A. Blakeman

Does the use of ICT help or hinder children's learning in primary schools?

The use of ICT in the modern age is vital, weather it's in the work place or during leisure hours our life is dominated by the use of computers. So the introduction of children to the use of ICT seams vital if they are to have access to this new world of cyber space.

This being the case what is an appropriate age to present them to this with out it having a detrimental effect on their literacy skills and general education? Could ICT have a detrimental effect on children's learning or would it simply enrich the learning presses and get young people back into education? Is their a possibility that a dependence on ICT will be brought about, if so is this a problem in this computer controlled world? The focus here is on the use of ICT in primary schools, is it appropriate and healthy to introduce it to children at such a young age?

The first question that needs to be asked is what qualifies as ICT to children of such a young age? When we talk about ICT in primary schools are we talking about simple computer orientated learning games designed to develop reading, typing and spelling skills. If so then this is only for children of a young age within the first to grades of primary school and wouldn't really be detrimental in any way. These types of programs have been shown to be beneficial and would encourage learning in young children. Though this wouldn't be classed as true ICT as its not really teaching any computer skills, a child would only learn spelling skills. These programs are really just a substitute for a poor teacher who cannot inspire the children to learn through traditional teaching methods. They do the trick but deduct from class social skills and social interaction that would be encouraged if the teacher were giving an actual lesson to the whole class.

These programs also remove the competitive edge in the classroom, as all children would be doing this individually. This class competitiveness is key in encouraging children to push themselves further, would children keep pushing themselves if they where finding the programs or would it just reduce their learning rate? I think with out this competitiveness we would see a slow drop of the learning rate as more children got "stuck" in section of the program. Where as they may keep pushing if in a class situation to keep up with their friends etc.

What if we were talking about simple word processing? This would be teaching actual ICT skills and would, if taught at an early age, be extremely beneficial in later life e.g. secondary education when it comes to writing essays etc. The only risk at allowing it use at this early age would be the effects of the automated spelling checks etc but ill talk about that later on. These skills would transfer through out the Childs life if they where proficient at simple ICT skills by the timothy left primary school as it is used so much in life e.g. applying for jobs, C.V's writing official letters/applications. The effects spread through out life.

So we are asking if ICT would be a help or a hindrance to learning, but learning what? Obviously ICT use would help children learn ICT but would it deduct from children general learning or are we asking if it would help all round learning?

So we have seen some of the benefits in later life are their any drawbacks? The use of word processing programs at an early age could be very detrimental to children especially if they pick up this habit from an early age is the use of spelling and grammar checks. These have been show to dramatically reduce literacy, which would be extreme damaging especially when it comes to taking exams that are purly written. Though this could be negated by locking out this function of the program which may well be beneficial in teaching children to spell as it could be set to highlight which

words are wrong but no give the correct spelling encouraging the children to spell it themselves.

If children where using ICT as a subject then it would deduct form general learning but if the ICT was integrated into normal lessons then it would encourage all round learning and increase the children's ability to link different skills. Studies have shown that over 70% of all social groupings of children aged 7-14 prefer and enjoy learning from PC's (DFEE (2000). Survey of school children's use of computers: A report. London: department of Education and Employment.) so that would be a massive increase in the % of children who would enjoy their classes and thus we would see an increase in enthusiasm to learn.

Though would this be the case? This would solely depend on the amount of access the children had to the PC's. If it was an ICT classroom where all students and teachers had a PC and they worked along side each other then we would see an increase in performance and ICT skills would undoubtedly develop in the pupils. Though the truth of the matter is this inst the case, we are more likely to see one PC in a classroom untouched unless you are looking at schools ICT labs. That same study (DFEE (2000). Survey of school children's use of computers: A report. London: department of Education and Employment.) showed that roughly a third of pupils have access to PC for more than an hour a week, one third for less than an hour and one third never has access to PC's for pupils aged 7-14. These figures show a huge range of ICT literacy within our schools. With out the a fair ratio of PC's to children and usage time ICT will hold up the learning process as students would have to be rotated on their use which would limit their time and scope of the machine and disrupt the class as the pupils had to change over. As we see in many classroom situations this leads to the neglect of ICT in the class room in general subjects.

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Well the simple answer would be to fit all schools classrooms with enough PCs for all pupils though this would be unfeasible. Many schools are already in the economic situation that they can barley afford substandard PC labs. This is partly due to the nature of PC technology, which changes so rapidly that thousands of pounds worth of technology can be out of date within a few months and after years they are often obsolete.

The question to be asked now is weather it would be worth teach primary schools students on out of date technologies? It would be useful to a point, you could still familiarise students with the basics of how to use the technology but any further than that may be detrimental when they move on to higher education and have to re-learn things for the new technology and programs that they will encounter. If they where to used to old technology it could be hard to adapt to the new format.

The maim reason ICT is plug so much is because, as I said earlier, it is used so much in modern life. How much does it really help to have learnt the basic programs when you go into a job? Well it would dramatically increase the pupils potential job prospects and chances of getting a job but what about when they have the job will it help them then? It is unlikely that any one who had a general working knowledge of ICT from schools, even if learnt from an early age, wouldn't have to go through more ICT training when they get a job. This is because the majority of companies today have their own software and platforms so what people have learnt isn't relevant but rather that they can show that they are able to learn and use ICT.

So other than learning ICT would the students gain anything else from more ICT in primary schools? It would increase their confidence once they had learnt even a little in such a complicated subject and this confidence would have a nock on effect through out all their subjects. Although the study earlier (DFEE (2000). Survey of

school children's use of computers: A report. London: department of Education and Employment.) showed that as we get older there is a reduction in the usage of ICT in girls which may start occurring earlier if ICT was introduced in primary schools. This move away from ICT starts at roughly 15, which would be when ICT would first officially be taught in schools. So would we see a decrease in academic performance in girls if ICT was introduced in primary schools or would ICT usage be even in girls and boys? That would only be seen with time.

So is ICT a help or a hindrance? IT obviously would be of great benefit to start learning ICT at an early age in this computer orientated world but only if an effective program was put in place which allowed all the pupils to access up to date machines in all of their lessons. This is just unfeasible in this period of time,.

At the moment ICT is barely used in primary schools, at lest they should be fitted with ICT labs so different classes can rotate their use and then all ages get the benefit. ICT would be a help in primary schools if incorporated into an effective learning program used by all subjects.

A. Blakeman

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