

The computer in the classroom: a medium for enhancing social interaction with young people with autistic spectrum disorders

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Abstract

Angela Jacklin is a senior lecturer in education and director of student support at the University of Sussex. William Farr is a teacher at a primary school in Sussex, and a former MA student at Sussex University. In the project reported in this article, they worked together to consider how valuable the computer may be as a medium to enhance social interaction with pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The research took place in a special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties in the South East of England and involved 12 children from the school's unit for pupils with autism. From this initial group, three pupils were selected for more focused study. Using a mix of qualitative data gathering and analysis strategies, the research highlighted the importance of social interaction around the computer and indicated that the computer could be a useful tool for enhancing social interaction. This was found to relate in part to the adult's ability to follow the child's lead, as well as the complex intermingling of events known as tricky mixes. Where this happened, use of the computer appeared to result in more sustained and more positive interactions for young people with autistic spectrum disorders.