

Five things to do with... ICT outdoors

Tablets and other ICT devices can enhance certain outdoor activities for children. *Julie Mountain* discovers how best to use them

Children are now so familiar with electronic devices that outdoors might feel like the last refuge away from screens. However, ICT can offer new perspectives on outdoor learning and play, and it is worth exploring how to enrich the ICT curriculum by taking the devices outdoors and becoming physically active with them.

1: DAY IN THE LIFE

As a whole group, tour your outdoor space, taking note of doorways, gates, windows, exits and other places of interest. Discuss what happens in each of these places: for example: mums and dads arrive to drop off children; older children come out to play; the lunch van delivers food; the postie arrives. What else do children think might happen? Prompt them with ideas about animals, visitors, litter blowing in, cars driving past...

Divide the day into 15-minute segments (taking the opportunity to discuss time, the length of the day, seasons) and pair up children. Using the timer of the tablet, allocate each pair to a 15-minute segment when they can go out and record what they see and hear. They could take photographs or record video and use talking pegs to record their voices or the sounds they hear.

2: CREATE YOUR OWN ID GUIDES

Download and print plant and tree ID guides – try the excellent Nature Detectives and Wildlife Watch websites, or the Collins *Trees and Shrubs*



Photographing apples



guide. Use these to identify species in your grounds or garden, and label each one with its name. In spring, summer, autumn and winter, visit each labelled plant to take a photograph of its stem or bark, and its leaves and flowers, to create your own personalised ID spotter sheets. Use an app such as Skitch to annotate the images. Compare your plants with those on the ID sheets: what similarities and differences can the children identify? Why are the pictures not identical? What do children notice about your plants and trees over the course of the year?

Taking it further: over a few seasons, why not assign a QR code to each of your trees? Add information about each tree or plant – for example, its name, how old it is, how tall it is, photos of it throughout the seasons,



Labelling places where certain activities happen; identifying plants; and setting up a trail cam

whether there are any other similar plants nearby.

3. TOUR GUIDES

Children are fascinated by their own voices; Dictaphones (or a smartphone/radio mike) are a crafty way of encouraging speaking and listening. Ask children to record themselves exploring the garden, describing the areas they like and don't like, introducing their friends and listening to the sounds they can hear from within and beyond the setting. Play the recording back to the whole group and ask them to comment on what they hear. Would it sound the same at the weekend? What about at night?

4: TRAIL CAMS

While a trail cam (or wildlife camera) is an investment, it will provide hours of interest. Choose a motion-activated camera with a time delay that records video and still images, and has infrared for night recording. Move the camera to different places around the garden so that, over time, it captures a wide range of activity.

Top tip: don't point the camera at areas of high daytime traffic as they will trigger every 10 seconds or so and you will end up with thousands of almost identical images.

5. GETTING PHYSICAL

ICT tasks needn't be sedentary. For example:

- Boost children's physical activity by providing them with wrist pedometers; simple, inexpensive trackers are available online and even, occasionally, at pound shops. At the end of each day, create bar charts with the children, recording their day's step count.
- Hand-held metal detectors are an excellent way of encouraging children to explore every inch of the outdoor space – bury treasure in the sand or dirt, or under a pile of leaves, to add a reward for the most intrepid. ■

RISKS... AND BENEFITS

The biggest risk to taking ICT outdoors is probably to the devices themselves. Many 'child friendly' devices are available and you probably have several already. I'm a big fan of giving children the 'real thing' – iPads and cameras, laser measuring devices and so on – so that they become familiar with and learn

to respect them. Having said that, make sure tablets and cameras are protected from harm with chunky rubberised covers. There are also a few commonsense precautions: don't run with electronic devices; take turns to use them (no snatching); practise turning them on and off; and attach them to lanyards if possible.