Good Morning, Baltimore!

UK Research team members packed their bags and headed Stateside to Maryland in a fantastic opportunity to visit some of the institutions piloting B2S courses. The week long trip during March focused specifically on some of the exciting, but unexpected, developments and successes of the project: the wide appeal and different uses of the Learning to Learn (L2L) and Succeed with Math (SWiM) courses.

Focusing on the Baltimore area, researchers primarily spent time at two institutions: the headquarters of Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake and Waverly Family Support Centre in Northeast Baltimore. Team members Beck Pitt and Tim Coughlan also spoke with SWiM community college students, educators using both courses and conducted a series of content and curriculum focused interviews at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) on the final day of their visit.

Waverly Family Support Centre works with over 25 partner organisations to offer tailor-made development programmes to referred participants and their children. Situated in an area where “85% of the families are headed by a single female parent” and “90% have not completed high school” (All statistics from Waverly… leaflet, 2012) the centre specifically targets parents with children under 4. Waverly provide crèche facilities so that participants can attend a range of sessions to develop their parenting skills, gain qualifications and plan for their futures. The centre is making use of both B2S courses as part of their GED (the north American high-school test that’s usually taken at 18) examination preparation.

Waverly is supported by Goodwill, a workforce development agency whose Chesapeake branch has been supporting people across Maryland for over 90 years. Goodwill is utilising specific units of the SWiM course to help students prepare for their entrance exams for the ‘weatherization’ training programme. The programme, which trains students to redevelop houses, is of strategic importance: over 15,000 homes across Baltimore are currently empty and in need of renovation.

The flexibility of OER and the B2S course format is also proving popular with educators. Plans to integrate units and activities from both L2L and SWiM into existing college courses is a frequent outcome from the current pilots. As part of the project’s continuing efforts to scale up and reach a wider audience, a DVD version of SWiM has been developed. This will enable the course to be used in non-internet accessible locations such as prisons. The project also hopes to develop a Spanish language version of both courses.

Pilot news!

AACC have completed their first, eight week, hybrid format pilot of SWiM material. Positive feedback regarding the course’s ability to engage students who has been received from both students and the course facilitator. Elsewhere at Prince Georges Community College Team Builder’s Academy, students pursuing vocational certification in construction and construction management are using both B2S courses to improve their job readiness.

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