

# 6.

## Cross-phase links

### Schools Involved:

**Knowles Hill School, Newton Abbot  
Decoy Primary School, Newton Abbot**

### Case Study 1: THE DECOY PERSPECTIVE

**Background:** Decoy Primary, Wolborough Primary and Knowles Hill School, an 11-18 comprehensive, all in the market town of Newton Abbot, South Devon, were working together looking at how video conferencing could support transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 in the curriculum area of science. They also used the video conferencing equipment for a number of other projects, of which this was one.

**Aims:** • To enhance cross-phase liaison between a feeder primary school and a comprehensive school • Improve pupils' awareness of their future school • To give pupils an opportunity to talk to past pupils of their primary school and gain facts and information about the school they will be attending in September 2002.

### Preparation:

Several staff were involved with the initial preparation. At Knowles Hill these were Katy Bennie, head of sixth-form, Julia Elmore, teacher in charge of primary liaison and Dr Mark Moffat, science teacher. At Decoy, they were Keith Walker, teacher responsible for ICT, Len Peach, headteacher, Carol Lessware, Year 6 teacher and Tim Arnold, Media Adviser.

During these early conferences with staff, the arrangements were discussed and finalised. It was agreed that there would be, from Knowles Hill, as far as possible, students who had attended Decoy in their primary days and they would be available to answer any questions put to them by the Year 6 children from Decoy.

Questions would be written by the Decoy children and e-mailed to Knowles Hill so that the sixth-formers would have an opportunity to read the questions beforehand and have some of their answers prepared.

Decoy children were given time to write their questions. They were also given time to practise in front of the camera. It soon became clear that when the children were placed in front of the equipment they needed time to settle and get rid of any reservations they might have or over-excitement. As this session would stretch into teaching time at Decoy, cover had to be arranged for the members of staff who were involved.

## The Video Conferences

**The first conference** lasted about 30 minutes. After an initial settling-down period the children became very confident and at ease. Eight pupils were involved from Decoy and arranged in front of the camera and screen. All pupils could be clearly seen and I decided that the next time I could accommodate more children. Earlier in the week we had done some trials as to where the best position for the camera, TV and children would be. It was decided that we would need to maximise the amount of light falling on the children and decide where to place the equipment. We eventually put it on a window ledge so that the children would be looking towards the light. This was successful and we have been told that our picture was very clear.

The session went very well. All the children asked their prepared questions, which were answered confidently and informatively by the sixth-formers. As the children relaxed, spontaneous questions were asked and discussion developed. It was decided to have more sessions with a cross-phase theme and ensure that all Year 6 pupils would have the opportunity of a conference.

**Session Two** was arranged for a week later with a new set of children and questions. Again I followed the familiarisation routine and I decided to work with a larger group. I had also noticed that it was better to keep the remote control as still as possible and explain to the class that it was essential that one person could only talk at a time and within their set allocation. I also made certain that I had access to a telephone. This was very useful as there was a delay with Knowles Hill. The next session was a success and followed the same pattern.

### Learning Outcomes

The children learnt a lot about their new school and some of their fears and apprehensions were allayed.

They benefited from their conversation with the sixth-form students, their confidence growing notably as the session progressed.

### Future Development

- All Year 6 children, whether they will be attending Knowles Hill school or not, to have the opportunity to conference with children already in secondary education
- To try to organise link partners between Year 6 and Year 7.

**Carole Lessware, Decoy Primary School**

## Case Study 2: THE KNOWLES HILL PERSPECTIVE

**Background:** As a technology college, Knowles Hill School has been keen to use the latest technology for curriculum and other initiatives. The school has been video conferencing for the

last three years using a standard single camera mounted on a monitor and connected via a BT ISDN link. When offered the use of the Polycom equipment in order to look at ways in which the secondary school staff could work with local primary schools to enhance the teaching and learning of science, they jumped at the chance. This project forms a link between the existing work that was already going on and this new initiative.

Four sixth-form students took part: Becky Vickery, Sophie Matthews, Damien Harry and Louisa Jenkins. All had been through the lower school and are now doing A Level courses. Three are studying psychology by distance learning using the video link, and they all talk regularly to our Swedish link college.

**Curriculum Context:** • Post 16 Communication Key Skills, level 3, especially the discussion element, preparing and participating in a discussion, responding to questions and writing an evaluation • citizenship, in looking at the wider community and helping younger children learn about the world around them, in this case how a secondary school works.

**Aims:** • To develop communication skills • To enable staff and pupils to experience a three-way link via a bridge • To develop further the existing links between Knowles Hill and two local primary schools • To give staff (in particular the Primary Liaison Officer) the opportunity to experience the potential of video conferencing • To give sixth-form students the opportunity to talk to the primary school pupils and develop skills in responding to questions • To allow Year 6 pupils at the primary schools to ask questions about the transition to secondary school and life there by talking to sixth-formers in an informal setting.

## Planning and Research

*Two weeks before the session:* Initial discussion between Tim Arnold, Adviser for Media Education, and Katy Bennie, Head of Sixth Form, Knowles Hill School, looking at how the video conferencing material had been used and deciding who should be involved. The proposal was put to, and approval was obtained from, the Headteacher, Dr Colin Pope.

*10 days before the session:* The Primary Liaison Officer, Julia Elmore, the Headteachers of the primary schools, Peter Ball and Len Peach, the Science Liaison Teacher for Knowles Hill, Dr Mark Moffatt, and the Knowles Hill technician were all informed about the session and the link was booked.

*One week before the session:* Katy Bennie collected details of information that had already been distributed to primary schools from the Primary Liaison Officer. Times, dates and ISDN numbers were confirmed by fax to the primary Headteachers, and sample questions were requested.

*One day before the session:* All staff involved were reminded of the time and date of the session. There was a discussion with the students on the questions submitted, the order of answering and the information provided to the primary schools.

## The Session

**11.00** The seating was organised and a digital camera obtained from Resources.

**11.15** The equipment was tested, there was communication with the participants via mobile phone to ensure that everything was ready, the bridge was put in operation and the three-way link tested (unfortunately Wolborough School were unable to participate at the last minute because of other commitments, so the test link was with Mike Griffith of Global Leap).

**11.30-12.00** A link was established with Decoy School alone.

## Technical Issues

Many technical issues cannot be anticipated, but there are certain problems which seem to arise fairly regularly and therefore can be allowed for. The following are the only problems that were encountered in this session:

- The equipment was not in place on the morning; it had been moved and not returned as promised, and the technician had to find it and set it up at the last minute. There is therefore a need to ensure that technical support is available on the day so that the members of staff can concentrate on the session itself.
- One ISDN number was not available on the information provided. It is therefore important to plan ahead and have a landline or mobile phone in the room and/or to ensure that all telephone and ISDN numbers are readily available.

## Learning Outcomes

- It was an excellent way of proving the usefulness of the system and showing other members of staff how it might be applied.
- The staff concerned learned how to use a three-way link via a bridge.
- The students' awareness of the value of video conferencing was heightened and their confidence in using the technology was increased.
- The students' communication skills were enhanced as a result of the experience.
- The primary pupils were also able to develop their communication skills.
- The pupils gained an insight into secondary education.

## Areas of Potential Development

- To reduce the amount of time spent travelling to primary schools and facilitate contact between staff involved in the transition from primary to secondary school.
- To enable our primary colleagues to renew contact with former pupils of theirs and see how they have developed.
- To enable sixth-form students to use these links in project work related to their studies.
- To assist primary pupils in their own project work by giving them the opportunity to talk to secondary students about their topics.

**Katy Bennie, Knowles Hill School, Newton Abbot**