

How ICT resources can support learning at primary level: Rebecca Jenkin

Benefits for the teacher

There are many benefits to using ICT to teach literacy. ICT allows the teacher to produce and modify resources quickly and easily. It allows access to a wide range of information in various formats, and interactive whiteboards (IWBs) have become essential tools in the classroom. Computers, software, cameras and a range of ICT devices can all make teaching more effective and more fun for the pupils. But the number of activities and resources available to teachers is truly vast, and judgments need to be made about when and (more importantly) why ICT should be used. It should only be used when appropriate: meaning when, and if, it allows the teacher or the pupils to do something they would not otherwise have been able to do.

ICT in practice

Recent guidelines indicate that ICT should be used to support learning in specific subjects as well as being a subject in its own right. Each subject should be considered in its own right, and this article focuses on the use of ICT in literacy lessons.

- *Speaking and Listening* - In the classroom, ICT allows greater opportunities for sustained forms of talking, such as asking and answering questions. The use of webcams extends interactivity, and allows for instant feedback and reflection on the processes involved in talking, both in groups and individually.
- *Interactive whiteboard* - IWB technology puts emphasis on shared and public talk and on pupils' responses. Through ordinary talk, details cannot be easily remembered unless recorded in some way. Sound recording has been available for some years, of course, but transportable sound recording devices (such as MP3 or MP4 formats) make it more straightforward and support emphasis on listening. Also, digital cameras are likely to help the pupils' ability to reflect and comment on use of language: gesture, posture and facial expressions are integral elements of speaking. In more formal situations, video presentations allow pupils to view and review formal and informal presentations from the earliest years.
- *Early reading* - With renewed interest in phonics teaching, there is currently a wide range of software available to support early reading using synthetic phonics. Through the use of ICT-based phonics books, clear connections can be made between sounds and letters on a page. Learning to read is a long and difficult process, and many pupils struggle to concentrate when using books alone - increasing concentration and attention time is a key advantage to ICT. Many pupils view software differently from ICT - perceiving it to be more exciting. There are lots of audio-based reading schemes now available to schools, many of which offer significant advantages over books. For struggling readers, there are also many software-based reading intervention programs available that can dramatically improve pupils' achievement. Some feature speech-recognition software and integrated assessment for learning.
- *Vocabulary* - Interactive dictionaries can prove invaluable in the classroom. The days of having to refer to a weighty tome in the corner of the classroom are long gone, and the essential development of vocabulary is made easier through interactive resources.
- *Sentences* - ICT makes sequencing words easier. There are many products available to help with sentence writing skills, such as Textease or Clicker, and many offer added speech facilities to help pupils check their work.
- *Comprehension* - The use of ICT resources that include aural and visual comprehension activities can make a significant difference to a pupil's development. Pupils have to acquire listening skills, which they will need in all areas of the curriculum. If the only voice they ever hear is the teacher's, this can prove difficult. Many products are available that offer paper-based comprehension activities alongside sound, animations and video. These multimedia products open up a world of experiences to the pupil, allowing them to develop core comprehension skills without even realising it.
- *Composition* - Presentational software and databases extend possibilities for composition. Mixed-mode texts can be constructed on paper, but digital technology, with its facility for importing pictures and manipulating text, means that the presentation of writing can be more varied, involving design features which paper-based writing does not allow. Using word processors allows pupils to edit text without their changes showing on the page. They don't need to think so hard about spelling or presentation and so can focus on the content. They can present information in a range of ways and use a spellchecker or thesaurus.
- *Drama* - A strength of using ICT-based drama in literacy lessons is that it allows pupils to be experimental, reflect on their learning and reshape their ideas after reflection. Digital cameras, capturing moving and still images can greatly aid drama processes, particularly the development of dialogue. Capturing drama moments - by using freeze-frame functions - on camera and displaying the images on the IWB allows for ease of sharing, evaluating and extending understanding.

Activities

There is such a variety of ICT-based literacy activities available that this article will focus on a few core ideas for using ICT effectively without spending thousands of pounds.

Internet

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The renewed Primary Framework for Literacy is internet-based - reflecting the importance now placed on the internet in schools. The framework itself offers lots of ICT activities (video, soundbites and PowerPoints) and although the resources are not immediately easy to find, they are there, and link specifically to the units of work. But the internet is a great tool for teaching literacy in its own right. For teachers looking for examples of non-fiction texts (biographies, newspaper reports, persuasive writing and multi-modal texts) the internet offers millions of possibilities - as long as you have the time to search, of course. It is worth taking some time to refine searches before venturing into listed websites - the last thing you want is to have to search through thousands of website links. But spending a little bit of time on a search can prove fruitful.

PowerPoint

PowerPoint™ is a fantastic presentation tool: easy to use at a basic level, immediately gratifying (PowerPoint™ presentations look impressive very quickly) and offering many different designs and visual enhancements. This software is a must-have in the classroom.

Sound

Audacity is a free piece of software, readily available from the internet, that allows the recording and editing of sound (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>). Making the connections between text on a page and text as it sounds is critically important in literacy development, and all you need to do this is a computer, sound recording software and a plug-and-go microphone (available in all good electrical retailers for a few pounds). Pupils can record their own creative writing compositions for narrative work, interviews for non-fiction work, and music and words for poetry projects. The integration of sound into a project makes it immediately more exciting to the pupils, and allows the development of communication skills.

Video

Making films is an exciting and challenging activity for the classroom. Traditional stories can be performed (and recorded), scenes from plays or books can be acted out and recorded for whole-class discussion, interviews can be filmed for media projects, persuasive writing activities (such as composing adverts) can be brought to life with film and non-fiction reports can be backed up with film-based 'evidence'. The cost of hand-held video cameras has dropped and it is worth looking around for a bargain.

Voting systems

While the subject of voting systems can prove controversial, the use of voting pads for whole-class activities can prove effective. Voting systems allow pupils to participate in lessons by sending responses to questions or discussion topics via an electronic keypad. The responses appear on an IWB or projector screen. There is much research being undertaken into the effects of voting systems on achievement, and many of the findings suggest that these systems can help. Many IWB companies also offer voting systems, so it is worth asking your current IWB provider for more information. Voting systems are often used in mathematics lessons - particularly in association with multiple-choice-based assessment software - but they can also help the literacy teacher. In creative writing, the pupils' emotional response to texts can easily be gauged. Similarly, comprehension activities that offer multiple-choice answers can be carried out and results recorded instantly for assessment and monitoring purposes.

Supporting visual literacy

DVD and video texts offer good opportunities for evaluating purposes and viewpoints. Discussion of the ways that film texts are put together, for example decisions made by the director about camera angles, where to use a close-up or a middle- or long-distance shot can greatly aid the process of evaluating the effect of a text on the reader or viewer and offer a focus for sharing impressions of the overall effects of a text on the reader. DVDs can be easily paused and reviewed to analyse how directors (and writers) construct narratives. Discussions like these, based on film, transfer to discussions about authors' intentions and points of view and give pupils a frame for discussing their responses to books.

In conclusion...

If used appropriately and supported properly within the school by a technician, ICT can dramatically improve achievement levels, inspire creative thinking and encourage the development of skills that will prove invaluable in the real world. We live in an age of computers, so the sooner pupils become au fait with technology, the better. While researching and resourcing technology products and equipment can prove time-consuming, it is worth the effort. ICT can save teacher's time and inspire pupils to learn, so let's get tapping those keypads, pointing those cameras and have some fun.

<http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/teaching-primary-literacy-ict-6996>