

The Eagle's Kingdom - Getting kids 'on board'

If biodiversity ever needed the attention of the young people in our communities, it's now, with the problems surrounding climate change becoming more evident with every season.

Full attention is exactly what the nine pupils from Rosehall Primary, in Sutherland gave during the six months it took them to research and develop a new wooden board game for schools ***The Eagle's Kingdom*** which has participants exploring local environmental issues and working out how these lead to global connections.

The school was approached by Janis Keast of Highland One World and Trish Matthews of Nature Workshop who had spotted the need for an educational game that took the local to global route rather than the reverse, global to local, which they had seen working well in other projects.

Janis Keast, Highland One World

'It's an exciting way to raise issues - around energy use, wild spaces, urban growth - and to stimulate their awareness of the complexity of the decision-making process.'

Sometimes, it takes kids to work out what other kids will like best so it's no surprise that The Eagle's Kingdom has a lot to do with real life role play and having fun. Although the underlying principles of the game are down to adult input, it was the children who came up with the game as it is in its final format. They were given a very broad remit, basically to create a game which would help other children understand the importance of biodiversity and after some serious brainstorming with the adults and of course the fun of the test runs, theories were turned into a workable game.

The game basically involves players moving round four Highland habitats – woodlands, coastland, fresh waters and peatlands – solving environmental problems and gaining 'eagle points'. Pupils use three main life skills – thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution, while role play gives them the opportunity to take ownership of the environment and to learn to live more sustainably. Trials in several schools have shown clearly that 11 yr olds aren't too young to debate the pros and cons of building yet another supermarket in their area. We adults could probably learn something from them.

The Eagle's Kingdom was launched in Highland this year, and thanks to funding from SNH and the DFID is offered as part of a free workshop to schools which makes it accessible to all. Optimum age range – P5-P7 and great for both boys and girls. Just 2 months after flyers went out promoting the game to schools, it's had a take up rate of over 25% - 63 schools - and after the initial round of workshops, the word is certain to spread. It's had a positive response so far. Janis describes a moment when one of the less attentive boys in a large group came up to her and volunteered 'Thanks, that was great' – and she'd been sure he hadn't really been 'getting into it'!



Jeani Hunter, Headteacher (at the time of developing the game), Rosehall Primary:

“A project as large as the biodiversity game was obviously going to take up a lot of curricular time. I felt that the potential was worth any risk in not meeting targets. This turned out to be the case - many, many areas of 5-14 were covered in a ‘real and purposeful’ situation. The benefits were enormous in that the children could see a very exciting outcome to their work. It looked very good and could be used by other pupils to learn about biodiversity, sustainability, values and citizenship. Our children also developed their entrepreneurial, design, research, oral and written communication and ICT skills. They worked as a team using their best skills and were constantly assessing, evaluating and adapting. The culmination of their work was the launch of the game when they gave a PowerPoint presentation which they had prepared to parents, members of the community, SNH, RSPB and other organisations as well as MSPs and Highland Councillors. This they were later asked to repeat in the council chamber in Inverness for the Sustainability committee. All 9 children, and we had all ages and stages, were all involved up to this stage. Later the four older ones had a chance to visit another school where the game was being played to look for things which needed changing or opportunities for improvement.

I am able to say now that this project gave a wonderful chance to use flexibility across the curriculum and it enabled the children to develop in all areas of the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence.”