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Holiday at Howard Primary

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HOLIDAY AT HOWARD PRIMARY

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Howard Primary School and NCET

Introduction

This work was done as part of the NCET Design Collaborative Project by John Robinson and Stephanie Bower who teach at Howard Primary School in Croydon.

The case study was originally used as a newspaper article in the 'Preparing for Design and Technology in the National Curriculum' packs from the Technology Education Development Unit at the University of Salford.

Holiday at Howard Primary

Howard Primary is a group four school in the centre of Croydon. We have approximately 220 children, who are drawn from a wide range of home and ethnic backgrounds. The children we teach are third and fourth year Juniors (ie years 5 and 6 in National Curriculum terms) divided into two parallel classes.

At the start of the 1988/89 school year we decided to team-teach our two parallel classes as one large class because we felt that together we offered the children a wider range of expertise. All the work is undertaken via a cross-curricular approach. The children enjoy working in groups to complete tasks, although it took longer to convince parents that this approach is more beneficial than the old individually set tasks. We now believe very strongly that we can present all our children with the same educational opportunities, whilst at the same time catering for the wide range of abilities.

We believe that we can best fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum through cross-curricular working because children do not naturally split their thinking into subject packages and, as so many areas of knowledge are inter-related, it seems ridiculous to present children with work that is compartmentalised.

We approach all learning through a central topic. We try to base our starting point on the children's needs and experience, so that they have an understanding on which we can build. Well before the start of any new topic we decide on the concepts, skills and knowledge we feel are appropriate for our children. We then choose a topic that we believe will fulfil these needs. We spend a lot of time brainstorming ideas and deciding how we can develop our ideas to the full. We discuss our ideas with the children so that they can start thinking, collecting artefacts and talking to parents, as well as researching information from appropriate sources.

Once we start our work, groups of children are presented with tasks that involve several 'subject' areas. The task could reinforce previously learned skills or necessitate the learning of new ones. The children obviously enjoy working with others where they can freely discuss and develop ideas. We rarely dictate how we expect the children to complete the task. The important part of the children's work is the process that they go through to successfully complete the tasks.

When our children have discovered something themselves they are more confident at using it than when they are simply repeating tricks that a teacher has taught them. As much of our work as possible is of a practical nature so that the children really understand what is going on. It means that whatever the children do, they must see it as relevant and perceive its purpose, while still enjoying it!

Our children appear to be much more self-motivated to produce work of a high standard. They often want to work unhindered by even our intervention! This then frees us to work with groups of children who need to be taught new skills or helped to improve a weakness.

DATER 90

To enable us to concentrate our attention on sub-groups, the working areas are arranged so that whatever a child or group requires is readily available.

We have to trust children to move freely around the school. But, children being children, behavioural problems do happen and we rarely work in a silent atmosphere! However, the children develop more responsibility so that we have been rewarded by less problems from them. Most of them use their own initiative and, if they require an answer, they use all the resources available, including each other. Probably as teachers we still find the hardest part of working in this manner is not giving a direct answer to their questions, but redirecting them down an avenue that will bring them to a successful conclusion for themselves.

Holidays

In choosing this topic title for the Summer of 1989, we aimed to help the children, via group collaborative work, to develop a wide range of English, maths, science, design and technology, IT and geographical skills by requiring them to organise a family holiday around the world! They were expected to go through all the stages, from choosing their destinations to boarding the plane at the airport. The children were divided into threes so that they could represent a family of two adults and a child. It was decided that, to bring our work to an exciting conclusion, the children would turn the school hall into the airport so that they could simulate the real thing.

Larger groups of children were formed so that, through role play, they could represent the three key areas of the 'real' world that they felt would be necessary. One group of nine children were to represent a bank so that saving and all the skills of running a family bank account could be learnt. Another group of nine set up a class travel agents. The rest of the children represented the groups of people who would be employed in an airport. We hoped to organise for groups to visit a bank, travel agents and Gatwick Airport. It was not necessary for all the children to undertake all the trips as they could use their skills to report back to those who did not go. In fact we could not arrange a trip to the airport due to the security problems. However we did persuade a pilot to visit the school, and he spent a very informative morning explaining how a typical flight to Gibraltar would be planned. Children need to learn life skills as early as possible and, through role play, it is possible to place them in situations where they have to make important decisions. By using outside agents with specialist knowledge the children quickly learn to deal with problems thoughtfully as well as tactfully. Their powers of listening and discussing feelings and ideas maturely are sharpened. Often we see problems coming, but we rarely head them off, preferring to see how the children will cope for themselves. An example of this occurred in our class bank during the holiday project. A group of children realised that they had more money in their account than they should have had and they were faced with the dilemma of what to do. They decided to discuss the problem with the bank children. Once in the bank they were politely passed on to the bank manager who had to decide very quickly how to deal with the customers. This he did very well, although he later gave the rest of the staff a dressing down for allowing such a silly error to occur.

As we team teach it is possible for one of us to take small groups out of school while the other person teaches the rest. We visited the local branch of Barclays bank and a high street travel agent, both of whom were only too willing to take a group of children.

Early one morning nine children set off armed with cheques. The cashier closed the position and the children were taken to follow their cheques through the bank. Then, armed with all their new knowledge, the children hurried back to school to set up their own QEB (Quick Efficient Bank) in a corner of the classroom. They had to choose jobs in the bank, design a logo, make their own cheques etc so that every group in the class could open an account in the correct manner. In order that the children could learn to keep accurate records of their finances through statements, cheque stubs and paying-in slips, we paid each group an imaginary £1,000 a week. This money was later used to pay for their holiday. The bank was open at set times each day and the children soon taught themselves the social skills of being a customer or bank employee.

The children who were to set up the class travel agents (Holiday World) also used a visit to help them design the layout of their shop. They set out brochures, posters and designed a comfortable seated

DATER 90

area where prospective clients could either discuss their holiday requirements or simply peruse the brochures in search of information. They used the computer to design a booking form, company logo, headed notepaper etc. They soon became adept at guiding people to holiday brochures containing correct information.

The Holiday World logo was painted on the window along with lots of tempting offers. One of the most interesting being 'Book a Holiday with us *now* and get *free* children', a sign that definitely caused passing parents to talk about our work!

The hardest job for the children in the travel agents was to cost each family's holiday for them. This involved the use of a preset formula and a lot of maths, plus the use of a calculator to check their accuracy. The travel agents had many heated discussions because the errors made by individual groups were not in the travel agent's favour and they saw their profit margin falling.

A careful record of each customer had to be kept and travel documents, such as tickets, had to be sent. When a reminder was sent out asking for the balance to be paid no-one, except us, noticed that some resourceful travel agent employee had added the deposit on to the total. Some interesting conversations followed, plus some quick talking by the manager.

The rest of the children were set the task of developing the airport. In their threes they collaborated to design and build up one small area each. Their jobs ranged from airport cleaning, baggage handling, security and passport control, to stewards and pilots. Each group had only a small part of the whole in which to work but when everything was put together it made a very exciting climax to our project.

Every group in the airport started by deciding on the role their job involved. They then designed a uniform and a badge that would tell others what they did. The badges were designed on squared paper and then transferred onto the computer using a drawing program. They were then printed out, cut and mounted using a badge machine. A wide range of 'junk', as well as commercially produced constructional equipment, were combined to produce equipment such as a security scanner.

Where it was necessary for everyone to produce something, such as a passport, one group of children designed a work sheet or set of instructions for everyone else to follow. These activities did not prove easy as the children had to grapple with language that others could understand, and they often became frustrated when the instructions that they had written did not produce what they expected. It also became obvious that instructions that involved pictures and only a few words were easier to follow, and they developed a much clearer appreciation of real communication skills.

Many of the activities that the children were engaged in were simple, but required a lot of discussion and we could use them to monitor children's individual understanding of newly taught work. For example, when the pilot visited us there was a lot of discussion about planes and flight. From this arose a lot of science and design and technology work involving making paper aircraft. The children devised different ways of building their models and then fairly testing them. The testing involved a lot of practical maths, particularly measurement.

While the children are working it is important that we continually assess their achievements so that we can decide whether they have achieved a level of attainment and can move on to the next step, or that they have not yet grasped something and require more input or time. For example, in the National Curriculum science document, reference is made to understanding temperatures and using a thermometer (science attainment target 13, level 4). Therefore, through a problem, we could teach children the basic skills and knowledge required.

We used the starting point: 'How hot is the boiling point of water?' A lot of discussion, using different thermometers and checking for accurate temperature readings, started this work. Then, once we thought that the children could read a thermometer, we set them a problem to build on their knowledge: 'How can you keep a cup of tea hot on the plane?' A lot of science, maths and design and technology here – graphing, recording, accurate measuring, group co-operation and finding out about materials and energy.

DATER 90

Then we set the children a completely different problem to see if they could apply their newly gained skills and knowledge. If children confidently completed the task we could assess their level of understanding. The task was still to do with temperature measuring, recording and devising a fair test, but brought in further aspects of designing and making: 'The 'fridge on the plane has broken down in mid-flight. How are you going to stop the ice for the drinks from melting?'

This problem resulted in a lot of ingenious ideas, many of which worked, and it was easy for us to assess, by watching, listening and talking to the children, how well they could use a thermometer and how accurately they could read it while they were also developing other skills and knowledge.

The final element of the term's work involved the children turning the school hall into an airport terminal. This chaotic, but thoroughly enjoyable afternoon was, in the children's words, "magic, crucial, wicked and fun!" We saw long queues at the check-in desk, harassed security guards checking everyone and even the baggage handlers hurling bags about without a care in the world. The airport announcer could not be heard above the noise and the pilot was nearly murdered when he welcomed everyone aboard and we played our trump card. He happily told the passengers, who were all dressed in tee shirts and shorts, that their first stop would be the North Pole! A lively term ended on a very high note!

When we assess our children we find that our way of working makes it easier because we can sit down and discuss individual children's progress.

We are now becoming more confident in assessing our children which will no doubt help when working towards the levels of attainment in the National Curriculum. However, we are still searching for a simple way of recording these assessments that is not too time consuming.

Although we approached our work in a cross-curricular manner it is still possible to itemise the work we have done under National Curriculum headings, as shown below.

English Language

Letter writing, formal and informal. Short notes to cancel milk etc, adverts for the radio, TV (video), newspapers, descriptions, form writing and filling in, writing instructions for others to follow, conversations. Information retrieval from 'phone books, timetables and holiday brochures. Drama and role play. The children wrote, produced and acted out small sketches to inform others.

Mathematics

Telling the time, 12 and 24 hours clocks, timetables, time zones, direction, compass points, co-ordinates, converting Centigrade to Fahrenheit, money, coin value, handling money, giving change, shopping, costing large items, handling bank account, pictorial representation, measurement, distances, scale, converting miles to kilometres.

Science

Flight, temperature, using thermometer, insulation, heating and cooling, wind effects.

Design and technology

Investigating banking, travel agents, airports, flight, catering. Making a variety of 'environments'. Designing costumes for role play, passports, cheque-books, booking forms, headed notepaper, badges, plane layout, in-flight games, welcome routines, notices, logos. Talking about problems, completing a questionnaire on the whole topic.

Geography

World map, capital cities, places of world interest, map reading, continents, oceans, circumnavigation, flat map to globe, languages, currencies, area of countries and size relative to Great Britain, climatic conditions, holiday requirements, eg visa.

Music

Self composition to enhance their TV and radio adverts.

Information technology

Word processing, spreadsheets, database, drawing programmes, print styles, cassette recorders, video camera, typewriters.

Subjects such as history did not play a major role in our holidays topic. There were also aspects of every curriculum area that were less prominent. In science, knowledge to do with plants and animals was not covered; in design and technology there was little work with mechanisms. We will correct this imbalance in future topics.

We gave the children a questionnaire at the end of the topic so that we could gain feedback, which would allow us to improve the way of working for our next project. The answers from children confirm that they enjoyed everything and saw the topic as very relevant.

The interest from parents helped a great deal and we now try to involve them right from the start. As in most Primary classrooms, we still lack the range of technical equipment we would like but we feel it does not prevent, but only slows, our progress.