

# Using ICT to support young learners who are non-native speakers of English

The use of ICT to support young learners of EAL is becoming increasingly common place in the mainstream and specialist classroom. The value of using ICT is considerable and works on a variety of levels to support both teaching and learning. The motivational aspect of ICT is clear. Pupils who are very new to learning a new language find activities on the computer that they can do instantly. Also they feel that here is something that they can do, and often as well as, if not better than, their peers.

Rupert Wegerif in his research into the use of ICT with EAL learners identifies the benefit of the 'objectivity of computers':

*Because computers are machines, without expectations and with infinite patience, they can provide a safe context for children to try out ideas.*

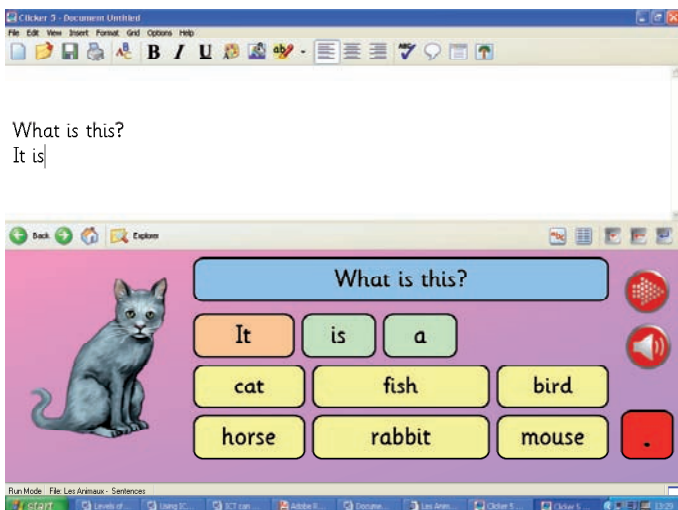
Creative use of ICT in the classroom can promote inclusion and reflect cultural and linguistic diversity. Pupils who have had very little experience of using ICT can engage in exciting activities that are accessible with even very limited English language knowledge. Similarly ICT literate pupils can explore ICT based activities that are not dependent on an equivalent level of fluency in English. Learners can showcase and share their work which has positive motivational effects and raises self-esteem.

The use of multimedia in presenting information is an important way of supporting access for the learner. ICT gives us the means to add pictures, sound and video, to use key visuals and graphic organisers, and to use the wealth of content rich sources from a range of cultures, that can be found on the internet. The use of word processing technology, in particular talking word processors, opens up an infinite range of opportunities. The combination of spoken, written, visual and picture support gives the learner the scope to engage in meaningful curriculum focussed activities at a linguistic level that is matched to their level of English language development.

Clicker is an example of a piece of software that has been widely recognised for its benefits for learners of English as an additional language. It is a powerful, easy-to-use writing support and multimedia tool, based on grids and screens, which enable you to write with whole words, phrases or pictures and to engage in a wealth of multimedia activities using pictures, photos, video and sound. The latest version, Clicker 5, has a modern look and is based on the latest technologies.

Clicker Grids can be designed to meet a variety of teaching objectives and learner needs. They can range from very simple picture/word matching activities, to sentence building activities, to talking books, to video presentations. The levels of interactivity enable learners to approach learning in a variety of ways.

Clicker Writer is Clicker's talking word processor - you can type into this with the keyboard, or you can click on items in the Clicker Grid to send them into



**Learners can write by clicking on cells in a Clicker grid. They can listen before they write and can hear their completed sentences.**

Clicker Writer. Clicker 5 offers EAL learners the opportunity to build up their use of written English with as much or as little scaffolding as they require. Activities can be built up from simple labelling activities through a range of sentence building grids. So for example, pupils at the early stages of learning English could select the correct label from a choice.

A pupil at the developing stage could create simple sentences using a 'forced order' grid which ensures they choose from the correct group of words by disabling the other groups. Cells can be colour coded to distinguish parts of speech or sentences, so learners can focus very tightly on specific skills, e.g. grammar, sentence building, or story building.

Pupils who are at a more advanced stage may use the support of a pop-up word bank to make their own talking book or make use of a writing frame to structure their texts within a particular genre.

Speech and sound are particularly important aspects of Clicker for English language learners, providing valuable opportunities for speaking and listening as well as reinforcement of learning. The realistic software speech with UK accent offers opportunities for the learner to hear the spoken word as many times as they need to. They simply right click in a cell to hear its content. They also receive instant feedback on anything they write in Clicker Writer. So they can see the word or phrase, listen to it, write, and then listen to a completed sentence.

In addition real speech can easily be recorded providing the opportunity for practising English and for the home language to be used to support and encourage the learner. The pop-up sound recorder is an excellent feature encouraging learner output in a non-threatening environment. It allows the pupil to try out simple words and phrases as many times as they like, and pupils love the idea of replaying their own voice in English. They may simply listen to a model and copy it, or add their own voice to an on-screen book they have created.

The flexibility of Clicker 5 makes it ideally suited to providing curriculum access to learners of English as an additional language. By providing visual and pictorial clues and by grading the level of linguistic challenge teachers can create grids that enable learners to participate in curriculum content learning while they are simultaneously learning English. Pupils for example, can sort food into fruit or vegetables groups whilst at the same time learning English names for some everyday fruits and vegetables. Teachers can add extra optional support into grids such as clues, hints or prompts.

The learning grids website [www.learninggrids.com](http://www.learninggrids.com) provides instant access to literally hundreds of ready made grids and new materials are added regularly. The grids are organised into relevant curriculum areas and there is also a search facility. The Edit mode within Clicker makes it really easy to edit existing grids and adapt them to suit individual learner's needs. However it is also very easy for teachers to make their own grids and talking books using the picture library or by importing their own photographs, and there are user guides and a technical support department on hand to give advice. In fact the beauty of Clicker is that it is really easy to create and customise materials to exactly the appropriate level.

ICT has a vital role to play in providing the appropriate resources and technology for both learners and teachers of English as an additional language. Clicker 5 is a versatile program that can be used to meet the needs of learners of English in a wide range of contexts and is definitely an essential addition to the language learning environment.

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