RESPONSE to *By-passing the debate: beyond the 'technology question' in the early years* by Professor Suzy Edwards

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Suzi Edwards' call to move beyond fruitless debates 'for' and 'against' technology is timely – one might even argue, overdue. Attempts to resist the realities of contemporary society and reconstruct 'yesterday's child' (Jenks, 1996) who is unpolluted by technology are as doomed as King Canute's attempt to hold back the tides. What's more, such attitudes are misguided in as much as they do nothing to prepare young children for meaningful interaction in their worlds or recognise and build on their everyday social and cultural experiences. As Edwards demonstrates, digital technologies are already a part of young children's lives before they reach nursery or pre-school and so practitioners need to recognise the implications of this and the opportunities opened up for developing meaningful learning. At present there is still too much poor practice in evidence which ranges from hijacking children's interests in order to disguise literacy and numeracy drills – known as 'playing on the computer' – to the sterile teaching of outmoded 'IT skills'; the use of mouse and keyboard are already redundant before the child reaches school.

That practitioners are often slow to take advantage of children's natural interest in digital technologies is mainly due to lack of confidence as most are only too aware of their own status as 'digital immigrants' leading 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). Fear of this power imbalance for adults who are accustomed to knowing more is exacerbated by practitioners' common belief in young children's intuitive and innate grasp of technology (Roberts-Holmes, 2013). In contrast, respect for the strong and competent child (Moss and Petrie, 2002) points to the need to co-construct learning, working from what each brings to the encounter. Adults' knowledge and understanding of effective pedagogy can enable meaningful interaction that supports investigations with digital technologies in just the same way as any other aspect of children's interests and this

should be an everyday part of early years practice, as Edwards suggests, as freely available and common as blocks.

Many of the anxieties about modern children (McDowall Clark, 2013) coalesce around the subject of technology whilst other commentators have argued unrealistically utopian views. Buckingham (2004) reminds us, however, that both these extremes are based on adult *images* of the child, whether as media-wise or vulnerable innocent, and we need to recognise that technology does not have consequences in and of itself. So Edwards' call to move beyond these outdated debates to recognise and respect the social contexts of young children's lives is an important reminder that most children are likely to be already taking part in technological practices within the home that are far in advance of what they may experience in many early years settings. This is contemporary reality and the challenge which it represents cannot be sidelined by futile debates about whether technology is 'good' or 'bad'. Such quibbles are irrelevant; the real issue is how to harness imaginatively the potentialities of new technologies (Flewitt, 2008) to support young children's development in ways which engage meaningfully with the home learning environment.

References

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