



Using Logitech Webcams with Supported Learning Students @ Cumbernauld College

Margaret: Hello my name is Margaret McKay and I am the inclusion advisor for the RSC Scotland South and West and I am here today at Cumbernauld College with Linda Aitcheson who is a supported Learning Lecturer and Colleen Hurren who is the Learning and Teaching Technologist. Today we are going to talk about how the college have used Logitech Webcams in the college.

Why how you decide to use Logitech webcams, how did this evolve?

Colleen: By a very indirect route, I was using Skype for international project in the college and I had to use a webcam wanted to update the software. I noticed that I could buy webcams with video effect software and I thought that looked like fun and considered using it during freshers week. I shelled out £35 to buy a webcam and we used it as an entertainment/getting to know IT session as part of freshers week and the students loved it. At our East Dumbartonshire campus I noticed that students with certain learning difficulties absolutely fell in love it and they would talk more through the medium via an avatar than they would normally and I thought maybe we have stumbled upon something.

Linda: I equally fell in love with it from a curriculum point view because I teach drama and do story work with students where we create stories and sometimes afterwards we will act them out. I wondered if this technology would be a different and exciting way to develop this kind of activity. So I decided to try it out with a group of students and the intention was to use the avatars and the facial accessories that come with the Logitech Webcams and time permitting we would add some dramas/role plays and then act them out.

Margaret: Did you feel that using the webcams with the different avatars and facial accessories made it easier for students on supported learning programmes to engage?

Linda: They seemed very comfortable using the software and it made the lesson much more fun – they laughed a lot, and at each other. Yes it was good fun and they seemed to like the colours and they loved the avatars because they could be a whole new character.

Margaret: What about any challenges or indeed barriers in using this new technology?

Linda: I suppose I felt that they were one or two barriers and I am not sure if this was to do with the way we had set the room up and also to do with lighting etc. There were times where the avatar or the facial accessories would suddenly disappear so it was about working with the students and getting them to think about not moving or turning so quickly and remembering to set the room out properly so that we weren't all crowding around the one webcam and crowding each other out. Once we figured it out we were fine, it was a bit of a process and a bit of a problem solving process for the students and for me as well but I quite liked that because it became part of the learning and it wasn't just about the product but the process of how do we use this and what do we want to get out of it and the teamwork needed to sure this technology.

What we found was that students go the hang of it quite quickly and started doing things like moving chairs, moving themselves and moving us too. So the students figured out that you could not stand around the web cam and that you have to turn the lights down too and for some reason in one of the rooms the lighting seemed to affect things.

Coleen: The other thing is the spec of the machine too so if you have an older machine it kind of slows it down too, especially with the richer avatars.

Margaret: So the students were really developing core skills and learning a lot about problem solving and working together as well

Linda: Yes because it turned out that I had planned to use this with one group of students but the group ended up merging with another group of students and so I didn't end up doing what I planned to do. Although it did not work out the way I wanted it to do, it kind of worked out better because the two groups came together and the technology allowed the groups to do a bit of teamwork. The technology allowed the two groups to work together and to break the ice because I wasn't too sure how they would work together because they had very different abilities.

One group was much more able than the second group and I was worried about how the two groups would come and work together and gel. It actually worked out quite well because we used a room with a smart board so some of the students in the first group who were quite IT literate were able to help the second group by together working the mouse and together working the smart board. Also the fact that it is such an interactive technology the students did not always realize that they were coming together and working and learning about the technology. So it turned out better than I actually thought and I was really pleased.

Margaret: What about from your own perspective and from the student's perspective there was a lot to benefit – working together and having fun as well too?

Linda: Yes problem solving too, because they had quite a lot of decisions to make, what avatars to choose and whether they were going to use face masks. When

we had a few blips they had to work that out too. Yes it was good.

Margaret: What lessons have you learned and indeed what advice would you offer to another college who is thinking of undertaking this initiative?

Coleen: In relation to technical issues I would say have a screen round the back of whoever is using the webcam because the facial accessories can jump from one to another. Have a good spec computer. In terms of social interaction I was going to say have a group with the same level of ability but I guess you have other benefits from having a mixed group of abilities. It depends if you want a particular drama product or if you just want them to learn things about IT and improve their social skills.

Linda: I think it just depends on what you want to do. I think what I learned was that this is the kind of technology you can use for working on lots of different levels so you can use it to achieve a whole product at the end of a process of learning which is what I originally wanted to do, however you can also use it as a tool or bringing groups together for lots of warm up activities so I would say it is multi functional and it can serve lots of purposes. You can use it for your curriculum if you are planning your curriculum for learning and not just for drama purposes, obviously you can use it for lots of different things, in teaching IT and other things.

Be flexible, be adaptable and think outside the box. Don't just think OH well I can't do this and I can't change it and go with the flow and have fun.