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Title: Reaching Out; A School Leader's Reflections On Comparative Approaches to Involving the Community in ICT Initiatives
Author: Sue Smith, Headteacher, Hunwick Primary School
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Hunwick Primary is a village school situated in the rural area of County Durham. It has 172 pupils, the majority live in the village or nearby villages. The school is very popular in the area so a few families travel from nearby towns. The school is at the heart of the village and the community centre is attached to the school building. The school works closely with the community association to try to provide as many facilities as is possible for the whole community. Pre and after school care; nursery provision, Adult learning - Art classes, Spanish classes, Aerobics, Cyber Café are examples of provision at present.

The vision is for the school to be the hub of the village providing opportunities for different members of the community. ICT can play an important role in this.

The school's involvement in the DfES Test Bed Project allowed more opportunities to involve the different groups in the community. One objective of the project was to further involve the community through ICT. The groups we hoped to involve were:-

- Nursery staff and children
- Over Sixties Group
- Community Association
- Teenagers
- Local football/cricket teams
- Local pubs
- Parents and friends of the school
- Local businesses
- Villagers interested in the history of the village

Different Initiatives to Involve the Community

Private Nursery – computers: To ensure the children who attended the private nursery were not disadvantaged by having little or no access to computers. We gave the nursery two laptops to use in the nursery and two PC's. These were greeted enthusiastically and children use them daily. This means the children are used to the laptops and computers when they come into school. The supervisor in the nursery also has access to the laptop for her own use and her skills have improved.

Development of Cyber Café in Community Room – providing a village facility to be used by all. To improve the digital skills of villagers.

The room was refurbished with some computer tables, computer chairs, couches and a coffee table. Access to the Internet was through a fibre optic cable to the school's server, therefore the school filtering system was in use. A printer was also available.

This room could be used by the school or the community and we hoped that it would be well used to introduce people to using the Internet and to carry out ICT training for the community.

1. Cyber Café Opening - to provide free access to the internet for the community.

This was open to villagers one night a week from 4: 30 – 7pm. We hoped to attract people who did not have access to the Internet and teenagers who had no other activities in the village.

To ensure that it wasn't taken up by Primary school children we set an age limit. Primary school children had to be accompanied by an adult. One member of the Community Association was there to supervise and sell soft drinks etc. We provided a technician to ensure the equipment was working well and was not abused. He also ensured the equipment was returned to the school premises. He was paid for this service. A sixth form student volunteered to take names, timings, and make sure everyone had their turn on the computers. Rules were displayed around the room.

Take up was slow at first but after the first two weeks we built up to about 20 young people coming on a regular basis to play games together, talk and enjoy the relaxed atmosphere. During the Autumn and Winter this continued to work well. During the summer term numbers fell so we closed it until the autumn term. This continues to be a success but we do have some problems staffing the room. Technicians left and so we tried without. This worked quite well as a couple of parents took over responsibility. If a laptop didn't work it was left and another one accessed. The difficulty is always getting help on a regular basis and the danger is that the HT becomes the one to cover in the absence of anyone else. A keen parent and teenager are the most reliable.

The teenagers have gained. They have somewhere to go one night a week where they are supervised and allowed to use the laptops to play games or access information for school work.

The teenagers are the main visitors to the cyber café and use it well. Adults have rarely accessed it in this way.

2. Basic Training for Adults of Computer Skills: A 10 week course.- aimed at non computer users who wanted to get started, particularly the older members of the community.

This was advertised through schoolchildren's letters, the parish magazine and in the local shops and pubs.

It was led by a teacher from school linked to Adult Learning in the Community. Twelve people signed up and attended well. They were allowed to borrow the laptops if they wished and three people did this. A contract had to be signed. They each received a certificate at the end. The course was well received. The majority of the learners were over 50. This was reaching the group we wanted to.

A follow up course was advertised but only five people wanted to attend. The teacher was keen to keep it going so we ran it with those five.

3. Drop In Sessions – to provide short training sessions on common uses of the internet for old and young villagers

A questionnaire was used to find out what people wanted to learn to use. Ideas were suggested; digital camera, holidays on line, shopping using the internet. We hoped to attract the young mums and dads to develop their ICT skills. Lots of parents said they were interested so a timetable was set up. People could just drop in on a Wednesday night at 6pm to learn. The timetable was delivered round the whole village. The digital photography and photoshop course attracted eight people. The other sessions were less successful with only one or two people attending. This was obviously not what they wanted.

Some said the time was too early but we couldn't find tutors to run them later.

Others said they kept forgetting when they were on. Perhaps people needed the regular commitment of one night every week.

From this we tried to get the young mums to come during the day when their children were in nursery but they wouldn't commit themselves.

Although these sessions were not as successful as we hoped I still feel in a more socially deprived or multi cultural area the idea would appeal. 'Learn while your child learns'

Laptop and PDA's at Home – children and parents. To further involve parents in their children's learning and provide 24/7 access to ICT resources.

All Year 6 children can take laptops home at weekends to complete work and do homework. We encourage parents and younger children to use them at home too. This has worked well - parents collect and return the laptops and are fully involved. They must agree to the school's conditions of use and sign a contract. They are more interested in their children's work and are much more comfortable coming into school and talking to the staff.

All Year 5 have 24/7 access to a PDA. The children are extremely comfortable with this size of product. We wanted the children to be innovative in its use and really move the project forward. How can we use it? What will it do? How does it change their learning? Their ICT skills are such that they have done just that and are now teaching the teacher how to best use the device. It is used in the classroom when the children choose - again some innovative uses by lots of the children. Parents are interested in this device, particularly dads. Some children enjoy showing their parents what it can do and how to use it, once again involving the parents in their learning.

Development of Digital Village Project - all community groups to be involved in village project. To collate photographs, stories and other evidence of life in the village in the past and store them digitally for future generations.

A bid for funding was accepted and we received a grant to develop Hunwick Digital Village; an online resource for all which would include historical data about the village.

a) The launch

This was aimed at getting all community groups involved particularly the older villagers. A co-ordinator was the key to its success. A local man who knew the village and its families, who had recently retired and had time on his hands was appointed.

The launch was arranged and an afternoon was set aside. The co-ordinator invited villagers and the school co-ordinator ordered balloons, t shirts, a banner and refreshments. A video was made involving various villagers. We wanted to whet their appetite and get them involved. About 40 people came and were prepared to give their telephone numbers and be involved further. This was important for the co-ordinator; now he had a core of people to get things moving. He worked with them to collate the history of the village and when it began to stall we had a Digital Village Weekend. Staff and children were also involved. We invited business people to advertise free on the site and sports groups to come with photographs and stories to add to the web. An expert from Teesside University, who was developing the web site, worked with us and produced various pieces from the weekend. This was a successful way of involving people who normally work during the week. It was however a commitment from school staff to give up time on the weekend. We worked it in shifts – a couple of hours

on for a few of us. The Sunday was more successful because it coincided with the school fair!

The older people were very happy to bring in their photographs and stories but were reluctant to work with the technology. We managed to get the support of some other villagers to work with them. This was more successful. They were also happy to tell their stories to children using video and tape recorders.

The co-ordinator pulled all this information together and made a show of the information available at the local pub one night. This was a tremendous success. About 50 people were present and many commented on the photos, people, events etc. so more info was added.

Involving the children (and using the local pub) always adds to the success of events.

b) Developing the Digital Village

To further develop the site we needed more funding. I applied for and received this to give more opportunities for learning and to add more information to the site.

The co-ordination between school and co-ordinator was now the job of the headteacher. (The role of co-ordinator in the school should have developed further as it is important that everything does not fall on the shoulders of the headteacher. In future the role would be clearly defined and agreed.)

Family tree courses were setup and we had 22 people interested. More digital camera sessions were also organised through Community Education in Co. Durham. These courses have been very successful and 22 new learners attended.

The project has been successful in unifying the different groups in the village and introducing many people to our digital resources. We also have an excellent resource for the future – a history of the village. The co-ordinator has also had many enquiries from people who have links with the village and often does bits of research for them e.g. finding graves of certain people, finding where families now live etc. As a school we are hoping to keep adding information to the site as time goes by, thus building up a history of the village as it happens. The school has a wonderful historical resource for history topics and future generations. The co-ordinator is also willing to keep updating the site when the funding stops.

The whole project has been very rewarding for numerous people:

- The web expert has to develop the software as we needed different things; this sometimes was a challenge for him but he can now share it with other groups.
- The co-ordinator is now very skilled in using the web site where he was previously a reluctant user of the computer.
- Some members of our community have received free training on digital resources and are much more confident in using the computer and internet.
- A group from the village are continuing to research family trees as a result of the training.
- Parents and children access the site to see changes and additions.
- Teachers use the evidence in local studies in history.

Learning from our projects

A number of emerging principles can be derived from our experience in a small relatively affluent village with a well-established community (some initiatives may be more successful in different contexts):

- Links to complementary private provision (the nursery) were appreciated and well-used
- Offering technology provision (updating ICT skills) as a focus for community involvement, although popular, had a relatively short shelf-life unless it could be associated with other interests such as photography or local history
- It may be effective to offer the school's technology and environment to established interest groups to ensure a critical mass of people with an existing common interest are reached. This may lead to enhancing the interest (e.g. local history) and ensuring a greater chance of sustainability
- The school was (understandably) most successful in reaching the parents and relatives of children through the pupils
- For practical purposes, the appointment of a community co-ordinating role (possibly in relation to the voluntary sector) will not impinge upon the management of the school
- Accessing funding and expertise from other sectors (e.g. Community and Further or Higher Education) can improve provision whilst addressing their missions; meeting the needs which trigger partners' funding also creates a dynamic towards sustainability. Facilitating Community Education
- Problems arose finding tutors for community education, but we managed eventually. Good relationships with the community education services are vital to ensure tutors are available
- The difficulty in keeping a project like this going is its expense. The expertise needed from Teesside University was key to the success as is the village co-ordinator role. Without the funding it would be impossible
- We are unsure about the continuing popularity (and therefore the sustainability) of some of the initiatives, though the historical resource (the Digital Village) will be of continuing use to some people for the foreseeable future.