

Seeing the science in our surroundings

June 24 2010

UK school pupils from Nottingham have become pioneer scientists as part of a research project aimed at designing an innovative approach to learning.

A research team from The University of Nottingham and the Open University is aiming to promote a passion for science among youngsters by making it personal to them and by encouraging them to carry out experiments that start in the classroom and continue at home or outdoors.

The project has developed a new computer toolkit named nQuire which 11 to 14-year-old pupils from Hadden Park High [School](#) in Bilborough and Oakgrove School in Milton Keynes have used to plan and design their study with the help of their teacher. They have taken measurements, organised data, and shared and discussed the results while being guided by software running on the handheld netbook computers.

Their homegrown experiments have included focusing on healthy eating, where the children took pictures of their meals and compared the nutrition to recommended daily intake levels, looking at 'microclimates' by taking measurements around the school playground to decide on the best location for a bench or flying a kite, and a study of the effect of noise pollution on birds' eating habits.

The new computer toolkit could soon be benefitting pupils across the country, with plans to offer it to teachers through an open source licence to support their teaching activities and promote proactive learning.

The project has been led by Professor Mike Sharples, Director of the Learning Sciences Research Institute (LSRI) in The University of Nottingham's School of Education and Professor Eileen Scanlon of the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University.

Professor Sharples said: "The project has shown how children can become active investigators, designing scientific studies and exploring their world. The nQuire toolkit uses a new generation of portable computers to take learning outside the classroom. We have been successful in engaging children in science that relates to their personal interests."

Professor Scanlon said: " We have been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the students and teachers engaged in this work."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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