

# UNLOCKING THE GRID

exploring the creative potential of  
digital technologies in education



## Report on Period of Consultation with Forest Gate Community School

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Please note that this report is based on interviews carried out in 2000, with a small amount of additional information since that time, therefore assertions in the text may not always represent the current situation.

The discoveries that can be made through a creative and exploratory use of digital technologies will provide key approaches to the development of educational programmes for the future. Projects developed in this context should offer an experience of discovery to the children, teachers and other specialists involved as they work together in problem-solving teams in the still uncharted regions of cyberspace. The key challenge is to focus on outcomes that are both meaningful and necessary to young people and their wider communities, exploring new applications for the technology in the process and thus opening up possibilities for teaching and learning.

# CONTEXT

## Forest Gate Community School

The school chosen for this research was Forest Gate Community School in LB Newham, for a number of reasons. It houses one of the five City Learning Centres (CLC's) in East and South East London with state of the art equipment and broadband connectivity. The CLC, though housed in the school, is in effect independent of it, though a high percentage of time is allocated for school use. One of the remits of the CLC's is to initiate and develop e-learning materials and content for the National Grid for Learning which can be shared in an interactive way with other schools. Forest Gate School also had a history of formal and informal links with The Art of Change (now cSPACE) , and were welcoming of the consultation.

## London Borough of Newham

The borough offers both need and opportunity for this work. Newham is one of the poorest boroughs in London with one of the lowest levels of educational achievement in the country, yet is taking active steps to address the problem.

Regarding ICT, Newham has been in the forefront of establishing the National Grid for Learning. Organisations such as Newham Online have now been working for a number of years in partnership with the council, commercial partners such as Marconi and MASE, the statutory education sector and with voluntary and community groups to establish an internet gateway or portal for easy access to Newham-related information. It has also set up an extranet to link together Newham's existing Wide Area Networks (WANS) to include the whole education sector, key industries such as the film studios and public services, using broadband connectivity to allow fast and secure transfer of information including live images.

There have also been initiatives to offer low cost telecommunications services to local users, while supporting partnerships of local organisations in the use of the internet for social, cultural, educational, economic, political and personal benefits. Newham's aim has become a leader the ICT field in the UK. Newham Online has offered support to our Unlocking the Grid initiative and was involved in the development of the proposals.

# CONSULTATION

During Spring 2000, a period of research and consultation was undertaken with teachers from Forest Gate Community School and other specialists. Heads of department from a range of subject areas were approached to explore needs that could be met through a creative use of digital technology. In addition a number of arts professionals from organisations such as Sound Vision Trust and the Hayward Gallery computer specialists were approached for ideas and advice, including the incoming manager for the City Learning Centre.

Meetings were held with Heads of the following Departments:

Art  
English  
Media Studies  
ICT  
Drama  
Music  
Religious Education  
PHSE  
Design and Technology  
Maths  
PE  
Community Languages

## Issues

A number of issues emerged from these discussions that threw light on both existing ICT resources and the extent to which they supported or otherwise classroom work. There was also some speculation amongst teachers as to the possible impact of the City Learning Centre on teaching and learning in the school.

It became evident, that though there were already two computer labs in the school, few of these resources filtered through at that time to non-ICT specialist subject in the curriculum. English and Media Studies teachers were concerned that prior to this time, a significant amount of existing resources were taken up by GNVQ course in Business Studies. They gave the example of a Year 7 newsletter project that had to be carried out as a paper based cut-and-paste.

Although pupils coming into the school were seen as increasingly computer literate due to their primary school experience, it was not until Year 9 that pupils, at that time, gained secondary school access to digital technology that enabled them to develop further their primary school work in this area. (Since returning to the school in the intervening period however, more pupils seem to be gaining access to the technology through access to the City Learning Centre).

A further concern amongst teachers was the nature of the resources that were due to be installed in the City Learning Centre. In line with most school computer suites, the CLC had been designed as two classrooms of computers with fixed peripherals such as scanners and printers. Teachers were concerned however that teaching and learning processes in non-technical subjects require a range of activities in one lesson, not all of which would require sitting at a computer. An alternative concept that gained currency through discussions was the 'small office and large cupboard' approach whereby teachers could book out a range of portable equipment for use in their normal classrooms.

# Ideas

With each teacher or group of teachers discussion initially ranged around the kinds of ideas and activities they would like to see happen, which in a number of cases developed into project proposals. The following ideas were noted:

## English

Pupils to create something themselves/links with others

## Art

Need for computers in classroom – at least one for scanning and production plus another for online research.

Pupils keener to research via the web than books.

Access to banks of pictures that could be downloaded and printed also to student-friendly text (particularly for Years 10/11).

Networked computers as an aid to departmental theme planning.

Posting of pupils work onto school web site.

Projects based on web links with galleries (further explored with Hayward Gallery Education Officer)

## Music

Interest in making links with parents/ local communities and businesses.

Sampling music/ gaining DJ experiences.

Curriculum online for Key Stage 4 so work can also be undertaken at home/ access to past work and course criteria.

Ability to download compositions and information about performers. Technology could enable pupils to be more autonomous in their work.

Idea of radio station (see Projects).

Need for own equipment linked to keyboards, not separately available at City Learning Centre (now achieved through an application to Forest Gate SRB).

## Drama

Performance linked to Multi User Domains/ exploration of character and identity.

## Media Studies

Online publication/ webcast radio.

## ICT

Interest in a project for the whole school.

## Religious Education

Virtual prayer room.

Example of lesson reflecting a monastic way of life/ inward looking / sense of belonging/ values/ question of what makes people withdraw from society/ finding self/ autonomy. Power/democracy issues/ also business oriented.

Opportunity of making links with History and Business Studies subject areas.

Class-managed bulletin board with topic discussion.

Web pages for each Year group containing different topics + ethical page linked to third world issues + use of pages to display projects.

Input to Newspaper project (with English/Media Studies).

Pupils' work on creation myths possibly to link with VOLCO project.

## PHSE

Link to citizenship curriculum.

Input to Newspaper project (with English/Media Studies) with posters and health page. Also problem page whereby pupils could send in problems anonymously and receive a confidential reply. Topics from this would provide material for classroom discussion.

## Design and Technology

Department web page containing links for research and to help pupils with homework.

Use web site and links to build on existing relationship with Fords.

Input to Newspaper project (with English/Media Studies) with reports on school/industry links.

Would also like to be able to use 3D computer aided design with pupils.

# PROJECT PROPOSALS

The consultation gave rise to the following project ideas:

## School Magazine

This would be a periodical online publication managed as an interdisciplinary project led by the English and Media Studies Department with help from ICT. There would be a pupil production team made of volunteers from all year groups. Editorial meetings would take place each week, possibly after school, and a designer involved at appropriate sessions. Material would be produced through pupils' coursework and the option of input offered to all departments. It could also be produced as hard copy if costs allowed and could involve visits by pupil production team to professional printers (Westferry Printers on Isle of Dogs identified).

Initial ideas could include:

- Features and interviews by English and Media Departments.
- Problem page by PHSE.
- Bulletin board for ongoing topic discussion by Religious Education.
- Pictures, Illustrations and artist profiles by Art Dept.
- Music page with news and gossip by Music Dept.
- Reviews by Art, Media Studies, Music and Drama.
- Business page by Design and Technology.

Resources and cost implications for online version:

- Cover for three staff, one lesson per week.
- Session fees for a person to manage initial co-ordination of project.
- Session fees for professional designer (alternatively links with the University of East London's Graphic Design Department could be explored).
- some travel expenses
- Use of computer/ scanner/ printer/ digital camera/ recording equipment/ TV/ fax/ telephone/ photo imaging and design software.

## **The Forest Gate Roadshow**

A webcasting project led by the Music Department. Year 10 pupils would create a radio station using music and interviews which would be webcast to other secondary schools in the borough over lunchtimes. It would introduce a wide range of skills to pupils and the department felt that it might also gain support from some ex-Forest Gate pupils who are now DJ's in their own right. Advice and consultation was received from Lol Gellor of Sound Vision Trust in Hackney, who has extensive experience of creating radio stations with young people. The project was envisaged as an after school club once a week. It would take a term to generate the initial material, after which it could become a regular feature.

For costs and resource implications contact Sound Vision Trust (see contact list).

## **Hayward Gallery Exhibition Project**

A project idea was developed with the Art Department to link with the Education Department of the Hayward Gallery around current exhibitions. The Hayward have been developing a new web site for their education programme and are keen for ideas to make creative use of it, as well as to make project based links with schools. We discussed the possibilities of building a project around one of their forthcoming exhibitions so that pupils' work could be displayed on the site concurrently with the exhibition. We also discussed the possibility of bringing their free touring exhibitions into the borough as inspiration and source material for pupils, plus links that could be made with the Women's Art Library's digital collection for similar purposes.

## **VOLCO**

This is a cSPACE project that was already underway with junior schools. However on introducing it to the secondary staff, there proved to be interest in adapting this project for Key Stage 3. *VOLCO* is a Virtual Online Co-Operative environment, an evolving virtual planet being constructed by young people co-operating across the world. Hundreds of young people are creating the Volcan archives through interaction with others of different cultures and life experiences. The result is a growing and increasingly complex virtual society out of the imaginations of young people. This is being developed into a transferable educational resource capable of supporting a wide range of subjects in the school curriculum. The pilot project can be seen at [www.cspace.org.uk/volco](http://www.cspace.org.uk/volco). Interest was expressed by teachers from departments including English, Art, Media Studies, ICT, Religious Education, Maths, Community Languages and PE. Since the consultation, we have successfully carried out part of the project with the English Department, based in the City Learning Centre. Extension of the project to other subject areas is now dependent upon further funding.

## **Developments for School Web Site**

Since the period of consultation, a web site has been designed for the school. This now may be used to incorporate some of the many creative ideas thought up by teachers:

- to host the school magazine (including its interactive aspects such as the topic based bulletin board and problem page)
- live links for homework and research
- picture resources for Art and other subjects
- display of pupils' work for parents to access, including visuals and music
- to host and promote special projects
- links to industry and local resources
- links with partner schools
- subject area pages (which subject staff will need support to develop)

# THE GRID UNLOCKED...

It became clear from the consultation that the teachers in this school have many good ideas for creative use of the technology. If only a few of the above suggestions are implemented, Forest Gate School will have a very innovative programme in progress. Teachers need support for this however. Training in the hardware and software is necessary but not in itself enough to try out new ideas and processes. The teachers know how they would like to expand what they are already doing, and may well be able to imagine a technological answer. However the ideas are more likely to be realised if someone were on hand to help translate this into the technology and co-ordinate initiatives, whether a member of staff released from duties, or a specialist brought in on a part-time or sessional basis.

The ideas developed would seem to impact on many aspects of teaching and learning and expand opportunities for working across disciplines. The increasing number of parents with access to the internet are also likely to become more involved with their children's work if they are able to see it online in their own homes.



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