ICT and Documentation

Project: Celebrating Play through ICT

"I can think of the next steps that a child needs to take"

"I can evaluate and reflect upon the child's learning and development"

BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET

Acknowledgments

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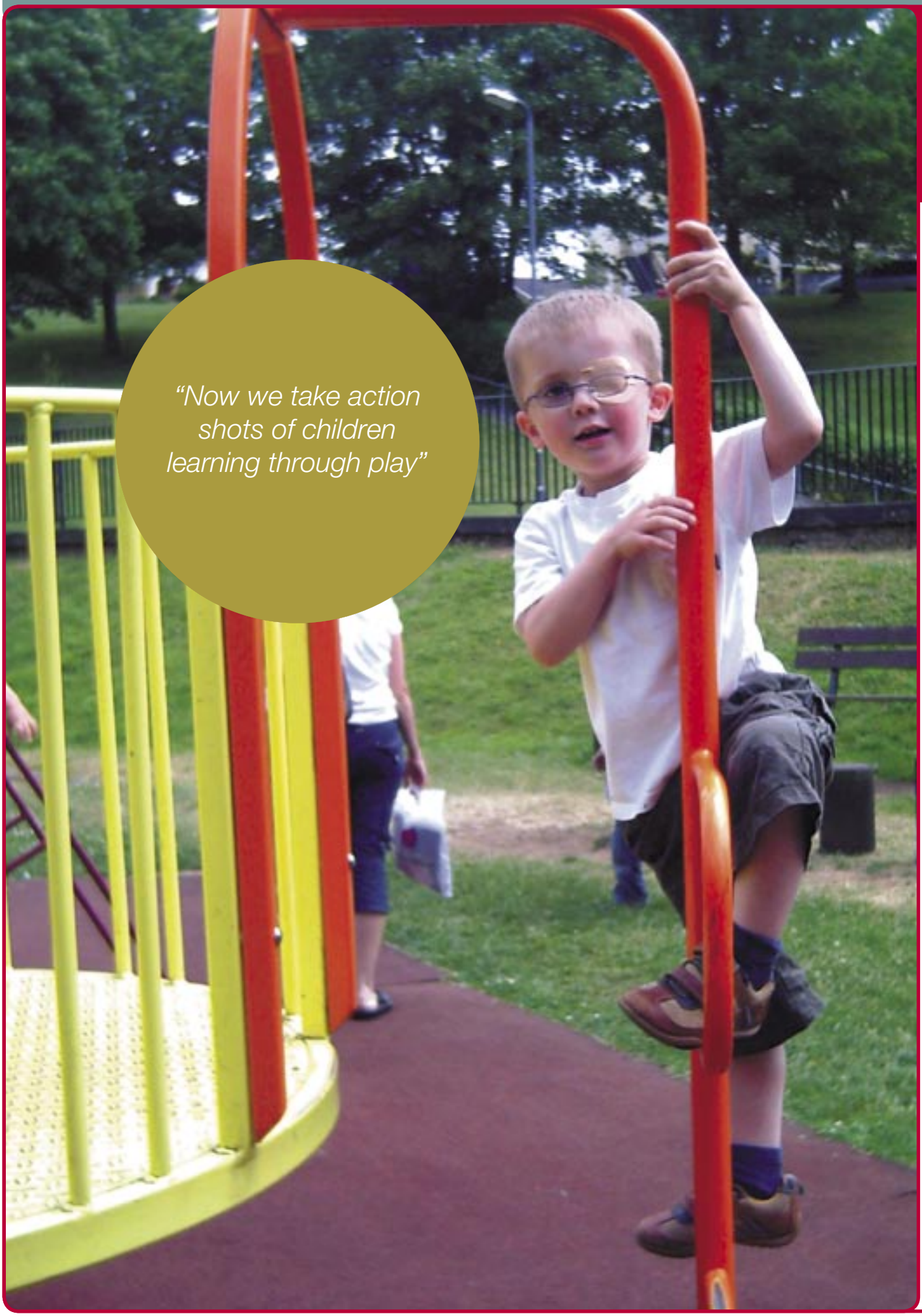

"Now we take action shots of children learning through play"

Foreword

Celebrating Play through ICT

I am delighted to present this booklet which has been produced as the final part of a National project looking at ICT in the Foundation Stage. Bath and North East Somerset was pleased to be one of only 20 authorities whose bid to the Primary National Strategy was successful in securing the funding for this project.

We now recognise that we live in a digital society, however, children learn best through play and this project celebrates play whilst also clearly demonstrating the learning taking place using digital technology. We are able to use this technology to step into their world and through projects such as this, we can see our youngest children as confident, competent learners.

I believe this is an excellent booklet providing useful information and practical ideas, I commend the booklet to you and thank our children, their practitioners and my colleagues for their contribution to this development.

Ashley Ayre
Director of Children's Services
Bath and North East Somerset

Introduction

This booklet is an outline of the main findings of the Bath and North East Somerset Project "Celebrating Play through ICT". The Project was funded by the Primary National Strategy as part of national research into using ICT in the Foundation Stage. We start by sharing some information about the project and then go on to look at documentation. We hope that this booklet will encourage you to explore new ways of recording and enhancing children's learning. We have tried to avoid jargon wherever possible. There is a glossary of terms at the back of the booklet to explain some of the language used.

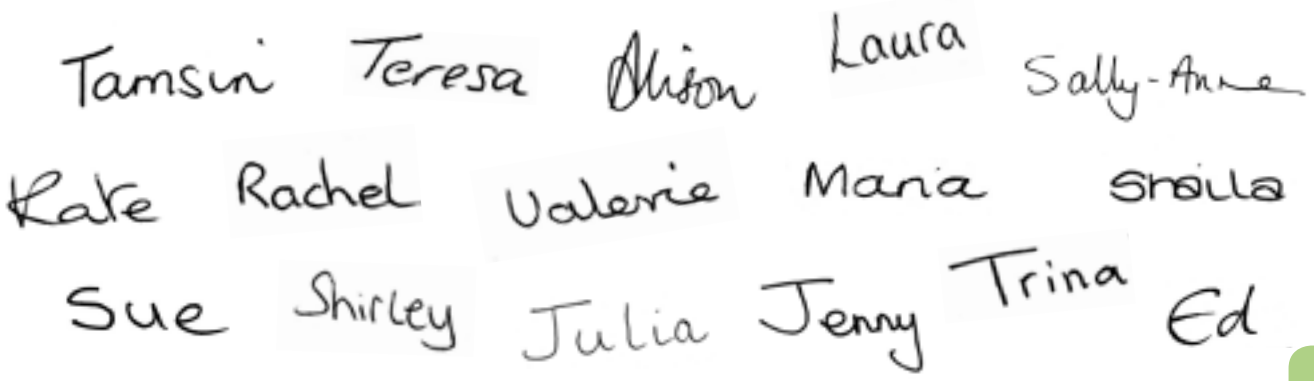
About the Project

All Bath and North East Somerset early years providers were invited to join the project and a research group was formed. The participants within the project included practitioners from maintained schools, childminders and the private, voluntary and independent sector. They included a wide range of ICT skills from absolute beginner to advanced. They explored different ways that modern digital technology can be used to record and enhance children's learning through play. The group met regularly to discuss practice and share their discoveries.

We were particularly interested in recording child-initiated learning as we know this is where children reveal their true selves! By using photographs and video with children we opened up their world and their thoughts about it.

This booklet represents the final stage of the project and outlines our understanding of documentation. Included are ways we use the technology and practical advice. We hope that you find it useful and that it will encourage you to have a go and try something new!

The Project Group



Who is the audience?

We identified three main groups of people who both contribute to digital recording and would benefit from a greater use of it in settings: children, parents / carers and practitioners. Here are some of the potential benefits we discussed.

You can probably think of more….

one Children

- Proves children remember events from a long time ago
- Can stimulate memory, talking and vocabulary
- Encourages reflection
- Provides opportunities to talk about difficult feelings i.e. using photographs of real situations to resolve conflicts during circle time
- Develops identity
- Helps children to see their own progress and development
- Children can use ICT themselves
- Celebrates learning
- Provides opportunities for children to value their own learning and to see adults valuing recording

two Parents

- Provides opportunities for parents to see what they usually can't or are not able to see
- Honest sharing about their child
- Evidence of lunchtimes and breaks
- Gives parents something to talk about with children
- Annotation interprets learning taking place
- Provides insight into the child's morning: 'I played'

three Practitioners

- Provides real evidence of children's learning and development
- Provides opportunities for reflection
- Enables educators to see things that could have gone unnoticed i.e. see things in the background
- Improves skills in observation and ICT
- Provides opportunities to share with other educators
- Getting to know children better

What did we do?

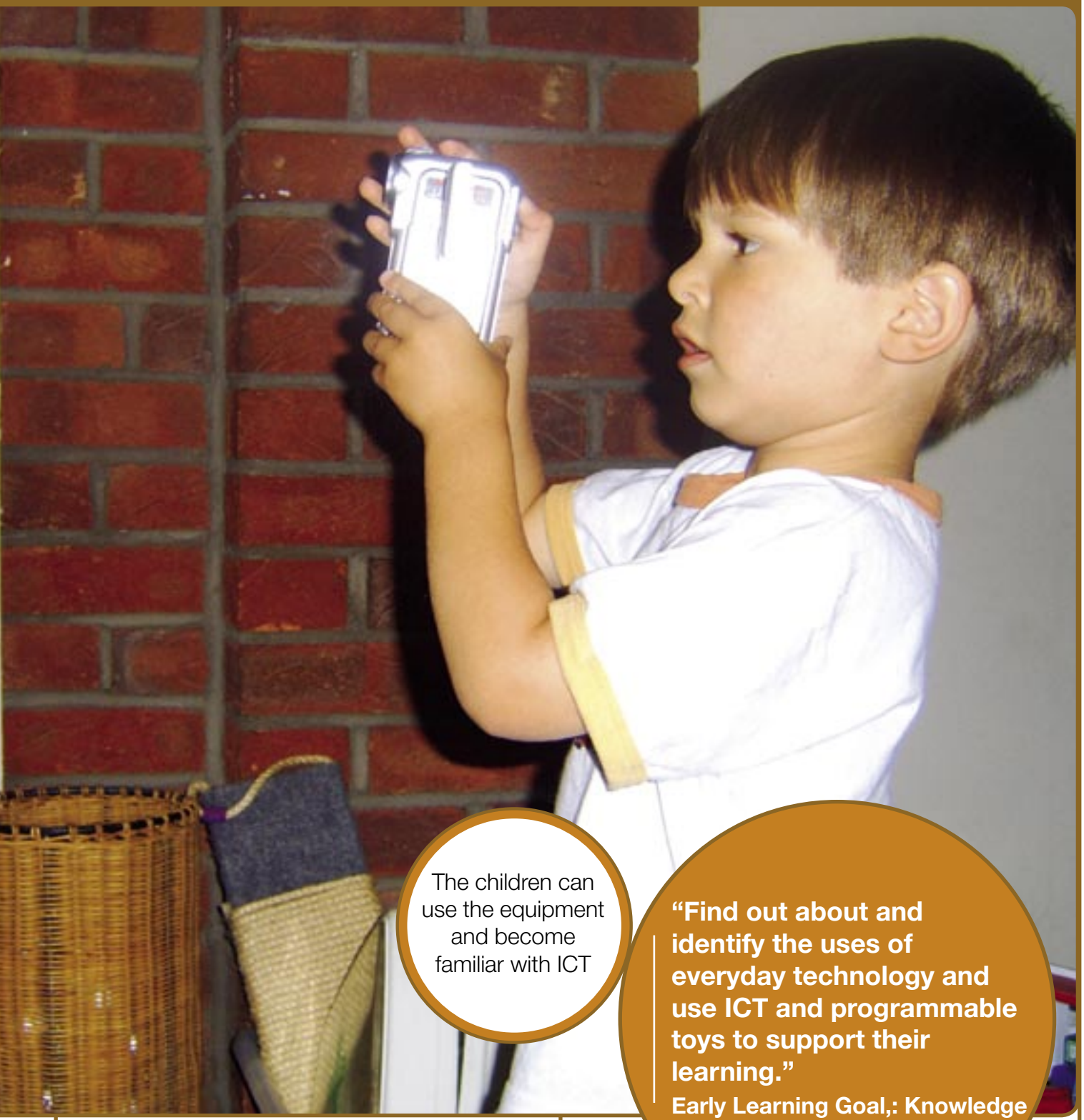
Members of the group chose to use a range of digital media. These were:

- Digital stills camera and docking station (no computer needed)
- Digital stills camera (computer needed)
- Digital video camera
- Digital voice recorder
- Additional display screen
- Graphics tablet (allows you to write with a pen but writing appears on the screen)

We explored ways of using this equipment for the three target audiences: children, parents and practitioners.

At one nursery, the children went for a walk and they took photographs. This is the view along the pavement at the garage in The Avenue.

Children



The children can use the equipment and become familiar with ICT

"Find out about and identify the uses of everyday technology and use ICT and programmable toys to support their learning."

Early Learning Goal,: Knowledge & Understanding of the World

This photo is an example of a child taking a photo of their friend.

Children

Children can record their own learning
Video clips can record models or creations that move, e.g. moving puppets or visits and special events e.g. a ballet lesson.

Here Thomas uses the camera. Earlier in the day he had discovered a huge nest of baby spiders hanging from a web and decided to make a movie of them.

Leila carefully uses tools to make a pattern on her butterfly. She is proud of her work and asks to take a picture of it.

Using the photographs and movies with children
Practitioners can share the photographs and video clips that they have taken with children as part of their normal daily activities.

During a growing and mini-beasts topic the children took photographs of plants and flowers around their school.

They commented:

"The photos are good because they help you remember what you saw outside."

"Even when the flowers have gone in winter we will know what they looked like from the picture."

Children

Encouraging children to reflect upon their work and the work of others
The photographs and video clips can be used to enable children to reflect upon their work. Children will share how they once found something difficult and now they can do it with ease.

One child was pleased with their video clip saying:

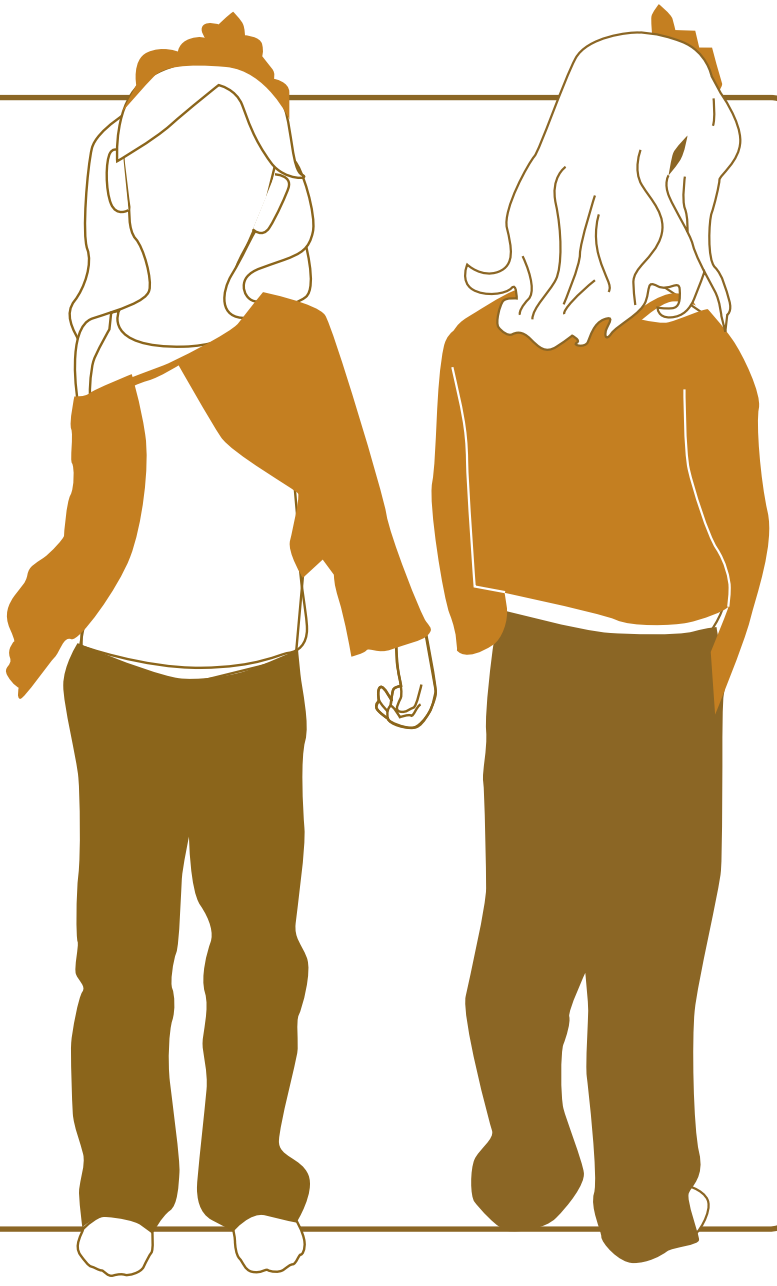
"I did that. I captured Tom and Charlie's good voices."

Enabling children to share what they are doing with others
Children can find it difficult to remember what they have done during the day. Their memories are often overshadowed by what is happening around them. Photographs can be a powerful medium with which to stimulate their memories and share in past experiences. They also act as a talking point, giving children something to spark off their memory and conversation.

One child commented:

"When my mum sees the pictures on the whiteboard, then she will know what we did at the train station."

Encouraging children to become more independent
Several settings were already using photographs to label resource boxes and coat-pegs. This encourages children to access resources and recognise their coat-peg independently.



One setting has taken photographs of a child's front and back view and used these to make small world play characters that children can play with.

One Nursery looked after an Iranian child who was beginning to master English. He was due to return to Iran during the summer so the nursery made a booklet for him to take home, to encourage him to share his nursery experience while he was away and keep practising his English.

Children

Capturing unplanned significant moments

The settings involved with the project found that because they were using the camera more regularly, they were more likely to be able to capture those unplanned moments which are so worthwhile recording.

Supporting transition to the next class or school

Digital media can also enhance the transition to a new school or setting. The children can take home a photograph of their new teacher or key worker and photographs can be taken on a home visit and used to help the children feel more at home.

One school organised a play morning in the summer term for the children who would be new to the school in September. The teacher took photographs of their play and will display these in the new term to help to settle the children in.

Self-registration

One setting used photographs of the children on a washing line as a form of self-registration.

Parents

Learning diaries
Several settings started to create learning diaries as a way of recording children's learning and documenting their progress.

Some childminders organised their diaries into the six areas of learning from the Foundation Stage and collected photographs that demonstrated learning in each area. They then stuck them into the diary and annotated them, sometimes including quotes from the children. The parents of these children love looking at them and seeing the learning taking place.

Home-school links (Freddy the Frog)

One Nursery had a toy frog, Fred, who accompanied children on outings or special trips. Ben took Fred to his Grandma's house and recorded this in photographs. Sometimes the Nursery made books of Fred's adventures and these were used to support children and families.

Parents

Display screen / PowerPoint

During the project several settings explored ways of sharing their documentation with parents. Two schools used a display screen in the classroom with a slide show of photographs. A couple of schools played a Looped PowerPoint slideshow on their interactive whiteboards as children and parents came into the classroom in the morning. Some childminders ensured that their laptop was available for parents to view photographs taken.

One Nursery used a display screen in the window of the classroom and used a Graphics Tablet to scribe children's comments. While parents were waiting to collect their children they were able to read the annotation of pictures as it actually happened.

Displays on boards / windows

Several settings created stimulating displays which included the children's photographs and quotes of things children have said. Windows were also a popular place for photos to be displayed, enabling parents to see within a short timescale some of the activities undertaken.

Sharing at parents evenings

One school displayed photographs taken on a pre-school visit and used them to share about learning through play during a new parents evening. Learning diaries can be shared as a visual way of showing the learning that has taken place.

One setting held an ICT open session for parents so that children could share their folders of photographs with their parents. They arranged for 4 laptops to be available and practitioners saved each child's folder to a memory stick which the parents took to a laptop to view. It was a very successful session.

Newsletters and parent's information
Several settings included photographs in their parent newsletters and included some examples of documentation.

One childminder has re-written her prospectus and used photographs to illustrate the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. She has also included some quotes from the children.

Permissions from parents
In order for the project to go ahead we had to ensure that parents had given full permissions for the settings to take photos of their children and for those photos to be shared with others. All settings already had policies in place to cover taking photographs for their own use.

One setting chose to use smiley faces to hide the identity of children but enable them to share photographs with other parents.

Practitioners

Using photographs to make resources
Several settings used the photographs to make resources. A practical way some providers did this was to use photographs to enhance name cards, labels, home-made books, games and other resources.

Self-evaluation
The project enabled practitioners to evaluate their own practice. They watched videos and listened to voice recordings and were able to pick up on things that would otherwise have been missed.

When she listened to a voice recording, one teacher realised that she had missed the contribution of some children and had not involved them in a discussion. This has made her more conscious of involving all children during an activity.

Evidence for other professionals who may need to visit the child in the setting
Documentation can be used to support other professionals.

One child with additional needs was visited by a Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist. They wanted to see evidence of his communication skills. The practitioner was able to share evidence of documentation, video clips, written notes and photographs to support her views. This was particularly useful as it showed the child 'at ease' in their everyday environment.

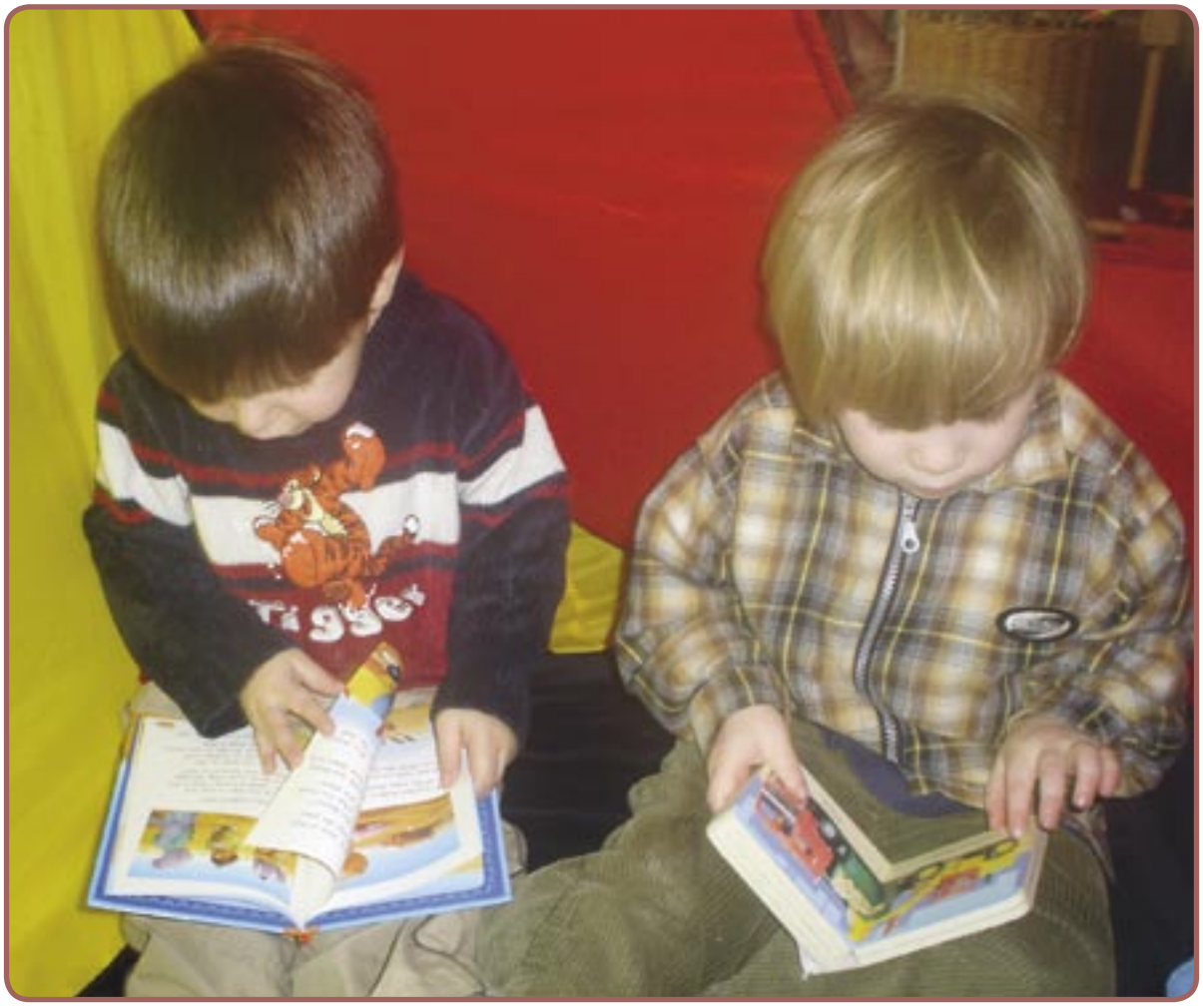
Experience of ICT for professional development
Practitioners involved in the project all felt that using ICT as part of their everyday practice also improved their skills and contributed to their own professional development. They found that when you practise a skill you develop it further.

Assessment and demonstration of progress made throughout a year
Using a learning diary or development diary can show the practitioner how the areas of learning and development have been covered. If a child does not have many photographs or observations in one specific area, for example, Knowledge and Understanding of the World, then the practitioner needs to consider if they have provided enough opportunities for children to develop in this area and more opportunities should be planned. It could also indicate an area in which the child has not progressed and may need further support. These photographs and video clips can also provide evidence for the Foundation Stage Profile in the Reception Year.

Celebrating the process of learning
Sometimes a series of photographs can demonstrate the process of learning even if there is no specific outcome.

Practitioners

Evidence for Ofsted
As and when you receive a visit from Ofsted, it can be useful to share information with them about what you do with children. They will want to see evidence that children are learning, developing and making progress. Sharing photographs, documentation and observations with them will assist them in making their judgments. Learning diaries and stories linking to curriculum plans also demonstrate effective practice.



Record keeping and supporting planning
Several practitioners within the project found the equipment most useful for supporting documentation. Photographs, observational notes and video clips can be used to build up a record of children's learning over time. They can help to identify children's strengths and interests and practitioners use this information to plan for their next steps.

Next steps

The project group enjoyed using the digital equipment to enhance and personalise the curriculum. When we examined the use of video clips, voice recordings and photographs as child observations, we realised that their use was limited and they were not enough on their own. The next few pages of this booklet explore the ways that digital media can enable and enhance the documentation of children's learning.

What is documentation?

"Practitioners' observations of children's play help them to assess the progress which children are making… Observations are analysed to decide where children are in their learning and development and to plan what comes next. This is an essential part of daily practice in any setting, regardless of the age of the baby or child".

(Early Years Foundation Stage, 2006)

A vital part of our role as early years practitioners is to observe the children we work with. These observations give us valuable insights into where the children are and how we can help them progress. When the observations include an element of reflection and are used to support future learning they can be called documentation. Documentation should be part of our everyday practice and therefore needs to be both simple and regularly used.

Documentation should be useful for: the children, their parents, and you as an early years practitioner. Children, parents and practitioners are the three main audiences for documentation.

Why is documentation useful?

Documentation enables us to notice, share, celebrate and reflect upon children's learning that could otherwise be missed. Project members were often surprised by the insights they gained when carefully reflecting on the observations they had made.

A childminder on reviewing a video clip realised that one child's attention-seeking behaviour was really an attempt to be included in a role play game. She was able to follow up on this in the next session by creating a role play opportunity for him to be involved with. Had she not realised this, his behaviour could have seemed annoying and a learning opportunity would have been missed.

The research group also found that taking lots of photographs and video clips was not enough in itself. Without a strong element of reflection they were merely snapshots. However once they were annotated, they became useful in understanding the child, sharing information with parents and planning for future learning. Quality is sometimes more important than quantity!

"Nothing gets under a parent's skin more quickly and more permanently, than the illumination of his or her own child's behaviour."

Chris Athey (1990)

How does documentation support future learning?

Once the photos and video clips are taken, the information obtained needs to be used. This ensures that the environment and experiences that are planned for children are sensitive to their changing needs and interests.

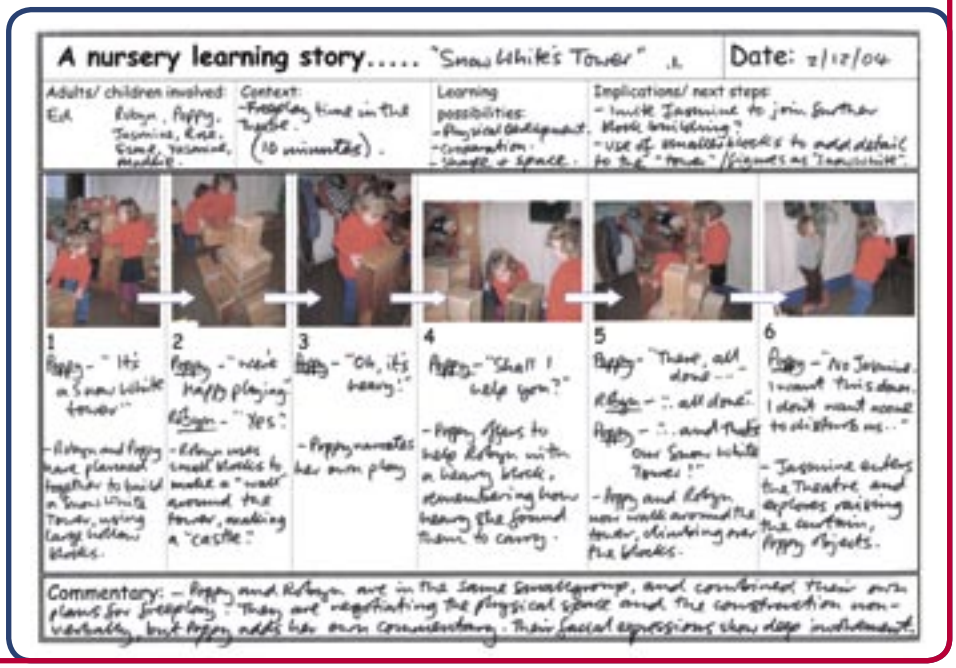
In one of our research settings children watched a video of themselves telling a story. They were asked to evaluate their performance and concluded "that wasn't very good, we can do better than that!" and decided to re-tell the story and record it again. By videoing their story telling and helping them to reflect the practitioner supported them in refining their skills.

The following three steps need to happen for documentation to support future learning:

1. **Observation** – video clips, photographs, written notes, anecdotes and voice recording…
2. **Evaluation and reflection** – What does this tell me about the children? What opportunities should I plan for this child? What changes should I make to our provision? Do I need to observe this more? Who do I share this information with?
3. **Implementation** – carrying out actions identified in step 2, for example sharing information with parents and carers.

"Children need well educated educators with knowledge at their finger tips, adults working with them who see what is happening, understand what they see and act on what they understand".

(Cathy Nutbrown).



Ways to document

Effective documentation can be as simple as hand-written notes, however within this project we focused on the use of digital media as a means of recording. The table below outlines the digital technologies used and some of their advantages and disadvantages.

Digital Technology	Advantages	Disadvantages
Observations	• Most readily manageable, available and possible – no technology needed • Low cost • Easily shared for interpretation • Everyone can contribute	• Can be time consuming • Tendency to record everything • The worry about observing everyone
Photographs	• Quick and easy to take • Visual • Captures moments • Children like to see themselves • Parents like them • Children can also take photographs • Can use camera with docking station if you don't have a computer	• Shared camera, in some cases with whole setting • Training needed on how to use it • Time needed to process and organise the photographs • Cost – printer cartridges
Tape recordings	• Frees up adult to focus on the children • Cheap • Captures all language and expressions • Can also capture children's voices at times when they wouldn't always be heard	• Time needed for transcripts • Poor quality recording may make transcripts difficult to interpret • It is blind and needs images to bring it to life!
Video recordings	• Captures the total experience • Accurate account • Clips can be revisited time and again • Powerful tool for sharing	• Expensive • Time consuming – review and edit • Technology skills needed to edit / transfer footage

(Adapted with permission from Wingate Community Nursery School, Co. Durham)

Top Tips and practical advice

Throughout the project technical problems would arise that we could not always solve by ourselves. Technical support is a big issue when working with ICT, but there are other things to consider to help you get the most out of your equipment. We hope you find our top tips and practical advice helpful.

General Top Tips

- Insure your camera and equipment
- Name equipment or write postcode with a permanent pen
- Get into good habits – keep the battery charged, download regularly and clear the memory
- Ensure all members of staff know how to use the equipment
- Keep camera accessible to all – photo/video opportunities can happen at any time!
- Spend time getting to know your equipment and have a go at using it – you could even take it home to practise
- Ensure you have permissions from parents for taking photographs/video, and sharing with others (Remember that their child may be in the background of another child's photo)
- Be aware of confidentiality issues and be sensitive when sharing photographs
- Use the camera, then review your photo or video. Look for ways of improving and keep repeating this process. Do, review… Do, review…
- Don't be afraid to ask other people for help – you'll be surprised at how many people have come across the same problem.

When printing

- A smaller photograph can be just as effective so print several on one page
- Print in black and white unless it is essential to be in colour – this will cut down on costs considerably
- Remember to have an ink cartridge in reserve – cheap deals can be found on the internet

Good housekeeping

- Ensure that your equipment is compatible with the computer (we found that some cameras do not work with Apple Mac Computers)
- Back up files – burn onto a disc, save on a memory stick etc.
- Ensure your computer has a large enough memory to cope with photograph files. Some cameras / computer programs will be able to compress files for you.
- If the photographs are never going to be enlarged, set your camera to a lower resolution (smaller file size – saves memory and makes programs such as PowerPoint run faster)
- Using Widows Explorer makes organisation into folders easier – you can drag and drop photos across
- Set up folders to view files as thumbnails. This will save you from having to open every image to view it.
- If children have access to the PC, perhaps set up passwords to view photographs or make them read-only – one child managed to delete a whole file!
- Housekeeping (e.g. filing photographs on PC or into learning diaries) is important to do on a regular basis
- Edit as you go. It is much faster to delete what you don't want immediately, rather than to trail through hundreds of photos at a later date
- Download regularly so that the memory card isn't full when you need to use the camera
- Give each child a folder on the computer
- Could break down further into areas of learning?
- Create new folders for shared events eg sports day or visit to a farm
- A Graphics tablet is easier for children to manipulate than a mouse

Top Tips and practical advice

When documenting children's learning

- Make a learning diary for each child with key photos and annotation to document their progress
- Continue to build up layers of annotation and commentary over time to enhance the rich documentation
- While videoing, provide a spoken commentary of what the child is doing and learning if the child is too far away to be heard. This will provide an instant documentation video!
- Ask the children to contribute – sticking photos into their diaries, commenting on photographs. Ask what were you doing then? What were you learning?
- Try printing photos directly onto sticky labels to avoid having to cut and paste
- Write short notes (anecdotal observations) to accompany photographs on sticky labels or post-it notes to avoid re-writing
- Annotate directly onto the screen with a graphics tablet
- Scribe exactly what children say and their responses to photos and video

When publishing and sharing photos and videos

- Share the experience of both filming and viewing with all staff, parents and children so that everyone can appreciate them
- Purchase a display screen for foyer or window
- Stick photographs in the window with annotation
- Use IWB or laptop to play slideshow
- Microsoft PowerPoint is an accessible program to use
- Burn CD for each child to take home when they leave the setting (permissions allowing)
- Share photographs through learning diaries

When taking photos or video

- Children can use the equipment too to record their own events
- To avoid a camera being dropped teach the children to wear the cord loosely around their neck
- Get down to the child's level and get in close to take a photograph or video clip
- Try not to take too many photographs or video clips. Less is more, use short clips and fewer photographs
- Be aware of background noise, lighting, camera positioning and your voice!
- Video can pause and pick out specific things that a still photo would have missed (video grabs)
- Use Microsoft Movie-Maker to do video grabs

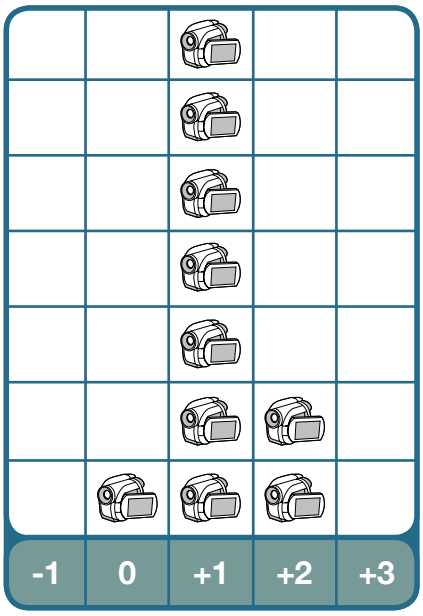
Outcomes of the project

Impact on practitioners involved

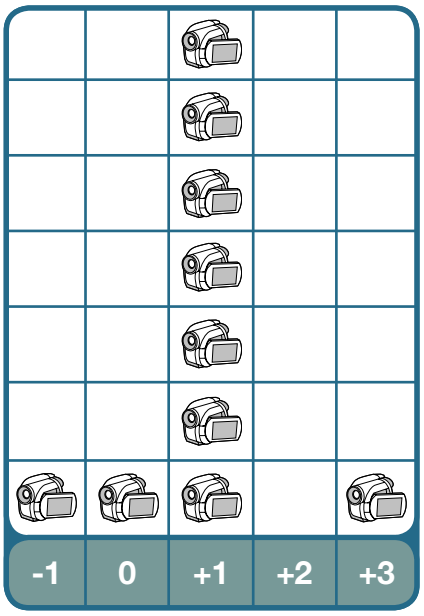
At the beginning of the project, practitioners involved completed a self-evaluation of their ICT skills and current use of ICT. Using the ECERS scale (Early Childhood Education Rating Scale) they gave themselves a rating in 3 areas:

- Information handling and communication skills
- Access and control of ICT tools
- Learning about the uses of ICT

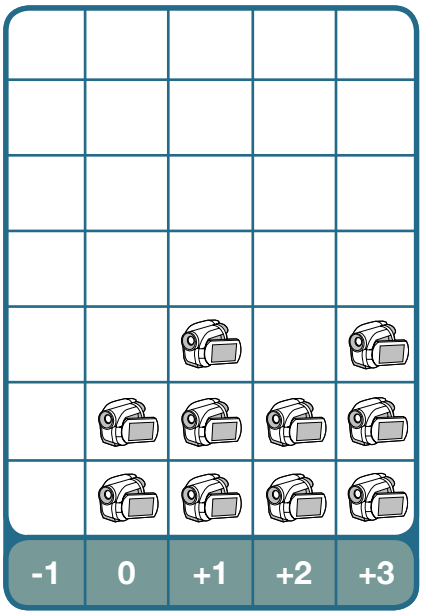
They used this scale at the initial stages of the project and then repeated it four months later. The charts below show the improvement in terms of points that practitioners made in each area. For example, if a practitioner gave themselves an initial score of 3 and then when they re-assessed they got a score of 5 this would indicate an improvement of +2. Some practitioners increased their rating by up to 3 points.* All felt that being part of the project and using the equipment contributed to their own professional development.



Information handling and communication skills



Access and control of ICT tools



Learning about the uses of ICT

*2 people did not complete the form

"We used to take photographs of children posing for us… now we take action shots of children learning through play!"
Trina – Teacher

"It (the project) made us get on the floor with the camera and watch them play!"
Valerie - Childminder

Wider impact within settings

All of the settings participating in the project involved other members of staff in their settings so it became a learning curve for all. Using digital technology helped practitioners to analyse and evaluate their own teaching and leadership styles. One practitioner mentioned how when she played back the footage she sounded like Joyce Grenfell! Listening to yourself or watching a video of your practice enables you to reflect upon your tone of voice, how inclusive you are and the sorts of questions you ask.

In one school (infant, junior and senior) involvement in the project raised the nursery profile immeasurably and now the senior school will replicate the nursery in using display equipment to share the children's learning.

In a pre-school, the staff were very interested despite initial concerns about using the equipment, now gradually the whole team are using the camera and printer and they are beginning to incorporate this way of working into the everyday life of the setting.

Outcomes of the project

Impact on children

The project has encouraged children to reflect on their own learning as the example on page 12 demonstrates.

When children were looking through their folder containing photographs from earlier in the year and responded to questions like: '*Do you like your folder?*' and '*What do you like about it?*' one child commented:

"My folder is funny because I can see what I did and how we looked when we started in Reception… We can do much more now."

The project enabled children to learn how to use the equipment and to improve their skills. They also learnt from each other and shared their learning.

"Hold it still or it will be wobbly."

Leila takes a photo of her childminder and pushes the button to view her picture. She then becomes interested in the other buttons so the practitioner showed her the zoom. She starts to laugh and the childminder asks her *'What's happening?'* Leila replies *"Ned's got fatter!"*

Impact on parents

The project has had a considerable impact on parents. It has enabled parents to glimpse inside their child's world.

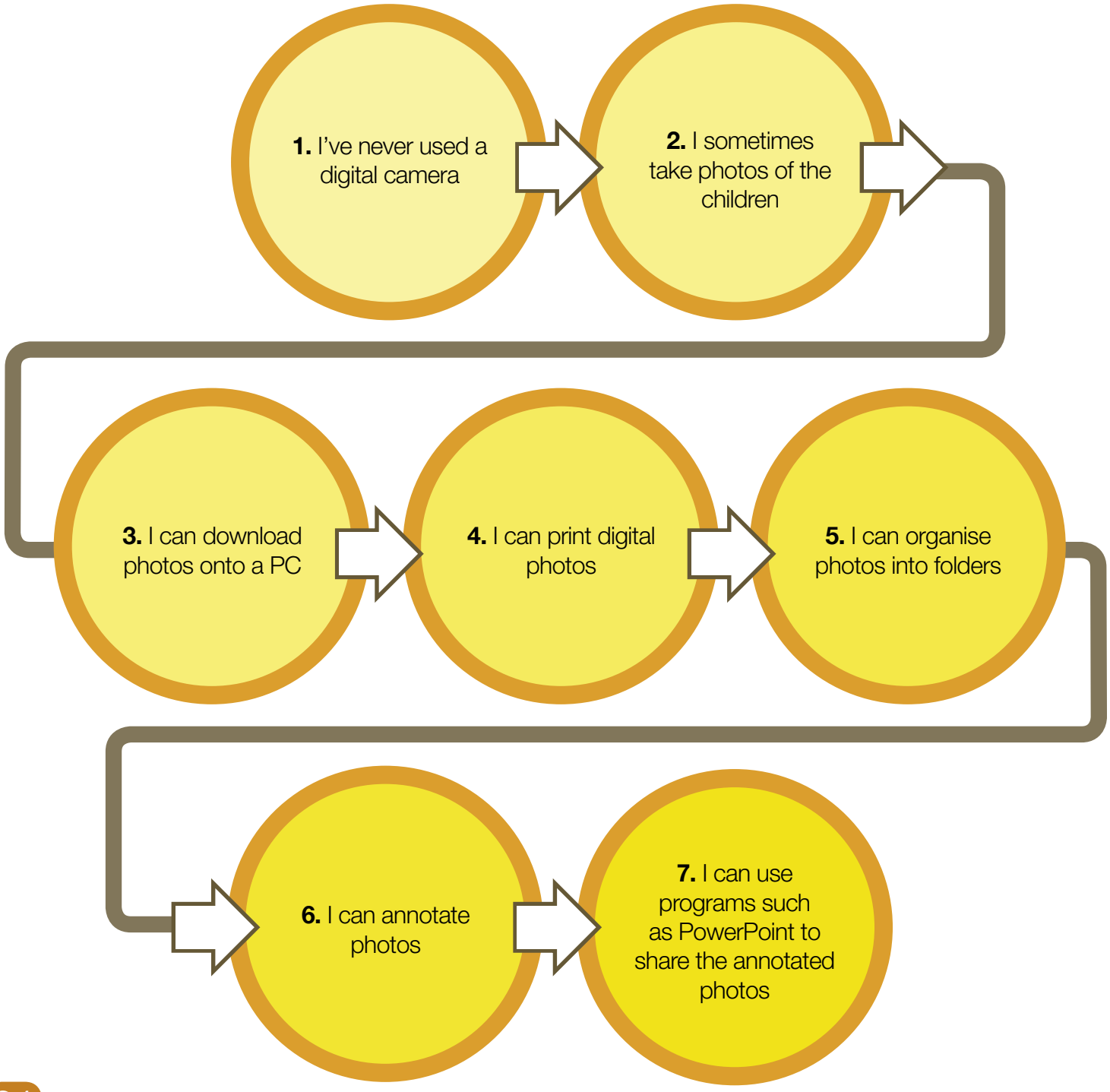
> *"I always wondered what they did all day – he always says 'nothing' when I ask him."*
>
> (Parent of child involved with the project)

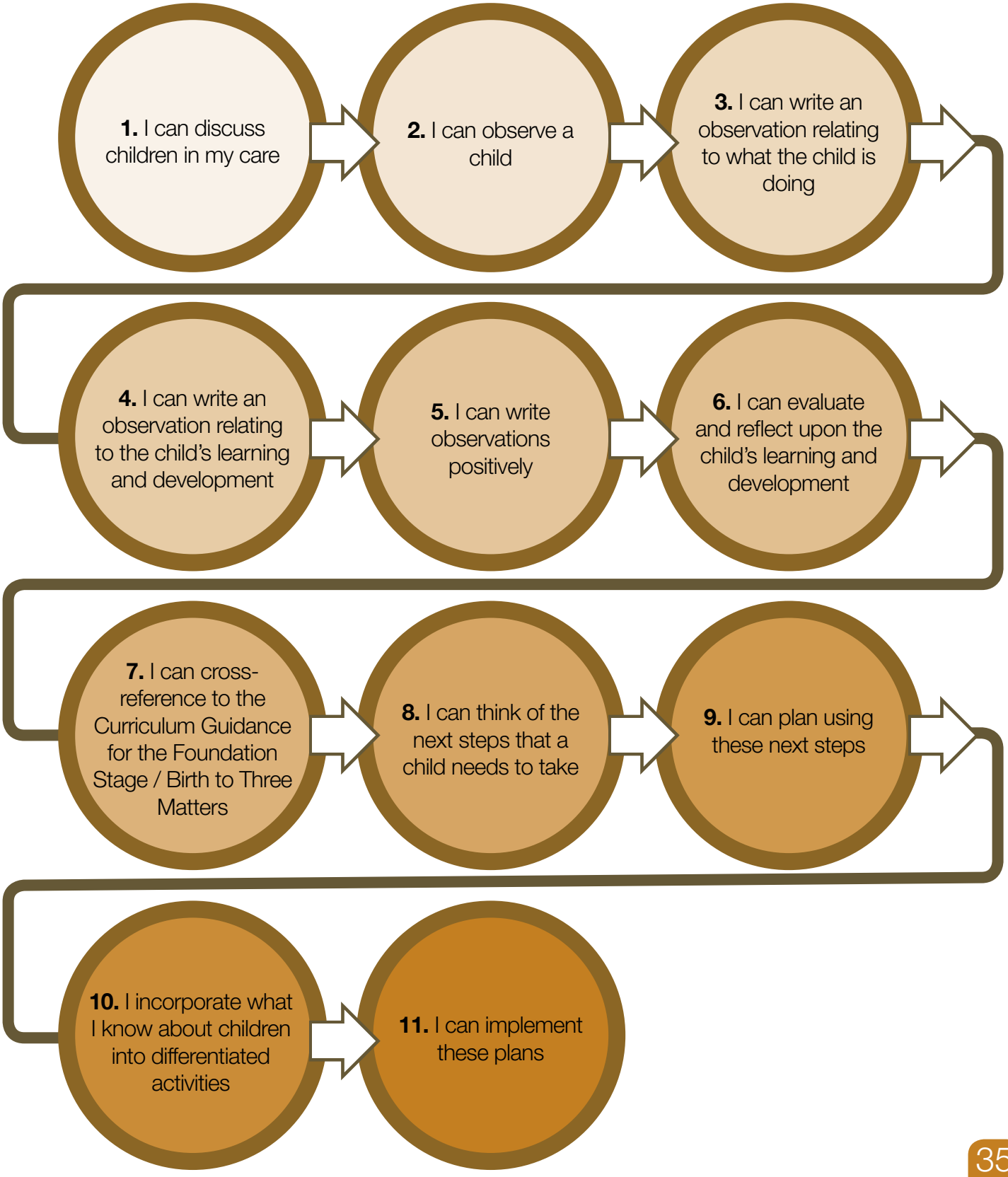
Parents have responded very positively to the settings involved in the project. It has particularly supported anxious parents who wanted to know if their child had settled in once they left. They were able to see photographs and video footage demonstrating that their child was fine and fully participating in the activities of the day.

> One Nursery sent out parent questionnaires and asked about their system of using photographs to record children's learning. They received very positive feedback from the parents who responded.

Where are you now?

These skills progressions can help you identify your next steps...




1. I can discuss children in my care
2. I can observe a child
3. I can write an observation relating to what the child is doing
4. I can write an observation relating to the child's learning and development
5. I can write observations positively
6. I can evaluate and reflect upon the child's learning and development
7. I can cross-reference to the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage / Birth to Three Matters
8. I can think of the next steps that a child needs to take
9. I can plan using these next steps
10. I incorporate what I know about children into differentiated activities
11. I can implement these plans

Glossary

Annotate – to make notes upon

BMP – (Bitmap) a file for saving photographs that takes a large amount of memory

Burn - to copy files onto a CD/DVD

Child-initiated learning – happens when adults structure a learning environment in which children learn through play and can choose how, where and what they wish to learn

Compress – to reduce the amount of memory a computer file takes

Digital – data recorded in such a way that it can be used by a computer

Documentation/documenting children's learning – when we record what children are learning and analyse it in order to plan for their future learning

DPI – (Dots Per Inch) refers to the resolution of an image when printing. Generally the more dots per inch the higher the image quality

Early Years Provider – childminders, pre-schools, nurseries, schools providing early years care and education to children

Foundation Stage Profile – Statutory assessment that is completed during the reception year (in the year when a child is turning 5 years old). It summarises the Early Learning Goals and judgments made are based on the practitioner's accumulating observations and knowledge of the child.

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IWB – (Interactive White Board) White board linked to the computer

JPG – (Joint Picture Experts Group) a compressed (smaller) file that pictures are often saved as

Microsoft Movie-Maker – This program allows you to edit video clips by cutting the unwanted bits and sticking it all together again

Parent/s – mothers, fathers, legal guardians and carers

PC – Personal Computer

PowerPoint - A Microsoft program designed for presentations. Images can be easily inserted into PowerPoint

Practitioner – refers to any adult who works with children in a setting

PVI – Private, Voluntary and Independent

Read-Only – files which cannot be changed or deleted

Resolution – describes the quality of the photograph in terms of the number of separate spots that make up the image

Thumbnail – Small image of the photograph. When opening a folder you can choose to 'view thumbnails' and this will display the small photographs instead of the folder icon

For further information

Glossary of digital terms
www.nmpft.org.uk/digitalschools/resources_glossary.asp

ICT in the Foundation Stage resources
http://www.hitchams.suffolk.sch.uk/foundation/index.htm

'More than Computers'
by Iram Siraj-Blatchford and John Siraj-Blatchford
Small booklet about ICT in the Early Years
ISBN 0 904187 292

Cheap ink cartridges
Can be bought over the internet - there are lots of sites so shop around.
www.cartridgemonkey.com
www.ink-factory-direct.co.uk
www.inkandstuff.co.uk

Recycle ink cartridges
This is a very simple way to support Tommy's Baby Charity and save tiny lives. You can order your Freepost bags or a recycling bin for your offices by telephoning **0800 435 576** or online at www.inkagain.co.uk
Inkjet cartridges which can be recycled:
- Hewlett Packard
- Lexmark
- Canon BC02/05/20/BX2/BX3

Learn Direct can offer courses in computers www.learndirect.co.uk
Also local colleges and training providers will offer courses and you can access computer courses at most libraries www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/lifeandleisure/leisure/Libraries/lifelonglearning/

For further information please contact someone from the Early Years, Advisory and Training Team on **0800 0731214**.

If you are a school you may like to contact the school's ICT consultant on **01225 395109**.

"When my mum sees the pictures she will know what we did at the train station"

"Now we take action shots of children learning through play!"

"I'll look after you..."

BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET