Worldwide learning

Global collaborations take the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science to a new dimension.

Charles Clarke recently spoke out in support of global collaborations in the classroom as he feels internationalism and partnerships between schools in different countries would enable UK pupils to learn more about a variety of cultures and boost standards in the classroom. Equipping children for life, the intention is that the skills gained from these school-level liaisons will go on to foster a climate for international partnerships in business after school. It also adds an entirely new dimension to teaching and learning across the whole curriculum, but particularly in the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and science.

For some years now we have appreciated the exciting learning opportunities that collaborative learning with children in other parts of the world can bring, but until recently it has been very difficult to make these partnerships work in practice. But now ICT has, once again, come up trumps, providing education establishments with affordable and intuitive tools with which they can establish and maintain these links. As the Global Gateway website points out, the global dimension applies right across the curriculum, but the use of ICT can be instrumental in supporting this. The time has come to fully embrace links between schools on an international basis.

Teachers may be aware of the *Global Gateway* website (*www.globalgateway.org.uk*) launched in February 2004. This site was developed for the Department for Education and Skills by the British Council. Charles Clarke personally invited education ministers across the globe to partner with other schools through the website. Encouragingly, a number of countries including Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Latvia have already been eager to get on board. Websites such as the Global Gateway undoubtedly offer useful assistance in developing international links, but it is not until you actually go through the process of implementing a collaboration project that you really learn what works, and what doesn't.

Gateshead City Learning Centre (CLC) has just completed an exciting pilot project run by the Australian Children's Television Foundation (the ACTF) in which we have been collaborating with schools in New Zealand and Australia through a revolutionary software package, developed by the ACTF, called *Kahootz*.

Collaboration between schools, businesses and the wider community is at the heart of everything a model CLC does, so we were very keen to become involved in a project that would push the boundaries of collaboration to another level and impact on learning in the areas of literacy, numeracy and science.

Teaching literacy, numeracy and science on a global scale

Kahootz is a cross-curricular CD-ROM for children aged seven to fifteen that gives pupils access to virtual 3-D worlds where they can write stories, develop ideas, build animation sequences or develop games and puzzles.

It is an ideal tool to have for collaboration projects: after completing activities and building upon new or existing environments using the Kahootz CD-ROM, pupils can save their projects as special Kahootz files called *Xpressions*, which are usually no larger in size than 40K. This reduced file size means that they can share and collaborate their work quickly and easily through the Kahootz online community, where new projects are regularly uploaded.

It is this type of development in ICT that has made global collaborations so attainable for schools. Because the library of 3-D worlds, objects and sounds resides on

each Kahootz user's own PC, very little data is actually transferred when two classes exchange content over the Internet. This ensures that collaboration and exchange are the main focus, not technical constraints. Just a few years ago, this type of technology would have been out of reach for those in the education sector, but it now well and truly affordable.

The pilot project involved a collaboration between Corpus Christi Primary School (Gateshead, UK), Marina View Primary School (Auckland, New Zealand) and Mount Waverley North Primary School (Melbourne, Australia). The three schools worked together over a two-week period, with some fabulous outcomes.

Predominantly Key Stage Two, the three classes of about 25 children undertook the following activities, which had a profound impact on their learning in literacy and numeracy learning:

Literacy

In another project, colourful laminated sheets of Kahootz characters were handed out to children at the beginning of the lesson and they were asked to make up stories involving the characters. Having composed the stories, the children, working in mixed ability groups, brought them to life by animating them in Kahootz.

The global collaboration came into play when the pupils shared their stories with fellow pupils in New Zealand and Australia via the Kahootz online community. Literacy skills were also incorporated into the Local Environments work where children in all three countries designed Kahootz worlds that typified the areas in which they lived and went to school. The children were then asked to provide accompanying annotation to offer others an insight into their worlds. Children at Corpus Christi Primary School in Gateshead, for example, designed worlds featuring Newcastle Airport, the Angel of the North landmark and even Newcastle United's football stadium! These worlds were then posted on the Kahootz community as Xpression files, giving pupils on the other side of the world the chance to interact with and discuss the projects.

Numeracy

With literacy skills under their belt the class can go on to address numeracy in a number of ways. In another successful Kahootz project that took place here, children's traditional numeracy learning was turned on its head when they used Kahootz to create mathematical treasure hunts. Answers to mathematical problems were hidden within the virtual environments. Having solved the mathematical task presented to them, pupils then had to 'walk through' the virtual 3-D environment to uncover the hidden answer. The benefits of being encouraged to create their own mathematical puzzles are obvious, but the searching for the answers element of the task also involved some profound mathematical learning. For example, when hiding the answers within their projects, pupils learnt some valuable lessons on rotating 3-D objects by varying degrees, and whilst searching for the hidden answers, students were developing their orientation skills. This would be equally successful used in the context of a global collaboration.

Science

Hard at work on their exciting literacy and numeracy projects, the science activities have yet to commence. The Australian Children Television Foundation have suggested the pupils undertake a Key Stage Two project entitled 'Creating a 3-D Habitat', which will address the 'Life processes and living things' programme of study, requiring children to research a specific habitat and then create it as a virtual environment in Kahootz. Pupils would then take their Australian and New Zealand counterparts on a virtual tour of the 3-D habitat they have created, whilst entire classes will be able to download habitats, add to them or deconstruct how they were made.

Outcomes

The outcome of this project has exceeded all of our expectations. The software has undoubtedly added an extra level of creativity to the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and science. But the great thing about this project is that each student has been provided with a global audience for their work. The motivation this has resulted in has surprised all of us, and the shared stories, incidental learning and knowledge transfer that has occurred when the pupils engage and challenge each other has been an absolute joy to watch. They have been encouraged to be creative and active learners rather than passive consumers of information.

Opening the eyes and minds of teachers and children alike, ICT has once again come up trumps. The benefits of this three-way global collaboration pilot project has included enhanced learning of literacy and numeracy through story telling activities and the exploration of orientation and giving instructions. As I've seen at Gateshead CLC, this has been coupled with the unique benefits of sharing information and ideas across the globe, developing an awareness and understanding of internationalism and other children's cultures. Spearheading the campaign for global collaborations to become a regular experience for pupils in the UK, it is forward thinking projects like these that will contribute to the shared goal of equipping children for life.

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