The Seven Principles of Effective Practice

As detailed by Iram Siraj-Blatchford and John Siraj-Blatchford in More Than Computers (2003)

1. Ensure an educational purpose.

Typical educational uses of ICT might be something as simple as the introduction of a pretend mobile telephone to encourage imaginative role-play, which children from a very early age will do quite naturally.

2. Encourage collaboration.

While it is important for children to play alone, an indicator of quality play not only involves solitary play but also playing collaboratively. Activities requiring joint attention and which involve children learning to share provide a better cognitive challenge for young children than activities where they work alone. Collaboration is also important in providing opportunities for cognitive conflict as children make an effort to reach consensus and for finding potential solutions in the creative course of problem solving.

3. Integrate with other aspects of the curriculum.

ICT applications should be integrated as far as possible with other play and theme work and all should work together to make the curriculum more relevant to children.

4. Ensure the child is in control.

Generally, ICT applications should be controlled by the child; they should not control the child's interaction through programmed learning or any other behaviourist device. The latter approach promotes directive teaching and is contrary to popular conceptions of effective practice. Negative responses from ICT applications can do much to ad to sense of failure and low self-esteem, especially among children who offer non-conventional but imaginative responses. In other words we could be crushing an individual child's creativity.

5. Choose applications that are transparent.

As far as possible, ICT applications should provide 'transparency': their functions should be clearly defined and intuitive. In practice, this means that the application can complete each clearly defined task in a single operation. A good example of this is the 'drag and drop' facility on the computer, which literally allows the user to pick an item up with a click, drag it somewhere else and drop it in place with another click. It is a perfect simulation of what happens in real life when something is moved.

6. Avoid applications containing violence and stereotyping.

Unfortunately it cannot be assumed that all software finding its way into early years contexts and homes is appropriate or even tasteful, but in selecting applications it is important to be alert for stereotypical or patronising images or actions relating to social class, ethnicity and gender. Applications should also

satisfy the principles laid out in the advertising standards authority code of practice, with regard to violence.

7. Be aware of health and safety issues.

Serious concerns have been voiced about the consequences of encouraging extended use of desktop computers by young children. It is therefore advisable that a typical use of any desktop computers application by a child should be comparatively short, usually no more than 10 to 20 minutes for three year olds, extending to no more than 40 minutes by the age of eight. With any other form of ICT involving batteries or electricity ensure that a risk assessment has been completed before use within the playroom.