

FE.11 Collaboration Between Schools and College: Learning From The Content Workshop Roadshow

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Description of The Content Workshop

The Content Workshop is a Test Bed facility located at Barking College. It comprises of a room housing high-end equipment and a team of graphic designers/developers aiming to support the embedding of ICT in the curriculum of Test Bed Schools. This is being achieved by close collaboration with teachers on projects developing content specific to their needs. Types of content produced to date have included digital graphics, illustrations, animations, interactive computer based activities and video.

Aims of the Road Show

From September 2004 The Content Workshop has been conducting a 'Road Show', visiting the Barking and Dagenham Test Bed schools. The aim of the visits was to develop awareness of the Content Workshop, demonstrate the capabilities of the facility and team showing previous work, build relationship with school staff, generate ideas for the use of the Content Workshop within each year group/curriculum area, and birth project proposals.

The team saw the Road Shows as a chance to kick-start the use of the Content Workshop, beginning a process of collaboration that would be of key significance in achieving the aims of the ICT Test Bed. Bringing together the expertise of teachers and developers, the Content Workshop would increase the intensity of focus on ICT materials, by designing them to meet specifications defined by the teachers, with specific applications in mind, for their class, in their school. The Road Shows would begin a process that would enable teachers to be involved in whole projects, from conception to realisation.

The format of the visits was generally a half hour presentation on the Content Workshop by 2/3 of its staff, demonstrating materials, followed by a 25-minute break out session, and finishing with a 5 minute plenary. In the break out sessions, school staff and Content Workshop staff joined into smaller, year group/curriculum area focus groups, with the aim of generating project proposals.

Participants

To date, seven of the nine Barking and Dagenham Test Bed schools have been visited, including Ripple Junior, Ripple Infants, Eastbury Secondary, Manor Infants, Manor Junior, Furze Infants, and Warren Junior.

In the infants and junior schools most of the teaching staff and some of the Heads attended the visits. At Eastbury Secondary the visit was attended by representatives from each curriculum area.

Outcomes

So far the Road Show has been a great success, and all aims are being achieved. 11 projects have been completed as a result, and many more are currently in progress. These cover the areas of numeracy, literacy, geography, science, and modern foreign languages, and include such materials as simple drag and drop activities, interactive maps with images of the local area, digital illustrations enhancing stories, and web tutorials to aid parents in supporting their children's learning at home.

Observations

I observed that many staff were not confident in bringing forward ideas of their own. Staff seemed more prepared to offer ideas in smaller groups when specific applications were being discussed. One of the ideas generated at Manor Infants was a set of interactive pictures taken from a historical site that they frequently visit. This idea came in the break out session when one of the Content Workshop staff used the example of an interactive map that was demonstrated in the presentation to begin discussions on how a similar model could be used in their teaching of history.

Also evident was the need to increase awareness of how ICT can be applied within lessons, and to spread the understanding that rather than just being for people with the know-how or time, ICT can be a facilitator for all. As an example, one development originating from the Ripple Junior Road Show was the use of templates for interactive quizzes where the teacher could edit a simple text file to change the questions and answers. This resulted in a time saving for the teacher, and more of these projects have been developed as a result.

Emerging from discussions was the importance in considering value added by ICT materials compared to time put in. The following question seems pertinent when embarking on any project: "Does this material involve ICT because ICT is there to be used, or is it taking advantage of ICT to enhance teaching and learning?"

As the Content Workshop were engaged in discussions with teaching staff it seemed that a gap was highlighted whereby teachers can lack technical understanding and developers can lack pedagogical understanding. The following section of this report outlines ideas for addressing some of the issues described above.

Ideas for Further Action: Addressing The Gap

To begin addressing the possible gap between developers and teachers I have proposed the idea that the Content Workshop team visit schools to observe lessons. This will enable the team to see how ICT is used (or not used) in the delivery of the curriculum, and benefit from watching teacher and student reactions to, and interactions with, ICT materials. In-turn the teachers can gain insight from Content Workshop staff into how lessons can be further enhanced with ICT.

The continued sharing of good practice across schools is of vital importance. With this in mind I propose that a staff member from one of the Test Bed Schools who has been engaged with successful projects be present in future Content Workshop Road Shows. This approach should help to reduce the 'them and us' mentality that can exist between teachers and developers.

The Road Show has been an example of what can be achieved by merging pedagogical and technical understandings, and by combining the life and enthusiasm of professionals in two complementary fields through collaboration. I hope that this will set precedent for more of such work in the future.