Supporting children's learning in the early years
ICT and learning

Rosemary Hill
Doctor Linda Miller looks at how ICT is being used in a Primary 1 class in Northern Ireland.

Linda Miller
You'll hear Sinead Donnelly, a Primary 1 teacher, in New Row School Northern Ireland, talking about she, and her teaching assistant Anne, plan for and use ICT resources across the curriculum. Sinead talks about her Primary 1 classroom, and describes how she tries to make the best use of the ICT resources available.

Sinead Donnelly
Well the Primary 1 classroom as you can see is relatively cramped for space, and we try to make the most of the area that we have. At present in the classroom we have one computer, for the entire class of twenty five children, which provides limited access, because we, two children we find can work at it at any one time. We compensate for that, by ensuring that the computer's available all morning to support all areas of the curriculum. We have a TV and video. We have two radio cassettes, one with a CD. We have access to a wonderful digital camera, and we have access to the roamer at all times.

Linda Miller
Sinead explains how ICT can be used to support a developmentally appropriate curriculum, and also how it can be used across all areas, to support the children's learning and play.

Sinead Donnelly
ICT is an extremely useful resource in the developmentally appropriate curriculum, that can be highly motivating, there's a high enjoyment factor. It can be self-correcting, so the children can use it independently, developing their autonomy, and it's non-threatening, and it encourages active participation. The children can explore freely during play. They have talking books, rhymes, and listening to and playing books. They develop basic computer skills using the mouse and the keyboard. The content-specific programmes provide levels for progression within that, and it allows the children to work collaboratively within their peer group, and this, we find, can provide a comfortable learning support to the less able children, and it also develops their social skills, and encouraging and direction, so it impacts on their personal social and emotional development. So ICT, we find it extremely cross curricula, and it's extremely versatile, and I find that it lends itself to literacy numeracy, particularly in the early years, and instructive play to consolidate the concepts that are introduced to the children in the main lessons.

Linda Miller
Sinead goes on to describe some of the ICT resources she finds most useful.

Sinead Donnelly
The radio cassettes and CD are widely used during literacy and music, as well as structured play. The children can use it to listen to stories and rhymes, and I also use the cassette, as a reinforcement to make games for children to develop number skills. The roamer which we use is a multi-functional character in our room. It can be Little Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks, can be the number-cruncher, or the shape finder, but it's used in all contexts, in all areas and, especially during structured play when they love to reinforce things. The digital camera is widely used to record children's work and to provide stimulus for large collaborative books, in literacy and numeracy, where we use the photographs that the children have taken on a walk, or when we've been making soda bread for the giant, or when we've been making pancakes,

or porridge as we did one day, for the class, and the master stole the porridge. We made a book recording the children's experiences.

Linda Miller
She describes how she and Anne, plan for, and monitor the children's learning and play.

Sinead Donnelly
As a result of the ICT training that we have just concluded, we, as a school have identified a need, and are currently developing strategies to monitor the children's experiences and learning. But together Anne and I, while the children are working on the computer, we observe the children, we listen to them, we question them, to ascertain if the children are competent in the use of the programme, to decide if intervention is required, and if so what type. The planning Anne and I work on together, it's based around the themes that we are using at that time, and we try and get programmes that are appropriate, to support and consolidate the activities, and the children's general individual development.

Linda Miller
Sinead finds the digital camera a particularly valuable resource.

Sinead Donnelly
In using the digital camera, the children have used it specifically for motivational resources, but we use it in the world around us. We've been to the woods, and we've taken photographs of the children playing in the woods in autumn, and we revisited in winter, and we're now revisiting in spring, and we have used the photographs to make a collaborative information book about the seasons.

Linda Miller
She expresses some concerns about the use of ICT with young children. She also notes the need for parents to understand, how and why ICT is used in the classroom.

Sinead Donnelly
My only concerns lie in the lack of good software, for the early year's packages, but with the enriched curriculum, and the need for the individual learning, and the autonomy of the children, there's not enough software that's going to support that. The parents, I feel need to be informed about the types of learning that takes place, that they realise that the computer is not used just to play games, that it's used as a support for learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Linda Miller
It is likely that Sinead's Primary 1 classroom is quite rich in ICT resources, compared with many early years' settings. Nevertheless, you may share some of her aspirations and concerns. We hope that this audio band has encouraged you to think about, and consider the possibilities for ICT in your own setting.