

P. 48 Using the Digital Camera to Improve School / Home Links

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Furze Infants

Characteristics of the School

In September 2004 I was an NQT based in year 2 at a 4 form Infant School in Barking and Dagenham. When I began teaching, I noticed the inhibitions that the parents seemed to have in approaching me. I thought that it would be a good idea to work in collaboration with them on a chosen project to reduce these boundaries.

Background

When parents did approach me, I felt that the parent teacher hierarchy was apparent and that this hindered the potential links between school and home. Often parents would come into the classroom and say that they didn't understand how to help their child with their weekly Maths or English homework, claiming that "I thought I was quite good at maths when I was at school, but..." I believed that these opinions could result in the parent feeling foolish and inadequate as a learner, consequently they might be less likely to approach me for help as a teacher.

I wanted to do something which would enhance the parent- teacher relationship. I came up with the idea of sending the digital camera home with my NQT mentor, Lynn Roberts. We hoped that this project would encourage better links between parents and the school through a non-threatening, enjoyable activity, which reduced the risk of 'getting it wrong'. I had hoped that the task would be student and parent centred enough to allow a certain freedom of expression and erase this fear.

Furthermore, I hoped that the initiative behind the digital camera project would encourage independent creative learning from the children, resulting in powerful ideas. I was also keen to encourage the children to manage and experience their own creativity. The children and parents were verbally given the brief that the children were to take photos of things that made them happy at home. The camera would be returned next day. My intention was to collect the children's work and put it in their individual folders as a collection of research. In addition to this I made notes in my NQT folder on their work.

Findings

The children's photos were to be downloaded and the pupils would select their favourite photographs. These photographs would be put together in a very simple montage using photo-shop, a computer programme that the children were not familiar with. The children were taken by Lynn in small groups of 4 or 5 and they would discuss their photos, describing what they had taken photos of and why they had chosen to take photos of those things. After that a brief demonstration was given on how to make a photomerge on the computer. The children were given no instructions on how to arrange their photos. The children only had one or two sessions to create their photomerges, thereby keeping the experience fresh in their minds.

Once they were happy with their photo merges two sets of work were printed out, one was taken home and the other was displayed in the class room. Often when a child's work was displayed in the classroom they would ask their parents to come and see their work. This meant that parents were invited into the school to see a good piece of work that their child had produced. This, in my opinion, broke down some of the barriers between parents and school.

Whilst the actual work created provided an insight into the children's home lives, the way in which they decided to display their photos also provided some insight into the type of learners that they were. Some children were very careful about selecting their favourite picture to go in the middle of the photo merge, displaying clear evidence of independent voice and opinion. One child explained to me that he had put the picture of his snake in the middle because that was his very best thing but that he found it hard to say how much he liked the other things, like his toys so he positioned them around the edge. Whilst others were careful to arrange the pictures in a patterned format, displaying clear evidence of audience awareness. Another child explained to me that he moved the pictures so that you "couldn't see any white", he had attempted to cover the whole page and make something interesting to look at.

Conclusions on the success of this project had to be drawn from parental and child feedback and from the outcome. Through parental feedback that I received I feel that the project has gone some way in breaking down the boundaries between parents and the school. I was approached by a parent governor who thought that "taking the camera home was a really good idea." When it was her daughter's turn to take the camera home she had had to get up really early to put her football strip on so that she a photo of it.

Certainly the feedback from both the children and the parents was extremely favourable; every evening the children would ask who had the digital camera to take home. The parents felt that this was a good way to encourage their children to enjoy school and they were very vocal in expressing their opinions that this was a good project. It was also a very inclusive project where all pupils could encounter success despite their achievements in other curriculum areas or levels of literacy.

However, I feel that this evaluation could benefit from further study. I feel that the project was extremely beneficial and I will certainly try to repeat it in years to come. I wonder whether it would have been more beneficial to begin this project with a more concrete form; perhaps a meeting should be called before the next project begins to explain what the project is for. Also, I may seek further feedback and evidence in the form of a questionnaire for parents.