

Enable- ASD: Enabling Collaboration in the Classroom with the Use of Touchscreen Devices with Young Children with Autism

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects more than 1 in 100 in the UK, 1 in 88 in USA and 1 in 150 in Australia, which means that every teacher will at some point in their career teach a child with autism. One of the key difficulties associated with autism is the lack or impairment of joint attention skills. Joint attention is a fundamental skill on young children's social and language skills' development which is usually mastered by the age of 18 months. It can be achieved when, for instance, a child keeps eye contact, takes turns and shares enjoyment with their parent about a joint activity.

Young children with autism have many talents among which is their affinity with digital technologies. Since the launch of the iPad in 2010, schools have increasingly used the devices and their associated applications for teaching children with developmental disabilities. Despite the increasing use of touchscreen devices in schools and homes, and the children's motivation in using them, there is limited research exploring their potential in developing joint attention in these settings. Parents and teachers often lack confidence in using tablets to practise specific skills with children with autism and have increasing worries about screen time and choosing appropriate mobile applications.

This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the impact a set of guidelines can have on teachers' practice and children's joint attention skills via school observations and interviews. An action research study will be conducted in an early years setting in England, UK. The results of the study aim to offer scientifically informed guidance in the form of strategies and tablet based activities on how adults can adjust their communicative style (e.g. by allowing time for the child to respond), the environment (e.g. by minimising distractions) and resources (e.g. by using symbols/pictures) to engage with young children while using a tablet. The evaluation of the guidelines aim to help teachers inform their teaching practice and urge parents to use the devices with their child in more collaborative ways.

Keywords: Digitisation of early childhood education, changing discourses of childhood, designing digital experiences for children