



Snapshot

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**Adria Quinn (VIC) on
Learning to Use Interactive Whiteboards**

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Snapshots are occasional papers about areas of interest for Network members. The ANSN is committed to making available quality resources to help teachers and schools improve their work.

Adria Quinn (VIC)

Using Interactive Whiteboards: Relections on my first year

Adria is a Year 5-6 teacher at Westbreen Primary School in Victoria.



This ANSN Snapshot has been developed from an interview by Keith Redman, Editor of ANSN E-News.

Background information

Westbreen Primary School is in Glenroy, in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It is a small school, with around 250 students. There are twelve interactive whiteboards (IWBs) – one in every classroom, from Prep to Year 6 – and they are networked.

What was my knowledge of IWBs when I joined the Hub?

When I joined the ANSN IWB Hub at the start of 2008, I had little experience of using an IWB – not much more than having had a “play” with it, really. That initial contact had made me aware of some of the possibilities, however the hurdle to overcome was not knowing what I didn’t know! The challenge was to find out what IWBs could do and how my school and I could use them – and then develop the necessary skills.

The ANSN Hub was invaluable in this regard. Not only did it provide me with training in how to operate the IWB; it also helped me discover how to USE one in the classroom. While I was learning, and trying things out, I was able to share ideas with other teachers in parallel circumstances, bounce ideas and share materials such as flipcharts.

What have I been doing with IWBs during my first year of using one

In my own Year 5-6 classroom I have used the IWB across the curriculum. In literacy, for example, I have used it as a “learning station”, where reading groups rotate between this and other focal points, technologies and resources around the room.

I have developed or borrowed/shared resources that the students can use in self-paced situations, such as flip charts that allow them to learn about synonyms and antonyms, word matches or descriptions of pictures. I have also introduced the educational use of interactive “games”.

One thing I learned quickly is that an IWB is not “just another computer”. To use one in that way would be a waste. Its capacity for interactivity makes it an invaluable resource/tool that students can use together, sharing their ideas and collaborating.

In the teaching of Maths, I have used the IWB to help develop specific skills and understanding – for example in measuring angles, where students can watch geometric material being explained, then manipulate the images and numbers themselves, discuss what they are learning with their classmates, and develop deeper understanding of the underpinning concepts through their hands-on experience. The impact of tactile involvement with the objects that they are studying is powerful to observe. This is particularly the case in our setting, where we have numbers of students who are “visual learners”, and many who have English as their second language.

I have incorporated use of the IWB in assessment, in a variety of ways. As well as using its “mechanical” capacity for maintaining running records of formal assessment, I have found that the IWB lends itself to use for group/peer-based assessment, where the students import or develop work on the board, evaluate it, and provide each other with feedback.

I have used the board much less for what might be described as “teacher-centred”, or didactic, teaching. This reflects my pedagogical focus, which is consciously away from “chalk and talk”, either physical or electronic, and much more towards student-centred learning.

Some things I’ve learnt, which have impacted on my practice

At the most basic level, I have learnt to incorporate the IWB in every aspect of my classroom work, whether that involves literacy work, the development of maths skills, learning in other areas of the curriculum, assessment or record keeping.

I have learnt that the IWB is like another pair of hands – freeing me to get one group started on interactive work, other groups of two or three working on computer-based activities, and individual students with me for 1:1 attention.

My “Ah ha!” moment

My Ah ha! Moment came when I heard some more “difficult” boys discussing their work on the board, and one of them saying “This is great!” then turning to me and saying “When can we do this again?”. Since then, observation and results have confirmed that the IWB has a strong impact with boys and in particular has helped raise their engagement with, and understanding of, maths.

Where to next for us?

I intend planning all my maths units to include IWB elements – which can be stored, shared, re-used and adapted over time. As I said earlier, in our school the IWBs are networked via our PCs, We will be building on this facility to share resources and ideas across the school and between student age groups. All our teachers are currently using the IWBs, but to differing degrees, and we would like to develop a more whole-school approach. More professional learning will be required, as well as collaboration and sharing with our Hub colleagues beyond the school.

What words of advice would I have for others starting work in this area?

Take time to play with the IWB, get the feel for it, and get your head around the possibilities – as well as the basic skills in operating it as a machine. Allocation of adequate time, your scarcest and most valuable resource, is crucial – both in your early learning stages and in the production of materials. Keep in mind that these will gradually accumulate as a bank of resources for you and your colleagues, and what you are doing is to change the way you work, rather than adding an additional and demanding layer to your already-busy schedule.

Don't be put off by things going wrong. That happens and will continue to happen. Students tend to be tolerant in such situations – they are used to technological glitches and will generally be patient as they are overcome – as long as they know that the outcomes will be worth it.

Keep going and make sure that you use the IWB all the time – establish that as a pattern and don't slip out of it, as you are building a habit that will start to show positive results for you and your students. At that point use of the IWB will gather its own momentum.

Learn from your mistakes. I created a flipchart with a beautiful blue background, for example, only to discover that it made the text totally illegible. My design work has been much more thoughtful since then, framed around simplicity and what will work. If something doesn't work, change or abandon it, and move on to find something that does the job.

Notes:

Westbreen Primary School has been part of the ANSN Interactive Whiteboards Hub during 2008. Adria and her school continue to extend their learning and experience through their Hub membership.

Email Andrea Federico, National Co-ordinator for the Hub, at federico.andrea.l@edumail.vic.gov.au to find out more about its work and the support and learning opportunities that the Hub provides to members

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