Conceptual Article

ICT FOR LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract

Technology has a growing impact on the school. This paper gives an insight into the role of Information and Communications Technology (JCT) in facilitating education of learners with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBO). Presenting a vivid account of the characteristics of learners with EBO, the author dwells into the advantages of using of JCT. The paper concludes with a note that teachers play a fundamental role in capitalizing on the opportunities offered by new technologies to support the full inclusion of all students in mainstream education systems.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, /CT, Learners with EBO, Advantages of /CT·*

INTRODUCTION

The term Inclusive education implies that the school must provide good education to all pupils irrespective of their varying abilities. All children should be treated with respect and given equal opportunities to learn together. Inclusive education is an on- going process. The key role of teachers in giving birth to and maintaining a truly inclusive classroom is unquestionable (Anderson et al., 2007), but such an important mission also requires that suitable, effective and barrier-free educational means should be employed. From this perspective, Information and Communication Technology resources are promising; there are grounds for maintaining that they help most students overcome barriers to learning,

Thus increasing their school achievement, together with their autonomy, willingness and self-esteem.

USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

ICT includes a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information. These technologies include computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony.

Haddad and Draxler (2002) identified at least five levels of technology use in education: presentation, demonstration, drill and practice, interaction, and collaboration. All forms of ICT may in general be used for presentation and demonstration, the most basic of the five levels. Except for video technologies, drill and practice may likewise be performed using the whole range of technologies. On the other hand, networked computers and the Internet are the ICTs that enable interactive and collaborative learning best; their full potential as educational tools will remain unrealized if they are used merely for presentation or demonstration.

There were times when high cost of hardware, a limited amount of developmentally appropriate software, limited funds to investigate the potential of computers as a teaching tool, lack of skill on the part of professionals in creating a range of response modes, lack of training and skill in computer use by special educators and parents, and the fear that technology would overshadow the human aspects of early intervention (Berhmann, 1988; Hutinger, 1986) were· all cited as reasons for non- utilization of ICT in the classrooms.

Computers are now more affordable, a wide range of developmentally appropriate software is available, and a variety of response modes have been developed which allow almost any child to access a computer (Burkhart, 1980; Charlebois- Marois, 1985; Goossens and Crain, 1987). ICT is valuable to all because learners can control the pace of multi-sensory experience. It encourages social interaction. 'Unlike people, computers are non-judgmental (they do not shout, and have no fav.ourites). ICT has been widely used with pupils with disabilities for many years, with considerable success. That is why they come in handy for inclusive education, more so of learners with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES (EBO}

EBD in learners may be apparent in a variety of forms, including:

- Social withdrawal, isolation or underachievement

- Low self-esteem or depression School phobia
- Hyperactivity and lack of concentration
- Disruptive, anti-social and uncooperative behaviour
- Frustration, anger and threat of or actual violence
- Emotional damage resulting from abuse, neglect or psychological trauma.

A learner with EBO may demonstrate one or more of these learning barriers, all of which may disrupt the learning process and may require high levels of professional support and guidance (Becta, 2001). Poor literacy and numeracy skills often result from inability to maintain concentration and persevere with tasks.

ICT FOR LEARNERS WITH EBO

Many teachers, parents, and administrators used to believe that learners with EBD will not be able to use ICT for the following reasons:

- Teachers will find less time to learn to use the computers themselves and then to teach the kids to use computers properly - This fear might have been based on misconceptions about the difficulties of using computers or due to their own experiences with poorly designed software;
- Educators and parents also· expressed concern that since special education learners often produce messy work, wear out their books, and break crayons and pencils, they are likely to damage computers;
- Computers are too complex - learners will only lose patience and become frustrated trying to make them work. They might deteriorate in communication skills.

Today, ICT has come to stay. One of the best liked features of the widely used form of ICT - computers - is that it does not tear, or wrinkle even when handled by the learners with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. While working on the computer, the children are kept busy entering answers, changing mistakes, or moving on to the next part of the lesson.. They receive frequent and immediate feed-back about their answers and continued working on each word until they spell it correctly. They participate more actively in learning than in most of their other lessons. Using ICT allows the learners to be more independent with their work. This will help reduce the competition between learners for teachers' attention and improve the overall quality of teacher-student interactions.

ICT-AN EMPOWERING TOOL

ICT usually improves the productivity of individuals. For learners with EBD, it represents more: It is an opportunity to communicate and gain access to education services. ICT can provide a non-threatening environment in which they can achieve success. For many, learning may have become associated with the fear of failure, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of those around them. The computer presents a calm setting in which learners with EBD control the pace and level of work. It can help them tackle writing tasks with more confidence and produce works that look very competent. ICT can enable learners to realize - and accept - that they are good at something.

Many learners with EBD find it hard to establish relationships, and have little abilicy or perceived need to relate to others. They may find group work, turn taking and being part of a class quite stressful. The use of ICT may remove discipline problems, and can often offer an entry point for another person to join in alongside, thus teaching them the skills of interaction.

Technology has proven its worth as an effective tool in supporting learners with EBD and enhancing their access to the curriculum. Educational programs and games encourage them to interact with the computer. These could be in the form of simple question answering, such as mathematical problems, controlling an object on the screen by entering the correct commands, or being a participator in an adventure game. Interactive talking books and music technology help them judge their own performance instead of being on the receiving end of judgement or criticism from others. Simulations of actual situations which students are likely to face can provide a secure environment in which to experiment with a variety of responses.

Many types of programs can be used which allow the learners with EBD to become aware of another person's point of view or feelings and how their actions and reactions will affect others. The control offered by simulation prevents difficulties that can arise due to inappropriate responses. Personification and Role-play of characters with emotional intelligence help them understand social interaction. Thus ICT aims to provide innovative social emotional learning environment. Thus skills required for good relationships such as initiating and terminating interactions, turn taking and waiting for turn, attending to an object or person, following one-step directions are all learnt.

Many learners will accept and understand that a computer is non-judgmental and treats everyone in the same way. For some learners, the frustration of additional difficulties such as a specific spelling difficulty or poor co-ordination can intensify the feelings of defeat and low

self-esteem. For these, ICT can remove the barriers to writing accurately and change their attitude to learning as a whole. It is also highly motivating, can help build learner's confidence in his/her abilities and is an excellent focus for social interaction.

The teachers now use ICT well to improve lesson planning, to enhance the production and presentation of resources and to produce individual learning materials of a very high standard including, for example, talking books. The use of digital cameras and multi-media presentation software to enhance lessons is common and teachers use the internet effectively. Software that is designed to allow learners to practice skills, such as those associated with spelling or comprehension may prove less confrontational for learners than having the teacher highlight their mistakes. Word processing is an excellent way of eliminating this sense of failure. The dictionary within the program enables them to check their spelling, and the range of fonts available means that they can produce attractive work, which is as good, and sometimes better than other pupils. Thus, with the help of ICT, it is possible to provide safe, secure, effective experiential learning using virtual learning environments, synthetic characters, and interesting, relevant storylines to usher in credible, believable character behaviours.

Learners who have EBD are often reluctant to take risks, test out ideas or enter into unfamiliar situations. Adventure games allow learners to develop their problem solving skills, test out ideas and think logically. They can be highly motivating for young people and are intended to be fun and encourage concentration, memory, recall and hypothesis. Adventure games can also help learners to develop language skills and problem-solving strategies.

ICT enables experiential safe and secure learning platform for those with EBD to overcome qualities such as low-self-esteem, disruptive behaviour, frustration, hyperactivity or emotional difficulties. While working with learners with EBD, giving praise (when earned) and rewarding positive steps either in terms of academic attainment or in attitude and behaviour will act as great boosters. These can be conveniently achieved by teachers with the aid of computers. Of course, ICT will not be the only strategy for engaging learners with EBD in learning. It can circumvent the whole spectrum of human interaction which they find so difficult. However, its perceived high status, its flexibility, the ever improving software, its privacy and ability to aid self-expression of pupils with poor literacy skills make ICT an especially valuable literary too (Howarth and Fischer, 2005).

CONCLUSION

ICT provides considerable opportunity for learners with EBD to explore social, personal and emotional experiences. In India, introducing technology to children with EBD is still quite early in its development. The success of using ICT for learners with EBD depends on three factors. First, the computer must be treated as a tool for learning, not as a toy for playing games. Second, the teachers and children must be given sufficient training in operating computers. Third, the software must be well designed and easy to use.

Inclusion of learners with EBD is to be regarded as a long-lasting process which requires time, effort, competence and strong conviction by all those involved in learners' education, first and foremost, by teachers. Innovations cannot cross the school's threshold without teachers' deep and active involvement. Educational effectiveness of any technological means mainly depends on the choices the teachers make (Moseley et al., 1999). Teachers must play a fundamental role in capitalising on the opportunities offered by ICT. They need to appropriately plan, carefully select, and conceptually integrate ICT in mainstream activities for better inclusion of all learners. The ball is in their court.

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