



Northern Grid / BECTA Video conferencing Project

Background:

Name of school,

Firthmoor Primary School

Location,

Darlington.

Size,

Approx. 250 on roll.

Type,

Primary

Other participants,

Darlington's E-Learning Team, David Raymond.

Equipment,

PVX Software, Logitech Quick Cam, Laptops.

Context

We want to use VC as a vehicle for improving communication links between our school and others locally, nationally and internationally, to gain further understanding of other cultures. We would also like to use VC as a research resource to provide links with institutions eg. Museums and art galleries.

Technical installation and set up:

Type of equipment used.

Polycom PVX videoconferencing software.

Logitech Quick Cam 4000 / 5000 webcam with built in microphone .

Networked, Elonex Laptop.

Layout and location of video conferencing area.

We used our ICT Suite and a spare classroom, to avoid back ground noise and any interruptions.

We set up the equipment at right angles to the window, to avoid sun light on the screen and so that the webcam wasn't facing the light. We found



that two chairs in front of the screen worked well, although most of the time we had other children standing behind.

We found six children, was an ideal group size.

Problems encountered and solutions developed with the above:

One of our problems arose because all features of the PVX Software were not fully installed. The share desktop facility was not enabled. This meant that we were unable to include our video clip as an attachment when conferencing.

We also had problems communicating with our partner because our E164 number had been entered incorrectly.

Firewall problems blocked our connections, so our partner school's were removed along with ours!

We had a time delay at our end so the images and sound were not synchronised. Maybe this was because the specifications on our laptop were not high enough.

Video Conferencing Partners:

We decided in the first instance to VC with North Road Primary School, in the same town because we already had a link with this school as part of a Comenius Project. The schools have worked alongside each other on topics to share with international partners. We have e-mailed each other and joined for visits.

What you did:

Curriculum focus.

Within the first year of our Comenius Project, part of the brief was to study an English artist and share our work with the partner schools. Our Year 3 and 5 children studied and copied the style of L.S. Lowry. They drew scenes of Darlington then introduced Lowry style figures. In our VC with North Road School, our pupils gave a brief history of Lowry's life and showed examples of their work. Some other children sang, 'Matchstalk Men and Matchstalk Cats and Dogs'.

Having explored the webcam software, we had experimented with the use of avatars (which was great fun), and we chose the matchstick man as a figure to introduce part of our VC. One of our Year 5 children provided the face tracking and voice-over.



North Road school had a resident artist so their children shared details of the work they were doing with her, then the children asked each other questions.

After the VC the material was included in an interactive 'big book' which was shared with our partner schools in France, Spain, Estonia and Martinique.

Evidence of Activity:

We took photographs of the children using the equipment and we made a copy of the video clip. We also have a copy of the interactive Big Book, which we are translating into Spanish and French for our international partners.

Our Video Conferencing thus far has been limited to a link with North Road School, who we dialled direct without using the JVCS. Communications with other schools in the project have been made by telephone.

Overall conclusions from the project so far:

Staff and children enjoyed using the equipment but the initial setting up of the conferencing was frustrating and quite time consuming. Further use of the facility will require thought on classroom management.

Future developments:

Where do you see your VC activity going in the future?

We would like to use the VC facility to improve communication between our and other schools in the country. It should be a natural follow-up to letters and e-mails for the children to interact directly.

In school we already VC with a school in France as part of our MFL programme and it would be a good extension of our Comenius Project, to VC with our partners in Spain, Estonia and Martinique.