

SWAMWAC Transition Report

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Part 1 - Overview

1. Background

Origins of the project



This particular transition cluster consists of Olchfa School and its five main feeder schools; Parkland, Hendrefoilan, Dunvant, Sketty and Cila. The schools are located in the west of Swansea. The cluster received funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, via the LEA in 2007 to develop the transition between phases, and set up and a steering group to oversee the a number of projects. This report focuses on the transition video project, which is itself one part of a larger series of initiatives being managed by the steering group.

The original idea for the project came from an inset session led by Clive Biscoe from the Education Library and Resource Service in May 2007. The session was focusing on information skills and visual literacy and following informal discussions at the end of the session the decision was taken to investigate the possibility of some kind of project based on Clive's work. This seemed like a useful angle to take for a number of reasons

- It would compliment, but not clash with, the existing transition work, much of which was subject based
- It fitted the wider 'Key Skills' agenda being driven by the National Assembly
- It fitted with the work being done by Olchfa in the SMART programme, which was itself a skills led curriculum
- It had an obvious 'novelty' factor to hook and motivate students
- It had the potential to allow individual partnership schools to tailor the project to their own needs and priorities at any given time.

The project in context

The work of the transition group is closely linked to current WAG guidance on improving transition. The group is led by a steering group of senior managers from each partner school, and employs a 'transition coordinator', Mrs Gwyneth Parry, to provide the day-to-day administration of the transition plan. This unique approach to the management of the program has provided both a level of continuity between the

various parts of the plan, and the opportunity to act rapidly and proactively to opportunities that have come along.

The group has provided opportunities and funding for a range of joint in-service training and curriculum planning focussed on continuity and progression in teaching and learning methods from years 5 to 8. Staff from both Key Stages have been able to interact, observe and exchange ideas as well as information about the pupils. Recently, focus has moved from progression in specific subjects, to progression in skills, with links being made with the new Key Skills Framework, recently published by DCELLS.

Paul James, the School Development Advisor from the Education Effectiveness Service has provided additional funding to support the aims of the project, and recommended the partnership to ESTYN as an example of good practice.

The impact of the various initiatives in the transition plan on teaching and learning are evaluated by the Headteachers of the partner schools, and have remained supportive and committed throughout. While the main focus of the partnership is on the member schools, a number of the initiatives deliberately include pupils from outside the catchment area who will be joining Olchfa the following September.

The agreed aims for the partnership are:

- To enhance current induction arrangements to smooth the transition of year 6 pupils into Year 7
- To promote interesting and exciting Learning and Teaching strategies which allow pupils to develop their skills as independent learners through tasks that are enjoyable, challenging and sufficiently open-ended to enable pupils to address them in a variety of ways.
- To develop strategies to ensure continuity between the primary and secondary phases in the ways pupils develop research, thinking and organisation skills
- To promote joint approaches to develop and build upon skills and competencies as pupils progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.
- To transfer information from the partner primary schools in order for Key Stage 3 teachers to appreciate pupils' abilities when they come to Year 7.
- To follow a 'plan, develop, evaluate and review' process incorporating the views of parents, carers and pupils as well as the Headteachers and staff involved in the Transition Partnership.

The work of the partnership was recognised by the Welsh Secondary Schools Association, who awarded the project first place for collaboration in their 2007 awards.



2. Developing the project

The project - initial design.



A range of options were discussed, including some kind of video conferencing links, video projects, and student led research topics. The idea that had the most traction was that we should develop a way that each feeder primary school class could be 'buddied' with a year 7 SMART class. The year 6 students could put together a video about their school, including a series of questions and concerns about moving up to Olchfa. These would then be picked up by their 'buddy' class, who would produce a further

video to address (and hopefully allay) those fears. At this point firm plans were not laid down, with those involved agreeing to go away and consider how the project would fit into what they were already doing, and the resourcing implications of the project.

Resourcing the project

Following an investigation into the various hardware and software options, the decision was taken to buy a series of Apple Mac computers along with digital video cameras, digital still cameras and all the necessary accessories. In addition, licences for Microsoft Office were purchased for each machine to ensure that schools could use them outside of this project. Each primary school would receive as many sets as they had year 6 classes, and Olchfa would receive five sets to share between the eleven SMART classes. Even at this stage, partner schools were encouraged to identify how they could adapt this resourcing to their situation, with four of the five schools opting for Macbook laptops, whilst Duvant chose the iMac desktop machines.

We invested in Apple Macs for a number of reasons, including:

- Award winning video and audio editing software bundled for free with the machines, eliminating additional software costs
- Desire to ensure all schools had a 'level playing field' in terms of software, training and resourcing
- Training and support available both from the Education Library and Resource Service and Olchfa
- Ease of use of software / hardware
- Wanting to focus on 'upskilling' students - an element was the use of different hardware, software and operating systems

We were advised against the choice by ICT advisors at the LEA, who told us that they would be unable to support them. Despite that it was felt that with support

from Clive Biscoe, Olchfa Staff and by investing in extended warranties the benefits outweighed this draw back.

Training Staff

As well as the physical resources, it was necessary to provide training for the staff involved in the project. This was delivered in three phases:

Phase 1- Whole day inset

Clive Bisco and Richard Jones from the Education Library and Resource Service led an all day inset of staff from all six schools looking at both the technical skills necessary to work the equipment and the knowledge and understanding of the 'language' of video. As the project was, at least in part, about visual literacy this was felt to be important.



The day was felt to have been a success, not just from the increased level of understanding amongst staff involved, but also in terms of willingness to experiment with the software, and also in terms of improving working relationships between staff from all the schools involved.

Phase 2 - Additional paper-based support

The drawback to having training at the end of the school year is that much of what was learned has evaporated by September, so Dave Stacey provided some additional written support both for iMovie and some of the additional programmes that staff had found useful. As the main project was not due to start until the third term, it was agreed that staff would, as much as possible, try out the equipment with groups of students in the preceding terms. This was felt to be useful both in terms of giving staff the chance to get used to the equipment, but also start to get the pupils used to using the cameras and the software, and also identifying any problems and issues ahead of the main project.

Training Students

By Christmas, it had become clear to the steering group that additional classroom-based support would be required to really make the most of the equipment, so funding was found to allow Dave Stacey and Nick Francis to spend half a day in each year 6 class, working with a small group of pupils on transferring the footage that had been shot into iMovie and creating some films. This group of pupils were then in turn able to train up other students (and staff) within the schools. Each year 6 teacher was encouraged to place this training in the context of existing work, rather than treat it as a 'bolt-on' as we wanted to explore some of the many ways which

the technology could be leveraged in day-to-day classroom activities. An outline of some of what was produced is included in the following section.

In Olchfa, the cameras and laptops were made available to SMART teachers on a 'sign out' basis, and they continued to experiment with using them in a range of contexts.

Encouraging staff and students to experiment with the technology, rather than follow a prescribed set of instructions had two major benefits. The first was the growth of a genuine set of ICT skills among staff and students. As opposed to learning one programme in a traditional form, staff and students are now much better equipped to solve problems by themselves as and when they arise, and there is some evidence that in some cases that attitude is now being transferred to their ICT use in other areas. The second was the discovery of a number of uses and applications that had not been considered in the original design. This includes the creation of 'talking head' style video evaluations using the built-in web cams, the creating of photo-movies to document various class activities in a less disruptive way than filming and the use of the 'Comic Life' programme to create comic strips using photos taken of pupils.



3. The project in operation



The original design for the programme had been to kick off with a 'video conference' between partner classes, making use of the built in microphones and cameras in the macs, and the free 'Skype' software. However it became clear that the LEA were unwilling to connect the Macintosh computers in the primary schools to the internet. A meeting took place between members of the cluster and representatives from the LEA and while no short term solution was found, both

Lindsay Harvey and Keiran Costello are working with us to try and harness the new video conferencing technology (JANET Videoconferencing service) currently being installed in some of the schools in the county.

While the lack of internet access has limited the usability of the computers, the main focus of the project has not been affected. In the short term, we have used a range of techniques to communicate between the classes, including visits, sending DVD videos and by writing. Longer term, for those schools that aren't involved in the first wave of the LEA's video conferencing project, we hope to be able to add web cams and microphones to existing PCs which can connect to the internet, and make use of the Flashmeeting video conferencing platform provided by the Open University.

Building up a skills base among pupils

Among the primary schools, a number of activities were undertaken using the technology to build up a skills base among the pupils. These included:

- Using photographs of schools events to create video evaluations
- Recording pupil presentations, which were evaluated by watching them back on the Interactive Whiteboard
- Creating a 'video brochure' of their schools
- Create 'news reports' from different historical events
- Using the 'Comic Life' programme to create comic strips using photos from 'freeze frame' activities

In Olchfa, the technology has been used to support activities within SMART lessons in a number of ways, including:

- Creating a video archive of class work, including presentations. In the short term this provides opportunities for more useful and insightful self-evaluation, and in the longer term provides pupils with a digital portfolio of their work
- Using the built-in cameras to record 'talking head' style evaluations
- Using 'Garage band' and the built in microphones to capture and edit various audio performances, including speech and music

- Using the 'Comic Life' software to plan and create a series of comic strips around the issues of bullying and conflict.

Buddying up



In the third term of the year, each year 6 class in the primary schools, were matched with one of the year 7 SMART classes in Olchfa. A broad outline was agreed, and then staff and classes were encouraged to go off and try a variety of strategies and approaches. This was to both ensure that the project remained pupil focussed, and also allowed us to build up a picture of successful practice in a relatively short time frame.

The broad outline followed three steps:

- An initial contact by the year 7 class introducing themselves, and asking for any questions
- A response from the year 6 class, outlining any questions or concerns
- A response from the year 7 class, addressing those questions and concerns.

An evaluation of the pilot class, from a practitioner perspective makes up the second half of this report.

The future

A lot of work has been put in to ensuring that not only is this project successful this year, but it becomes a self-sustaining part of the transition process. This includes providing a base of expertise among both staff and pupils within each school. Next year we hope to ensure that by starting the use of the equipment in the primary schools earlier that towards the end of the year opportunities can be provided for year 6 to train up the current year 5, eliminating the need for further training intervention.

For those schools who are having the video conferencing suites provided by the LEA there is an opportunity for closer collaboration between classes for a longer period, and also opportunities for staff collaboration that may need to be explored.

With pupils arriving at Olchfa with much greater ICT skills, including a greater willingness to try out new platforms and new technology, we now have an opportunity to look at creating e-portfolios within the school. Although these will require further investment in hardware to bring us closer to the 1 laptop : 1 class ratio operating in the primary schools, if this is successful it opens the door for those to be rolled back into partner primary schools, and for pupils to maintain a genuine record of their work as they move between key stages, and to plot the progression in their development of a range of key skills,