One Page Summary Report

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Collecting practitioner experience of technology use in special education

Last summer we did two focus groups with staff working in special education to find out how technology is used and how technology influences children's social behaviour. We've finally finished transcribing, analysing and presenting the data - here's a short summary of our findings.

We used a technique called 'thematic analysis' to identify patterns and recurring ideas in the data. We then summarised, rearranged, and grouped themes together to produce four key points on what we learnt about technology use in special education.

Practitioner attitudes

There were a mix of positive and negative attitudes in the data. There was an expectation for staff to use technology and it was reported that technology made the job easier.

However, there were a number of concerns related to using technology, such as balancing digital and non-digital activities, online safety, and whether digital learning transferred to non-digital settings.

Child preferences

Teachers talked about pupils' preferences for interactions and how technology could facilitate or hinder interactions relative to these. For instance, some children preferred close proximity in close interactions, whilst other children preferred their own space. Similarly, some pupils enjoyed games and activities with clear structure or instructions, whilst other children preferred to play more independently.

Learning opportunities

According to practitioners, technology provide opportunities to gain an understanding about the pupils they worked with, e.g. pupils could show their strengths and skills, and children could direct their own learning. Skills such as communication, spelling, and cause-and-effect were supporting using computer and tablet-based programs.

Interaction contexts

Practitioners described the different contexts in which children interacted with others . For some children, technology was a 'common ground' and friendships formed through shared interests in games. Other children interacted with others through excitement or enjoyment. However, sometimes children chose to use technology as an individual activity and chose not to interact with others.

Key findings

- Interactions around technology depended on context—and factors related to the technology, the child, the role of the practitioner, and the environment were important mediators
- For some children, technology did facilitate and provide opportunities for social interaction, but for others, technology was viewed as an individual activity. This could shape how teachers view the impact of technology, and best practice support for the child

Thank you again for taking part in our study. If you want to get in touch, please contact [name] at **[email address]** or check out **www.dart.ed.ac.uk/autism-tech-play** For more information and the latest news about autism & technology see **www.asdtech.ed.ac.uk**