Disabled children's evolving digital use practices to support formal learning. A missed opportunity for inclusion

# Details

## Year

2019

## DOI

10.1111/bjet.12827

## Issued

2019

## Language

English

## Volume

51

## Issue

2

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

British Journal of Educational Technology

## Publisher

Wiley

## Topics

## Sample

Seven children aged 13–17 recruited in three secondary schools via the Vi-forum (http://lists.educa tion.gov.uk/mailm an/listi nfo/vi-forum , a UK Government Department for Education mailing list offering teachers of visually impaired students support)

## Implications For Educators About

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

This paper takes an interdisciplinary approach combining digital education with disability theory to investigate disabled children's digital use practices for formal learning. Evidence suggests that children's lives have been transformed through engagement with digital technologies, eg, computers, laptops and mobile devices. Even so, empirical studies about disabled children's uses of technology remain limited, particularly studies that engage with disabled children's own views in context. In response, an exploratory, participatory research study was designed to gain up-to-date insights into how visually impaired children, as an illustrative case, experienced digital technologies for learning within the context of inclusive education policy. Disabled children and teachers were interviewed in mainstream schools in England; results were analysed using social practice theory to identify digital use practices characterised as digital learning and digital accessibility practices alongside children's experiences. Outcomes were mixed. Youngsters saw benefits to using digital technologies, particularly tablets, for learning. Nevertheless, digital accessibility practices were potentially stigmatising and carried an extra task load to overcome barriers that occurred when teachers had not developed inclusive digital pedagogy. The paper discusses the implications of these findings and calls for further research to guide schools to use digital technologies to support inclusion.

# Outcome

"when disabled children took part in learning tasks, their activities were often supplemented by what could be called “accessibility practices” or “workarounds” using technology. These accessibility practices emerged either through using the generic affordances of hardware in creative ways, eg, taking and magnifying images to suit their preferences or were due to the inbuilt accessibility settings and options that enhanced learning, eg, speech output. The results showed a wide range of benefits to digital use practices intended to enhance learning generally or to provide disabled children with access to the curriculum. Nevertheless, analysis of the data showed that some uses were necessitated by subject teachers’ lack of awareness about how to support disabled children. This led to disabled children having to carry out supplemen-tary tasks to access the curriculum or to rely on teaching assistants to overcome problems that occurred in situ." (Cranmer, 2020: 322). "there were examples of digital accessibility practices that could have been avoided through the provision of more inclusive pedagogy. This was of particu-lar concern given they added an extra task load for disabled children alongside reliance on teaching assistants that undermined independence and created stigma. " (Cranmer, 2020: 327).