



Brampton Ellis School

From pit to net

The regeneration of a mining community saw a major investment in primary school IT equipment. In addition to SMART Board interactive whiteboards, 142 laptops were put into the schools to encourage independent learning. Two years down the line, teachers and pupils are so used to SMART's cutting edge technology they can barely imagine life without it. Three schools in South Yorkshire lead the interactive whiteboard revolution.

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*Naomi Oliver,
ICT CO-ordinator,
Brampton Ellis School*

Community regeneration

Back in 2003 Brampton Ellis Junior School and its two feeder infant schools benefited from a £250,000 project to put interactive whiteboards in every classroom. The project, called Pit2Net, reflected the regeneration of a mining community between Barnsley and Rotherham that had seen pit closures and high unemployment.

Funded by the Government's e-learning foundation, Pit2Net transformed teaching and learning in an economically depressed area that had lost much of its Victorian employment base.

In addition to SMART Board interactive whiteboards, 142 laptops were put into the schools to encourage independent learning. Two years down the line, teachers and pupils are so used to SMART's cutting edge technology they can barely imagine life without it. After initial training and support from Rotherham Borough Council, teachers quickly adjusted. They are now independent innovators, experimenting with new ideas, and creating unique lesson plans from Internet sites, texts and pupils' work.

When temporary refurbishment works were carried out at Brampton Ellis Infant School, ICT Co-ordinator Naomi Oliver was given an unpleasant reminder of what life had been like before interactive whiteboard technology transformed classroom teaching.

"For a while we lost the server," explained Naomi. "Although I carried on using the whiteboard I couldn't print and save my work on the internal network or access the Internet and I realised then what an integral part of our day-to-day learning SMART Board interactive technology had become."

Life into history

For Naomi, the Internet is a key teaching tool, particularly in history.

"When I use any kind of visual material to teach young children I need text that is at the right readability level. Some of the CD-Roms available are too busy whereas the BBC schools website Famous People doesn't crowd the children out with facts. Famous People has integrity in terms of curricula content, and I can use the whiteboard as a big screen to demonstrate to the children how it works."

Naomi, who teaches six and seven year-olds, explains: "When you go to the Famous People website you choose a character, for example Henry the Eighth, and advance from one frame to the next. It's like a slide show, and I demonstrate to the children how they can click on hot spots in each picture to get more information."

Children studying Henry the Eighth can click on a picture of a lute and hear an example of Tudor music. In another frame they learn Henry enjoyed playing tennis. If they click on a hot spot they discover Tudor tennis balls were stuffed with dog hair.

Other hot spots contrast how poor and rich people lived in Tudor times, examining their style of dress and diet.

"By demonstrating to the children how Famous People works I fuel their interest and they can go on to use it independently on their classroom laptops," says Naomi.

Other names from the past in the BBC's Famous People series include prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, pioneer nurse Florence Nightingale and diarist Samuel Pepys who wrote about the plague and the Great Fire of London.

Naomi says: "The BBC has pitched Famous People at a level that six to seven-year-olds can easily understand. I have several pupils who have gone on to use the website at home with their parents, helping to fuel their interest in history."

Bring pictures to art

The Internet is also used as a key learning tool at Brampton Ellis Junior School where pupils look at images from national gallery websites to enrich their artwork.

ICT Co-ordinator Lois Gunby says: "I can zoom in on a famous painting from the National Portrait Gallery to demonstrate painting techniques and stimulate class discussions. Before SMART Boards I had to print off a picture and laminate it, and making the picture large enough for all the pupils to see was always a big problem."

Unlike a conventional whiteboard or blackboard, a SMART Board interactive whiteboard enables Lois and her colleagues to prepare, store and display material effectively, cutting down on paperwork.

In addition to using the Internet as a teaching resource, Lois uses Easiteach software. "In science there are animated sequences that explain concepts in an easy way," says Lois, "and using the maths software I can invite children up to change the size of graphs or move shapes around."

"Because the children can operate the computer by touching the SMART Board interactive whiteboard with their fingers, the whole experience is very tactile, very intuitive and user friendly."

For mathematics, teachers can highlight shapes and numbers or put number lines or number grids on the screen. Number lines are a useful tool when switching from counting in ones to tens for example.

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