

Thoughts about 'making newspapers'.

The main issue in this session was the difficulty in getting groups to produce something that looked like a newspaper rather than say a newsletter.

This is a very nice example of the difference between skills and capability. If this was to be used (only or primarily) as an exercise in developing skills in the use of Publisher (or Word) then it would not really matter what the final product looked like - the focus could be on answering questions such as 'how do I do X'. However if the focus is (primarily) on developing an understanding of what a newspaper looks like then it is important for you to focus your pupils minds on this rather than on the technicalities of the software being used or the content of the pages. For example, many (most?) groups were distracted from the intended purpose of the session by (at least) the following:

- formatting text and pictures in 'pretty' ways
- spending ages finding pictures to use
- spending lots of time writing amusing text!

This is not a criticism - for lessons/sessions with different purposes, each of these would have been a very useful activity in its own right, and the open-ended way in which this session was constructed (deliberately) gave groups the opportunity to be waylaid in this way - the better to make the point that similar things will happen in your classrooms.

It was very interesting to see the reaction of people when we showed the draft newspapers - especially the spontaneous comments everyone made when they saw Abi, Alex and Khalida's newspaper. As I went around the room after this, there was a noticeable difference in the questions groups were asking of each other - a greater focus on 'how can we make this look like X' and a greatly reduced focus on questions to do with the three 'distracters' listed above. You might consider putting a similar form of 'interim review' into your lessons.

Some ways in which people suggested reforming the activity so that the focus could be more clearly on helping the pupils learn 'what newspapers look like were:

- Giving the pupils a page of text and pictures and asking them to format it in different ways

- Drawing (either on paper or on the screen) an abstraction of the layout of different kinds of newspapers and other publications

- Giving the pupils a variety of different kinds of publications and requiring them to categorise them.