

Chatsworth road: an after-school video project

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This article describes an eight week after-school project designed to promote speaking and listening skills at KS2. Children from two Hackney schools explored a local shopping area and made a video about it.

Introduction

Chatsworth Road in Homerton, Hackney, is a thriving local shopping centre and a front line area of gentrification where shoppers can equally access chicken and chips or antiques and specialist coffee shops. Between April and July 2013 two primary schools in Hackney took part in a video project to track and investigate the rapid changes occurring in their shopping street. The project was funded by a local arts centre Chats Palace and offered a free after-school provision for children in KS2. The main aim of the project was to develop children's confidence in a range of speaking and listening skills using role-play, photography, interview and video skills. In total 20 children and 6 local businesses took part in the project on Monday and Tuesday afternoons. Children, teachers, parents and participating businesses came together to celebrate and evaluate their achievements at a video launch party at Chats Palace in July. The final video was posted on YouTube and is available to view under the title *Chatsworth Road: an after school video project*.

listening were at the heart of the learning strategy. Sessions were held on a week in/week out of school pattern. Initial sessions focused on the history of growth and change of Chatsworth Road; the value of migration and migrants to the area was particularly stressed. The group discussed where families came from and how urban conurbations like Hackney depend on migrants. The children looked at names of people on the electoral roll from a hundred years ago and noticed similarities and differences from names that are common in schools today. They looked at historical photos of the area and discussed shops currently on Chatsworth Road. The group was invited to select shops and businesses to investigate. We outlined key interview questions to ask the proprietors about their experiences of running a local business. Questions were rehearsed and roles were allocated. Everyone took turns to operate handheld video cameras, take photographs and interview and thank people. Each session ended with children reviewing their progress, developing metacognitive skills:



Chatsworth Road

'I learnt how to talk to people in different ways.'

Tom

'I liked it when we talked about doing interviews because I could relate it to my acting class.'

Marcus

Using character, narrative and role play the children prepared and filmed pieces to camera, completing a 'vox pop' exercise, including arranging permission and copyright. A model release agreement was drawn up to gain permission from participants for their appearance in the final video and the children explained this and gained consent from shop owners and local shoppers.

Both schools were very supportive in completing the paperwork necessary to take children out of school on a regular basis and learning support assistants accompanied excursions. Getting involvement and commitment from independent local businesses to host the visits and act as interviewees on camera was a running workload but we were pleasantly surprised by the willingness of local businesses to participate; many businesses were extremely

We're not in school now

Children from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of attainment from Rushmore and Daubeney schools were invited to take part in the project. Several were seen as reluctant and disaffected learners in need of support and encouragement. As project leaders, Julia Griffin and I were keen to differentiate project sessions from formal classroom teaching and movement, discussion and active

generous with their time and resources. The children were able to find out about the skills involved in running a business.

Social and ethical aspects of the project

Through visiting local businesses children engaged with a range of social and ethical issues. At the coffee shop they discovered how coffee is grown and imported and learnt to grind beans. They made and ate their own pizzas at a local restaurant and questioned staff about good customer service, décor and how restaurants attract customers. At the greengrocers they discussed what happens to unsold fresh food and found out how the owner donates to The People's Kitchen (a voluntary food project that cooks Sunday lunch to share for donations). The group bought and taste tested fruit such as apricots and pomegranates which many had never tried before and discussed the texture, smell and taste. Visiting a local charity and social enterprise shop introduced the children to Sufism and how the owner supports West African charities through selling recycled items. The established general store helped children to appreciate what goes on behind the scenes of businesses: the hours worked, buying and ordering goods, storage and the ways small shops work to protect their goods from theft and breakage.

Approaches to learning

Drama techniques and exploratory discussions were central to the project. In the first week of the project the children re-imagined Chatsworth Road as it might have been a hundred years ago. Using popular names of the time and the location of real businesses, children were given new identities to explore, for example: 'Joan the sweetshop owner's daughter', 'Stanley the station porter's son' and in one case a parentless child brought up at the local German Orphanage. Taking up roles enabled children to make connections between children of long ago and their own lives:

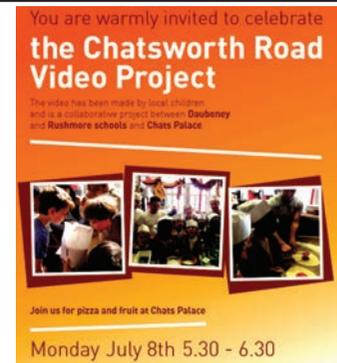
'I'm glad I didn't live in those times, it would have been smelly in the streets because of the horses and children had hard lives helping their mum and dad in the shop.'
Nelly

Supported by the use of old photos the group explored the lives of children at the time, their games, language and school experiences. There were discussions about conventions in documentary style films and the final video includes clips of children taking the role of news readers and news reporters.

Towards the end of the project the group asked local shoppers their opinions of the shops and services. This was a challenging exercise requiring the children to introduce, conduct and film an interview on a busy street. They had to explain and complete model release forms and at times, deal with refusals. For this task the roles of photographer and camera operator were eagerly sought after as they were seen to have high status and responsibility. Being behind a camera and organising the placement of shots was particularly rewarding for those with less confidence in their social and verbal skills.

Evaluation through a 'film premiere'

The completed film was shown at Chats Palace Art Centre in July 2013. Children formally invited parents, carers and siblings to an early evening film premiere. Some of the local shops provided pizza, fruit and cakes. Most of the participating businesses came along too so that the evening was a celebration of both the project and the local area. Following the viewing both children and adults were encouraged to offer written feedback on the film. Comments were pleasingly concrete:



'Can you get rid of some of the background noise on the street interviews?'

'The music is nice but there's too much of it.'

'Really loved this film can we see a bit more on the history part?'

The evaluation was then used to edit the film before uploading it to YouTube.

Children, LSAs and teachers at the schools were asked to comment on the project and the feedback was extremely positive, in particular, comments from the LSAs about how well the invited and disengaged children participated. Parents told us how enthusiastic their children had been about the project and how home life had been punctuated by discussions about the interviews and excursions to shops and businesses.

Conclusion

This is a relatively simple format which could be adapted to fit a variety of contexts. It was critical to gain the full support of the schools for the excursions. In school all that was needed was classroom space and occasional access to a smartboard, paper and pens. The project used handheld movie cameras, phone and digital cameras. The software was iMovie but other applications would work just as well.

The project gave children a glimpse of real working lives and made some links in the community between people of different generations. A video project like this enables children to look at a taken-for-granted area of their lives through new eyes. It encourages them to make links between the past and present and to gain confidence in key literacy skills in naturalistic settings. Finally, we hope that this project helped children to view recent and rapid changes to their local area as in some ways 'normal'.

Note

'Chatsworth Road: an after school video collaboration' co-ordinated by Julia Griffin and Jane Speare can be viewed via YouTube. The names of children in this article have been changed.