



The Associate Educational Fellowship Programme
'Improving professional practice through collaborative enquiry and dialogue'

The marvellous cheeky old iPad

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This small case study explored the impact of a tablet device on the learning and development of one young boy in a Voluntary Controlled School for 4-9 year olds in Bedfordshire.

The study was done to describe possibilities for supporting students with special educational needs by using a tablet device. The aim was to discover ways to use the device for particular needs and establish guidelines which might be useful for other schools.

Background- Introducing 'x'

In November 2012 Bedford Borough was approached by the headteacher of this school requesting support and advice concerning x, a six year old boy who had recently joined the school.

x has various conditions and needs and is currently under the care of five consultants at Great Ormond Street Hospital for children. Whilst a definitive diagnosis has not been made it is apparent that he has complex conditions which affect his whole life and well-being.

Prior to joining the school x had struggled at his previous school to be understood and spent much time trying to leave the buildings and unable to integrate into normal school life.

On starting at his present school x presented various challenging behaviours and aspects which staff made efforts to understand and support him with. The one aspect of school life in which he seemed to find an interest was using a computer.

Action Plan 'the wobble cushion'

In December 2012 after visiting the school and reflecting on ways forward the Bedford Borough team suggested an iPad purchase might meet x's needs. Evidence in support of this was found in research literature.

Children who have speech, language and communication needs should be helped as soon as possible.

The Better Communication Research Programme recommended that there should be:

a stronger focus on the outcomes that children and young people with speech, language and communication needs achieve;

professional development for all those working with children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, to recognise needs earlier and provide the right support – across education and health.

The report also recommends that data guidance on special educational needs for schools should be reviewed. This would be to encourage teachers to focus on children's individual profile of needs, rather solely on labels when deciding on what support to provide.

([Department](#) for Education 2013)

Initially it was suggested that the Teaching Assistant (TA) assigned to x should be given the iPad before the winter break and encouraged to use it on her own. Whilst a detailed review of academic literature was beyond the scope of this study, the team wanted to use evidence based practice to support their work. In this respect recent academic findings of the Scotland iPad Evaluation shows that staff should be encouraged to explore and become familiar with the device and not use it in a class situation until confidence has increased (Burden 2012).

Following a period of exploration by his TA and Headteacher x was introduced to the iPad in January 2013 with the aim of using the iPad to meet at least some of his IEP targets. In addition he began to use a 'wobble' cushion to sit on. This air filled cushion, it was suggested, might encourage him to stay seated for a period of time.

At this time his IEP targets included:

Greeting people appropriately

Working as part of a small group taking turns sharing interacting

Writing holding pencils and markers, using scissors

Responding to name

Following simple instructions

Staying at an activity or task

To count up to 5 objects

Understand the value of numbers

Relating addition to combining two groups of objects totalling up to 3

In June 2013 Bedford Borough Lead Teacher for eLearning visited the school to review progress. Following discussions with his TA, and his headteacher and then a session with x himself the impact of the iPad was considered. The next section describes those impacts.

Impact of iPad

With some trepidation the school introduced x to the iPad, not knowing quite how he would react. To everyone's considerable delight he took to it straight away, renamed it 'the marvellous cheeky old iPad' and had no issues with working out how to use it at all. In addition the 'wobble' cushion seemed to encourage him to stay seated and enabled him to focus on his school tasks for longer periods of time.

Huge improvements to his behaviour, mark making and strength in his hands were evident in a very short time of using the iPad. In his early days x was unable to be in a classroom situation and had an attention span of about 30 seconds. After this time x found safety and security in the library. Working with his TA, x used the iPad in the library and was able to interact and focus on that for much longer periods of time. His ability to work independently was facilitated by allowing him to self discover using appropriate apps. An example of this was 'Hairy Letters' which enabled him to learn by listening and doing, but also choosing which letter he wanted all on his own. The English accent and lower case lettering makes this an appropriate app for his curriculum needs. In this way he has begun to personalise and individualise his own learning which had not been apparent before.

His ability to make attempts at letter recognition were found to be considerably easier on the iPad than on paper. Although he was encouraged to replicate his learning on wowo boards and then paper that was and still is, a struggle. The iPad then was sometimes used as an incentive to complete his learning by more traditional methods then move onto the iPad. He was able to type his own name and identify his own learning areas by that identifier.

Progress was made in his Numeracy skills as well. Using the app Maths 3-5 and then Maths 6-10 J has made progress in his counting. Castle Maths has been used for shape recognition with excellent results. Although understanding the value of number and relating addition concepts continued to be an area of development. A disadvantage of some of the apps is that J quickly learnt strategies for achieve successful outcomes without actually understanding the deeper learning. One example was to repeatedly touch the screen 'guessing' correct answers until a rewarding 'tick' was revealed. This is something to consider when choosing appropriate apps.

x does not use his iPad at home, this has been established as a way to make the iPad a part of school not home life and the hope is that he will not lose interest by overuse. To this end some apps are specifically used for a 'treat', one such is Robot Lab which requires a considerable level of logic and hand eye co-ordination to complete.

Measure of progress – 'Are you Jesus?'

Having arrived at the school unable to participate in school activities nor engage with the curriculum spending more time rolling on the floor than anything else, x progressed considerably. Over the first six months of using the iPad, he began to spend up to five minutes in a class situation and then moved to time in the library. He did join in assembly and he did sit down in the lunch hall.

Using the iPad app 'Talking Tom', s learnt to greet people more appropriately. Where once he would lick or hug people he learnt to shake hands. This became particularly apparent at the visit to the school by OfSTED inspector. x ran over to him and asked him if he was important? The inspector answered to the affirmative to which (after shaking his hand) x replied: 'Are you Jesus?'

Next steps – 'Can you help me?'

In terms of collaborative learning, x continued to find it difficult to work in a group situation and displayed degrees of possessiveness about his iPad, books and toys. Considering communication between students his TA reported that he found difficulty playing with other children and his social skills were limited.

It would seem that x began however, to understand his sense of self and to develop some responsibility for others. On introducing him to a new toy to which he quickly named 'Sunny' he asked 'Can I look after him?' and then began to teach 'Sunny' how to use the iPad. On trying out a new app on the iPad called 'Flow' he quickly learnt how to use it but was also able to seek assistance asking 'Can you help me?'. Perhaps this might lead to more interaction with his peers.

Introducing him to the app 'Showme' x could begin a drawing for himself, record his own voice and take a picture of himself to embed onto his show me video. He achieved this after a very short instruction lesson. He was able to replicate most of the steps to re-do the task. On re-playing the session it was with considerable delight that he was able to recognise his own voice and his own photo. This is something that the team feel can be worked on further. By using the curation and creative tools provided by the iPad x might be enabled to express himself more easily than writing with pencil and paper, which he continued to find considerably difficult. A possibility for progress here is the app 'VideoScribe' which enables high quality drawing, voice over and music animations. x was introduced to this alongside the 'Show me ' app and that hope is that it might enable him to produce his own videos and then replicate that in his writing and drawing on paper.

Summary

Whilst this small case study requires additional input over the coming months it may already be of some assistance to other schools.

In many cases studies of sufficient size have yet to be carried out to provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of particular interventions. That does not mean those interventions are ineffective or lack practical value. It simply means that we don't know enough yet (Lindsay et al 2012)

It is apparent that the iPad has in the words of his headteacher 'transformed x's life'. Where once he would lick, scream and roll on the floor, he is now able to sit, focus and behave appropriately for a far greater period of time than could possibly have been imagined. This is mainly due to the introduction of the iPad. There is of course more progress to be made and we look forward to exploring together further ways to meet his targets.

As for the school, their recent OfSTED inspection resulted in an impressive 'Outstanding' and perhaps most significantly the inspector(Jesus) reported that x 'symbolised the ethos of the school', a very remarkable boy supported and nurtured by a very remarkable school

References and Applications (Apps)

Burden, K., Hopkins, P., Male, T., Martin, S., Trala, C., (2012). *Scotland Ipad Evaluation*. The University of Hull, Faculty of Education

Department for Education *accessed* 23 April 2013

<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00219244/research-says-early-intervention-key-to-helping-sen-children>

Lindsay, G., Dockrell, J., Law, J., & Roulstone, S. (2012). Better communication

research programme: Improving provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. London: DfE.

OfSTED 2013

Physiotherapy Room *accessed* 13.June 2013 (wobble cushion)

http://www.physioroom.com/catalog/Wobble_Cushions/3184.html

Apps:

Flow

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/flow-free/id526641427?mt=8>

Hairy Letters

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/hairy-letters/id410276288?mt=8>

Maths 3-5 and 6-10

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/maths-age-3-5/id471864743?mt=8>

Maths Castle

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/maths-castle/id612597701?mt=8>

Robot Lab

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/toca-robot-lab/id434826169?mt=8>

Talking Tom <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/talking-tom-cat/id377194688?mt=8>

Videoscribe

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/videoscribe-hd/id505464331?mt=8>