

What Does Technology Integration Mean to a Preschool Teacher?

A preschool teacher has a computer in her classroom. So, what's next? The school district gives her software but she questions whether or not this software is appropriate for the preschool classroom. There is no recommended age on the software jacket but it is a story program. Young children love stories. She questions whether this software will be responsive to the children's interests and ideas as they emerge? She doesn't know.

The teacher introduces the software as she would a book. "Boys and girls. Look what I have. I have a surprise for you." She shows the software jacket to everyone. "This is the surprise – I have a new software program. The words say Little Monster Private Eye and it is called, *The Smelly Mystery*. A mystery is something to which we don't know the answers. So we are going to put the program into our computer. We are going to see Little Monster on our computer and also on our big screen. Do you see him there? Boys and girls we are going to read the story and play this mystery. We are going to do a little bit each day. Remember what a mystery is, it is something we don't know."



By creating an appropriate computer environment and developmentally appropriate activities for preschool children, through software and off-computer materials, teachers can provide a variety of experiences, projects, problems, and ideas to explore and investigate. Whether it is *Smelly Mystery*, *Thinkin' Things*, or another piece of software it can be used by a preschool teacher as a catalyst for introducing a series of experiences or concepts such as: same and different, right and wrong, big and small, sorting, matching, predictions, or graph reading.



In the computer environment, the teacher helps children see how the skills or concepts addressed in the software program relate to other learning areas of their curriculum. The following dialog demonstrates how a teacher can relate emergent literacy and math/science skills to the software program, *The Smelly Mystery*. "Carol wants to know about the Evil Smell Switcher. Shall we tell her who are our suspects?" Holding a rebus chart of labeled Smelly Mystery characters the teacher asks the children, "Who's this?" They respond, "Jerry Bombanat, Yally." The teacher points to one character then another and says, "That is Mrs. Yally's little boy. Who's this?" The children say, "Little Laff." The teacher asks, "Who's this?" All of the children shout, "Ickky." The children are able to name the characters in the story and the teacher continues, "Today we will look for clues. Before the end we will make a prediction who each of you thinks would be the Evil Smell Switcher." As the teacher is guiding the young children in making choices they also map the clues from each page. The teacher says to the children, "We need to



find the clue. Who remembers where the clue was on this? This is page three.” The children respond, “The refrigerator.” “Thank you. We wrote it down right there (referring to a chart placed next to the computer).”

This activity also demonstrates how the teacher is helping children understand new concepts by building on prior knowledge and creating shared meaning (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). When the preschool teacher creates an intellectually engaging computer activity, using any piece of software or equipment, it will promote children’s learning and development. Related activities for software could include art, blocks/manipulatives, construction, cooking/snack, dramatic play, group/individual story experiences, music and movement, outdoor play/motor, science/math, sensory, literacy links, related books, poems stories, software, family connections, and/or extensions beyond the classroom. See **Integration Examples** - section in this workshop.



Assessment of these computer activities as with any planned activity must be ongoing, strategic, and purposeful (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). Assessment results may determine that adaptations are needed to help in planning further curriculum integration. For example, if a child could not use a mouse to access a program because of physical limitations, a touch tablet or switch might be considered. If a switch is selected, software that is switch accessible with modifications (slow, medium, fast scanning speed) or with different levels of difficulties could be considered. If the teacher has software that is not switch accessible, programs such as *Click It* (www.intellitools.com/) or *Discover Kenx* (www.donjohnston.com/) allows modifications of any program that could be used by the teacher to modify the software program and make it switch or touch tablet accessible.

So the teacher has a computer in the classroom? What’s next? A teacher who has acquired a good foundation of early childhood development and appropriate practice has the knowledge to create an intellectually engaging computer environment for young children. By creating a computer environment (see **Computer Environment Workshop**) selecting software or adaptive devices (see **Software Evaluation Workshop** and **Adaptations Workshop**) developing and assessing activities the teacher will be able to incorporate technology into the classroom curriculum to enhance, reinforce, and bring together different discipline areas to achieve a total connection for young children.

Bredekamp, S., and Copple, C. (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice: In early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.