

P.26 Evaluating the contribution which a digital camera and interactive whiteboard can make to improve speaking and listening in the nursery.

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Aim

To investigate how the use of a digital camera along with the interactive whiteboard can improve the standard of speaking and listening within the nursery setting. The research has been an ongoing project since September 2004.

Background

I came to work in the nursery in September 2004 after teaching in year 2 the previous year. The school is in deprived area of North East England where the children have very poor speaking and listening skills on starting nursery and their level of vocabulary is particularly low. The children were already taking teddy bears home at the weekend as a stimulus for speaking and listening and had been doing so for quite a while before I started teaching in the nursery, but they were not taking the digital camera with them. The children were finding it difficult to explain what they had done with the teddies over the weekend without some visual prompts; a non digital camera had been used previously but the children found the space between taking the photographs and getting the film developed to long.

The teddies are now sent home with one child from each nursery session each Friday with the digital camera to take photographs of what they have done over the weekend. The photographs are then brought back to the nursery and displayed on the interactive whiteboard where all of the class can see them. The photographs act as a stimulus to talk, allowing the children to easily recap what they have done with the teddy over the weekend.

By showing the photographs on the interactive whiteboard they provoke an immediate response from the child who is telling their story and the children who are sitting listening. Here is an example of some photographs taken by the children.



Progress

When the project first started four digital cameras were sent home each week and each photograph had text added to it before being displayed on a display board. This eventually became unmanageable and it was found that the children's photographs weren't being displayed for long enough. Now only two cameras are sent home each week and the photos are printed off and a short story which the children contribute to is written to accompany this on a display board. Two weeks pictures and writing are displayed at a time so that the children and parents have enough opportunity to view them. They are then moved into a display book so that the children and parents can look back at what has been done previously.

Some of the parents were very nervous at first about letting the children handle the digital camera at home, this is becoming less of a problem as the parents see the children using them within the nursery setting and see that it is acceptable. Deciding what to do with the bear and what to take photographs of was also a challenge for some parents and they would often ask for ideas, and felt that taking photos of the bear in the bath for example was ridiculous and needed reassurance from staff that this was exactly what we wanted. By displaying the photographs in the entrance to the nursery we found that more parents would take the time to look at them and that this helped to give them some idea of what to do.

At the beginning of the project it was felt that the children who had severe language problems would not benefit from taking home the cameras, so those who participated were chosen very carefully. Over time though it was decided that all children should be given the opportunity as even those with these severe problems would respond to seeing an aspect of their home life on the big interactive whiteboard even if interpretation was needed by the teacher or nursery nurse.

Evidence of change.

The children's responses to the photographs have made me alter some aspects of my classroom practice. The children have become much more aware of the use of digital cameras and consequently they have been introduced into the everyday running of the nursery as an excellent way of recording. The children will now ask if they can take a photograph of something they have done in the nursery to show the other children.



Here is a photograph taken by the children of something they have constructed.

This is leading to the children developing their ICT skills as well as their speaking and listening.

As the children take the cameras home and then discuss what they have done it gives staff and other pupils a chance to gain an insight into that child's home life and their interests. Consequently allowing that child's curriculum to be targeted at their individual interests allowing them to access all areas of the nursery. For example one little boy with very poor language skills just took photographs with the teddy in the garden and on his tractor, we then developed this idea in the nursery by looking for books on tractors and building up a display geared at this child. We also made pictures of tractors and encouraged the child to draw a tractor using a pencil something he had rarely been seen doing previously. This meant this child was now accessing areas that he would not have previously.

Parental feedback.

Parents have become very involved in this project those who were reluctant at first have developed in confidence through looking at the examples of what other parents and children have done. Parents often provide comments for example "we really enjoyed ourselves" and "I was more excited than was" the comments received have all been positive and made the whole project seem worthwhile and worth continuing with.

Children's feedback.

The children really enjoy taking the teddy home and they all become very excited on a Friday while we're talking about what they might do with the teddy and who is taking it home this week. The children can't wait to show the others in the class what they have done and even those who are usually very quiet will be eager to tell at least one thing. The children who are viewing the photographs on the whiteboard like to try and ask the child some questions and this is something which is becoming more frequent as the children are developing in confidence and their speaking and listening skills are improving. While the child is talking about their weekend the others are asked to sit quietly and listen and then at the end they will be given the opportunity to speak most, children do respect this even if they're desperate to say something.

The children also like to comment on who took the photographs and are especially pleased with those they have taken themselves.

Feedback from other staff.

The nursery nurse within the nursery has seen the project from its early stages and has commented that "the digital camera and whiteboard made the project much easier as the results were immediate for the children and they are much more likely to talk about what they have done if they can see the picture in front of them."

Conclusions and recommendations.

Improvement in Speaking and Listening?

The speaking and listening in the nursery has improved slightly overall with the use of the digital camera. The main improvement has been in the children's participation and eagerness to speak during these sessions. Children who would not have usually spoken in front of such a large group are happy to talk about their weekend and show the photographs.

It has also helped those children with very poor language as an adult or another child can describe what is in the picture so that they do not feel left out of the activity.

It was useful to send the teddies and the camera home with the more confident children first so that they can model what to do to the rest of the class.

Whilst the introduction of the interactive whiteboard and digital camera is improving standards of some speaking and listening it is vital that it runs alongside other activities such as our talking time box intervention group and individually designed language programs as the impact would be reduced if used alone.

Recommendations.

I feel that the use of the digital camera together with the whiteboard could be integrated into other areas of the nursery to build upon the already successful project. The children should be encouraged to take photographs of themselves in the nursery and then show the rest of the group. This would also provide an excellent method of collecting evidence.

I would highly recommend sending home the digital camera with the children as it is an excellent opportunity to bring the home life of the child into the nursery. Try to ensure the project does not become unmanageable by sending too much home at one time as it can make the process more of a chore than an excellent learning and teaching tool.