

Mary Niven's Development Work
**Using ICT to support the development
of literacy**
at Beechfield School, Watford

Mary trained to be a teacher in Scotland. After a year teaching in Dundee she moved to her current school, a primary school in Hertfordshire, which caters mostly for students with English as an Additional Language. Many students also have speech and language difficulties. The development of students' literacy therefore is a priority for the school. ICT¹ is developing fast in Mary's school and teachers and students enjoy using a recently-developed ICT suite and the Smartboards that have been installed in every classroom. Mary wanted to develop the use of ICT to support students in developing their skills and abilities in speaking and listening.

Mary discussed her initial thoughts with colleagues in her school and they all agreed that the project would be very worthwhile. She was particularly interested in the 'C' of ICT and so investigated the literature to learn more about how ICT could support improvements in literacy and communication (Rudd and Tylesley, 2006). Mary learned that there is a growing body of evidence which points to the positive impact of ICT on the learning of students with special educational needs (Condoe and Munroe, 2007). She therefore began to plan the detail of her development work. She decided to focus on nine children in her Year 5 class who either had specific speech and language difficulties or who were reluctant to get involved in discussion. The activities she planned would be undertaken by her whole class but would address the specific needs of her target group.

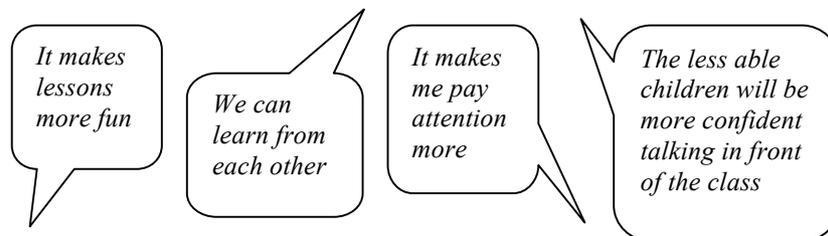
The first step for Mary was to amend her Literacy Unit plans to include the use of ICT. She began with a unit which focused on developing children's understanding and use of instructional texts through recipes. The children evaluated a range of recipes in terms of their organisation, layout and clarity. They wrote their own instructional text, a recipe for chocolate truffles, which they then made. The children were asked to comment on what they were doing as they made their truffles, as if they were taking part in a TV

¹ ICT – Information and Communication Technology

cook show. They filmed themselves using Digital Blue video cameras. A Digital Blue camera is a hand-held video recorder which can be easily used by children to create movies. These can then be edited and downloaded for viewing on a laptop or Smartboard.

The children edited their cookery programmes and watched the playback with interest. They were asked not only to watch but also to make evaluative comments on how well they and their classmates had used instructional language in their 'cookery programme'. Most children found this a very useful and enjoyable experience although some children in Mary's focus group appeared to be shy and even embarrassed and did not appear to enjoy watching themselves. Mary decided that it might be more beneficial for the children to work in smaller groups for this type of activity in future. This would perhaps give the children with speech and language difficulties the confidence to want to feed back more readily on what they are seeing and feeling. Mary put this into practice when children moved onto their next ICT and language-based activity, this time creating an explanatory text. The children had to make powerpoint slides on the Smartboard to explain how to create such a text. They then filmed themselves making this presentation. Again, they watched the film and discussed what they had learned.

Mary wanted to know how the children felt about the impact of her experiment in using ICT on the development of their literacy. In order to gain their views she set up a debate in which the children had to try to persuade her to let them use ICT more frequently in literacy lessons. The children offered numerous reasons, for example:



Mary found that the project had numerous benefits. On a personal level, she became more confident in using ICT software and hardware to support her curriculum aims. Students also became more confident in speaking in front of their peers and in evaluating one another's work. They also became more independent, knowing

when to use different technologies in an appropriate way to support their own learning. Other teachers were inspired by both Mary's formal presentation of what she had achieved through her project at a staff meeting and also by seeing Mary at work with students. Both teachers and teaching assistants became more confident in using ICT themselves following a session in which Mary demonstrated how to use the Digital Blue camera.

At the conclusion of her project Mary was excited by what she discovered about the way in which using ICT can provide those children with speech and language difficulties with a creative way of expressing themselves. She looked forward to working with her colleagues to help them develop their understanding and practice still further.

References

Condie, R. & Munro, B. (2007) *The impact of ICT in school – a landscape review*. Coventry: BECTA.

Rudd, A. & Tylesley, A. (2006) *Literacy and ICT in the Primary School*. London: David Fulton.