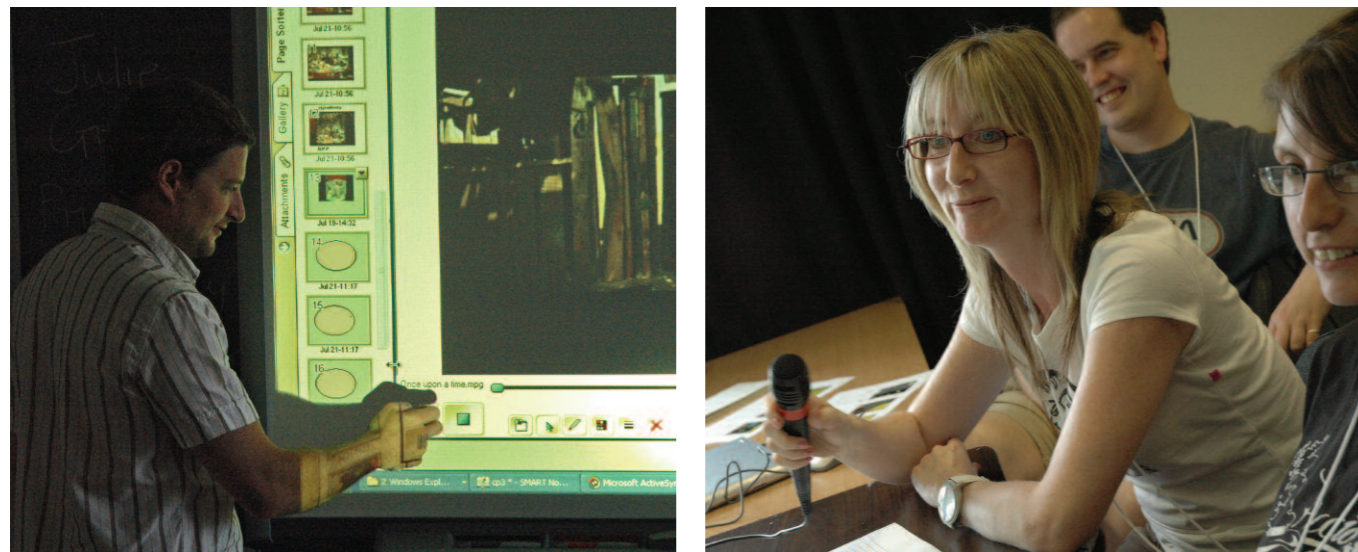


INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARDS AND DIGITAL VIDEO

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ABSTRACT

Whiteboards have been the 'buzz' kit of recent years but are they actually of any use when teaching with digital media, or are they merely a projector screen with detachable bits that you end up losing? The session aimed to explore, through examples and hands-on experience, how the board's own software can be used as part of the teaching sequence, using digital media, at Key Stages 2 and 3. The focus primarily fell on literacy but clear links can also be made across the curriculum.



An Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) is an ideal opportunity to spend a phenomenal amount of money on a fancy projector screen. After spending huge wadges of cash you can then enjoy the ability to show 'interactive materials' to large numbers of open jawed children all at once while they sit in mesmerised awe. As one teacher once said (while presenting at a national conference on whiteboard use) 'the children don't have to think at all!' Well that's alright then! As a Teaching and Learning Consultant (TLC) who was originally seconded from a school to lead one of the six Local Authority Interactive Whiteboard pilots, funded by the Government through the National Strategy, I have had the opportunity to witness the implementation of whiteboards into primary schools with close consultant support, lighter touch initial training with follow up review meetings and completely unsupported integration of the devices. What is clear from each of these situations is that teachers often feel pressure from the investment and subsequent expectation of 'standards' rising. This tends to lead to an over-emphasis on the board's use, or the idea that using the board automatically equals 'interactive teaching and kinaesthetic learning'. In this text I would like to describe my own evolution of use of the board and how that has naturally led to use of digital media.

I think that I was quite fortunate in my acquisition of a board from a local Education Action Zone (EAZ) because three weeks earlier I had discovered a projector in a cupboard when doing my initial audit of ICT equipment as the new ICT co-ordinator in the school. I immediately used the projector for display of text, so we could all read together, or for use of images that could be used to generate adjectives or sentences or whatever. I also found that I could use short video clips in applications such as Microsoft's Dangerous Creatures to really engage the children. Use of images, and especially video images, really struck me as a way into engaging a group of children who often struggled to be motivated. What I really wanted to do at this point was to deconstruct clips so that the children could focus on key points rather than just watch and be entertained. It was at that point that my Headteacher came to me one day and said that the EAZ had bought us (and four other schools) an IWB each. I was over the moon because I had seen one demonstrated at my previous school by a rep some months earlier. 'I'm glad you're pleased,' he remarked, 'Why, what is one?' This view was obviously shared by the other schools because their staff

had never seen one before and the boards got shunted into the ICT suite (well it's ICT kit isn't it?) or worse, into a cupboard. I, meanwhile, tried to hand-drill it onto the wall during a Friday afternoon lesson while my kids watched, bemused. Luckily the caretaker's husband made it secure during the weekend.

At last I could actually manipulate, highlight, circle, label and generally 'interact' with text and images at the board. I could save work and refer back to it easily for days. I could even refer back to an earlier 'page' to reinforce learning at a later point in the lesson. I was also able (due to my home computer having a TV-in which allowed me to capture video from my video player) to acquire video that related to text that we were studying. I was able therefore to display a video clip from A Midsummer Night's Dream alongside the original text and/or the text that had been adapted for the screenplay (which I typed in myself). We could compare and contrast use of language very efficiently. We could also look at how the director/actor had used setting, clothing, demeanour etc., to enhance the 'story.' I began to realise the value of studying the visual texts as texts in themselves, particularly as it quickly became obvious that the children were far more switched on to discussing the video, then using it as a way in to discussing the written text.

I was actually observed by my Headteacher, Philip McElwee when I taught the Shakespeare lesson and he was impressed but made an incredibly valuable point, one which should be the mantra for all IWB use. He commented that he wasn't convinced that all the children were engaged in the learning: 'What were they actually doing?' This was an important observation for me because it crystallised some instinctive concerns that I was beginning to have. It would seem during lessons that all the children were watching the board but were they really engaged? Were they learning the things that I wanted them to? An interesting experiment with a Y1 class a year later may put this into a context:

I often played the children animated stories on the board while they were getting ready after PE. As soon as you were dressed you were allowed to sit on the floor and watch (mouth open optional). Their favourite was 'The Tortoise and the Hare'. The words would highlight as they were read and then the cartoon would play the action in a very engaging way. I already believed that most children were watching it in a very superficial way, taking no heed of the words so I had never used it in a literacy session. One day to confirm my suspicions I decided to put it on in French, which was one of the menu options. The children duly arrived on the carpet with legs in sleeves and so on, due to their haste to watch the 'cartoon.' Not one noticed or wavered their attention despite all the language being in French (spoken and written). I even questioned them afterwards, 'Did they notice anything different today?', etc. They, as Year 1 children do, told me variations to the cartoon action that they had clearly made up in the hope of getting it right. It is a salutary whiteboard lesson: what you think you are teaching the children may be something completely different to what they are actually learning. I needed a way to ensure that the children were accessing the text and responding to it at their pace, at their level, with a purpose, not merely watching the big screen at the front. But at the same time I was convinced that use of digital media, deconstruction of 'video text,' was just as valuable as studying traditional printed text. My solution was to focus the deconstruction of text or creation in response to stimulus onto the individual learner.

From about that time I began to ensure that a written text was given to children to read and respond to (on wipeboards or post-its) before we would then go through it together at the front of the class on the IWB. This gave the majority of children the chance to read the text at their own pace and then have a useful task to undertake. It also gave the teacher a chance to keep a weather eye on the whole class, focus on a few individuals at a time (possibly to support, possibly to extend) and get a general understanding of what issues the children may bring up from the text BEFORE standing in front of the whole class. I found this approach to be very useful in helping me to be precognisant of how the class discussion of the text would perhaps go. This allowed me to prepare myself mentally as to the sort of questions I would need to ask to focus the discussion in the direction I would wish it to go to meet my objectives. If I found that none of the children were catching on to my way of thinking about the text it also gave me an opportunity to 'seed' ideas among the children before we came back together as a class. The board was then being used not as the stimulus but as a place to reflect then perhaps extend the use of the text, to isolate phrases or key ideas to take them further.

This approach was used both with text and with images, the children having a print out of the image on the board to annotate themselves. As I developed this approach I was fortunate to discover a vital part of the whiteboard software that would allow me to take the same approach to some extent with video. I was 'brought up' on Smartboards; they had developed a part of their free software called 'Smart Video Player' (I believe that all of the major IWB software packages now have the same functionality). It allowed me to play digital media clips (converted from videos, TV, etc...) yet also at the touch of a button take stills (that dropped into the Smart Notebook software for manipulation/annotation etc.). These stills could be picked out by me before the lesson and dropped into PowerPoint so that I could print out handouts for the children of key moments from a clip. They could then watch

the clip on the board but respond at the key moments at their desks. This again allowed me to focus on the additional or different elements to a genre that video used alongside traditional text. The more I did this, the more obvious it became that children were completely unaware of the genre/types of TV and film, exactly the same as when they studied written text genre. That statement is at odds with 'ICT evangelists' that I have watched in horror describe how children 'just know about film, they can do it, we can't, give them the tools and let them get on with it...' (he shall remain nameless but I use the example to highlight some of the dangerous thinking that is presented at conferences up and down the country). Children do not instinctively know about film but they are certainly motivated by it and can access it more easily than written text (due to their saturation in it?). The IWB allows the teacher to deconstruct the text easily, focus on key moments in a scene and then take the learning on usually at this point to create a written text (and yes of course primary schools must take into account the spectre of national tests which are written).

I am afraid that I have given a very superficial review of how the whiteboard can facilitate study of, or at least use of, digital media. I began to use digital media to support my traditional literacy teaching but this began to evolve into focusing on digital media genres in their own right... however still making the links back to the sort of text that children would potentially be tested on at the end of Key Stage 2. It is ironic to my mind that I have to justify my study of digital media back to traditional text study when most of the children that I taught will be saturated with the digital media in their ordinary lives and will rarely (in comparison) use traditional text. Still, that is the testing system and we must take account of it.

I recently tried to take this teaching focus further by working with a local Advanced Skills Teacher on a CARA application. The teacher in question wanted to use their grant to purchase laptops and digital camcorders for her children to create a digital text as well as a written text at the end of each study of a genre. Her application was rejected on the grounds of it being too ambitious and financially unviable (despite being costed out to the nth degree). This was particularly disappointing for a grant application designed to focus on action research of new ways of effective teaching. It seems to me that it is indicative that although thinking is changing on use of digital media, there is still a long way to go.

My session at the 2006 CP3 followed the above structure, introducing the audience to my growing sophistication with the software and classroom technique through a range of resources that exemplified each stage. Some I have mentioned but I would like to discuss here a few of the further examples that I used. We explored the idea of sequencing still images into a video timeline (within Smart Notebook) as an activity within Early Years as a precursor to video editing. This activity gave the children more images than would fit in the timeline to introduce the idea of using only the most relevant clips to the finished product. The child could also then use the Smart Recorder to record their retelling of the story directly from the board as a movie clip. Effective practise within the Foundation Stage focuses on children having control of the board in small, often unsupervised groups, often even as individuals. The boards that we fitted in our Foundation Stage settings were all positioned in roleplay areas at child friendly heights so the idea of using them for sequencing and basic editing was immediately obvious. Very quickly it also became obvious that the children were more than capable of creating short video clips using the recorder.

Taking this idea a little further I also demonstrated a lesson where I had captured a film clip and taken the sound off it. Six key moments in the clip had been isolated and made into handouts that the children used for descriptive sentences. These were then read into the narration tool in Windows Movie Maker to become the new soundtrack to the clip. I also demonstrated this in the session at CP3 although the attendee's narration was inferior to the quality of the sentences that Y2 at St Gabriel's RC Primary had come up with, obviously! I also showed the audience the use of clips that I had used from various Hollywood movies to teach the children specifically about types and function of different shots. The children had discussed these and had then used that knowledge to create key shots when filming, then using Windows Movie Maker. The intention was to recreate this teaching sequence in the CP3 session but time was against us. My final examples used music video clips to introduce the idea of using something very relevant to children to access poetry.

As a concluding paragraph I wish to offer this glimpse of the future. A child walks into a classroom, he immediately whips his Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) out of his pocket and downloads a video clip from his literacy class page on his learning platform. He watches the clip, has an attendant set of questions which he then discusses with a few friends. He can take the clip home and ask his family what they think or perhaps browse the internet for key information relating to the clip. He then creates a short presentation that represents his views using words (probably voice recordings and video clips as often as text) and stills or excerpts from the clip. This is then uploaded to the teacher's work area and can be used as a marked piece or projected onto the IWB to be analysed and discussed with the class (who have all downloaded the presentation in advance to see what they think). Sound

amazing? Total fantasy? Many elements are already happening in projects up and down the country (most notably in Wolverhampton where the handheld learning project has been running for several years). This approach puts the onus of learning much more squarely on the shoulders of the learner, not the teacher (who becomes more of a facilitator). Early indications seem to suggest that the children rise to this shift of emphasis and become far more motivated and involved in their learning. The whiteboard is then used as the feedback tool, the review tool in the classroom, where ideas are bounced around and manipulated by the teacher to meet the objectives that are prescribed. In this learning environment it becomes very obvious 'what the children are actually doing.'

Andrew is a learning and teaching consultant from Redcar and Cleveland LA.

He was involved in the original DfES whiteboard pilot as a consultant. He has extensive experience of in school support and training, both in LA and nationally. His intention is always to make the ICT 'invisible' and become merely a facility for enhancing learning and teaching. His involvement in the use of digital media was really kickstarted at last year's CP3 and he has since been developing media projects for KS2.

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