

P.24 Using Digital Video to help the transition from infant to junior school

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Context

I work in Furze Infants School in Barking and Dagenham, we have a four form intake and each year group has over 100 children. At the end of Year 2 most children continue their education at the junior school which is located on a separate site. The transition to Year 3 is unsettling for the children and many Year 2s are concerned about the change. To help alleviate fears the whole year group visit Warren Juniors at the end of the summer term for a morning where they are introduced to the school and have a chance to meet their new teachers.

Part of my role at Furze has been to provide space in the school day to allow higher attaining children more freedom to experiment with literacy and new technology in small groups out of class. Last year I thought it would be interesting to use some of my group sessions to enable the Year 2 children to make a video about themselves which could be played on their visit to Warren. The idea was to give the children a voice in a situation where they are usually passive recipients of information. I hoped the project would not only reduce any anxieties the children had about the transition, but would also allow the groups to engage with video technology in a purposeful and motivating way.

Change in Practice

I worked with forty children – ten from each class at a time, each group participating in four sessions that ran over three weeks. Although not all children from the year group were involved in making the film, I encouraged filming to take place in class and during break times so that as many children as possible could be represented. Digital video had not been used previously with any of the children in school, although some had limited experience from home. We used four 'Digital Blue' cameras and software – a simple, child-friendly package that allowed the children to carry out both the filming and editing by themselves. The first session was set aside to simply enable the groups to play with the technology and understand what would be possible with the equipment. This relatively unstructured time was invaluable, fun and memorable; several children said it was the most entertaining part of the project. The groups loved having the chance to create footage that mimicked television programs they watched, one child was particularly adept at taking on a reporter's role, creating an off the cuff documentary about our new playground. It was noticeable just how much the children enjoyed being able to use existing knowledge about film to create their own footage and several children when questioned at the end agreed it was the most memorable part of the project.

The following three sessions allowed us to plan, film and edit snippets of film that could then be compiled to make one video. Before any filming took place, we planned the ideas, assigned roles and thought about what the other groups had already completed. All planning was carried out electronically on our class screen using Easiteach software which simply acted a notebook – this enabled everyone to collaborate more easily; not only within each group but between groups as well because it was simple to access everyone's planning. The fact we were working with video clips also enabled close cooperation between groups; it was easy to view and understand what each class had created so far and to then plan complementary footage.

The final film was compiled by pairs of children working on a rota system – this part of the project was slightly rushed so many of the children only saw the finished version for the first time when it was shown at the junior school. The film was set up to run at the very beginning of the visit to Warren Juniors – a kind of 'hello' from the children to their new teachers. Year 2 all seemed to enjoy watching and there was a definite 'buzz' that we'd done something new. After the visit I overheard lots of conversations about which bits of the film were the best and the children involved in its creation seemed genuinely proud of their achievement – one girl stated that she had been worried in the middle of the project that it would look a bit of a mess, but that the final film had been really good.

Implications

The aim of the project had been to allay the fears and anxieties of the children in Year 2. It is difficult to assess whether this was achieved or not, but what did become clear by the end of the term was that the group had been empowered in a new way. The children seemed to have increased self esteem and appreciation of themselves as a group. When children from one class saw another class behaving well on film, one child was genuinely shocked and exclaimed 'I didn't know star base [class name] could be so good'. I felt the film had helped to create a year group identity. It was noticeable how impressed the children were with each other - I had been worried about the section of the film that showed the individual interests and achievements of a few children, but in reality that segment held the audience's attention extremely well. The individual children filmed had been showing what they did out of school time, football, ballet, karate clubs and so on, this particular section of the film generated a great deal of conversation afterwards such as 'Did you see Jamal, I do karate there with him... yeah, I do that, those kicks'. It was almost as if it didn't matter who was showing the activity, what was important was that the club had been represented by someone and that something that happened outside of school appeared in the film.

The film also enabled the head teacher of the junior school to pick up on things the children had said and tailor his introduction to directly respond to the video, which made the visit more of a personal, two way meeting. Possibly the most exciting end result of this project is that it has sparked off plans to develop an ongoing dialogue between the children in the two schools and this year the children and teachers in Year 3 intend to create a video for the Year 2s to watch before their visit to the school. The head teacher at the junior school was extremely enthusiastic about the film – he felt that nothing like it had been done before and the technology had allowed for a new kind of communication between the two schools to take place.

The project is to continue this year, bearing in mind the following ideas:

- The role of the audience was vital for the project - not just in terms of motivation for creating an end product. I had not anticipated how useful it would be to watch the developing film at all stages and how much the children would learn from evaluating their own and others progress throughout the project. This year I intend to allow for more time for the groups to watch and comment on the filming as it happens – children need the chance to peer review work and discuss achievements/ improvements. It will also be helpful to look at what was produced last year and to evaluate what worked well.
- Last year the project was an 'add-on' to the school curriculum, this year we plan to incorporate it into whole class lessons, with children working with their class teacher to create the majority of footage and for the sessions to meet National Curriculum objectives in weekly planning.
- If the computers being used are not networked, it is essential to have a log book noting the footage that is contained on each (named/numbered) laptop so that children always return to the same machine to continue with unfinished work.
- Filming does not have to be directly relevant/ applicable to as many children as I expected. Children were extremely interested in what others had to show, although there was an issue last year with children that were not involved in any way at all. The experience of different classes highlights the need to involve all children from the year group in some capacity – in the class where only the children directly involved were captured on film, the class teacher raised the fact the other children were very jealous. This was less of an issue in classes where the cameras went into the whole class lessons.
- Finally, if using Digital Blue cameras, it is worth remembering to clear any footage off them at the end of each session – even when they're turned off, the memory uses battery energy if anything is being stored!