

'Look what I did today!'

Using digital images for communication between the nursery and home

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For a long time teachers have been using a range of methods to record those significant moments in learning: written observations of what was achieved and how, verbatim quotations and samples of work. Photographs are not new as a means of recording those often highly transitory moments, the here and gone. However, it may be that digital imagery enables something new in the process of recording achievement.

At one nursery school, the use of digital cameras is an intrinsic aspect of the process of record keeping alongside other more 'traditional' methods. The capturing of noteworthy moments by adults is a means of

drawing children's attention to their achievements and demonstrating the merit of what they have accomplished, thereby contributing to a sense of worth and self-esteem. Children's own use of the digital cameras to record their successes or involvement in the act of data capture also engages them in the process of making decisions about what is of significance in their learning.

Each child has an electronic folder containing information, including digital images. Some children have as many as 20 or 30 images in their folders. The nursery computers are networked so that access can generally

be almost instant. The children's folders provide an electronic record for reference by staff, enabling them to add another valuable tool to the process of tracking individuals, evaluating progress and revising day-to-day plans accordingly. They also provide evidence for inspection.

However, they are also often used in the process of feedback and review with the children themselves. Images can be a powerful reminder; a means of bringing to mind experiences which talk alone may not be able to accomplish. During just one afternoon, various children and adults used the computers to revisit and explore learning, conversation openers including, for example, *'Do you remember the shoe shop?'*; *'Are you going to show M what you did?'*; *'Do you want to look at your kaleidoscope?'*. Thus adults and children can reflect together on past events, possibly as part of a sequence or in relation to other experiences, to think about what has been learned and where next. Such conferencing can enable children to participate in the educational process and to take some ownership of the nature and direction of their learning.

The technology in the nursery is being used almost transparently for record keeping. These young people are experiencing purposeful use of digital cameras and are picking up technology-related terminology, skills and knowledge almost incidentally. One child, watching carefully the procedures of accessing her file asked, *'Are you getting my picture?'* Explanations of procedures, almost incidental, provide situated contexts for appropriate use. For example, one member of staff commenting to a child *'I'm just going to put this picture of B's into this file, then we can have a look at it'* demonstrates how the technology is an intrinsic part of daily activity.

Digital images are used on a day-to-day basis in the nursery to share experiences and achievements with parents and guardians. A real benefit here is in the immediacy of access. Parents and carers can often see what has been done that very day either as a finished product or in the act of doing.



On one level, this communicates the range of experiences provided by the school and a flavour of what

children are learning. For example, the children's chalked swirls on the playground were soon lost in the rain but the digital images provided evidence for parents (as well as the children's records). However, images can also be highly meaningful for individuals in particular circumstances. For example, for a child who is having particular behavioural difficulties, an image of this child cradling someone's foot as s/he puts a shoe on it is highly significant. Similarly, the achievements of children with special educational needs can be shared positively through visual evidence.

In this way, images can communicate in powerful ways which verbal description and explanation are not always sufficient to reproduce. They can provide a forum for two-way discussion between parents/carers and their children or staff and parents/carers, or a three-way conversation involving child, parent/carer and nursery staff. Thus the images are not just a way of showing and seeing but also a means of enabling interaction. As well as invitations to view images, parents and guardians also download this information so that they can have their own electronic copies. If parents/carers do not have the necessary technology at home, hard copies are printed for them.

A new child had started at the nursery the day I visited. During the afternoon, he and one of the staff explored using the camera to capture images of situations in the nursery. This led to taking a picture of the child, downloading it onto the PC and printing it. The same image instantly provided a means of generating a name card, providing a picture of the child for the school record book and adding to the gallery of 'our group' in the shared area. Of immense benefit was that this child was rapidly made to feel part of the life of the school. By the end of the afternoon, his printed image being displayed alongside those of his new colleagues signalled to him, the other children and his mother his membership of the group and his inclusion in this community. The advantage of digital technology over traditional photography here was again in its immediacy.

Underlying such effective use of digital cameras to record children's achievements, however, is a shared staff commitment to its efficacy and value. This entails both policy decisions and agreed organisation and management procedures, as well as individual ICT capability. The implications of this are that all nursery staff have agreed on how, when and why images should be captured and their purpose and meaning communicated to colleagues, as well as the manner in which image capture should be undertaken in the day-to-day running of the nursery.

Digital images are deemed to contribute to the recording and communication of achievement in highly significant ways and as part of a broader record keeping policy at the nursery. As one aspect of record keeping amongst many, the images help to contribute to providing a meaningful but concise picture of children's achievements and to tell a story about their progress.

Developments are still at an early stage and very tentative. Yet the work at the nursery demonstrates the power of digital images in encouraging dialogue within the nursery and between school and home. It is not only a matter of the meanings the images themselves can communicate but the communication between children and adults that they can engender that is significant.