

Module title – Moving away from the traditional classroom: The silent digital revolution in education

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From Clicks to Confidence with a Happy Heart:

Growing Digital Skills in Welsh Classrooms

Being digitally confident is not just about clicking buttons it's about nurturing **curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking**. In today's classrooms, digital competence is more than a skillset; it's a mindset that empowers learners to navigate technology with purpose and care.

The **Curriculum for Wales** recognises the importance of digital competence by placing it alongside literacy and numeracy as one of its three cross curricular responsibilities (Welsh Government, 2018).

Growing Digital Skills Across the Curriculum

To realise this priority to life, the Welsh Government launched the Digital Competence Framework (DCF), a practical guide that helps learners develop digital skills across all areas of learning. Rather than treating digital

competence as a standalone subject, the framework encourages teachers to embed it into everyday classroom experiences. It's structured around four key strands that support progression from early years through to secondary school (Welsh Government, 2018).

The Four Strands of Digital Competence:

These are the cornerstone of the framework, guiding learners from their first curious thoughts with technology towards them having confident, critical engagement in the digital world (Welsh Government, 2018).

Each strand opens a different door -

1. Citizenship:

Safe, responsible, and positive participation in online communities, including awareness of digital rights (Welsh Government, 2018).



2. Interacting and Collaborating:

Teamwork and communication through shared digital tools, such as co-authoring documents or exchanging ideas online (Welsh Government, 2018).



3. Producing:

Creativity in action, from designing posters and podcasts to videos and presentations (Welsh Government, 2018).



Data and Computational Thinking: logic, coding, and resilience, helping learners solve problems and approach challenges with confidence (Welsh Government, 2018).



Together, these strands sit at the heart of classroom practice, ensuring digital competence is not treated as a standalone subject but as a future focused competence that learners continue to develop (Welsh Government, 2018). Critically, the framework has been extended through the Routes for Learning guidance to support learners with complex additional learning needs (ALN), ensuring that progression in digital competence is inclusive and accessible to all (Welsh Government, 2022).

Progression in the Curriculum for Wales

In the Curriculum for Wales, progression is not a tick box or tied to age, it is a living journey, shaped by curiosity, resilience, and confidence, with the heart of learning

beating strongest when every child moves forward at their own pace (Welsh Government,2021).

The **Progression Code** (Welsh Government, 2021) sets out the principles of progression a continuum shaped by curiosity, resilience, and confidence, rather than age related checklists.

Progression Steps, meanwhile, describe the practical milestones learners reach at different stages of readiness, such as, recognising online safety rules, participating responsibly and critically evaluating digital information (Welsh Government, 2021). Examples include:

- **Early progression: Online Safety Basics** recognising simple rules for staying safe online.
- **Middle progression: Responsible Participation** using shared platforms respectfully.
- **Later progression: Critical Evaluation** questioning the reliability of digital information.



Explore the progressions code

<https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/5c8681b2-ec0b-4e72-a41b-315ebf1a3224/Curriculum%20for%20Wales%20Progression%20Code.pdf?download=true>



Classroom Practice: The Heart of Progression

Progression only truly beats with life when it is felt in the classroom. **Estyn (2018)** found that schools at the forefront of curriculum innovation were those that wove digital competence into everyday practice, treating it as part of the rhythm of learning than an add on.

Rennie, Smyth and Mason (2020) rather emphasise that progression begins with clarity of purpose; tutors must first identify the outcomes they want learners to achieve by the end of a module. With this focus on outcomes, digital learning avoids slipping into routine clicks and instead pulses with confidence, creativity, and critical engagement.



Broken Heart: Critical Reflections on Digital Progression

However, every heart has its fractures. **Estyn (2018)** highlighted there was uneven progress in a minority of schools who failed to monitor how teachers developed literacy, numeracy and digital competence across the curriculum. Many of these schools were found to be repeating skills without meaningful contexts. A majority

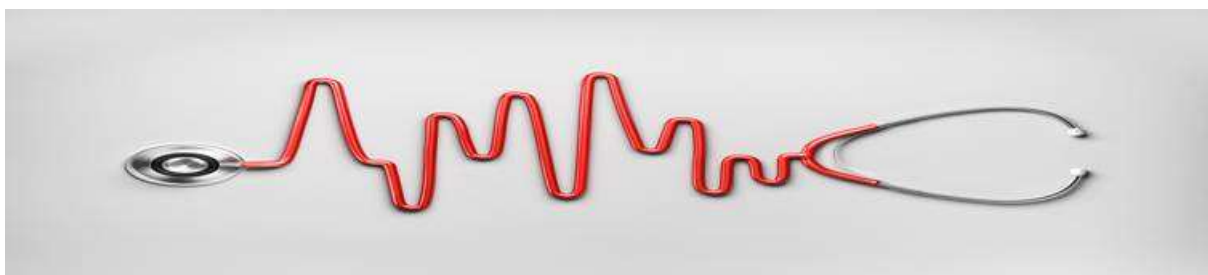
were found to be considering elements of the DCF however this work was often at an early stage, which meant the rhythm of innovation sometimes faltered.

Rafalow (2021) similarly found that even when schools had comparable access to digital tools and teacher training, social forces shaped their use in patterned but disparate ways. As a result, students from different racial-ethnic and class backgrounds experienced markedly different educational outcomes, despite using the same technologies.

Carroll et al. (2023) remind us that progress will not keep its rhythm unless learning communities such as the Digital Technology Learning Support Network (DTLSN) receive proper support. When these networks are nurtured, they can play a vital role in helping Wales and the wider UK overcome ongoing digital skill gap.



Keeping the Rhythm Alive!



Every heartbeat has its strong and weak moments. What matters is how we respond with care, with clarity and with

community. If we keep listening to the rhythm of classroom practice and support the networks that sustain it, digital progression in Wales can grow not just stronger, but more human.

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The Digital Garden:



(Copilot, 2025)

Thriving in Sunshine, Surviving the Frost

Step into the digital garden. For today's children and young people (CYP) it is a place of both sunshine and frost. Sunshine warms the soil, helping creativity, connection, and learning to bloom. But frost creeps in too inequality, exclusion, and surveillance can bite at tender roots. Just

like seedlings, CYP thrive or struggle depending on the climate we create through media, policy, and practice.



(Copilot, 2025)

In this digital garden, climates matter. Some spaces feel like sunshine, nurturing growth, while others bring frost, stunting roots.

Children online today are not just playing they are studying, socialising and shaping identity in digital soil. Sunshine can nurture creativity and confidence, but frost can stunt growth, leaving some excluded or unsafe.

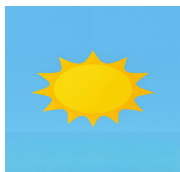
The big question is - How do we tend this garden, so every child has the chance to flourish? Rafalow's (2021) digital divisions shows that schools, like gardeners, can nourish digital skills by valuing play and creativity or let frost creep in by disciplining and dismissing them, reproducing inequality in the soil of learning.

So, how do we make sense of this digital garden? Back in the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan dropped a seed of an idea "*the medium is the message*" (McLuhan, 1964, p.8). McLuhan showed us that the medium shapes meaning.

Siemens (2005) extended this by showing that learning itself is a network of connections across people, platforms, and information.

If we dig into that seed, what grows is a reminder that it is not just the content children consume that matters, but the platforms themselves. With platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and online classrooms shaping the roots. However, some soils are rich and nourishing which helps creativity and confidence to sprout. Whilst other soils are thin or toxic, leaving seedlings struggling to grow.

Think of it like this:



(Copilot, 2025)

Sunshine platforms - spaces where creativity blooms, friendships grow, and confidence takes root.



(Copilot, 2025)

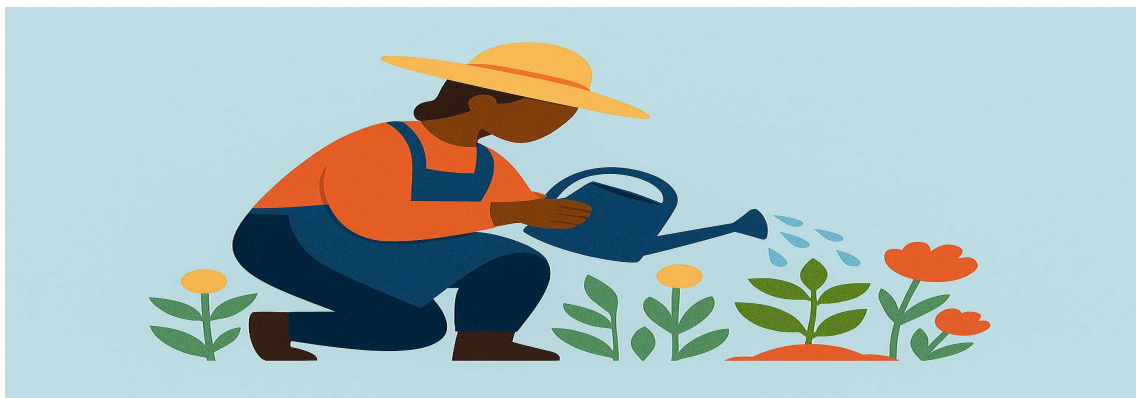
Frosty platforms - spaces where inequality spreads, exclusion bites, and harmful behaviours creep in. The medium is the climate, and the digging shows us what lies beneath. Just like in any garden, the climate and soil together decide whether seedlings thrive or struggle.

Connectivism: The soil beneath the digital garden

Just like a garden needs good soil and the right climate, children's learning in the digital age depends on the networks they grow into. This idea comes from the connectivism theory that says knowledge isn't locked away in one place, but spread across people, platforms, and information (Siemens, 2005).

Imagine roots stretching through the soil - Every click, every chat, every shared video is another connection. When those roots find rich ground, creativity blossoms and confidence grows. But when the soil is thin, or the roots are cut off, growth slows and young people struggle to flourish.

Constructivism: The Wild Meadow of Learning



(Copilot, 2025)

Not all learning grows in tidy rows. Constructivism shows us that children and young people learn more like wildflowers tangled, unpredictable, and full of colour. They aren't empty pots waiting to be filled; they are gardeners

themselves, choosing which paths to follow and weaving meaning from their experiences.

In the meadow, growth is messy. Some plants shoot up quickly, others take time, and some surprise us altogether. Classrooms that embrace this ‘fuzziness’ mirror real life, preparing learners for the long seasons ahead. Instead of trimming everything into neat lines, they let curiosity spread, resilience take root, and lifelong learning flourish (Driscoll, 2000, cited in Siemens, 2005, p. 376).

Sunshine vs Frost: Platforms in Contrast

In practice, the digital garden reveals both blooms and blight. Sunshine platforms nurture growth, while frosty climates expose risks.

Sunshine in practice, UNICEF’s Voices of Youth (2021) shows how moderated programmes like the Youth Mediathon give children and young people (CYP) safe spaces to bloom, learning new skills, building friendships, and sharing their voices globally. These are sunshine platforms where creativity and confidence take root.

Yet frost creeps in too; Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) (2025) warns of risks such as grooming, cyberbullying, and surveillance. Inequality spreads when learners lack devices, language support, or safe online spaces. Poor soil stunts growth, leaving some seedlings

behind. UNICEF (2025) echoes this, urging investment in inclusive, protective digital environments. Beyond investment, UNICEF (2025) also highlights that new impact measurement systems must be rooted in robust architecture and cyber protection, ensuring the soil of digital transformation is safe and fertile for growth.

Keeping The Garden Alive



(Copilot, 2025)

Sunshine platforms show what happens when creativity and confidence are given space to bloom. Young people connect, share, and grow together.

However, frost is never far away. Risks like exclusion, surveillance, and harmful behaviour can creep in, leaving some seedlings struggling to take root.

So, what's the gardener's role?

- Check the climate: Are spaces safe and welcoming?
- Feed the soil: Give learners access, support, and networks.
- Let the meadow grow: Embrace messy, creative exploration.

When sunshine outweighs frost, the digital garden becomes a place where every child can root, grow, and flourish.

The digital garden is never static - Seasons shift, climates change, and new seedlings appear. Our role as gardeners is to keep tending, adapting, and protecting so every child can grow with resilience, creativity, and confidence in digital soil, whatever challenges tomorrow may bring.

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Step in Time



(Guardian, 2024)

25 Years of Nursery Teaching in a Digital World of Kites and Carpet Bags.

25 years in nursery classrooms I've seen it all; chalkboards, crayons, whiteboards and tablets. From the squeak of chalk to the swipe of a screen, every change has brought new magic. **Just like Mary Poppins** arriving with her umbrella and carpet bag, digital tools can surprise, delight, and transform learning.

At the start of my journey, there was only one lonely computer in the corner, but over the years, I've seen interactive boards to draw on, rhymes that sing, numbers that dance and phonics that sparkle on iPad appear (Apple, 2025).

Step in time - the nursery has changed with every beat and I've grown too, learning alongside the children as digital tools became part of our play and discovery.

Mary Poppins' Umbrella



(Bing Images, 2025)

Digital tools in nursery open wide like Mary Poppins' umbrella giving children shelter and support as they play and learn.

- **Interactive CTouch Boards** let children draw, sing nursery rhymes, and play number and phonics games. Becoming magical canvases (CTOUCH UK, 2025).

- **iPads** capture children's play. Children explore apps, take photos of their play, and share learning with families (Apple, 2025).

☀ **Just as Mary Poppins insists on the essentials**, the Curriculum for Wales insists on three magical companions: **Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Competence**. They float under the umbrella together, mandatory cross-curricular skills that every practitioner must nurture across the learning journey (Welsh Government, 2022).

☀ These companions carry children's rights with them; Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states play is essential (UNICEF UK, 2025). It's truly amazing when literacy, numeracy and digital competence float under Mary Poppins' umbrella side by side, every giggle, rhyme, and game becomes more than play it's a magical pathway to learning.

Mary Poppins' Carpet Bag



(Bing Images, 2025)

Mary Poppins never arrives without her carpet bag of endless surprises, that is full of treasures. In nursery classrooms, digital tools are just the same.

- A CTouch Board becomes a stage for counting rhymes or phonics adventures (CTOUCH UK, 2025).
- An iPad slips out like a magic trick, capturing play and sparking stories (Apple, 2025).
- Drawing and creativity apps tumble out, letting children sketch, colour, or design extending imaginative play.

☀ **Within Mary Poppins' endless bag**, it's not just gadgets that appear, theories spill out too. **Piaget's** (n.d, cited in Bates, 2023) suggests, idea that children build knowledge through exploration and **Vygotsky'** (n.d., cited

in Bates, 2023) implies, scaffolding showing that children learn best with support in their Zone of Proximal Development sit alongside the digital surprises we pull out in nursery practice.

☀️ **These ideas**, explained in Bates' Learning Theories Simplified and How to Apply Them to Teaching (2023), show how play and tools go hand in hand, reminding us that every app, board, or iPad moment is more than entertainment it's a chance to nurture curiosity and creativity (Apple, 2025).

Mary Poppins' Kites



(Bing Images, 2025)

Digital tools become kites for children and staff in Nursery practice, so **let's go fly a kite** together, lifting ideas and confidence into the sky.

- Guidance matters, kites need wind and someone holding the string.

- Children rise with support.
- Staff need Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and peer guidance (Welsh Government, 2018).

☀ **Bruner's** (n.d., cited in Bates, 2023) suggests, spiral curriculum shows learning builds loop by loop. This means children revisit ideas at deeper levels over time, each loop strengthening their understanding.

☀ **Rafalow** (2021) explains that when digital tools are built into everyday lessons without careful reflection, they can end up widening the gaps between learners. Some kites soar effortlessly, while others remain grounded reminding us that it's our role to make sure every child catches the wind.

☀ **Looking to the future**, when children and staff fly kites together, digital competence becomes more than today's play; it's preparation for tomorrow's learning journey. **Mary Poppins reminds us** that kites don't just fly they soar, carrying joy, confidence, and learning higher with every tug of the string.

A Spoonful of Sugar



(Bing Images, 2025)

For me, digital tools really are a spoonful of sugar in nursery life they make learning lighter, sweeter and full of joy. I have watched interactive boards turn into magical canvases where rhymes dance and numbers sparkle. I've seen iPads capture the little moments of play and help children share their discoveries with families (Apple, 2025). Apps too open doors to creativity, letting imagination spill out in colour and sound (Welsh Government, 2022).

These are the times when kites lift off the ground, carried by laughter and discovery.

Sometimes sugar can be too sweet if we are not careful. Rafalow (2021) reminds us that when technology is woven into lessons without reflection, it risks widening divides. Some children's kites soar, while others remain grounded. Access isn't equal either not every nursery has the same resources, and staff need continuing

professional development to feel confident (Welsh Government, 2018).

Without balance, the sparkle fades, and the kite that once promised to soar risks drifting back to the ground.



(Copilot, 2025)

Well, after 25 years in nursery classrooms I've stepped in time with chalkboards, whiteboards, tablets, and apps. Each beat has brought new magic, and I've grown alongside the children, learning every step of the way.

The future? Well, it feels a little

'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious' (From the film Mary Poppins, 1964). Digital tools are not just today's spoonful of sugar they're tomorrow's kites, ready to lift confidence and curiosity higher. Learning has always been the key, for me and for the children, unlocking joy and discovery with every tug of the string.

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Monsters at Play



(Monster Phonics, 2025)

Adventures for 21st-Century Learners

Welcome to the Monster Party! Monster Phonics is more than colourful characters it is a synthetic phonics software created by Monster Phonics Ltd. (Monster Phonics Ltd., 2025). Validated by the Department for Education, the programme is designed for nursery learners aged 2 to 4 years old (Department for Education, 2025).

However, it is a monster of investment, with a full school bundle costing between £649 and £899 per year (Monster Phonics Ltd., 2025). Therefore, not every setting may be able to afford access to Monster Phonics.

Nursery settings don't have to be dull, in fact, in my classroom it's a full-on monster party! With **the Monster Phonics Nursery Programme** (Monster Phonics, 2025) has created bright, friendly characters who turn sounds into songs, colours and giggles.

Children aged 2 to 4 meet monsters like 'Angry Red A' and 'Green Froggy', who help them learn their first sounds and words. Parents join in too, with eBooks and activities at home, so phonics becomes a family adventure.

Meet the Monsters



(Monster Phonics, 2025)

Monsters In Action

Monster Phonics introduces their programme through an official video:

Watch it here - 🐜

<https://vimeo.com/526694094?fl=pl&fe=sh> (Monster Phonics, 2021).

But the magic doesn't stop with characters, it's how they are used in practice that makes the difference.

The Monster Phonics Nursery Programme



(AI-generated image, 2025).

Validated and Trusted

The Monster Phonics Nursery Programme (Monster Phonics, 2025) is a Department for Education validated synthetic phonics scheme created by Monster Phonics (Department for Education, 2025).

How it Works

Aimed at nursery learners aged 2 to 4, it makes phonics accessible, multisensory and fun. Each sound is colour

coded and linked to a friendly monster character, helping children hear and remember phonemes.

Support for Everyone

Teachers are supported with lesson plans and assessments, parents join in with eBooks and home activities, and staff benefit from Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training through the Monster Phonics Training Hub (Monster Phonics, 2025).

But not every family has the same access to costly resources, so programmes like Monster Phonics need to stay flexible enough to include every child, whatever their circumstances. Research shows that digital access isn't equal (Cranmer, 2020), and the Department for Education (2025) reminds us that validated phonics programmes must be systematic and accessible to all learners.

Every Child, Every Story

- **Some of children in my setting have autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**, the Monster Phonics can help them regulate because the colours and rhythms give them something steady to focus on. This is important as Porayska-Pomsta et al. (2018, p.35) highlight in their research on how digital tools can

support autistic learners. In practice, I see children relax into the rhythm, finding comfort in the predictability of colour and sound.

- **For some children English is their additional language** (EAL) and the monsters help them connect familiar sounds with new ones in playful, colourful ways. For instance, a child who speaks Polish within their family home ‘lights up’ when ‘Green Froggy’ helps them connect the F sound across both languages (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).
- **Families come from different socio-economic backgrounds**, reminding me that access to digital tools is not always equal (Cranmer, 2020). Some children practise phonics at home with apps and eBooks, while others rely entirely on the classroom so programmes like Monster Phonics must stay flexible and joyful enough to include every child.
- **This reflects the Curriculum for Wales**, which emphasises inclusive, playful approaches to early language learning (Welsh Government, 2021).
- **Together**, these diverse needs show why phonics programmes must be flexible, inclusive and joyful giving every child a way into language through sound, story, and play.

🎵 🎵 The Classroom as a Soundtrack 🎵 🎵



(Monster Phonics, 2025).

In our monster filled classroom, the phonics follow the same routine, so it plays like a favourite playlist. For children who have ASD, the repetition of songs, the steady beat of activities and the colour coded monsters create a track they know off by heart. This creates an environment all the children can join in with without missing a beat.

Together, the monsters turn our classroom into a festival of sound, a place where every child finds their rhythm.

Monsters Meet Theory

Learning with monsters is not just fun it is connected to ideas about how children learn. Vygotsky (n.d., cited in Bates, 2023), reminds us that children grow when they have support around them. In my classroom, the

monsters guide children until suddenly they are smiling and showing, 'Look, I can do it on my own'.

According to Aubrey and Riley (2022), inclusive practice means adapting theory to diverse learners something the monsters naturally support through colour, character, and play.

Monster Magic

The real magic of Monster Phonics is how it turns routine into joy.

- Songs, colours, and characters make phonics memorable, helping children connect sounds with play (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).
- This joy reflects the Curriculum for Wales, which emphasises inclusive, playful approaches to early language learning (Welsh Government, 2021).
- The use of colour and character supports diverse learners, especially EAL children, by giving them concrete hooks to hold onto (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).
- For children with ASD, the rhythm and repetition create a steady soundtrack that makes learning feel safe and predictable.

- The Department for Education (2025) highlights the importance of choosing programmes that engage children and support progression, and Monster Phonics does this by making phonics feel like a party rather than a chore.

Monster Mischief

Even monsters bring a little mischief into the classroom.

- Some children get so caught up in the colourful characters that they forget the sounds behind them. It takes careful teaching to keep the balance between fun and focus.
- Digital access isn't equal and its costly, so not all settings have it, and some children practise phonics at home with apps and eBooks, while others rely entirely on the classroom. That's why flexibility matters (Cranmer, 2020).

Monsters Make Learning Shine

Monster Phonics brings colour, rhythm, and laughter into our nursery. The monsters turn phonics into play, story and song - I love watching children light up as they

join the party. Yes, there's a little mischief with costs and access, but the joy far outweighs it!

For me, the real magic is simple, every child gets an invitation, and together we make phonics unforgettable.

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