

Event offers an opportunity to interact with new autism technologies

Posted on Friday 28th October 2011

This week teachers, parents, and children with autism – will have a unique opportunity to see how innovative interactive technologies can be used in enhancing autism education at a special event at Topcliffe Primary School in Castle Vale.

Researchers from the Universities of Birmingham, Southampton and University Wales Institute Cardiff will be demonstrating how virtual environments, touch tables and ipad software can be used in teaching children on the autism spectrum.

The event on November 1st is part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science.

Research shows that technologies can offer significant benefits for children on the autism spectrum, particularly in the areas of social interaction and communication. The technologies on show were created by researchers working together with children, parents and teachers.

Dr. Karen Guldberg from the University of Birmingham's School of Education comments: *"Although new technologies can significantly improve learning experiences for children on the autism spectrum, unfortunately few research-led innovations make it into everyday use in classrooms.*

We want to change that by taking our technologies to the people that matter most in our research. We involve teachers, parents and young people in the design, development and evaluation of everything we do, so we want to see the results being used in schools.

We encourage practitioners and parents to come to Topcliffe primary school to see how these ideas can be applied."

The technologies on show include:

- 1) ECHOES, is a learning environment where 5-to-7-year-old children on the Autism Spectrum can improve social and communicative skills by interacting with a virtual agent and digital objects
- 2) COSPATIAL focuses on encouraging the development of collaboration and social conversation skills for young people on the autism spectrum aged 8-14yrs using technologies like touch tables.
- 3) Reactickles – and Somantics use touch, gesture and camera input to encourage expressive communication and play for young people and adults. This software is accessible on ipad, ipod and Mac.

Ian Lowe, Head Teacher of Topcliffe Primary School comments: *'We are amazed by how successful these innovative technologies are in engaging the children. As a result, our teachers are developing better understandings of what motivates and engages children with autism. Therefore we are able to adapt the teaching to really spark learning'*

Professor Richard Noss, Director of the Technology Enhanced Learning Research Programme adds, *"This event shows just how research in technology-enhanced learning can transform the lives of autistic children. But more than this, by engaging with deep and difficult questions of learning, teaching and design, this work shows a way forward for harnessing the power of digital technologies for all. Congratulations to the research teams and all their collaborators who transformed their findings into practice."*

Details of the event:

Where: Topcliffe Primary School, Birmingham B35 6BS

When: 1st November 2011 from 10.30-2.30 with a launch at 10.30.

Contact: Dr Karen Guldberg on K.K.Guldberg@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:K.K.Guldberg@bham.ac.uk>)

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/autism-technologies/index.aspx> (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/autism-technologies/index.aspx>)

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For further information contact: Ben Hill, PR Manager, University of Birmingham, Tel: 0121 4145134, Mob: 07789 921163.

The Festival of Social Science

The Festival of Social Science is run by the Economic and Social Research Council which runs from 29 October to 5 November 2011. With events from some of the country's leading social scientists, the Festival celebrates the very best of British social science research and how it influences our social, economic and political lives - both now and in the future. This year's Festival of Social Science has over 130 creative and exciting events aimed at encouraging businesses, charities, government agencies; and schools or college students to discuss, discover and debate topical social science issues. Press releases detailing some of the varied events are available at the [Festival website \(http://www.esrcfestival.ac.uk/\)](http://www.esrcfestival.ac.uk/). You can now follow updates from the Festival on twitter using #esrcfestival

