



Take flight

Discover a high-flying transport topic that will help children's learning reach for the skies

How can you incorporate two weeks of geography, one week each of art, ICT, technology and international focus, plus build in numeracy, literacy and history? With airports – that's how. Year 4 teacher, Richard Smith, from St Andrew's CE Primary School in Islington, London, achieved exactly that using the International Primary Curriculum's thematic unit on Connections that focuses on airports. Here, Richard describes some of the activities that helped his class' learning take off...

Class connections

'Before investigating airports with my class, I introduced the 'Connections' game. This simple game helped to establish how much the children already knew about countries and cultures around the world, and showed them

how they had some connection to each of these places. To play the game, you stand up and name two countries that you have personal connections to and why. For example, 'I ate Italian food for dinner last night and I went on holiday to Greece.' Then, someone who has a connection with Italy stands up and holds your 'Italy' hand, stating their own connection to Italy. They then say a connection that they have to another country. Another person who has a connection to Greece does the same with your other hand, and gradually you build a circle of international connections involving all the children.

The class very quickly picked up the idea of the game and soon realised that they had links to lots of countries that they'd never realised before. It did get quite challenging near the end trying to find common links, but we did it and

managed to create a complete circle including everyone. It was such a simple game, but the children really enjoyed it – as did I!



International links

Following on from the 'Connections' game, the class thought showered the different countries that we had each found a connection to. Having played the game first, the children found it easier to think about additional ways that they were connected to those countries around the world. They came up with dozens of connections; from languages, clothes, places they'd visited and favourite foods. It was a good exercise in international mindedness as the children couldn't believe how many connections they had with other countries.



All aboard

Having built the children's understanding of the connections that we had with different countries, we then moved on to consider all the ways that these connections could be physically reached; from hovercrafts and ferries, cars and buses to helicopters and planes. It was at this point that we started looking more closely at airports.

We started to build up an idea of what actually happens at an airport. Year 4 is a very international class who have travelled overseas a lot, so much of their existing knowledge about this was based on experience. However, you can adapt your lessons to suit the experiences of the children. For example, you could create a role-play setting of an airport terminal within your classroom, complete with passport control desk, security x-ray scanner and airport lounge. By encouraging children to 'check in', 'pass through security' and 'board a plane', even those with no real flying experience can participate in discussions.

Terminal plans

The children then went on to create plans for their own airport terminals. There was lots of sharing of ideas and planning about the needs and demands of an airport. The children used large grid paper to draw their own plans, learning how to draw the various airport features to scale. They

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really had to think about the essential areas of an airport, such as check in, baggage handling, security and passport control, and the logical positioning of these areas in their plans. They also had to think about entrances and exits, the size of the different areas, and all the other amenities that people need while they are in an airport. There was lots of numeracy work involved with this including measuring, drawing to scale and calculating simple area. We used our plans to record and track data, creating bar charts of priority facilities, important amenities and luxury features at each of the airports the class had designed.

Airports in words

Incorporating literacy into our airports unit was also easy. The children produced creative writing about a day in the life of an airport; they wrote a report on a country that their airport had a flight connection to, and they also completed detailed evaluations about fleet designs.

The art of airports

There were lots of good ideas from IPC about how to incorporate art into this unit, and the children especially enjoyed it because it had purpose and required a significant amount of research. After investigating airline logos and fleet colours, I asked the children to design their own logo to be featured on the tail of their own airline fleet. First of all, they had to select a country that their airline would be based in and then their logo artwork had to reflect something about that country. One child chose China and used the colours of the Chinese flag, another chose Iran and had Arabic writing within their design. We developed 3D designs of our logos on the computer and then created our airline tail designs using collage. There was some fantastic work, incorporating ICT, geography and research skills, that came from a very personal and highly challenging task. ▶



In the skies

The children enjoyed researching the history of flight and how people travelled from country to country before planes became such a popular mode of transport. Many children were surprised at how recently such technology had become accessible. (Search for 'aerodynamics' at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus for more information on the science of flight.)

We also spent some time thinking about how airline passengers can enjoy a long flight. We talked about some of the amenities that airlines provide for their passengers and the things that people take on board with them to help pass the time. The children then researched the entertainment packs that different airlines create for their young passengers. Afterwards, I asked the children to design their own airline entertainment packs. The results ranged from mini games, to snack packs and in-flight magazines.

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Real-life meaning

At the end of the unit, the class did another thought-showering exercise to see what they'd learned. Their ideas flowed freely with very little prompting from me. There was excellent understanding of how airports function; behind the scenes, as well as in more obvious public areas. There was very good development of skills associated with planning and design. It was clear to me that through this cross-curricular unit, the skills, knowledge and understanding that my class had gained was very meaningful for them. Using the whole 'big picture' overview on a theme that the children were enthusiastic about, and then linking all the individual subjects into it, helped them to retain knowledge and learn and develop many skills. Through this, and the other IPC units, I'm seeing far more child-initiated learning.

I have one particular child who I've seen a dramatic difference in since working with IPC. During the Connections Unit, he completed work on maps, artwork activities, wrote a report and contributed

to collaborative work. This was possible because he felt in charge of his own work.

Unit evaluation

This was my first experience of teaching the Connections Unit and I really enjoyed it. I used IPC's cross-reference document to assure me that I was meeting National Curriculum objectives. Although this unit does not include science, you could easily add environmental elements or work on forces and the science of flight. In my planning, however, I just made sure that my next IPC unit had a strong science theme, so it wasn't really a problem. I didn't include any outside visits in this particular instance. Next time I teach this unit though, I think I'll try to arrange a visit to an airport, or for an airport worker to come into school.' ■



Useful websites

- www.baa.com has interactive maps of different terminal buildings.
- www.scandinavian.net
- www.airfrance.com
- www.britishairways.com
- www.klm.com
- www.malaysiaairlines.com



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Further information

The Connections Unit is just one of 80 thematic International Primary Curriculum units of work, all encompassing academic, personal and international learning goals. Every unit is designed to engage and excite primary-age children of all abilities throughout the world today.

The IPC is a practical, skills-based, international curriculum used in more than 50 countries throughout the world. More than 350 state primary schools in the UK use IPC. The IPC provides a rigorous teaching framework and lesson plans, cross-referenced to National Curriculum guidelines, enabling teachers to spend more time developing creative learning opportunities in the classroom.

To visit an IPC school near you, or for a free sample of another IPC unit and more information, go to www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com or call IPC on 0207 531 9696.