaking and listening. Some were more competent and skillful than others, therefore selecting children of various levels of development allowed those who were familiar with technology to help those who were not.

The software was easy to use and gave them a chance to experiment independently or with little help. In my Classroom assistant role I was able to supervise and only intervene when assistance was needed but could not be gained from others in the group. There was always one person in the group who could lead and help the others (although on one or two occasions, I did have to intervene to stop more confident children taking over completely).

Pupils recorded their images, placed them on a visual time line using a 'click and drag' method, then added their own special effects, animation, text and sounds to create a range of still and moving images.

Children were able to present their work in new and exciting ways. They gained a sense of achievement as the final product was very rewarding.

Upon talking to the children they made the following comments:-

"It was fun" and "I did it all by myself."

I observed that the children worked collaboratively (co-operating to get the job done, and providing assistance and encouragement for each other) and their ICT standards had been raised. The Class teacher was impressed with their progress and suggested that when using the Digital Camera, "Children are in the experience, they make it and learn from themselves as models".

Pictures were taken by the Class teacher to demonstrate that the Digital Camera was an exciting way of introducing children to independent and active video work.

Reflecting upon the Digital Blue experience

a) The children's confidence in the learning situation

The children adapted well and soon gained confidence. Their skills improved as they became familiar with the keyboard and software. The structure and length of the activities varied, depending on their abilities. Work could therefore be differentiated, for example by adding more images and extending the length of text written. They responded positively as they were not put under any pressure to perform and soon learnt from their own experiences and by watching their peers.

The children were able to 'see instantly' what they had captured as no processing was required. Mistakes could easily be rectified at the 'touch of a button' and work could be saved and continued at a later date.

The Digital Camera also helped to develop the children's sentence-level work. It allowed them to compose their own sentences, read and recognise if their written work made sense. It also promoted the use of capital letters and full stops.

b) My role in supporting their learning

My role was to support the children by supervising them throughout the activity. I allowed them time to recount the story and recall their favourite part. Sequencing skills also showed improvement as the children were able to differentiate between the beginning, middle and end of the story. I was able to intervene at appropriate times by asking leading and open-ended questions. Praise was given when they had successfully completed their animation. The children were responsive to suggestions made by their peers. They concentrated and encouraged one another.

As the task progressed and the children became more competent I was able to act as a bystander. If a problem arose some of the children would seek their own solutions whilst others would seek help. Managing learning with the Digital blue was very much an extension of applying good Classroom Assistant practice to my new found ICT skills.

c) Training to use the Digital Blue camera

I was invited by the classroom teacher to get involved in supporting children using Digital Blue. Having been introduced to use the equipment by the teacher and observing children who were familiar with the equipment, we planned the activity. To build my confidence with the camera I took it home for a couple of nights to practise with. It was important that I could experiment with the equipment and make any mistakes in a safe setting because I felt the need to feel confident (especially at the beginning of their Digital Video work) if I was then to support their growing confidence with the technology.

Future Uses of Digital Blue

I discussed with the class teacher how I could further enhance the children's knowledge with the Digital Camera, for example by letting the children write their own storyboards to act out using 'lego figures' to tell their own stories using animation.

I believe that the Digital Camera will also encourage and motivate children with Special Needs to communicate more effectively with others whilst developing their independence, literacy skills and building on their self-esteem.

Using the Digital Camera gives children an insight into animation of how all the stills come together, and they can gain confidence at the beginning of their school experience, by producing 'their own' personalised movie.

I hope that all children will benefit from having the opportunity to use the Digital Blue Movie Creator Camera in their school as it could be used in any curriculum subject.