

Making hard topics in English easier with ICT



A NATE/Becta project

2008

Introduction

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This report and additional materials referred to in the case studies can be found on the NATE website at www.nate.org.uk/htt

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1 The 'hard to teach' project: overview and key outcomes

Key outcomes

The following themes emerge from the case studies:

The ICT element in the teaching of hard-to-teach topics

- was effective in supporting and encouraging both independent learning and collaborative learning;
- fostered individual creativity;
- brought real audiences and real purposes into play;
- enabled and encouraged reflection and evaluation, including self-assessment and peer-assessment;
- allowed teachers to respond to students swiftly and to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching and learning;
- provided anonymity in exchanges and contributions, leading to a much wider degree of participation and a much deeper level of analysis than hitherto achieved;
- encouraged teachers to become more experimental;
- gave both students and teachers confidence and increased motivation.

Organization of the project

NATE recruited teachers for this project on the basis of open advertisement through the website, local authorities and the National Strategy.

Twenty-two teachers from nineteen local authorities attended a conference at Elm Bank Centre, Coventry, in March 2008 with the following agenda:

- What do English teachers consider to be hard-to-teach topics?
- Which areas of ICT seem appropriate in tackling these topics?

Attendees also discussed the kind of project they would wish to undertake in their schools. Each was allocated a mentor from NATE. Between March and July, NATE mentors visited and advised the teachers involved in the project. Email support was also available as well as a dedicated website.

A follow up conference was held in July 2008 where the work of each of the delegates was shared and further advice was given with regard to the writing of case studies, which were written up by the end of the Summer term. Of the twenty-two initial delegates, seventeen completed case studies and one wrote two; these are reproduced in full here.

What is hard to teach in English?

Generally, a hard-to-teach topic is one that:

- is inherently repetitive or tedious;
- is conceptually complex for the developmental stage of the class or individual pupil;
- uses language that alienates or confuses (for instance subject specific vocabulary, jargon, psychology, etc);
- stretches the learner or takes him or her into unfamiliar territory.

More specifically, a consensus emerged that two areas of the curriculum which students find hard seem to be GCSE poetry – especially poetry from different cultures – and the ‘literary heritage’.

Skills which students find hard to learn include ‘reading between the lines’, humour and irony, metaphorical language, alternative readings of texts and authorial intent. They also find it difficult to understand ‘themes’ and to compare, contrast and cross reference. Understanding and writing about the structure of a text and the writer’s language choice is also hard for many students.

Other skills which they find difficult to master are structuring and planning their writing, translating the oral to the written, developing critical thinking and refining their research skills (especially with regard to the Internet). Many students have difficulty mastering ‘exam speak’ and academic language, together with academic referencing or noting of sources.

What has the project taught us?

The aims of the project were firstly to identify problematic areas of English, subjects or topics that were difficult to teach – or difficult for certain groups of students – and secondly to explore the capabilities of ICT to address those difficulties. The approach was by definition experimental and tentative, and the outcomes uncertain.

As we toured the country observing the resultant practice and as we read these case studies, it was evident that the fresh impetus and the special qualities of some forms of ICT – especially the new Web2.0 tools¹ – have produced remarkably successful results. The ICT has not substituted for inspired teaching (and these teachers are wonderful to watch) but enhanced and extended the impact of their lessons, indeed frequently creating motivated, autonomous learners that continued pursuing learning in their own time as a direct result of the project.

The main positive results are summarised below, but overall we were impressed by the collaboration and the sense of ownership conferred on students by activities such as wikis, blogs and podcasts.

Positive outcomes

Improved standards when writing for real audiences

The way in which ICT brought real audiences and real purposes into play was seen by teachers as a major advantage. Where there was an appropriate audience, the work produced by students (in whatever medium) showed a desire to achieve a more polished, accurate outcome. Although this effect was observed with all kinds of students, it seemed particularly to stimulate and engage boys.

Increased confidence

Students’ motivation increased as their confidence developed. Two key factors in this were the familiar and non-threatening nature of the various means of communication, together with the opportunity for anonymity in exchanges and contributions. It enabled students to ‘have a go’ and particularly encouraged those who were shy, lacked self-esteem or simply might not have wanted to show too much interest in a normal classroom setting.

¹ Web 2.0: ‘a term given, rather loosely, to what are called “second-generation” web based functions. These would include social networking sites, podcasts and blogs. Web 2.0 highlights peer to peer relationships rather than the top-down ones which currently dominate internet usage.’ (From NATE’s *Position Paper on ICT in English*, 2007)

Independent learning

The projects were particularly effective in supporting and encouraging both independent learning and collaborative learning. Although the studies look at whole-class projects, a number of them gave birth to more individual, student-generated activities that continued beyond the formal lessons.

Reflection

It was noticed that the use of ICT enabled and encouraged reflection and evaluation, especially self- and peer-evaluation. It also allowed teachers to respond to students swiftly and to reflect on the direction and effectiveness of the teaching and learning.

A number of the projects allowed a more personalised form of learning – often at the pace and in a manner of the student's own choosing. One of the most noticeable threads emerging from the studies is that of student autonomy.

Creativity

The projects frequently allowed creativity to flourish and not merely in the finished 'product' but in the seeking of new ways to undertake tasks or tackle problems. This empowers both the learner and the teacher. As can be seen from the breadth of practice described in the studies, the ICT element sometimes offered an entirely new approach; in other situations it enhanced teaching and learning by supporting existing good pedagogy.

Technical issues and the digital divide

There were, inevitably, technical problems. Encouragingly, almost all the participants learned to deal with them or were able to adapt their teaching accordingly. Good ICT provision was of course a key factor but the schools represented had a wide variety of provision of equipment, together with easy access and technical support.

The 'digital divide' was recognised by teachers as a factor and where out-of-lesson computer use was needed, efforts were made to ensure students were not disadvantaged. Most students took to the ICT based aspects with the adeptness of 'digital natives' but teachers do need to be aware that not all students are equally adept and that there are aspects of ICT in which they need training and guidance.

Teachers

The outcomes reported here have emerged naturally, without any prompting from the NATE organisers. Teachers were left to decide their 'hard to teach' focus, their curriculum or student area and the sort of ICT best suited to the task.

The project has encouraged teachers to be more experimental than they might usually be. Most did not know if their approach would work or what the outcomes might be. Some had to adapt their projects quite radically in the light of experience; many were surprised and delighted by outcomes. In addition to the work within school, the teachers benefited enormously from the exchange of ideas which took place both at the conferences and, for some, in-between.

Caveats

Before waxing too lyrical about the results of this project, one should bear in mind certain factors which might mitigate against the same techniques being used with the same degree of success elsewhere.

One is the halo effect whereby anything new, or anything promoted by an enthusiastic teacher, is likely to be more successful than tired old approaches. However, student familiarity with ICT is such that the novelty value of such approaches is now much reduced. There will always be some value in fresh approaches, however, and all teaching should, surely, aim to try new things as a matter of professional practice, whether this involves ICT or not.

A further proviso is that these projects were undertaken by a self-selected group of teachers who were already well-disposed towards ICT. The danger that such innovative approaches will be restricted to a group of enthusiasts is a real concern and one which can only be gradually overcome. It should be stressed, however, that it was the attitude of the teachers involved rather than the level of ICT provision or of their ICT competence which was the key factor. Clearly a basic level of competence and a basic level of provision are pre-requisites but the teachers were not, by any means, all ICT experts.

And now?

There are heartening findings arising from this project and they deserve wide dissemination. However, like their students, teachers learn best by doing and it is active involvement in projects of this kind which is most likely to achieve the positive developments we have witnessed and would wish to see multiplied.

2 Project summaries

Title	Target	Method	Summary
<p>Using a visualiser to shine a light on poetry Phil Grosset, Easingwold School, North Yorkshire</p>	<p>Writing poetry</p>	<p>Visualiser</p>	<p>Phil Grosset explains how a visualiser works and provides a number of practical examples of its advantages for rapid text analysis and feedback in the classroom. Its particular advantages, he concludes, are spontaneity, interactivity, variety and its contribution to classroom management. His lively study makes a convincing case for adding a visualiser to an English department's inventory.</p>
<p>Interpreting texts through interactive storyboarding Gregory Anderson, St Augustine's School, Scarborough</p>	<p><i>Romeo and Juliet</i> with Year 9</p>	<p>Images, Bitstrips: online cartoon writing software</p>	<p>Gregory Anderson shows how Web 2.0 collaborative software can bring the over-worked technique of storyboarding to life. Using free web-based resources, he shows how his students learnt to appreciate the different ways in which a scene could be presented and interpreted. Students responded with enthusiasm and reported that the visual medium helped them remember the Shakespeare play they were studying. The case study provides detailed descriptions of the application, including how to obtain printed copies of the finished work.</p>
<p>Engaging with poetry Caroline Mortlock, Bexhill High School, East Sussex</p>	<p>Poems from Different Cultures with Year 10</p>	<p>Images, PowerPoint, Movie Maker</p>	<p>Working mostly with lower-achieving GCSE students, Caroline reports how student motivation, self-esteem and understanding of the poetry was improved by their use of Windows Movie Maker to create short videos about poems they were studying. The students were keen to follow this up with more work of the same kind, using their own drawings, photographs, video and sound. Inviting a class in the year below to evaluate the work, by selecting one film for the school website, produced high level discussion. The activity revealed the need for students to have some proficiency with the software, 'so that the ICT is the medium of the learning, and not the learning itself'.</p>
<p>Poetry for EAL and SEN students Tom Charles, The Bishop David Brown School, Woking, Surrey</p>	<p>Poems from Different Cultures Year 11 and Year 8</p>	<p>Images and sound Movie Maker</p>	<p>Tom Charles explored poetry with groups of students whose first language, in most cases, was not English. He believed that 'visual exploration' of the poetry would help develop understanding and an awareness of multiple interpretations. Like Caroline Mortlock, he used Windows Movie Maker software to collate and display the pictures. He found that his students gave much more spontaneous responses than in the normal classroom situation and gained confidence in expressing their own opinions.</p>

Title	Target	Method	Summary
<p>Enlivening the study of poetry with Year 8 Lisa Tippings, Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent</p>	<p>Gothic literature, Year 8</p>	<p>Projector and images</p>	<p>Lisa had previously found that students in her school, particularly the boys, were resistant to poetry. Using ICT to present visual material on Keats' 'The Eve of Saint Agnes' resulted in increased engagement and sustained interest through a series of lessons. Having students type their responses on a laptop to share with the whole class encouraged much greater pupil participation. As a result the English department has become much more aware of the power of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.</p>
<p>Blogging, but not for England: a Year 10 venture Martin Brennan, Eastbourne Technology College, East Sussex</p>	<p>Reluctance to write</p>	<p>Blogs</p>	<p>Keen to encourage reluctant students to write, Martin experimented with blogging with his Year 10 group. Although the results were patchy, a number of particularly resistant students became engrossed and a group of six boys then devoted considerable time to writing posts on a regular basis. His lively account explains the basics of blogging, including some pitfalls to avoid. He concludes by recommending that teachers plan short term, easily managed, targeted blogging activities with extension potential for key groups; his next step involves opening up the blog for student book reviews.</p>
<p>Blogs and the National Curriculum Mark Ellis, Newent Community School, Gloucestershire</p>	<p>Work experience reporting with Year 10</p>	<p>Blogs</p>	<p>Mark Ellis has been exploring the use of Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis and media sharing in the classroom. This case study describes how to use one such application – a blog – as a means of promoting high quality original writing for GCSE coursework. Mark adapts this medium with an upper set Year 10 class, who were working on descriptions of work experience. The results are mature, entertaining pieces of writing through which the students show a heightened awareness of audience.</p>
<p>Teaching ballads Chris Mackinder, Woodway Park School, Coventry</p>	<p>Ballad writing</p>	<p>Word processor and multimedia input – film, pictures and soundtrack</p>	<p>Adapting a project that he had used previously, Chris Mackinder sought to exploit the power of ICT to help students write their own ballads. Within a carefully-structured approach which included studying both traditional ballads and a film retelling, students used a number of simple tools to help them with their compositions. Students found this made the activity both easier and more enjoyable. As a result they took considerable pride in their achievements. The activity lends itself to sharing across classes and schools.</p>

Title	Target	Method	Summary
<p>Building learning power with wikis Anna Richardson, Caludon Castle School, Coventry</p>	<p>Poetry with Year 8</p>	<p>Wiki</p>	<p>Anna set out to explore the value of wikis to develop skills in independent and collaborative learning with two Year 8 classes. Her focus, as in a number of other case studies, was on poetry. She discovered that allowing students access to learning from home removed the constraints of the classroom further and developed the personalisation of learning. The project began to take on a life of its own when another class became interested and conversations about poetry developed between the groups, not just during lessons but also at lunch times and at home. Anna was delighted at the sophistication of some of the discussions and the way the wiki gave all students, no matter what ability, a voice which enabled them to ask questions themselves and interrogate texts naturally. Using the wiki totally transformed a number of the students' views of English and, more importantly, of themselves.</p>
<p>The GlobalDover wikiproject Amanda Monk Peak, Dover Grammar School for Boys</p>	<p>Poetry with Year 8</p>	<p>Wiki</p>	<p>Working with a large group of boys who were voluble but often reluctant to write, Amanda sought to develop writing skills including writing styles and writing for different audiences by building a wiki about schools across the globe and using technology to reach other communities. Students soon became engrossed and created a large number of pages on a wide range of topics. They also accepted suggestions and corrections from their peers and kept each other on task. Students' feedback was an integral part of the project; comments online were more honest than their 'official' feedback to the teacher. The project now moves to the next stage: contacting schools in other towns called Dover around the world.</p>
<p>Wikiteers, wiki-wars and the AQA Anthology Carol Weale, Dane Court Grammar School, Broadstairs, Kent</p>	<p>Poetry for AQA GCSE Anthology</p>	<p>Wikis and wiki-wars</p>	<p>Faced with the task of engaging GCSE literature students in the study of 28 poems and exploring the use of language, form and structure in a sustained manner, Carol Weale sought to create an environment for stimulating and interesting student-led discussion. By setting up an AQA Anthology Wiki where students can explore each other's interpretations, she utilised the 'MSN' communication culture that her students were familiar with to engage their interest in posting responses on the site and so engage them in the participation of a literary community. The unfolding open discussion, and analysis of each other's work that resulted, was a fascinating demonstration that students were willing to devote considerable time and energy outside the classroom to continue the discussions.</p>

Title	Target	Method	Summary
<p>Active revision strategies for C/D borderline students Sam Custance, Holsworthy Community College, Devon</p>	<p>Revision program for GCSE Paper 1, Reading</p>	<p>Podcast revision, quizzes, Pictionary and Taboo on the interactive whiteboard</p>	<p>Revision can often mean more of the same, typically in the guise of some rather dry and unexciting worksheets. Just at the time you want them to concentrate the most, they lose interest! Here Sam Custance tackles this tricky situation and explores how ICT can help to make revision an appealing process in which students actively engage with and develop their understanding in preparation for an examination. Through employing a range of websites and strategies, often based around the use of an interactive whiteboard, Sam has made revision an opportunity for students to build confidence and a positive approach to their examinations.</p>
<p>Analysing the language of poetry through podcasts Kate Murphy, Batley Girls' High School, Kirklees</p>	<p>AQA GCSE poetry with Year 9</p>	<p>Podcasting</p>	<p>Seeking to engage Year 9 students in working collaboratively on the language of poetry, Kate asked them to produce podcasts. She developed a structured series of lessons that allowed students to work in groups without disturbing other recordings. Students' conversations as they compiled their scripts revealed detailed consideration of the language of the poems; Anna concludes that the <i>process</i> was important as well as the final podcast. The students developed speaking and listening skills, learnt new ICT skills, really engaged with the poems they were studying and, perhaps most importantly, seemed to be having fun.</p>
<p>Using podcasting to improve close analysis of language in poetry Carrie McMillan, Kingsmead Community School, Somerset</p>	<p>GCSE poetry with Year 10 and Year 11</p>	<p>Podcasting</p>	<p>Podcasting requires a computer, a microphone and recording software; with these tools, anyone can be a broadcaster. Carrie McMillan uses them to help her GCSE classes explore the language of poetry in closer detail. Making her students the 'experts', she provides them with the technology and a real audience, before setting them off on some in-depth analysis of three poems. The results appear to show pupils talking engagingly, enjoyably and knowledgeably about poetry – often with the increased awareness of language that Carrie is seeking. Especially interesting are Carrie's observations of the different outcomes of running this project with both years 10 and 11.</p>

Title	Target	Method	Summary
GCSE poetry podcasts Phillip Lloyd, Laisterdyke Business and Enterprise College, Bradford	Poems from Different Cultures with Year 10 and Year 11	Podcasting using Audacity	Teaching poetry to a challenging group of GCSE students, Phill Lloyd wanted students to engage in active revision. He sought, in particular, to address the difficulties which students, whose own experiences were limited, had in grasping the cultural implications of the 'Poems from Different Cultures' cluster in their anthology. Podcasting offered a focused way to achieve this and, whilst there were difficulties along the way, the activity was productive. Examinations taken shortly afterwards demonstrated that students had a good grasp of the poems, which could be, at least in part, attributed to the podcast activity.
Teaching the literary heritage Angus Weir, Ninestiles School, Birmingham	Literary heritage with Year 9; oral and media skills	Video, greenscreen and mind maps	Working in a well-resourced school, Angus exploits the technology available to enable Year 9 students to produce short trailers for Stevenson's horror story. In this way, he sought to address problems students find in coping with pre-twentieth century texts as well as in developing speaking and listening skills and understanding media studies terms. In addition, analytical and comparative writing posed a challenge. Working to a tight schedule, students researched, produced and evaluated their trailers. Student comments indicate that the activity had made them much more aware of the techniques both the author and they, as film-makers, had used. This case study and the accompanying online products demonstrate the sophisticated activities possible with the right resources.
Collaborative work on Shakespeare Steven Howell, Stretford Grammar School, Trafford	Shakespeare with Year 7	Shared editing; Internet, word processing	As a strategy to overcome the confusion students often feel when encountering <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , as well as an attempt to encourage more collaborative working, Steven devised an activity based on the main characters. Students would create their own profiles and then review the work of other groups. The activity had interesting effects on the students, many of whom seemed to find the provisional nature of each step of their work liberating, since they knew it could be revised, extended and improved by other groups. The activity confirmed Steven's desire for a more flexible, wiki-style resource that would make collaboration much easier.

Title	Target	Method	Summary
<p>Using SMART Notebook 10 for refining and presenting information Sam Custance, Holsworthy Community College, Devon</p>	<p>National curriculum assessments, Year 9</p>	<p>SMART Notebook 10 software</p>	<p>Sam Custance focuses on how the introduction of a SMART interactive whiteboard to her classroom helped students with their problems in refining and presenting information. The interactive nature of the board encouraged students to contribute and share their written work in public. Tools also made it easier to illustrate planning and drafting and to focus on individual words or phrases. Sam provides a wealth of practical examples and concludes with a useful list of fifty teaching and learning ideas. Whilst her examples are from the SMART Board software, users of other boards will find much here to inspire them.</p>

The complete report, including the case studies and additional materials, can be downloaded from the NATE website at www.nate.org.uk/htt

3 Using a visualiser to shine a light on poetry

Phil Grosset, Easingwold School, North Yorkshire

Overview

Phil Grosset is a teacher of English and Media Studies, and an AST for ICT across the curriculum. He teaches at Easingwold School, a broad intake mixed 11-18 comprehensive school of about 1300 students in North Yorkshire. In this case study he explains how a visualiser works and provides a number of practical examples of its advantages for rapid text analysis and feedback in the classroom. Its particular advantages, he concludes, are spontaneity, interactivity, variety and its contribution to classroom management. His lively study makes a convincing case for adding a visualiser to an English department's inventory.

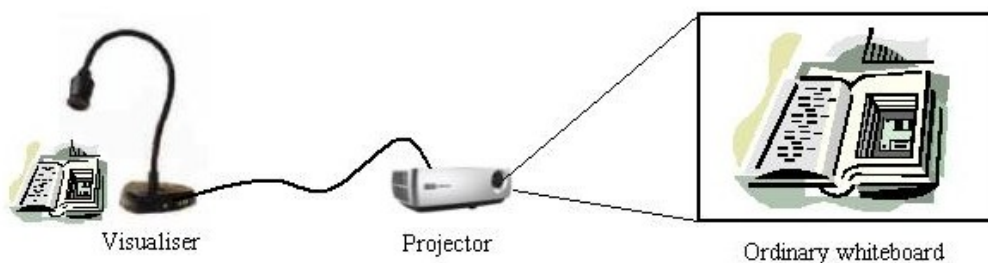
Introduction

In this case study, I will be writing about the use of a visualiser in the English classroom. For those readers who have not yet come across visualisers, I will apologise in advance: there is always a twinge of disappointment when you discover that the visualiser is not in fact some advanced brain projection device. It is often also referred to as a document camera, which is sadly a much more accurate term. Or, as one of my Year 10s put it when I arrived excitedly with my new gadget, 'a camera on a stick'.

Compared with the latest interactive white board, pre-loaded with enough software to run a mission to Mars, it may seem a little low tech. However, the ability to project pupils' exercise books, colour texts, or 3D objects quickly and easily is a very powerful tool. Having used a visualiser for two years now, I will try to share some techniques, and point out a few pitfalls.

How does the visualiser work?

The following illustration shows the most straightforward set up, as used in this case study.



More advanced (and expensive!) machines will allow you to connect to a laptop or PC, or to integrate with a particular model of interactive whiteboard. This allows you to save still images or video for later use: a potentially useful addition. However, simple is sometimes best, requiring less equipment, training

and of course plugging in time at the start of the lesson. More expensive models have a built in zoom, a light, and even a microscope. I haven't thought of a use for the latter yet, but why should scientists have all the fun? As for cost, visualisers start at around £200, which should buy you a model which will plug into either a projector or a computer. The model I have used is the attractively named Ken-a-Vision Vision Viewer 7890U. Think of it as the Ford Fiesta of visualisers: how much do you actually need?

The hard-to-teach topic

A visualiser can help with one of the fundamental challenges in English: sharing texts interactively and spontaneously with students. It can also be used to unlock the process of writing: either through more effective teacher modelling, or by the group sharing of pupils' own work in progress.

I have integrated the use of a visualiser into the teaching of a Year 7 unit on writing poetry. These particular Year 7s are a bright bunch, with most of them being at Level 5 or above. However, I have successfully used similar techniques with classes of all abilities. In the past, I have struggled to scaffold pupils' own efforts in writing poetry, perhaps presenting them with a completed model to 'get them started'. Instinctively, we know that the most important interventions often come during the early drafting and planning stages. We might have an important discussion with one pupil, which we can later tell has made a big difference to the final outcome, or which has helped that pupil overcome an obstacle. If we are having a really good day, we might do this several times in a lesson and perhaps read out one or two examples of good work. The challenge for the visualiser is to help pupils and teachers engage in the thinking and tinkering process collaboratively, at the same time. I will now outline a few activities that can help in this process.

Method: Activity one: rearranging the lines

Start with a simple task: cut up the lines from a limerick and mix them up. Project them onto the board, and ask pupils to help you put them into the original order. You can quickly try out a few combinations, and discuss the merits of each. In their feedback, pupils should discuss the clues they have used to arrive at their decisions, including syntax, punctuation, rhyme and sense.

Next, give small groups of pupils some cut up lines from a poem (it doesn't have to be the whole poem, and it doesn't matter if the lines are taken from the same section). With my group, I used 'Blessing' by Imtiaz Dharker. Ask the pupils to arrange the lines into an order that they can justify, using the same clues as the previous activity. Stress that it doesn't have to 'make sense' and that it doesn't matter if the lines are in the order of the original poem. They are trying to create something new, and explain their choices and effects.

Now ask pupils to come to the front and present their ideas, using the visualiser. You should find that there are several orders, which create different effects. The visualiser is key here in allowing the pupils and teacher to feed back, and to quickly experiment with alternatives. As an addition, you might model the effects of adding or deleting punctuation to affect meaning, and ask the pupils to do the same.

Method: Activity two: prose to poetry

Initially, my group felt more comfortable writing creatively in prose rather than poetry. I set them a brief writing task (one hundred words) to describe an extreme environment, such as a desert or Arctic

wilderness. Descriptions had to include some imagery, and reference to the senses. Here's an example of the kind of thing:

As I drew back the tent flaps and stepped out onto the ice, I was hit by an icy heat. The temperature had dropped below minus thirty: even today, on the first day of Summer. The cold clawed at my face like a provoked tiger, and spread through the layers of my clothing like a virus.

Using the visualiser, you can pick up the exercise book of any pupil: no scanning, photocopying or acetates required! You can then, with the help of the class, highlight the sections of prose which 'seem more like poetry' – a deliberately vague instruction to allow for a bit of creative interpretation. You might end up with something like this:

As I drew back the tent flaps and stepped out onto the ice, I was hit by **an icy heat**. The temperature had dropped below minus thirty: even today, on the first day of Summer. The **cold clawed** at my face **like a provoked tiger**, and **spread** through the layers of my clothing like a virus.

Next, use the visualiser to model the extraction of words from the prose to create a brief, enigmatic poem:

An icy heat
cold-clawed like a provoked tiger,
spread.
Like a virus.

This is a good time to discuss the merits of different line breaks, punctuation, compound words etc. When pupils are completing their own efforts, they might add any additional words or punctuation they see fit, but they *should not* try to make it rhyme.

Finally, pupils can present their work. The beauty of the visualiser here, is that it allows pupils to feed back on the writing *process*, not just the finished, polished article. Hopefully, their work will be scruffy, full of crossing out and amendments, with nuggets of gold flashing amongst the mud. This is what real writing looks like! My class were able to give much better feedback on their language choices because it was still fresh and immediate.

Activity three: 'If, My Darling', Philip Larkin

I am indebted here to Chris Warren of NATE, who provided the idea for this activity, based on his model technique, a summary of which I have included as [Appendix B](#).

'If, My Darling' is not an 'easy' poem, but it is important to stress to pupils that poems are not like crossword puzzles: they don't have a single, neat solution. Once freed from the expectation of having to make perfect sense of it, my pupils enjoyed using it as a starting point for their own writing. I adapted the delivery of the lesson to take advantage of the visualiser while pupils were drafting their own versions of the poem. Pupils drew two sets of mind maps: containing the things that someone would and would not find inside their minds. These were a great visual presentation tool for pupils to explore and share their initial ideas.

Then, during the drafting process, the visualiser was used extensively to share work in progress, and to give feedback. Feedback took the form of comments from the teacher and the pupils, as well as annotation and alternative word choices (contributed by the whole class). Of course, not every pupil can have their work shown, but they can all take part and benefit from the discussion. It is really important to give this process time: it is not a five minute plenary activity. In a fifty-minute lesson, up to half the time was given over to sharing and feeding back. Once you have established sharing work as part of the culture of the classroom, you will find the challenge is to stop pupils critiquing each other's work once they have started! Of course, students need to understand the importance of balancing criticism with positive comments so that student confidence isn't undermined; this is best learned through the teacher modelling this with the class.

Although throughout I have stressed the importance of the visualiser in aiding the *process* of writing, it is worth including a few samples of pupils' finished poems. No doubt the success of this activity is in large part due to the strength of the idea and the original poem, but I do believe the visualiser helped to raise the status of the drafting process, and make explicit the amount of tinkering that is required to produce an interesting poem. I have included a few examples as [Appendix C](#).

Key findings: strengths and weaknesses

Like any technology, visualisers have their strengths and weaknesses, and it is important to be aware of both. First, the good news:

- **Spontaneity** You can project a text quickly and easily, without forward planning. This can be a real motivation to pupils, who know their exercise books might at any moment be projected four feet high. Not having to make special plans or resources is also a great bonus for the teacher.
- **Interactivity** Almost any text can be an interactive text. Over time, pupils can be trained to look forward to having their work shared, critiqued and annotated.
- **Variety** A wider range of texts can be shared with a group. Try photocopying a Mars Bar or can of Coke when you're looking at branding and packaging.
- **Classroom management** The visualiser is a great tool for focussing the attention of the whole class. It also allows the teacher to spend most of the time looking at the class, rather than facing the board.

As for pitfalls, these are some of the ones I have come across:

- **Size limits** Not all paper sizes or fonts work equally well. A4 is about the limit for viewing a whole text, though of course you can work your way around the sections of a larger text. Fonts below around point 12 are also hard to read.
- **Lighting** For visualisers without a built in light, dim images can be a problem. On a sunny day, you might struggle to see the board with the curtains open, and struggle to make out the image with them closed. A small torch and a piece of Sellotape is a suitable Heath Robinson solution.
- **A computer is sometimes better** True, a class set of computers and an interactive whiteboard might sometimes be preferable, but we don't all operate in a perfect environment. On the other hand, computers all too often hide the drafting process, which can be the point at which pupils learn the most.
- **Orifices** Inevitably, pupils will want to use the visualiser to share the insides of their ears, nostrils or mouths. For some, the temptation to share a giant sized projection of their inner ear is just too great. You have been warned.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, visualisers are a little used resource in English teaching: hopefully this will change as more people see the potential that they offer. No technology is a panacea, but I believe that relative ease of use, spontaneity and pupil engagement are serious reasons for considering one.

To finish, here are a few links to manufacturers' websites:

- www.ken-a-vision.com
- www.avervision.com/UK/
- www.elmoussa.com
- www.lumensuk.com

Appendices

- A 15 things to do with a visualiser...
- B 'If, My Darling': classroom activities
- C 'If, My Darling': examples of pupils' work

Appendix A: 15 things to do with a visualiser...

1. Show examples of pupil work (it is especially useful for spontaneous sampling of exercise books).
2. Show images from posters, leaflets etc as a way of demonstrating presentational devices.
3. Demonstrate types of shots (close up, medium, close up, etc) to media students, or in media units of work at KS3 and 4.
4. Share a novel or a short story with a class when there aren't enough for a class set.
5. Use it to allow pupils to make presentations to the rest of the class. One example from a recent lesson was to display mock-ups of adverts for an advertising campaign in an advertising agency pitch.
6. Create and share mind maps for a new topic.
7. Create and share designs for a web page (without the need for ICT access or expertise).
8. Share an image with a class. You could ask pupils to bring in an image which they feel matches a line in a poem.
9. Display your lesson objectives and learning outcomes!
10. Display instructions for a task (to save time writing on the board).
11. Record a class discussion (and return to it later).
12. Present a model answer.
13. Teacher- or student-led text annotation
14. Teacher modelling of marking a piece of work.
15. Save time for pupils with writing difficulties. After you have written notes on paper and projected them, give them to a pupil you know who struggles to copy from the board. This has worked well with a visually impaired pupil in Year 10.



Appendix B: 'If, My Darling' (classroom activities)

Using 'If my Darling' (Philip Larkin) as a model for writing: a lesson plan

Read the poem. Put emphasis on the argument, as you read it, stressing 'not', 'no' and 'nor', then stress 'would find', 'she would also'.

Ask class to investigate the basic structure of the poem – what is it about?

Draw as many responses as you can.

Finally try to direct the students' attention to:

- a) the images and what they imply;
- b) the positive and negative definitions of personality, based on misguided expectations.

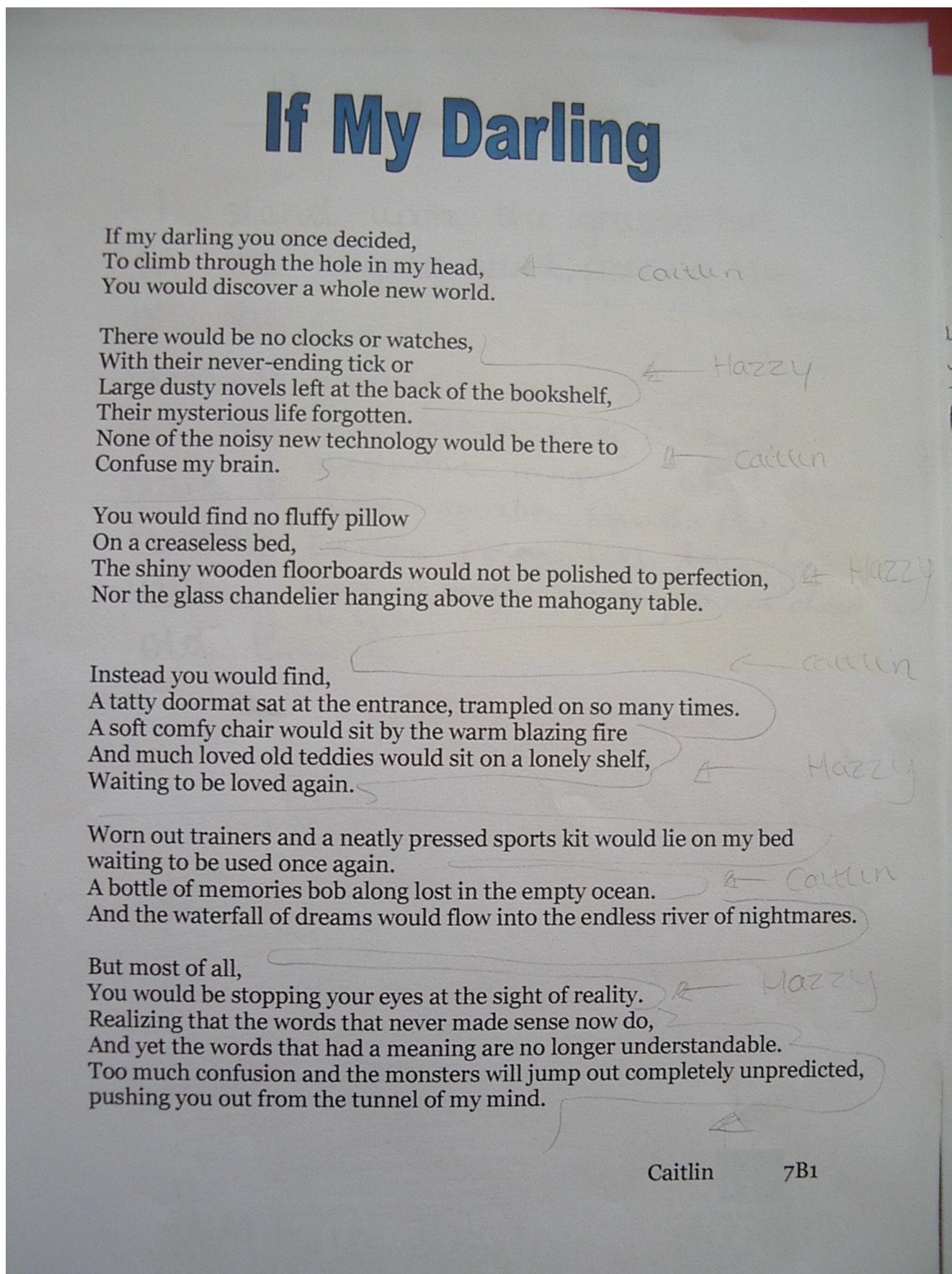
Ask the class to write a poem about another person entering their minds – mother, brother, sister, beloved, father etc:

- The first part of the poem will be about what that person will not find, the second part will be about what the person will find (and some things in the dream-like world of the mind will be distinctly strange)!
- Stress that the approach should be through images and metaphors (look at the original).
- Stress that the lines should not rhyme.
- The first part of the poem will be determined by the other person's mistaken vision – what they are expecting to find, but cannot.
- The poem's conclusion might be a guess at the visitor's reaction to discovering the truth (as in Larkin's poem).

By demanding fairly rigorous adherence to the structure, you will encourage pupils to exert discipline over their material, and you will discover that a solid framework can release writers to write... eventually.

This lesson plan was suggested by Chris Warren.

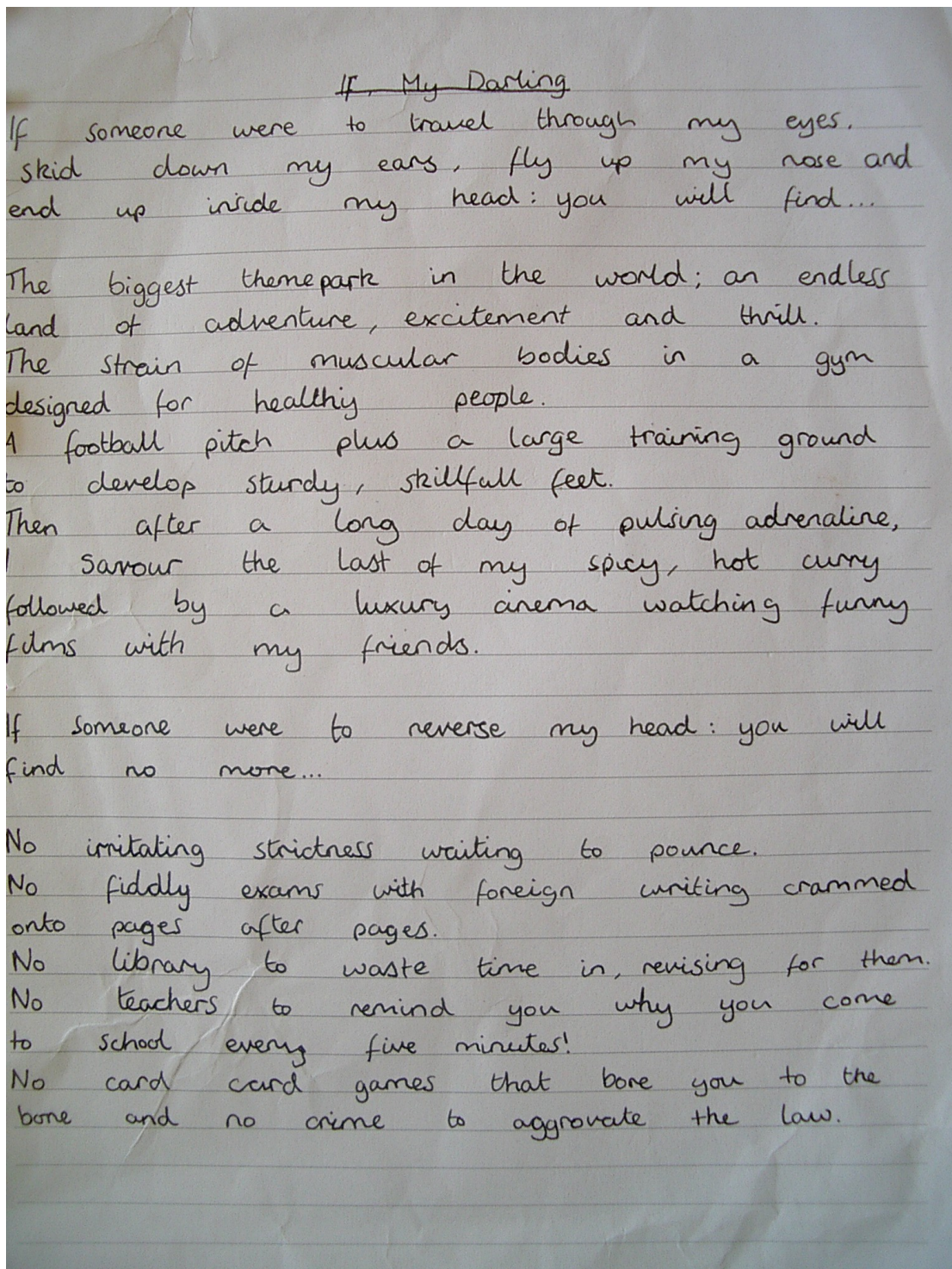
Appendix C: Examples of pupils' work



If my Darling

The ocean of knowledge deep and blue
homes many strange creatures of my mind.
Plankton of punctuation float in the sapphire ocean
The consumed by the misty grey literary whales
adding more to my dictionary
The river of unknown spills into my ocean.
My ever flowing questions answered. &
Upstream a water fall of thoughts falls into another flow of water
that passes through the valley of many emotions
and climbs up the mountain of my greatest desires and dream
No icy pathway freezing the happiness of my world
No time consuming technology buzzing in my ear.
Nor a clock with its never ending tick
No sense of time.

With a sense of calm my peaceful world
Occasionally disturbed with excitement
would welcome visitors
In its own unique way
That would fill my darling with a rush of happiness



I, my darling...

Vague, dusky, memories: - scattered in an ocean of dreams;

A jigsaw never complete.

In a stale corner, a rusty lap: Dipping

With hope and ambition.

No hate scattered :-

Like pencil shavings.

No grudges: Stained

On a ragged canvas.

A maze of treasured books;

Their ancient secrets untold.

Silver lined clouds -

Portraying optimism.

No distorting anger :-

Enveloping the silent air.

No echoing, suffocating corridors:

Crammed with violence and cruelty.

An old wooden cabinet:

Spelling out secrets

A faded rag-doll, battered yet fondly loved

Her glass blue eyes; searching deep into my soul.

I watch you grow: then I watch you smile

As you sit on the rocking chair; That creaks softly.

(Page 1 of 2)

If, My Darling

If my darling you were to find,
The glorious entrance to my mind;
Pull back the twigs, pull back the moss,
As now at the end of this narrow passage are all my
secrets and all my memories.
Open this door with the small golden key and there
you shall not find:

Any terrible crimes, like a buzzing wasp stuck in a
house,
Or unbearable blank walls to dull for words.
No pongy smells will crawl up your nose: and
nothing so cold will give you the shivers.

You wouldn't find any taste-bud stinging creamy
sauces making the good food beneath go soggy.
There will be no bone fizzing insults, taking my
head to pieces;
And no dreadful loneliness, lurking behind a sharp
corner.
But most of all, no blackness isolating you from the
good things in life.

However there are good things coming next, so
don't get to depressed.
As they are as beautiful as the golden key you may
remember from the beginning;
So now enjoy yourself in this wonderful mind of
mine.

Shooting stars shall wizz in front of your every eyes
gleaming and smiling at you warmly.



(Page 2 of 2)

Happiness will fill you up like a balloon full to the
brim of helium:
A delicate little box will sit in a dusty corner where
I place all my worries, never to bother me again.

Metallic bubbles will float across luscious, green
woodland and shimmering, blue oceans.
A couple of bookshelves shall stick out from the
ceiling will cradle interesting books full of bright
pictures and large print,
Near by somewhere a few cuddly cushions will be
laid out and comfortably lounging on them will be
my very own guinea pig and rabbit happily
munching on grass and vegetables.

This may send your mind in a muddle; it may be
too much to take in. Your feet might may be numb
from walking or brain may feel like it's going to
explode. Remember though that the words of this
poem are the words of my mind, and some day the
words of your mind will turn into a poem to read.

You have stayed in here too long now,
So don't be afraid when the floor beneath you turns
to dust and you fall.

Down

Down

Down

Down

To the safety of your home.

However don't tell anyone.

It's a secret!

4 Interpreting texts through interactive storyboarding

Gregory Anderson, St Augustine's School, Scarborough

Overview

Gregory Anderson explains how Web 2.0 collaborative software can bring the over-worked technique of storyboarding to life. Using only free web-based resources, he shows how his students learnt to appreciate the different ways in which a scene could be presented and interpreted. Students responded with enthusiasm and reported that the visual medium helped them remember the Shakespeare play they were studying. The case study provides detailed descriptions of the application, including how to obtain printed copies of the finished work.

Introduction

Teaching different interpretations of a text is difficult, not least because we may have our ideal interpretation of a scene. Is it surprising that pupils want to be told a 'right' answer? Should it also be surprising that pupils find it difficult to explore different interpretations when some struggle to discover even one? Perhaps collaborative storyboarding will be an effective way to support the teaching of this important English skill.

Context

As a reward in the aftermath of intensive revision for SAT's tests (a trial that future groups will thankfully no longer have to endure), my mixed Year 9 class in a North Yorkshire 11-18 comprehensive were scheduled for a series of lessons that were interactive, pupil-centred and fun. In practice, though, there was time for only one lesson. The remit was for the pupils to explore how user-friendly the comic making website www.bitstrips.com was to use. An informal questionnaire had previously revealed that 88% of pupils had access to the Internet. It was not surprising that, as digital natives, these pupils thrived; with no prior training the class were able to create at least one comic strip per pair.

As a bonus, by emailing these comics to a central email address, they could be collated, uploaded into a word document template, and edited into a full colour comic book. This book was printed for £4 plus postage and packing from www.lulu.com.

Aims

The purpose of this project is to encourage the exploration of different interpretations – of Shakespeare scenes for example – through the use of interactive storyboarding. Storyboarding is a visual modality accessible to all pupils. Similar to mind-mapping, it allows pupils to understand and work with concepts that they would struggle to explore in linear writing. Whereas drawing a storyboard by hand in the classroom has recognised pedagogical benefits, the use of ICT in this project intended to produce a more professional, novel and seamless storyboard by using www.bitstrips.com

You may also want to celebrate the work of the pupils through digital and print publication (see <http://ganderson.wordpress.com/>). Another aim might be to facilitate straightforward collaboration between different classes and different schools.

Hard-to-teach topic: Different interpretations of texts


Although skills associated with traditional storyboarding can be developed, there is surely more potential in the use of higher-level thinking skills – that is, of exploring different interpretations. While traditional storyboarding encourages pupils to ensure a clear link between each comic pane, apt punctuation and spelling, and some adherence to the conventions of comic strips, the potential of ICT allows interactivity and collaboration.

Method

Use a PowerPoint slide showing a moment from a scene in a Shakespeare play: The one shown below has taken a frame from a simple Bitstrips cartoon showing Romeo overhearing Juliet at the balcony that I had created on the Bitsrips site.

Example Slide

ROMEO AND JULIET MEET NATE 2 BY MRANDERSON



WWW.BITSTRIPS.COM

- 1) How do you think Romeo and Juliet might be feeling when they say this? Why?
- 2) How else do you think they might feel? Why?
- 3) Click on the picture to change it and email it to mranderson2@gmail.com.

Figure 1 – PowerPoint slide using a frame from the Bitsrips site

Notice the layout:

- a) a title, which could be a reference to the set scene;
- b) a comic representation of the scene, which could be pre-made by the teacher or a pupil (because it was hyperlinked, clicking on this picture would open it up for editing – see below);
- c) a series of prompt questions;
- d) an address to which pupils can email an edited picture (this doesn't have to be your personal email!)

Using the first question as a whole class activity – or as a starter – you can discuss one possible interpretation based upon the body language and facial expressions of the characters. At this point you could ask yourself what other questions could this picture stimulate? In addition, could these questions be phrased more appropriately? For example (as the project focuses on exploring different interpretations), should the questions be phrased more specifically?

Some pupils may experience difficulty with the second question. Having already written and discussed one interpretation, there may be a sense that this scene has been dealt with, and that it should be time to move on. In addition, as the characters in a traditional storyboard have specific, immovable expressions, where is the legitimacy of a different interpretation?

Perhaps it is the moment when pupils witness the changing of expressions and body language that different interpretations are legitimised. Because the text, scenery and positioning of the characters has already been created, teaching can focus on the expression and body language.

Editing the pictures

Simply clicking onto the picture (either via a laptop or your interactive whiteboard) whilst PowerPoint is in slideshow mode will open the picture for editing if you've created a hyperlink in PowerPoint to the Bitstrips page for your cartoon. If you are already logged in to Bitstrips your screen will look like Figure 2.

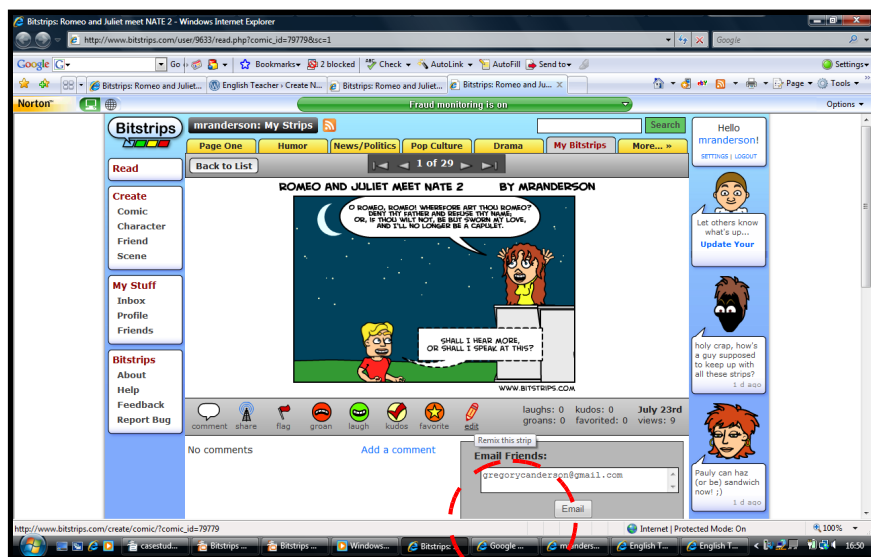


Figure 2 – Clicking on the PowerPoint picture links to the Bitstrips site, where the image can be edited

Clicking on **edit** (the pencil icon underneath the cartoon) will open up the next screen, Figure 3, where you can create alternative interpretations of the scene.

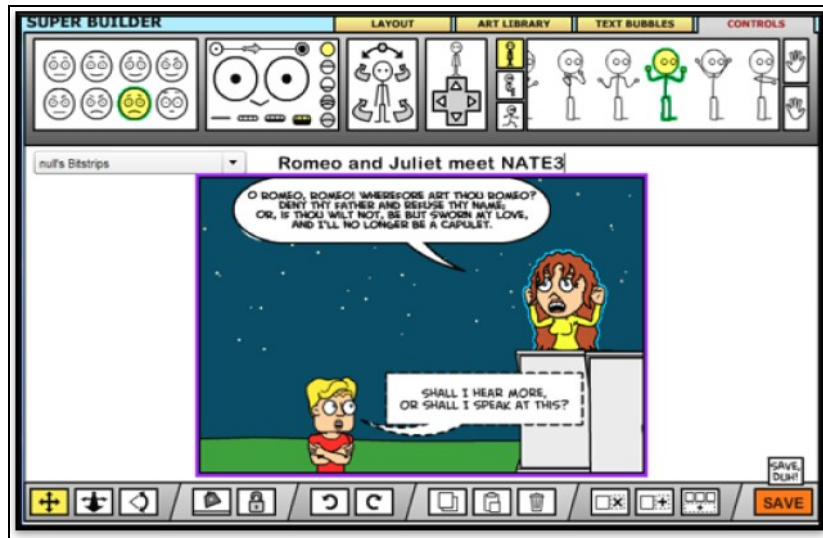


Figure 3 – Editing interface of the picture on the Bitstrips site

Pupils begin by clicking onto a character; selecting the control tab and then they choose different expressions or body postures. This is perhaps the most important teaching point: to emphasise that although the *words* are not changed, their *meaning* does depend on expression or body language.

Once you click **save**, it is possible to enter details for the purposes of emailing the strip to yourself or to the students. Once you have done this you will access this screen:

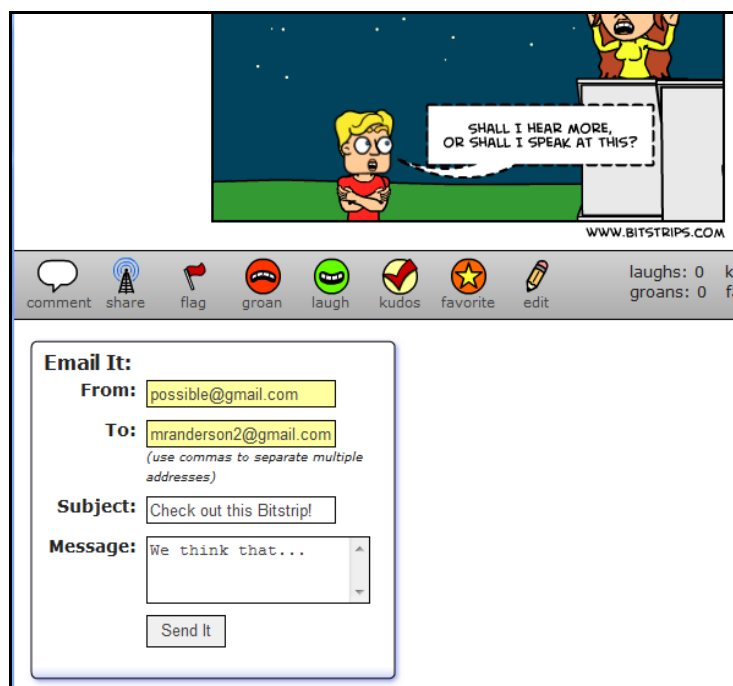


Figure 4 – How to email your storyboard

Now pupils can send their interpretation to the agreed email address. Note that by sending a short Point-Evidence-Explanation (PEE) paragraph in the message box too, you are creating another learning function. An example of a PEE paragraph might be:

On the other hand, Romeo may be so happy that Juliet is unknowingly declaring her love for him that he may enjoy eavesdropping on what she is saying. Perhaps he wants to both listen to what she is saying, to 'hear more', and to speak directly. Also, Juliet seems happy and liberated and speaks her words with conviction, 'if thou wilt not'. This seems clear to me because she will clearly compromise her life to be with him.

Note that it is the moment when you can see several different interpretations on the same screen, all captioned next to their respective storyboards, that pupils can appreciate how different interpretations are created – especially if they have been involved in justifying their interpretation and storyboard themselves.

Outcomes, or how would the storyboards and interpretations be used?

The interpretations could be emailed to a common address and posted on a secure educational blog (e.g. <http://ganderson.wordpress.com>). Furthermore, collated set scenes could be edited and published in a 'print on demand' revision book, which is free to download or can be purchased from lulu.com for a small sum.

Depending upon how these comic strips are used afterwards, high-level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and comparison can be accessed. Pupils could see, through collaboration with other classes, how characters can show different interpretations through body language and facial expressions, how these can be justified, and how these justifications are equally valid.

Key findings

Enthusiasm amongst pupils for using interactive storyboarding is high. Universally, pupils seemed to appreciate being able to create professional-standard comic strips, and recognised its strength for visual learners:

I prefer it to drawing because I can't draw as well. (School A, 2008)

I like the way I can make the characters change their expressions easily. (School A 2008)

I prefer learning by making it a picture. (School A, 2008)

Some pupils expressed its potential usefulness as a revision tool:

It helps you visualise what you put down... it helps you remember what you thought about, and it helps you relate the characters to pictures... which helps me remember the story.

(School B, 2008)

Also, some apt criticism was also provided:

[It is not as good] when people put their interpretations when they are not a visual learner [sic]...maybe they should be able to put some audio to it too. (School B, 2008)

Another key finding was that the ICT is straightforward: no software needs to be purchased or installed, although updating the latest free Adobe Flash is essential (only your ICT administrator can do this, but it should be a five minute job); there is no need to sign up to an account (although it is recommended); therefore no ICT expertise is required by the teacher. In addition, the new curriculum specifies the importance of a real audience. If you consider another classroom and/or another school to be a real audience, then this project provides a real audience.

Next steps

This case study shows the first few tentative steps into the collaborative use of interactive storyboarding. While computerised storyboarding has existed for a time – especially for Shakespeare – this project aims to take full advantage of the collaborative function of Web2.0 applications, and of the new curriculum’s emphasis on creativity. (The webmasters of [bitstrips.com](http://www.bitstrips.com) are trying to encourage use across education institutions worldwide, so any teachers who would like to share their ideas or practice are heartily encouraged to contact me on mranderseyork@gmail.com.)

Some further ideas for how to use this collaboratively came out of the NATE working party meeting:

- Editing the pre-set characters – why do they have different appearances? Why different clothes? What quotations can back this up? One character you can edit is Juliet from the set scenes above: <http://www.bitstrips.com/character/65679/> .
- Editing pre-set scenes – why different props? Why different facial expressions? Why different positions?
- Adding to another class’s story – what are the conventions of a horror story? A crime story? A love story? This would be slightly trickier, as pupils would be expected to follow on from each other’s stories as a whole class. Perhaps pupils would be allocated a certain story to each pair (for example ten pairs?), and each class would complete three to six frames of the start of a story, showing structure, development and crisis. These could be sent to another class, and the other class would have to solve the stories. Finally, these can be brought together and shared amongst all classes.

Having previously worked with largely teacher-centred ICT projects (Boardworks-style Flash games for example) it became clear that the most pedagogically sound ICT projects were:

- pupil-centred, allowing the creation of pupil content;
- collaborative, involving more than one class and another audience;
- straightforward, low-cost and easy to maintain.

I hope you have found reading this case study useful. Hopefully, like me, you see and value this project’s potential for collaboration. Please feel free to email on gregorycanderson@googlemail.com to discuss any part of it, or to look on the blog www.ganderson.wordpress.com later in 2008/9 to see how other teachers are getting involved.

5 Engaging with poetry

Caroline Mortlock, Bexhill High School, East Sussex

Overview

Working mostly with lower-achieving GCSE students, Caroline reports how student motivation, self-esteem and understanding of the poetry was improved by their use of Movie Maker to create short videos about poems they were studying. The students were keen to follow this up with more work of the same kind, using their own drawings, photographs, video and sound. Inviting a class in the year below to select one film for the school website produced high level discussion. The activity revealed the need for students to have some proficiency with the software, 'so that the ICT is the medium of the learning, and not the learning itself'.

Introduction

When we met for the first time in Coventry as a team, there was considerable discussion around the definition of terms – what constituted ICT, and what constituted a 'hard-to-teach' topic. 'Hard to teach' was understood to mean anything that students are reluctant to engage with – therefore a very wide field! There was, however, particular emphasis on poetry and on critical skills, which led me to make my own choice: Year 10 (low ability and challenging behaviour), studying 'Poems from Different Cultures'.

Aims

I had two main aims: to increase students' engagement and motivation; also to improve their understanding of the set poetry and their ability to write about it.

Context

The school I work in is a large (1650) mixed comprehensive, situated on the south coast. The intake covers the full ability range, but with a markedly extended 'tail'. Achievement in English in the school is strong compared with other subjects. Year 10 are divided into two bands according to whether they are pursuing vocational, college-taught courses (Z Band), or academic options (Y band). The Z band has a higher number of lower-achieving students, and students for whom language-based courses present significant difficulties. The group I chose for this study were 10Z4. In English, we group in three tiers; in the Z band, 10Z1 follow an accelerated course; 10Z2 and 3 are parallel middle ability sets, and 10Z4,5 and 6 are parallel bottom sets. 10Z4 contained five students with significant behaviour issues and one persistent truant. The class numbers 25 in total, with eight students on the SEN register. The three students with the highest GCSE targets in the group all have significant behaviour issues.

Topic under focus

The topic under focus is study of the AQA 'Poems from Different Cultures' section of the GCSE anthology, specifically 'Island Man' and 'Hurricane Hits England'. The skills are those of analysis and, ultimately, those of writing under examination pressure.

ICT strategies

With 'Island Man' we began by the students writing their own poems, following the same narrative/subject outline as 'Island Man' using a [guided visualisation](#) and then using images from the web to illustrate those poems

We then moved on to using Movie Maker to create a mini movie of 'Hurricane Hits England'. I selected the images; we made a recording of the poem using one of the school staff, a food technology teacher, which was available on the students' shared network area along with the images.

Methods

With 'Hurricane' we began by talking about the great storm of 1987, right at the end of a lesson. I then asked the students to talk to parents/older family members about what they remember of the storm, and to bring those memories into the next lesson. It was a great start to the following lesson to have everyone telling their stories and sharing their memories – for another time, the best thing would be to record those memories using Audacity, making a class oral resource. We then set about reading through the poem together and making some minimal annotations – not much more than who Oya and Shango are. The students then got straight to work on Windows Movie Maker. They had had some limited experience of using the application in IT; some were very confident, two were significantly resistant. Most were highly engaged, even if their skills were limited. This process could be slowed down another time and work done with the images and the poem on paper before moving to working on computers; it would depend on the class. With the class I had, they needed to go straight on to the computers to achieve a sense of momentum. They worked on their movies for two double lessons. This was not continuous work as individuals in the class had coursework they were completing, and there were, as always, absences. When three students had completed their movies they needed extra work and that increased the pressure to move on to the next topic.

I then used the best of the videos they had made with several small groups of higher ability Year 10 students, asking them to evaluate the videos and choose which would be best to include on the school website. This produced some high level discussion and was meaningful as it was a real task – their choice is now the one on the website. Videoing some of the discussions enabled us to stop when one of the students came out with a particularly good comment and analyse it further – this is certainly an approach I would like to use a lot more.

Outcomes

The students enjoyed the lessons and want to do more Movie Maker work in future. They want to film, draw and gather their own images. They were frustrated with the frequent crashing of the system and the general slowness of the computers. There was a marked improvement in self-esteem amongst the students who completed their projects. The class attitude to poetry is better than one might normally expect from a group of this kind; all of their work with the Anthology poems so far has been of a practical and exploratory kind.

Key findings

Using ICT, specifically Movie Maker, to work with poetry was engaging and productive; it improved the students understanding of the work and kept them involved – but I feel it’s a very small beginning. The best thing is the students’ enthusiasm for more work of this kind. They are very keen to use their own drawings, photographs, video and sound to do more work of this kind.

There is an issue about skills. Students are going to learn much more about the texts, the hard-to-teach topics, if they are already confident users of ICT. ICT is not a magic bullet, and it is as capable of alienating students as it is of engaging them. In the case of my class, there were three students who excelled. One was a confident user of technology already; the other two were very quick learners of the necessary skills. For the weaker members of the group, the ICT was a barrier we had to overcome. When they understood how to use the application, they were fine – but made much slower progress and did not complete the project. I spent more time enabling them to use the ICT than enabling them to engage with the texts – and that’s not ideal. They’ll be fine on the next project! A better approach would have been to group the class according to skills and give each student tasks they were confident with. Then my ICT experts could have got on quicker and the others would have felt much more involved and engaged.

Next steps

I want to develop the movie making approach – definitely including student drawings and possibly some animation work. I think it is also essential to plan so that the ICT is the medium of the learning, and not the learning itself – tuning tasks to students’ abilities so that they are challenged and engaged.

Appendices

- A: ‘Hurricane hits England’: resources and teaching outline
- B: Hurricane Hits England: picture sheet
- C: ‘Island Man’: text for guided visualisation

Appendices: Engaging with Poetry: resources

Appendix A: 'Hurricane hits England': resources and teaching outline

Michael Fish: 'Earlier on today apparently a lady rang the BBC and said she heard that there was a hurricane on the way. Well don't worry if you're watching, there isn't.'

http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/bbcweather/forecasters/michael_fish_1987storm.shtml

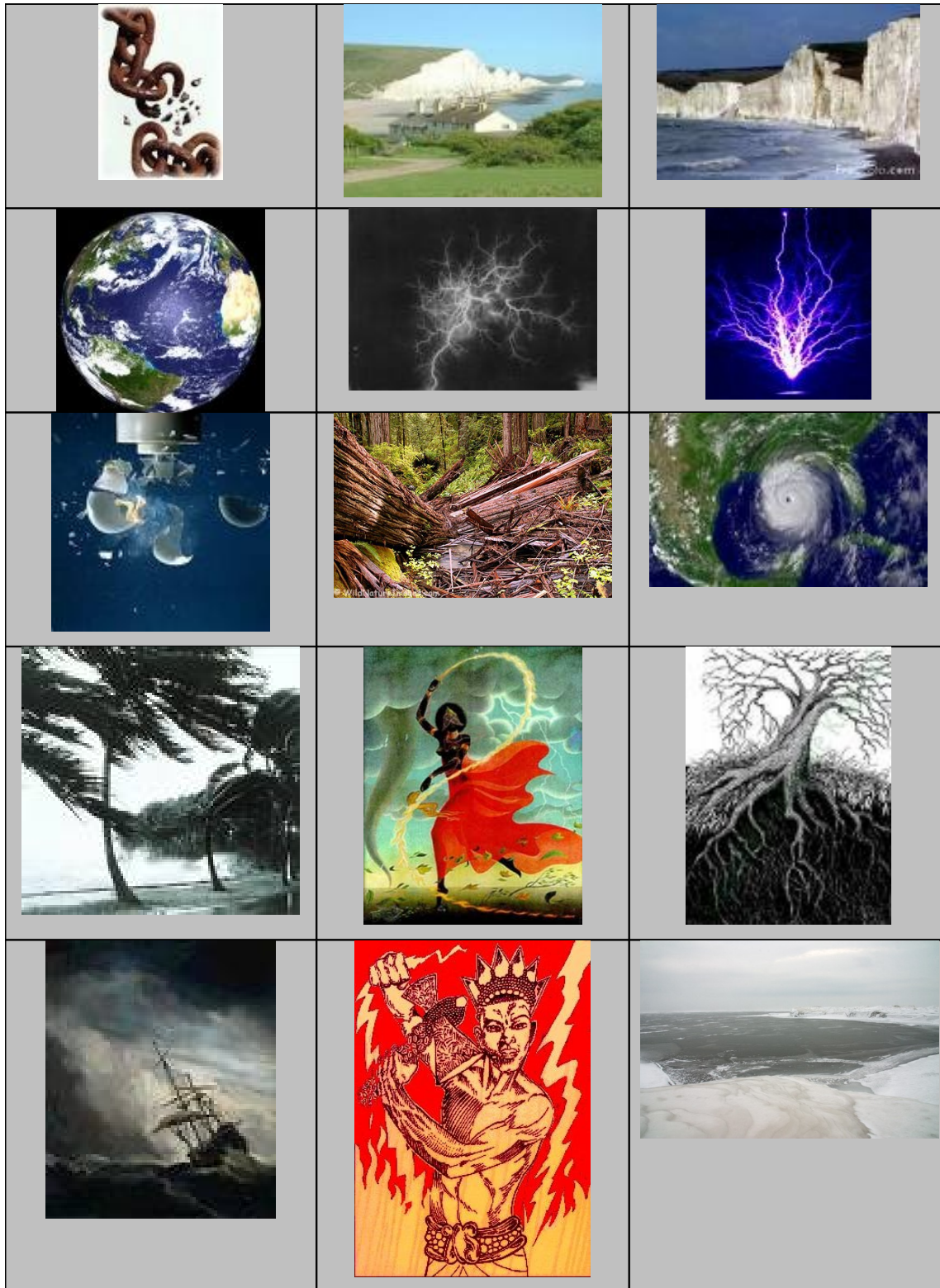
Teaching outline

- Begin by talking to students about storms and hurricanes at the end of a lesson. Ask them, for homework, to ask an adult what they remember of the Great Storm of 1987. Use the stories they bring in to start the next lesson. These stories could be recorded using Audacity; making a good En1 assessment.
- Read the poem together and do whatever 'can-opening' techniques you do with a poem to ensure the students have a basic understanding. Simple notes on Oya and Shango can be found at <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/shango.html> ; <http://pantheon.org/articles/o/oya.html>
- Assign groups of students a stanza each and ask them to highlight the most important two words in each line of their stanza. Use a plenary to discuss these; make sure everyone's got something highlighted in each line and make clear that they will need this done before they do the movie-making.
- Issue pairs or groups with the 15 pictures and get them to match these with their highlighted words – works well as a 'paste onto a sheet of A3' activity.
- Pairs open Windows Movie maker; import pictures and sound.
- Use their understanding of the poem to create a mini movie – keep saving it as a 'project' until you are happy with the results.
- Ask students to evaluate their own movies – explaining what key ideas they wanted to get across and how successful they feel they've been.
- Ask students from outside the group to choose the best video(s) for inclusion on the school website.

YouTube versions

- 'Hurricane Hits England' read by Grace Nichols: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qsa_QAFMs5o
- 'Half Caste' by John Agard: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLD_OtM0gsk&feature=related

Appendix B: Hurricane Hits England: picture sheet



Appendix C: 'Island Man': text for guided visualisation

Imagine you are on a tropical island. You are near the sea. You can hear the waves. You can hear seabirds. Somewhere nearby, fishermen are getting ready to out in their boats. Feel what the sun is like on your skin. Look inland. The colours are strong. There are trees, with bright green leaves. All the time, you can hear the waves.

You start to realise you are dreaming. You are not on the island. There are different noises. You are in London. You can hear lots of traffic, really loud. You are waking up now, you feel heavy. It's another day in London. It's grey.

6 Poetry for EAL and SEN students

Tom Charles, The Bishop David Brown School, Woking, Surrey

Overview

Tom Charles explored poetry with groups of students whose first language, in most cases, was not English. He believed that ‘visual exploration’ of the poetry would help develop understanding and an awareness of multiple interpretations. Like Caroline Mortlock, he used the free Windows Movie Maker software to collate and display the pictures. He found that his students gave much more spontaneous responses than in the normal classroom situation and gained confidence in expressing their own opinions.

Introduction

The students in this case study are either those who have had very little exposure to the English language or those who regard both English, and school, as a ‘boring waste of time’. [Appendix 1](#) gives some details about their background.

During the 2007/8 school year, I taught English Foundation to Yr 11 – Set 4; Yr 9 – CHUMS (combined humanities) and Years 7/8 – combined group. The Yr 11 group comprised 18 students: 11 SEN and seven EAL. Target grades are 3Cs, 13Ds and 1E (1 not entered for any examination – newly arrived from Nepal). EAL students’ home languages: one Urdu, one Iranian, two Polish, two Nepalese and one Punjabi. CHUMS - Yr 9 (Combined Humanities – English, History, Geography and RS) are all of low ability and include four SEN and eight EAL students (three Polish, two Urdu, one Punjabi, one each Nepalese and Portuguese). Lower School Years 7 and 8 – a combined group of 25 students, most of whom are either SEN or EAL or both.

Aim

My aim in planning the use of ICT with these groups was to make the activities interesting, challenging and enjoyable (‘fun’). The outcome would be that each student increased in confidence and ability in the use of English and, by using pairs or groups in the activities, would develop both self- and peer-evaluation.

The hard-to-teach topic: poetry

The hard-to-teach topic I was addressing was poetry. This encompassed the visualisation and subsequent individual interpretation of each particular poem. I wanted the students to ‘see’ how the poets’ choice of words and use of language created atmosphere, mood and meaning. This ‘visual exploration’ of the poem should lead each student to realise that there is ‘no one correct answer’ to the meaning of the poem. If the students could substantiate what the poetry meant to them through visual, sometimes also audio, means



then each would have succeeded in creating his or her own impression of what the poet was trying to communicate.

Method

The method I wanted to employ was quite straightforward. At the outset, I wanted to engage the students with ICT in a constructive, challenging and novel way.

- I wanted them to make a presentation of **a poem they had not read before**.
- Firstly, they had to **read and annotate** the poem.
- Secondly, they had to fill in the **planning sheet** with their own ideas.
- Next, they had free choice to choose **images and sounds** for their presentation from the Internet.
- Finally, they combined the images and sounds with what they believed to be the **key phrases and words** from the poem.

I believed that poetry could be brought to life and made relevant by the simple use of Movie Maker. Students could be given an unseen poem and then asked to present it in visual form, including what they thought were the main quotations.

Students would first be given an outline worksheet that they could use to jot down their ideas whilst examining the poem. They could then go online to research suitable images that would convey their ideas about the poem. The finished presentations could include added music files and/or voice-overs. These presentations could then be evaluated by their peers.

This use of ICT would also allow students to prepare and research at home and in their own time at school. I thought that the enjoyment and ‘fun’ factor in allowing students the freedom to express their ideas to everybody would go a long way in dispelling the myth that some topics were hard to teach. Obviously preparation would be vital but, once the techniques had been developed, the use of ICT might be extremely beneficial to each student’s learning and development.¹

What happened?

Eight Lower School and four Year 11 students came into school on Monday and Tuesday during a mid-term break. They were in an IT room from 9am until 12 midday. It was very casual. I gave each student a copy of a poem: Year 11s had a poem from another culture – ‘An Abandoned Bundle’ by Oswald Mtshali, and LS had ‘On the Highway’ by Nguyen Quang Thieu (pre-release 2007/8). None of the students had seen the poems before.

I explained that they had to read the poem, making short notes about what they thought it was about on the poem itself. They discussed this with their peers. I thought I might have to explain various images/words etc. but was surprised that, by working together, they came up with very astute responses to the poems. (We so often underestimate their abilities!)



¹ Rationale: NATE/Becta conference

Next, I gave them each a [planning sheet](#). On this they noted down key images/symbols, sounds or music that might be used and a selection of key phrases/words from the poem itself.

The Internet search began. Much discussion followed about the chosen pictures. It was interesting to hear why they were deciding on some images and not others. It was extremely surprising to look at their choices and I was amazed at the different methods they used to search for images. Some went for the 'images' search engine on Google and others preferred to surf for specific sites. 'An Abandoned Bundle' produced some startling images of rabid dogs and rubbish tips. Two students found moving images of smoke and fish struggling in nets!



My biggest worry was that of time limitation. In a one-hour lesson, students had found all their images, but had not yet begun to put it all together in Movie Maker. They were so involved and occupied that I thought that the impetus would be lost when they returned to complete the task. However, the following day they were still very keen about the project. (I would recommend that a two-hour session be organised if possible. Finding available PCs might be a problem in some instances but an enthusiastic request amongst colleagues should do the trick.)



The greatest enjoyment for both the students and me came when they proudly showed off their presentations. They were intrigued at their different visions of the poetry, yet all had discovered the underlying theme or purpose of the verse.

Key findings

I found that by using ICT in this way, all the students became much more imaginative in their interpretations of the poems. Each student gave a much more spontaneous response than could be expected from within the normal classroom situation, and he or she could substantiate these responses without hesitation. All the students realized that they had achieved the aim of the exercise and had no worries about giving their responses. They gained confidence in expressing their own opinions and were quite happy to put forward their points of view.

The most important findings were:

1. that students used the poetry to expand and explore their own views of the world;
2. that students have an ever-changing global awareness of life in other cultures;
3. that students had the ability to work together in an English language situation;
4. that students' abilities tend to be underestimated by most teachers;
5. that students' use and knowledge of the English language increased;
6. that students' confidence in their own use of language increased dramatically;
7. that poetry in the curriculum could be explored in an engaging and entertaining manner.

Next steps

Once the students have used this method to 'visualize' in this way, a simpler approach may be used. They could be given a poem and a planning sheet and, without access to the Internet, they would then

discuss the poem and write down the images they thought might 'fit in' with the ideas contained in the poem. A quick 'Tell us all what pictures you might use' and 'Why did you choose that particular image?' around the class would show whether they were on the right track. I hope that they would develop enough confidence in visualising in this way to substantiate their choices. 'Right – go home and, for homework, choose one of the images you have imagined and see if you can find a corresponding one on the Internet...'

An alternative method, which I have used before, develops confidence and critical awareness. The students use a program that offers them a wide choice of vocabulary to construct a short piece of blank verse on any topic. I found that poetrylibrary.org was suitable for the ability range of my students. This application allows students to send their 'poetry' to a partner via e-mail. The partner then produces a presentation showing their interpretation of the piece.

Obviously, the aim of these approaches is to enable the students to visualise mentally the 'pictures' that the words represent and to gain a more accurate idea of the intention of the author. I hope that eventually all students will use this technique confidently. The method reinforces their ability to substantiate their ideas. This technique has proved very successful in CHUMS, with students preparing their own presentations that are then shared with and evaluated by their peers. This advances **cross-curricular literacy** and the confidence the students gain is invaluable.

Students' impressions:

This is fun...

They blocked this site! ...and I want that picture...

Can we do this on weekends?

Please organise a club, sir!

When can we do that again?

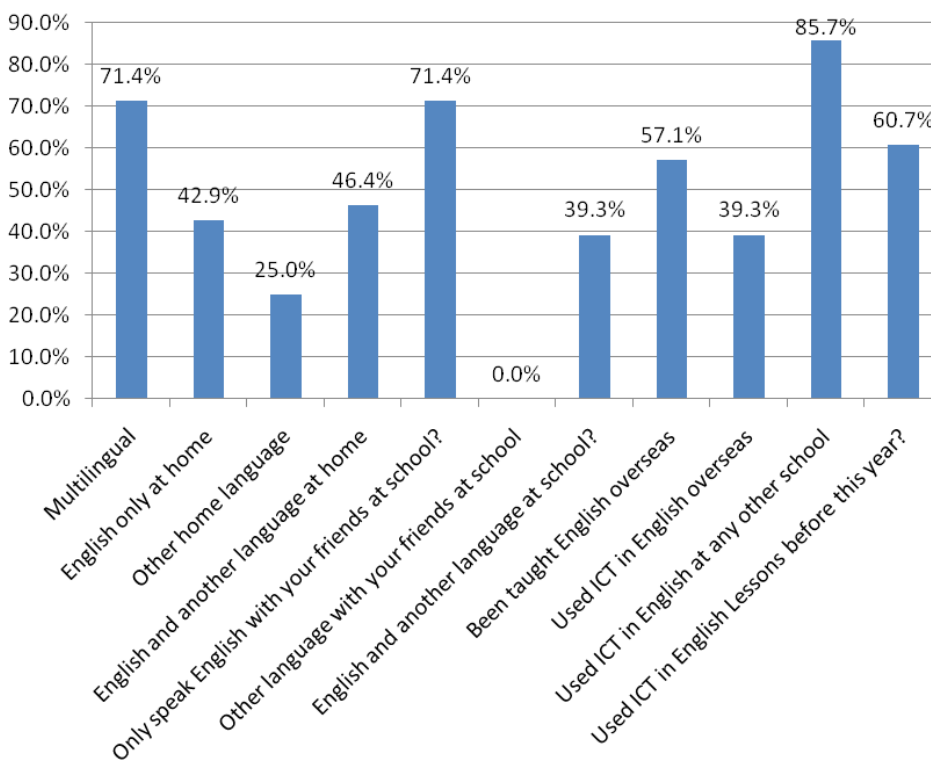
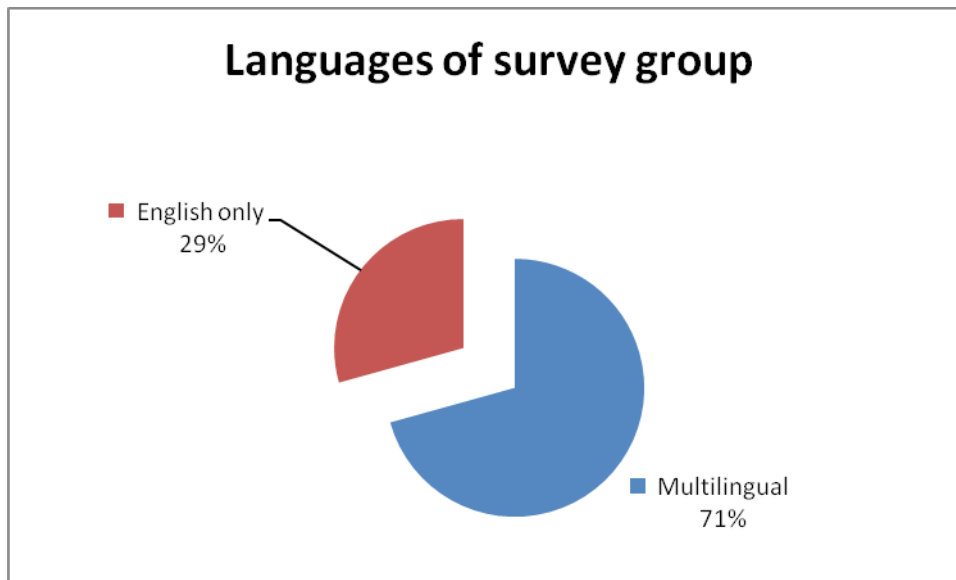
I just thought of something else I could have used...

When can we get mini-laptops?

Afterword: it looks like the school is thinking about equipping certain groups with mini-laptops for the new academic year.

Appendix 1

I carried out a survey of study groups on home language and use of ICT during May/June 2008. Copies of the survey questionnaire are available on request. The graphical representations below show results:



Appendix 2

English task planning sheet for use with Movie Maker:

Key images/symbols sounds/ambience	Comments and ideas for representing these in the film	Key words and phrases that will appear in the film

Additional resources

These items were also created during the course of the project:

- ‘Using ICT in English’: questionnaire used to produce results in Appendix 1.
- *On the Highway*: video presentation created by Year 8 students in response to a poem.
- Staff presentation: PowerPoint presentation to colleagues at The Bishop David Brown School on the benefits of ICT use by students, produced in response to the initial NATE/Becta Conference, March 2008 as part of the school’s policy of extending the use of ICT across the curriculum.

7 Enlivening the study of poetry with Year 8

Lisa Tippings, Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent

Overview

Lisa had previously found that students in her school, particularly the boys, were resistant to poetry. Using ICT to present visual material on Keats' 'The Eve of Saint Agnes' resulted in increased engagement and sustained interest through a series of lessons. Having students type their responses on a laptop to share with the whole class encouraged much greater pupil participation. As a result the English department has become much more aware of the power of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.

Introduction

I am the Assistant Head of English at Tredegar Comprehensive School. The school is a mixed comprehensive with one thousand pupils on role. It is an 11 to 18 school and the only comprehensive serving the town. Tredegar is in Blaenau Gwent, one of the most deprived areas of Wales with one of the poorest LEAs. Unfortunately money does not exist to purchase an abundance of technology and there is very little, if any, extra funding to apply for. As a result technology provision has been forced to take a back seat as money has always been needed to purchase new texts for the three key stages. Eventually, however, the department was able to purchase a laptop and projector but we were unable to buy an interactive whiteboard. Every classroom is equipped with an ordinary whiteboard. There are five teachers in the department and resources were stretched so I purchased my own laptop.

Aims

I decided to get involved with the NATE/Becta project as we were becoming more and more concerned that as teachers of an important core subject we were not giving the pupils their full ICT requirement. Even with our limited resources we wanted to ensure that ICT was seen as an integral part of English and something that could enhance the pupils' experience and enjoyment of the subject. The department does not have a computer suite and it is very difficult to book the Learning Resource Centre as it is needed for ICT lessons. However we knew that our actual teaching and the learning of the pupils could be enhanced through carefully planned lessons and through considerate sharing of limited resources. More than anything we wanted to capture the imagination and interest of the pupils and successfully prove to them the value of ICT use in English.

Hard-to-teach topic: the teaching of poetry

I decided to focus on the teaching of poetry mainly because some of the misconceptions held by our pupils mean it can be a difficult topic to teach. Blaenau Gwent is an area heavily involved with sport, in particular Rugby Union. It is also an area that does not necessarily welcome the idea of the 'New Man'! Poetry is perceived as feminine and not something any self respecting rugby fan should admit to enjoying. The girls are generally far more tolerant although there still exists a belief that poetry appreciation does not necessarily lead to promising job prospects. Ultimately I wanted to show the pupils that poetry was not just for love-struck romantics but that it can be dynamic, lead to greater

understanding of the world and most importantly that it can be enjoyed purely for the sake of enjoyment and entertainment. Teaching poetry appreciation through the medium of ICT would hopefully give the subject more teen appeal!

I decided to use my top set Year 8s as my guinea pigs. They are on the whole a willing and able class. However there is a substantial tail end of sometimes difficult boys, all of them rugby and soccer fans and all of them liable to cause a disturbance simply because English is not PE and I am not a six-foot-four male or a rugby-obsessed Head of PE.

Method

I decided to introduce the pupils to Keats' poem 'The Eve of Saint Agnes'. I was definitely throwing myself in at the deep end but I decided that there was no point in making only a half-hearted attempt at experimenting with something new. If I was going to convince Senior Management that more money needed to be invested in the use of ICT in English, there could be no half measures. Lack of department training and equipment meant resources and ideas were limited. I decided to begin by simply projecting talking points for the students to consider from the laptop onto the whiteboard. This had an immediate effect as did the fact that questions based on an illustration for the poem were delivered in the same way. It was hard to believe but after the pupils read an extract from the poem and considered their discussion points in groups, the pupil with the most to say was a previously very disruptive boy who often treated the subject with scorn! After the lesson I asked him if he had enjoyed the lesson and this was his response:

Yes, Miss. You have never really used the laptop before and I liked the fact that you did something different today other than turn your back and write on the whiteboard.

I was sure there was a compliment in there somewhere! Indeed the boys' behaviour continued to improve throughout the series of lessons that I taught. I later asked his ICT teacher about his attitude in ICT lessons and was told that the pupil was one of the most attentive and responsive in the whole class!

During the lesson it was also noted that the pupils seemed wary of annotating the illustration they had been given. It seemed this was because the pupils felt this was an expensive resource that needed to be kept clean for future classes. In the next lesson and with help from a colleague I projected the image on to the whiteboard. I then encouraged the pupils to type their thoughts on the laptop and therefore project them on to the whiteboard. This relatively simple task encouraged much greater pupil participation than previously experienced. The pupils wanted to use the equipment so felt encouraged to give their opinion knowing they could be active participants as a reward.

Throughout the remaining lessons I taught I ensured that ICT use was an inherent element of each one. The pupils were encouraged to share their opinions on the laptop so that these could easily be referenced in future lessons. We began to keep a log of poetry read and enjoyed and it was so much easier to keep track of changing opinions and ideas on the laptop than on random pieces of paper that inevitably run the risk of getting lost. The pupils were keen to use the equipment so were much more giving of their opinions and thoughts.

Key findings

In conclusion I realize that to many, our achievements seem minor and our use of ICT limited given all that the medium is capable of achieving. However we have come such a long way. Before this project the equipment we had was very rarely used and no extra funding was available for further purchases.

Yet in the space of several short months the following has happened:

- Following a meeting with the headteacher where I put my new-found knowledge to good use (particularly the Becta report *Key research evidence about ICT in the English curriculum*¹) the department was awarded further funding to purchase two more laptops and projectors.
- Plans are afoot to turn an empty classroom into an English ICT suite. It will probably take another year and at the moment we might have to have computers from the ICT room instead of new, but this is infinitely superior to what we have now, i.e. nothing!
- The department has purchased a poetry pack to be used specifically on the laptops. It contains poets reading their own poetry and will I am sure capture the interest of the pupils.
- We will be purchasing a copy of *Twenty Things to do with a Word Processor* from NATE.
- I have given my first PowerPoint presentation!

Most important however is the effect the project has had on the pupils. My Year 8s were given a questionnaire to fill in following the series of poetry lessons I had taught. Here is a selection of their responses;

I don't usually like poetry but I have enjoyed these lessons.

I like the laptop being used. It means we are more involved and can take part in the lesson.

English isn't always my favourite subject. I like science and maths but I felt better using the laptop as I'm used to having more IT use in lessons I like.

There can be no better evidence than this that the project has been a real success and not just for the pupils. As a department we have become much more aware of the power of the medium and the responses it can provoke. We will certainly be investing more time and energy into ICT use in the future.

Many will see our journey as being a small one but on the contrary it has been monumental. We have come such a long way in terms of ICT use since February when the project began. We have gone from being a department that rarely used ICT to embracing it fully and to ensuring all future units of work contain ICT strategies, therefore enhancing both teaching and learning. It is a future we are looking forward to with great enthusiasm.

¹ Becta, 2003: http://partners.becta.org.uk/upload-dir/downloads/page_documents/research/wtrs_english.pdf – although slightly dated, this contains useful pointers to the value of ICT in English.

8 Blogging, but not for England: a Year 10 venture

Martin Brennan, Eastbourne Technology College, East Sussex

Overview

Keen to encourage reluctant students to write, Martin experimented with blogging with his Year 10 group. Although the results were patchy, a number of particularly resistant students became engrossed and a group of six boys then devoted considerable time to writing posts on a regular basis. His lively account explains the basics of blogging, including some pitfalls to avoid. He concludes by recommending that teachers plan short term, easily managed, targeted blogging activities with extension potential for key groups; his next step involves opening the blog up for student book reviews.

Introduction

I teach English and media at a small 11-16 technology college on the South Coast. In a town assumed to be genteel, ageing, and possibly prosperous we have the usual comprehensive intake of some bright, high-achieving students and a majority of resentful writers.

Aims

Following the initial NATE/Becta conference on 'Using ICT with hard to teach subjects', I chose the ever-lingering malaise 'reluctance to write' and the faddish new medicine of blogging to see if I could affect a cure. I can't say I emerge as the new Bones but it I didn't kill the patient either; indeed there are some signs of further life.

Method

I have used blogs before but only in my role as web co-ordinator. We have both PE Department and Gifted and Talented teacher blogs. I set these up and gave some, very small training (that's all it takes, really) and I also used a blog for some student voice work on a project to see if we could get student responses using online applications – we post, they add a comment.

This was different though. The class, EN3, is taking their AQA English GCSE in a year. Of the 18 students, none was targeted above a C this year and the majority expect D to G. The one-year course means that everything's a big rush to the finishing line (coursework deadline, with 'Different Cultures' poems thrown at them for good measure). This gives us two potential shots at the holy grail of a pass at C or above in English, as they can retake in the Summer during Year 11. But it does little to inculcate a love of the subject.

I believed they were disenchanted but just to be sure I checked by means of a questionnaire. Sure enough, on scores of one to ten regarding writing tasks, copying, short answers and stories came out top (in a relative sense) and essays, long answers and auto-biography scored low. Only 14 completed the questionnaire; some refused it as it involving writing! Four gave 'nul points' on their 'enjoyment of writing' score.

Comments included:

I don't like writing I never will

I don't mind writing but I don't like it *and*

I don't like writing... Because of my spelling mistakes and learning difficulties.

This last from Stacey, more on her later.

Given this ringing endorsement of my English teaching I set myself to find a suitable safe space for my students to blog in. Like many of my fellow teachers in need of inspiration I went online looking for help and a shoulder to cry on. The good thing is I found it, them.

One of the prime concerns at our NATE/Becta meetings was the issue of safety, not only that of the children but also teachers leaving themselves open to charges of irresponsibility by allowing students to connect to potentially unsafe environments. I say this to put your minds at rest in case this stops you working online. It shouldn't.

There are free blogs you can join and immediately start writing on but they require an email account and my students have been banned from using email in school for five years. This was due to 'misuse' during ICT lessons. It is of course mind-boggling that on the one hand the government is promoting ICT as the gateway to next generation learning and the world of work, while my poor lumpen proletariat can't surf or email. These ironies run through our present use of ICT in schools.

The free blogs like 'Wordpress' <http://wordpress.com/> and 'Blogger' <https://www.blogger.com/start> are a marvellous resources but hard to control and monitor for 18 people. They are set up as individual writing spaces for journal-like activities. They are great and so easy to join you should try one today (doctor's advice). But they were not right for my class, not yet anyway. I'm a teacher and I need *control!* Also Blogger has a 'next post' link and if you sit there and click it, say, 18 times, you might come upon someone with, perhaps, an interest in high-heeled boots – and not just to go with their flares. This means they are not safe, at least not 'school-safe' as some heads and heads of department might define it.

At my wits end (well okay just heady-scratchy-end) I turned to Classroom2.0 <http://www.classroom20.com/> This is a forum for teachers interested in using new web technologies. I signed up and asked for advice on blogs – I got six pages of help. I also found out about Free Hosted LMSs. These are Learning Management Systems, online classrooms that developers are making and hosting. In this case it's free, perhaps altruistically but more probably to make money through sales or advertising. You might be aware of MLs – we call them VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) in schools. The good thing about these LMSs is that they try to keep pace with the latest changes, whereas our current VLE, for example, lacks a blogging function.

As luck would have it, there was a thread on Classroom2.0 assessing and advising on these systems. I was able to join three and look around them asking specifically:

- could I create classes and passwords?
- would my students be anonymous?
- could I make the blogs private?
- could I delete anything inappropriate?

The answer to all is a resounding 'yes'.

I decided on edu20.org. <http://www.edu20.org/> which is the baby of web entrepreneur, Graham Glass. He has obviously made a packet through software development and now lives on a boat writing applications and looking very healthy, wealthy and sun-tanned (I know, I know). Graham turned out to be very helpful: he responds directly to emails and makes changes to the site based on teacher comments.

Description

I joined and made a class (in the end I made six classes for students across year groups). You are given administration rights, so you have almost full control and your class is given a code. If you want it private you can password-protect it. The site's functions include among other things: wikis, chat rooms (useful but filtered sometimes by my school's network), polls, and blogs.

Blogging works like this: once logged in and in your classroom you click on the tab called blogs and are given two options, post a message or view all posts. Posts have a limit of 500 words. You can post a message and then read yours and others in your class. The system also allows you to comment on other posts. This is a great method of peer assessment. In the limited number of comments students made they were supportive if not incisive. But that is a skill we need to explore and this technology supports it brilliantly.

When I finally gathered my non-writing pupils in an ICT room, I got them to go to the site and sign up. The good thing about edu20.org is you don't need an email address and you don't have to give your real or full name or age. You can input all your details but you can also operate almost anonymously.

There were issues with the login passwords in that the students set them and then forgot them (and their usernames) but the teacher can reset them. This is time consuming and unnecessary but seems to go with the territory. One good way around this is to get students to use their mobiles to photograph their details (their suggestion).

And all of a sudden I was in the promised land of online writing and new illiteracies. What brave new task did I get them to do? A review. Now, looking back, I can see the error of my ways. I spent so long looking at blogs and users and systems I ignored the why. If we are going to use technology, we are going to need to find the right application for it. More on that in a while though.

My hook for the fish was YouTube. We have a fairly supportive SMT who are willing to allow teachers to trial material and ways of working. I was able to have edu20.org unfiltered and then have a special login created to allow access to YouTube. I knew the patients would like this. I gave them carte blanche to find a clip or trailer of their choice and write about it on the blog. I won't go into the issues around YouTube here but I realise they are myriad and murky. Suffice to say that I don't suggest using it when Ofsted arrive – but also remember the Government are already using YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/DowningSt>.

If you look at a YouTube page you will see a box on the right with 'embed' above it and some code below it. You copy the code, go to your blog on edu20.org and insert the code onto your page (you have to click a button called 'source' and then just paste the code). This is the only technical element the students had to do. The trailer then plays on your page. You therefore have two elements: your post and a moving image trailer. Some of the students wanted to write about films and games that were certificated 18 and, in the optimistic belief that they were mature beyond their years, I allowed PG rated

trailers of older films. The other way around this is to use images of the DVD or game covers in the reviews instead of trailers. This is easy to do as well: you just need the images on the PC you are using and you navigate to them.

So did it work? Well, yes and no. I only used the ICT rooms twice. Some students wrote one line reviews; some didn't even join the site. They saw YouTube was unblocked and had a wonderful English lesson surfing music, game and film videos. Starving people tend to gorge themselves. Most blogged, which meant they wrote, but there was no 'penicillin moment' and I'm not Marie Curie.

Key findings

At least two students became immersed in this activity. One was Stacey who for two months this year refused to write in any lesson other than Science ('I can pass that subject and my other grades are c**p'). She wrote three reviews on horror films and games. Not only that, she went on to write Manga based Fan-Fiction and has opened a new world of literature to me. It turns out she reads this fiction obsessively. Her particular area of interest is a storyline called Naruto. She showed me on FanFiction (<http://www.fanfiction.net/>), over 149,000 stories written and shared by people. One time it was suggested that VHS would be the death of cinema, only for attendances to rise; likewise computer games and videos may see the rise of certain credible types of writing. Stacey's writing wasn't technically accurate, structured or incisive but I actually had *writing*, something I could work with. Crucially, I now had her engaged on two stories – both of which I could use for coursework. When interviewed, Stacey said it was the ability to watch and write and continually refer back that engaged her. I think it was also in a medium she feels comfortable in: not pen and paper but online.

It was very similar for Callum who usually takes an age to write, doesn't enjoy it and is very quiet. For the first lesson he sat watching game videos online. He kept telling me he was doing research. The thing is he was. He also wrote two reviews I used for his GCSE English coursework. Callum's original comment on writing was 'I don't enjoy it'. Well he does now – or at least certain genres of writing. As I've been ploughing through the Anthology he asks if can be excused to blog. He can't of course – we don't live in education system that operates at the level of individuals, at least not yet.

Other students wrote, but these two were particularly hard cases to crack. I think this worked with them, proved at least that the technology works and can engage some of the students. This is one task and I'm sure other teachers will be able to devise numerous opportunities for writing based on these applications. The first thing you need from students to assess and improve writing is simply that: a text of theirs to work from. I now have these. The quickest method of highlighting spelling and grammar is to take the text into Word and deal with the red and green underlined issues. We did this with the final GCSE drafts but not on the edu20 site.

I was able to undertake this task with other English classes and over the course of a few lessons was able to build up a whole series of reviews. I then set up a Wordpress blog and posted the best of the reviews there. This blog is now on our school website (<http://etcreviews.wordpress.com/>), meaning the work has a real audience: our school. It celebrates and validates their comments in a very public way. We can now build on this sense of audience and collaboration.

Follow-up: more blogs

I wasn't satisfied, however. I had a real context, good; we'd created an online writing community, good; I had coursework, hooray. But the task could have been done with pen and paper. This was just taking existing practice and using a computer instead of a pen. Surely we haven't spent millions for this?

I went back to basics. Blogs are a form of journal; the word comes from Web Logging or blogging. What I needed was a real use for a journal in a way that paper finds hard to replicate. What I discovered were six Year 10 boys (all in a Media class and two also in my English class) who don't like writing and are hard to engage, but love football.

I set up a Wordpress blog <http://etceuro2008.wordpress.com/> with me as the administrator (nothing is published without me, I get emailed to authorise all posts and comments) and I made one student, Craig, an author – which means he can log on and write. The six boys blogged on Euro 2008 over the course of the three- week tournament. They love football and talked incessantly about the matches even though England were not involved. They made 29 posts on the matches and used the BBC football site to research the games. The comments are neither original nor great prose and they are littered with technical errors, but I have six boys wanting to write on a regular basis for an audience. The writing was done in a Media class during practical lessons; we simply set aside 15 minutes during the lesson where they could go online and blog. Craig used to read the posts at home and the rest during ICT-based lessons. This was true collaborative work – only Craig could type, the others huddled around commenting. I can't use this work for assessment but we will be taking some of it for a magazine article for Media GCSE work.

That seems less important than finally providing a valid space for these boys to write in. They don't even see it as a written task. Craig later said he didn't think about the writing; it was simply 'interesting doing this' and it was made easy doing it online. They also took ownership or control of it. About three posts in I blogged when Craig was absent with two of the boys and two other boys made comments. The rest of them resented this and said it was their space! I was delighted. The Euro blog lasted until the end of the tournament when I deleted Craig as a user – but glad to say the patient was alive and kicking.

Conclusion

I now have a clear idea for at least one role for blogs as journals in classrooms. I think short-term, easy-to-manage, targeted blogging is the place to start. Set up extension or alternative activities for key individuals or groups. Next year the Year 10 boys have asked to blog on the premier league and Eastbourne Borough, a team they play for at Junior level and go to watch. Other possibilities include a blog for Year 7 on their first month in school.

Next steps

Beyond this I am going to keep the review site going as a whole school literacy initiative and open it to book reviews, while also looking out for different opportunities for students to blog. I will then be able put down my stethoscope, take off my white coat ... and let the patients cure themselves.

9 Blogs and the National Curriculum

Mark Ellis, Newent Community School, Gloucestershire

Overview

Mark Ellis has been exploring the use of Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis and media sharing in the classroom. This case study describes how to use one such application – a blog – as a means of promoting high quality original writing for GCSE coursework. A blog is a diary or journal, which is ‘posted’ or published online, to which readers can add comments and responses if they wish. Mark adapts this medium with an upper set Year 10 class, who were working on descriptions of work experience. The results are mature, entertaining pieces of writing, through which the students show a heightened awareness of audience.

Newent Community School is a mixed 11-18 comprehensive school with 1,400 students on roll. It has arts and science specialist status.

Introduction and context

Blogs are wicked!
Blogs are cool.
Blogs bring audience
Into school.

I’m not going to be skipping to that at my age, but Web 2.0 tools can lighten the steps towards a sense of audience for your students’ writing in ways that will surprise.

While you were digesting the 2008 National Curriculum revisions, were you cheering with the rest of us at having ‘more room for creativity’, ‘exploring culture and identity’ and ‘building critical engagement’? Yes, I thought so. But...you wouldn’t be human if your heart didn’t sink just a little at the implications of finding *real audiences...by making links with the local or global community*.

Now the visionary people who drafted the revisions surely sense the potential of Web 2.0 for ‘providing real audiences and contexts for writing and speaking beyond the classroom’ and are fully aware that our students are doing this already, for themselves, by themselves. Just ask your students if they’ve ‘talked’ to somebody in another country this week. The answer is ‘well duh!’ – that is what they are doing on various messaging applications and social networks in the evening.

The National Curriculum example of ‘Real World’ English that ‘could be through contact with writers, actors and journalists and others whose “business” is words’ is silly. Take the back of a convenient envelope and do a few calculations: *one Paxman plus one Duffy divided by 3200 schools equals chaos*. These people are already being e-peppered by e-drivel that wouldn’t have got through in the days where feedback required reflection, time for purpose to cool, and of course the expense of a stamp.

So... where is the real audience going to come from?

If you require an audience, look around you!

When I were a lad... there was still one shop left in Birmingham where the assistants were not allowed to handle money. Instead, they popped the paperwork and your cash into a vacuum tube, it whooshed up to *Accounts* and returned after a few minutes with the receipt and the change. A similar sterile transaction can sometimes occur when students hand in their hard-crafted work. It is sucked up to the *Place of Feedback* and returned after an indeterminate time directly to the author. Nobody else touches it!

'Blogging', replaces this with a public posting and public feedback on the Internet. Students know that their work will be read by many people and they give and receive feedback in a public forum. Sounds challenging? Well, yes. But you don't just let your students slap stuff on the Internet for Petrov from Cairo to comment on.

Method and description

Our annual Year 10 Work Experience week can inspire useful GCSE coursework. Students have unique material for reflection and comment, which overcomes one of the barriers to writing. But there is often a problem with the sense of audience. *Just exactly who will be reading? Why will they be reading? How will they respond if I start like this? Or like this?* Just some of the thought processes students may fail to engage.

The blog experiment has five phases:

1. Find a blog provider
2. Set up a blog with the right security and permissions
3. Enrol the students
4. Set the task and the conventions
5. Stand back and let them get on with it – monitor from a safe distance

1 Find a blog provider

By the time you read this, there will be an even wider choice. You have to look. If you would like to use one that is already tried and tested, you will find a free blog available to you at <http://edublogs.org> which you join using your school email. There is no need to sign up for a blog that costs money!

Issue 1

Schools have no uniform approach to Web 2.0 and you may find that either your network manager or your local authority will filter edublogs' traffic or may not provide you with a school email system. There is no way around this, except enlightenment. Good luck.

However, you may find that your LA has some kind of learning platform and that wikis and blogs are part of that. You have to ask.

Once you have made a blog – and you need to manufacture a good name for it, one that you can continue to use next year and with a different group of students for a different purpose – your next step is to let the senior management team know what you are doing.

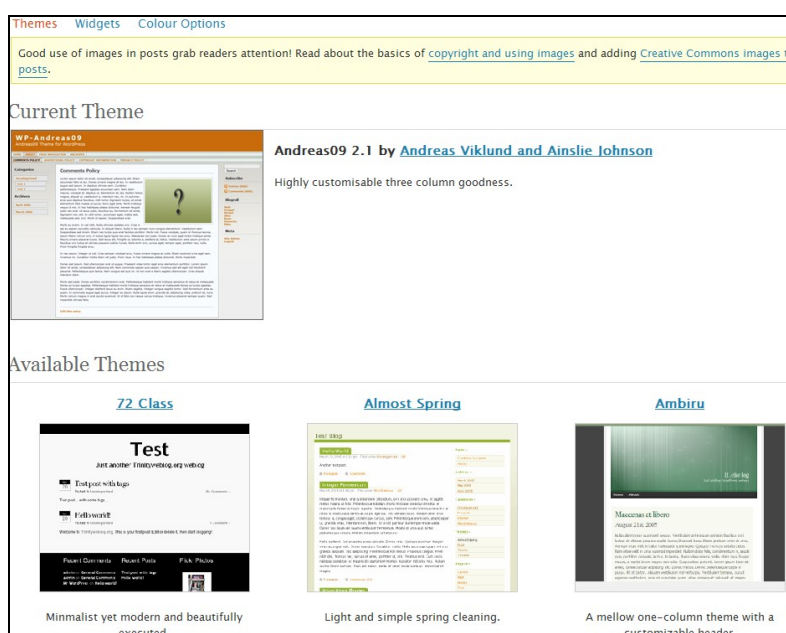
Issue 2

See Issue 1 above. If you decide to use a blog, the chances are that you will be taking a bit of a pioneering step at this stage. Make absolutely sure that your senior management team

approves of what you are doing and enrol them on the blog so that they have full access. (This provides a different ‘audience’ as well! Students like that sense of being taken seriously.)

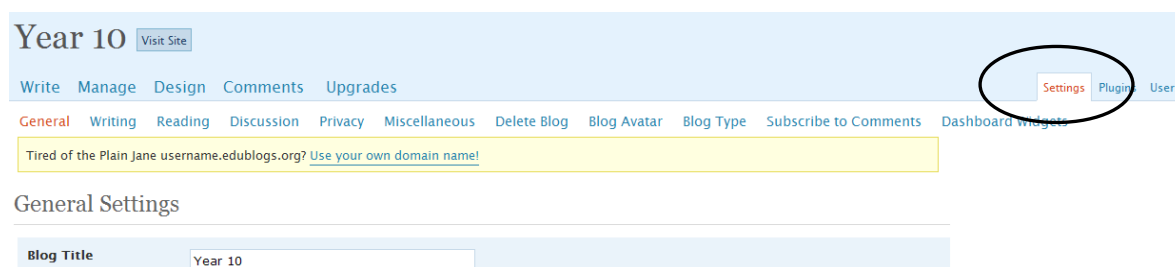
2 Set up a blog with the right security and permissions

The fun bit is choosing a ‘theme’ which governs the way the blog will look. This is a matter of personal choice but there are some subtle differences between how the chosen themes use the right and left side bars and what you can put on them. It is easy to change a theme, even when the blog is open and running with entries in place, so nothing is lost if you make frequent changes to the theme.



This is the simple window for changing themes on Edublogs. There are dozens of themes.

Once you have themes, you need to think about how a blog is normally used and how different school use is. Most bloggers want the whole world to read and comment on their blogs. This is just *not* acceptable, at least in the current climate, with a school blog. So you need to adjust the security settings under Manage – Settings.



Set ‘Users must be registered and logged-in to comment’. This gives you control. *Anybody* on the Internet can theoretically see the blog but they won’t be able to comment unless they are members of Edublogs. Now you make one crucial setting. Under Settings – Discussion, set ‘Allow people to post comments on the article’ but also set ‘Comment author must have a previously approved comment’. If you do this, then you will always get to decide whether the first comment anybody makes will be accepted. This means that you can approve all the students: I asked them to ‘comment’ on a dummy

post I made, just to get them all on the system – but if any outsider did comment, you could simply not approve and that would be that. You should also set the blog to email you whenever there are posts or comments – just to keep an eye on things. If you ever *do* run into problems with an inappropriate post, the sooner you are on to it the better.

Issue 3

Inappropriate use. There is much terror about the use of the Internet by young people. It doesn't matter what you think rationally about this; the perception is the problem. It is as well to anticipate that you may just get an inappropriate post. However, since your students have to logon to post, you will know who wrote anything that gets posted. You should stress to the students how important it is to guard the confidentiality of their login and passwords so that others cannot get *them* into trouble. Does your school have a policy on inappropriate use? You should know what it is. This is, however, a good opportunity to talk about levels of security in passwords and about identity theft – topics with *huge* real-world application.

3 Enrol the students

Students have to join Edublogs themselves. They should *not* request a blog, but just sign for membership. Make sure that they create a username that you can recognise – I made all my students email me their username for my records – and that others in the class will recognise too, but it would be foolish for anybody to use their full real name. Your students should use their school email addresses to register. Keep Hotmail out of it! You then have to go to the Users tab and add them all to the blog. This is where using school predictable email addresses comes in very handy. When you enrol your students, set their role to *Author*. This allows them to post.

However, blogs are really for individuals to use and the world to comment. We are trying to use them slightly differently. If you ever want to be able to find the posts a student has made, then you have to do a bit of trickery: make each student a 'category'. Posts are 'tagged' with categories – a free-form indexing system. By making students into categories, any posts students make can be put into the category of their own usernames, and can therefore be found at will by others.

4 Set the task and the conventions

This is your teaching role. As well as the task itself, you will have to decide before you start what the conventions of written English will be and what the comment conventions are. Normal Internet use does *not* respect the GCSE English criteria. You may decide to allow students to express themselves as they like because you are dealing with a group for whom grammar and punctuation are undiscovered countries. I took the decision to insist on 'normal' written English standards for school work, but I also pitched the task as being for magazine/colour supplement publication and we read a few relevant articles in preparation, looking at the techniques used by authors to engage interest and structure the narrative. This at least gave us a benchmark.

Some of the students posted their accounts during the Work Experience week. An evolving account of events could be an alternative use of the blog. When I do it again, I think I will insist on a preliminary post and a reflective post after the event as a minimum. I think that will be interesting.

The comment conventions you set have to depend on your school's Assessment for Learning (AfL) readiness. We are all at different stages with this. Those schools that have been involved in the Key

Stage 3 Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) pilots will have a ready vocabulary for students to use. One of the difficulties, I found, was how to encourage students to point out technical errors in the writing of others without producing the smart that a public rebuke might cause. This is a tricky one. With other classes using wikis, I have put students in groups with the specific task of commenting on and revising the technicalities of work within the group – that seems to take the sting out of it. However, the advice to students that *what goes around, comes around* is easily understood. I have not encountered any bitterness or bad feeling so far.

5 Stand back and let them get on with it - monitor from a safe distance

The results speak for themselves. I think that the sense of audience is markedly improved. This is best demonstrated in the opening sentences and the well-considered strategies that the students used. Here is a selection of openings:

Yes I must admit I was there stood outside the doors of the Assembly rooms hopping from foot to foot. But I finally plucked up the courage and faced my fears of dealing with new people in a new environment.

Well the end of work experience for me will be over in less than a couple of hours. But to be frank this hasn't been work experience for me. It's been life experience. I'm coming back from this placement a different person I know it sounds corny, but it's true.

Fortunately, I did not have to navigate tube routes or attempt reading a map to get to my placement on that first Monday morning. I spent work experience week in my second home, Brecon. (*Making a reference to somebody else's post.*)

The first day... What was I expecting? Cut up fingers, absolutely tedious paperwork and 'watching' glass jewellery being made.

Well to be honest I was absolutely wrong, my work experience was excellent. It was interesting, fun, a new experience and definitely changed me in some ways.

And a comment or two:

I like the build up to the little boy booming (good use of booming much better than shouting) heroin at the end of paragraph one.

Yes. This needs a bit more work but what you've done here is good. The build up to the ending is quite effective, and really funny; the random things children come out with is certainly something you can use for humour's sake.

Issue 4

You really have to get out of the way and let them do it. You can't tell me that you weren't itching to 'correct' the errors in the examples I have just given. But this is an opportunity to save the red ink, and open up a different approach to the question of who *should* be taking responsibility for the accuracy of work. Remember, that what you can't see from extracts is the number of changes students have made to their posts in the light of comments *from other students!*

If anybody would like to read the blog, it is at <http://newenglish.edublogs.org> for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

I appreciate that the public forum will be for some students a lot more ‘trying’ than the vacuum tube method of dealing with work, but the advantages seem to be overwhelming. This class is certainly writing with a sense of audience. The fact that the audience is other people that they know, as well as their parents and some of the staff from our school, does not make the audience any the less ‘real’. Students respond with a sense of obligation to the reader both as ‘posters’ and as ‘commenters’ and I am sure that, whatever defects this method may have, the drafters of the new National Curriculum would approve of that.

10 Teaching ballads

Chris Mackinder, Woodway Park School, Coventry

Overview

Adapting a project that he had used previously, Chris Mackinder sought to exploit the power of ICT to help students write their own ballads. Within a carefully-structured approach which included studying both traditional ballads and a film retelling, students used a number of simple tools to help them with their compositions. Students found this made the activity both easier and more enjoyable. As a result they took considerable pride in their achievements. The activity lends itself to sharing across classes and schools.

Introduction

The initial documentation for this project talked about topics that can be ‘notoriously hard to teach’ and went on to explain that solutions can ‘be found through the use of appropriate technologies and the novel methods that spring from them’. In this case study I propose to share some ways in which the teaching of ballads might be enhanced, made potentially even more interesting and better understood by pupils.

I am a great believer in the practical and friendly application of technology and am certainly no computer ‘whiz kid’ so all of my solutions have been what I like to call ‘lo-tech’. I believe that they can be applied in any classroom with computer access by English teachers and/or non-experts in the ICT field. When I was Head of English, Drama and Media, part of my brief was to increase ICT usage throughout the department, assisting colleagues to develop their ICT skills whether they were advanced or basic. On this basis I always tried to find meaningful solutions that would actually work in front of real classes and didn’t require a vast array of technical resources which weren’t readily available in a regular classroom environment.

Context

In this case study I propose to share some of the things I have recently done with my Year 8, Set 2 class using basic ICT capacity to enliven a topic and put across challenging ideas. I consider that the way I have worked could be a model for other areas of the English curriculum where the technology and techniques can be quickly and easily adapted for other purposes.

The hard-to-teach topic

The aim of the topic is to allow pupils to explore the ballad form, differentiate it from other poetic forms and then have an opportunity to create their own ballad. Once initial definitions have been offered and some important oral work has been carried out, one can move on to the writing/word-processing phase which youngsters really enjoy.

Background

I well remember trying to teach this topic some years ago with an ordinary whiteboard and board marker, discussing pupil choices and suggestions, adding alternative lines, etc. and though enjoyable and capable of producing pleasing results, it was hard and sometimes frustrating work for pupils and teacher alike. With the increased availability of word processing facilities, memory sticks and access to the Internet both in school and home, it has become not only easier but more satisfying to teach this (and other) topics.

Method

Step 1

Pupils are introduced to the topic and allowed to carry out some **Internet research** on ballads alongside classroom teaching. The main aim is for pupils to have a definition of ballads so that they can apply this in their own poem when they come to write it. A **Google search** of 'Ballad Poems' will bring up several basic websites that provide this as well as some examples of traditional and other ballads that can be spoken aloud. You may need to clarify ballads as poems rather than 'pop song ballads' - though these could be a fertile ground for exploration anyway! These sites are useful:

- www.types-of-poetry.org.uk
- www.wikipedia.org
- www.poetryarchive.org

Step 2

As so many ballads tell a story, the use of a film as a focus for the pupil poems is a good starting point. I use a DVD of *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton) but have also used *The Night of the Hunter* (Laughton) and *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch). All are quality films, suitable for use in school, though *Elephant Man* is not suitable for younger pupils (KS3).

Pupils can carry out **Internet research** on the focus film but they need to be aware that they are watching the film with a view to writing their own ballad: 'The Ballad of...Edward Scissorhands?'

Possible tasks are :

- looking at Internet reviews of the film
- Internet research on the director, main actors, etc.
- finding and saving a plot summary
- creating a simple PowerPoint slide show of images from the film. These images can be used later on in the unit when pupils will want to illustrate their own ballads. (Sometimes due to restricted Internet access, especially for images, it is a good idea to create a folder of images yourself and place it on a resource drive from which pupils can access easily and select pictures.)

Step 3

After sharing some previous examples of pupil work (e.g. on an interactive whiteboard), you can start to create the poem with the pupils. At this stage, and depending on how many computers and how often you have access to them, it is time to decide whether this is an individual or group endeavour; either can yield great results.

Step 4

Give the class your ‘free gift’: the first stanza of the ballad (of ‘Edward Scissorhands’).

Just look at him, there he stands,
Edward with his scissor hands.
So sad that his creator died
Before his hands had been applied.
Alone at night he’d look down
From his mansion o’er the town.
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon Lady rang the bell.

I like to read this aloud with the group: we have some fun with choral reading, parts of the class reading a line each and so on. This first stanza acts as the model for remaining stanzas which, with support, the class will go on to compose.

This opening stanza provides the number of lines, the end couplet, **rhyme scheme**, a sense of **rhythm** and establishes the idea of using the film’s unfolding plot as a way of **structuring** the poem. Pupils need to be held to the structure as this underlines the discipline needed to write original poetry.

Step 5

Pupils now move on to begin to word process their own Stanza 2 : they can find this quite challenging and some joint work on the interactive whiteboard using some initial pupil examples is often a big help to those who are struggling with the concept.

A further and essential piece of support is to give the class a series of prompts for the next and the following stanzas, in respect of *Key Events* in the film:

Example of pupil prompts for Stanzas 3, 4 and 5**Stanza 3 prompts**

In Stanza 2 you have covered – Edward is coming down to town with Peg, how the neighbours all were talking about him, etc.

In Stanza 3 you might cover some or all of the following :

- *When Edward sees a picture/photo of Kim – love at first sight?*
- *How Edward tries to cope with everyday things such as eating and drinking.*

In Stanza 4 think about :

- *The family barbecue with Ed using his scissor hands as a skewer.*
- *How the neighbours surround Ed and invite him to their houses.*
- *Edward’s flashback when opening a can to how he was ‘made’ by the inventor.*

In Stanza 5 think about :

- *Edward is in the garden cutting a tree/bush into a shape (sculpture).*

- *Kim arrives home from a trip (early) and is terrified by Edward who is in her bed!*
- *Kim screams – Edward bursts the waterbed.*
- *While Kim is comforted, her Dad gives Edward a strong drink and he collapses, drunk.*

The above basic prompts usually enable most pupils to begin writing. Their creativity and imagination flows. You can enhance the atmosphere with suitable music if appropriate – don't forget, the evocative soundtrack (by Danny Elfman) is easily available.

Step 6

As pupils continue with their original writing on the computers they can use Internet sites such as www.rhymezone.com and an Internet thesaurus to help with the process. In my class the youngsters had been using the Rhymezone site previously and simply applied it to this task. Well done guys!

Step 7

Pupils now proceed to write individually, in pairs or groups (your choice) the rest of 'The Ballad of Edward Scissorhands'. I suggest about eight stanzas in total but this very much depends on the class and resources (such as computer room time and access).

Conclusions

Having taught this unit over several years with increased use of ICT I can genuinely say that it has not only become easier to teach but more enjoyable – not least because the pupils really become engaged and are extremely proud of the discoveries they make on the poetic journey and the professional end result. It is nice when pupils ask to take their ongoing work home to show parents and carers and also share each other's efforts with interest. Understanding is increased and takes root – the classroom becomes a place of discovery.

Next steps

My next step is to get more formal written feedback through a survey and I would like to do more display work, as well as sharing pupil work with other schools using ICT.

Appendix: an example of a pupil's *almost* complete, illustrated ballad.

Just look at him! There he stands,
Edward with his scissor hands.
So sad that his creator died
Before Edward's hands had been applied.
Alone at night he'd look down
From his mansion o'er the town;
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

In the mansion peg opens the door
A shadow is seen on the floor.
A figure stood the looking dead
All the way from toe to head.
Peg brought Edward to town
Edward hasn't been this far down
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Edward had a big crush
While he was in love he was cutting a bush
He really likes to trim trees
But really afraid of the bees
He has trouble eating meet
But can't take his shoes off his feet
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Ed helps everyone making the barbeque
With his big long skewers.
All the neighbours gather round
And no one made a sound.
They tasted all the food
They were in a good mood
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Edward was cutting a bush
But he had a big crush
Kim arrived early back from her trip
Edward busted the bed and had a dip
Her dad gave Edward a drink
The colour was pink
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Ed starts to style the people's hair
The ladies thought Edward very rare.
Next day their dogs get a trim
The scissors move the scissor skim.
Next day he was on tele
But he had butterflies in his belly
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Jim pressures Ed in robbing a house
Edward was a quiet as field mouse.
The alarm goes off and Ed caught by the cops
All the neighbours come out there pyjamas tops.
Edward gets let off with a warning
Then he comes back in the morning.
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Ed saves Kim's little brother from Jim's van
But things were going as plan.
Ed is chased from the town
He feels sorry deep down.
Ed and Jim have a fight
And Jim goes out the window for a flight.
Yet what a tale there was to tell
When the Avon lady rang the bell...

Jamie 25/4/08

11 Building learning power with wikis

Anna Richardson, Caludon Castle School, Coventry

Overview

Anna set out to explore the value of wikis to develop skills in independent and collaborative learning with two Year 8 classes. She wanted to explore whether using a wiki would enable her to implement ideas in Guy Claxton's *Building Learning Power*. Her focus, as in a number of other case studies, was on poetry. She discovered that allowing students access to learning from home removed the constraints of the classroom further and developed the personalisation of learning. The project began to take on a life of its own when another class became interested and conversations about poetry between the groups developed, not just during lessons but also at lunch times and at home. Anna was delighted at the sophistication of some of the discussions and the way the wiki gave all students, no matter what ability, a voice and enabled them to ask questions themselves and interrogate texts naturally. Using the wiki totally transformed a number of the students' views of English and, more importantly, of themselves.

Introduction

In recent years, Wikipedia has become one of the best known and most popular websites, attracts 683 million visitors a year. The name *Wikipedia* derives from two words: 'encyclopaedia' and 'wiki'. As an encyclopaedia, the site provides access to more than two million entries. However, as a 'wiki' it also allows its users to create their own entries, and to alter or add to those already on the site. As such, it is a collaborative webspace controlled by its users; a space designed so that anyone who accesses it can contribute to or modify its content.

Having recently attended staff training at my own school, I decided to explore the potential of wikis for making 'hard topics' easier to teach with ICT. So, despite very little knowledge of what a wiki really was or what it might have to offer, I set out with the following aims and objectives:

Aims and objectives

- to learn how to use a 'wiki';
- to develop skills in independent and collaborative learning;
- to see how much impact wikis can have on learning and teaching, including contributing to 'Building Learning Power';
- to see if wikis really could make hard topics easier to teach.

Context

Deciding which year group I would involve in the project and what exactly to teach through the wiki was one of the first decisions that had to be made. Due to timetabling issues, examinations and Year 10 work experience, in the end I had very little choice. I work in a school that begins the GCSE course in Year 9 so I decided to trial teaching some of the Anthology poems to a transition group: Year 8 going into Year 9.

The hard-to-teach topic

Clearly this was an ambitious task as teaching AQA Anthology poems was one of the problem areas that was thought of as 'hard-to-teach'. As I was teaching two Year 8 classes, one at the higher end of the ability spectrum and one mixed set, I thought this would give me ample opportunity to compare the effect of teaching through wikis across ability ranges.

I decided that the following English skills could be taught through the wiki site:

1. Understanding poetry
2. Comparing texts
3. Reading between the lines
4. Metaphorical language
5. Alternative interpretations – achievable through the discussion pages
6. Themes
7. Writing about poem and texts using 'PEE'

Process

The first step of the project was to create and develop the webspace. Although this sounds extremely daunting, it really isn't as hard as it sounds; in fact, I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly I got to grips with it (see the 'How to use a Wiki' help sheet if you are interested in setting up your own).

The transition scheme that I was using with my year 8s had a section on poetry with a focus on the poem 'Havisham' by Carol Ann Duffy. This was preceded by looking at Dickens' portrayal of Miss Havisham and followed by a comparison with 'Song' by Auden, looking at similar themes, and this then led into some creative writing.

I began by uploading the poem 'Havisham' on to the wiki and created a page with a number of resources that I would normally have delivered to the class myself. I uploaded a PowerPoint which I had previously delivered to other classes on the poem, a set of questions, some notes in a word document and two links to useful websites which analysed the poem. I briefly showed the students how to use the site, got them signed up with their own usernames and then set them off to answer some fairly difficult questions. They had to use the resources on the site to answer the questions. It was up to them which resources they used from the site; I deliberately did not specify this. I also briefly introduced the students to the discussion pages, encouraged them to communicate with each other this way in order to get some answers to the questions. I also used the discussion tool as a plenary at the end of the lesson: I gave them a question which they all had to post a response to.

It may be relevant to mention at this point that this was one of my objectives for this project. I had become very interested in the ideas around Guy Claxton's *Building Learning Power: Helping Young People Become Better Learners* (2002) and students becoming more independent; this seemed like an ideal opportunity to see how resourceful and resilient students could be if they were given the opportunity. Additionally, allowing students access to learning from home removes the constraints of the classroom walls and develops even further the personalisation of learning.¹

¹ Taken from NCSL's 'National Conversation on personalising learning'

Following this, for home learning, I asked them to go back on to the site and read the poem 'Song' by Auden and join in a discussion about the poem's meaning; they had to contribute to a discussion or ask a question about the poem themselves. At this point, after seeing my enthusiasm for all things wiki, a colleague of mine became interested and asked if she could be involved. My students taught her students how to use the wiki and before we knew it, there were conversations going on about poetry on-line, not just during lessons but also at lunch times and at home – an extraordinary response!

Another colleague used the wiki with some year 10 students who were completing some coursework on *Our Day Out* by Willy Russell. She uploaded useful website addresses and documents to help students with the essay (such as essay plans) and began using the discussion as a tool to help students develop the depth of their responses in the coursework.

The wiki has since developed and now lots of English teachers and students are involved in creating the site and adding what they feel is important. This is particularly important as it gives students a voice and some control over their own learning. As yet, absolutely no one has abused the site. Clearly 'cyber bullying' is a potential issue but is very easy to monitor as you have full access to everything on the space and can delete anything inappropriate. Using school policies and pastoral support, as with any classroom bullying issues, is the best way to prevent this.

Results

My study suggests a number of benefits from teaching through wikis. The discussion below highlights key learning in relation to the content of the scheme as well as a number of skills being employed by the students whilst using the wiki.

Without doubt, the most useful tool is the discussion page. Some of the discussions going on between students of all abilities was, quite frankly, unbelievable. Indeed, it was the response to the requirement to discuss 'Song' that confirmed to me that using a wiki was extremely beneficial. Suddenly, lower ability year 8 students were reading a poem for meaning and giving their own personal opinions, explaining their views in detail, using quotations, commenting on language and offering alternative interpretations. Most importantly, students were now interrogating the poem themselves, asking questions and explaining things to each other. A number of students posted questions asking for help reading the meaning of different lines from the poem; these were promptly answered and explained by others in the class. Suddenly, it seemed there was no need for me!

Considering I had not explicitly 'taught' the poems to these year 8s, the way in which they were discussing them was fantastic. They naturally used the 'PEE' structure without being told as I think they felt they were arguing their point and somehow having a 'real' audience meant that they did not assume the person reading their entry to the discussion understood their point. All of a sudden therefore, my middle set year 8s were making points, using correct evidence to back up their point and explaining it effectively. This is part of a discussion which took place between a student in the top set and a student from the mixed set based on the question I posed:



[rob95](#) re: Dickens Vs Duffy

Dickens makes Havisham sound bossy but not angry. Dickens uses lines like: 'Walk me, Walk me'and come, come, come.

Duffy is the other way around - she makes Havisham seem angry and sad but fragmented and frail. 'Beloved Sweetheart Bastard' is an oxymoron so it implies her fragmented mind and angryness.

Posted Jun 27, 2008 8:56 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[stinky_potatoe_head](#) re: Dickens Vs Duffy

dickens, even though he makes her sound a bit mean, he also creates a bit in us, which makes us want to feel sorry for her. Whereas duffy makes her sound much more angry and scary, its makes us want to hate her, except for in the last paragraph

Posted Jul 4, 2008 2:05 am - [\[delete\]](#)

This demonstrates what I consider to be one of the most important factors as to why wiki is so successful: it gives all students, no matter what ability, a voice. Those quiet students in class who never put their hand up to answer a question will happily join in all kinds of discussions on the wiki. This is helped by the fact that they can choose their own usernames so actually their identity is hidden from other students, lessening any chance of ridicule.

Additionally, one of the other hidden delights for me was the fact that not only were all students responding in detail to questions I asked, but they were now beginning to ask questions themselves and interrogate texts naturally. Some questions were of a very high level, others were just on a very mundane level but meant that the students were connecting with the text in a more personal way: they were now beginning to see the poem as relevant to them.

if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

[\[delete topic\]](#)



[stinky_potatoe_head](#) if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

hey, JOIN THE DISCUSSION!! lets hear wat u think??

Posted Jun 27, 2008 2:27 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[bef_luvs_u](#) re: if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

i reckon she would go really well with ozzy osbourne, he neva changes his clothes nethal lmao...x

Posted Jun 27, 2008 2:34 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[stinky_potatoe_head](#) re: if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

i think she wud be really gud with pete doherty, hehe lol

Posted Jun 27, 2008 2:36 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[XxlouxX](#) re: if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

I sooooo agree with bef_luvs_u dat is sooooo true...xxx

Posted Jun 27, 2008 2:36 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[wba-boy](#) re: if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

amy winehouse

Posted Jun 27, 2008 9:25 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[Bran2](#) re: if miss havisham were alive today, which celebrity wud she be best with??

Britney spears =D

Posted Jun 27, 2008 11:17 am - [\[delete\]](#)

Additionally, students were becoming collaborative, helping each other rather than relying on me for the answers. I am convinced that the following interpretation would not have been drawn out of the poem had I taught it to the students and then got them to answer questions on it:

What does this line mean?

[\[delete topic\]](#)



[rob95](#) What does this line mean?

What does this line mean? Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves.

Isn't Crepe the french word for pancake? Or does it mean something different in this context?

Posted Jun 27, 2008 2:53 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[Bran2](#) re: What this line could mean

Crepe is the french word for pancake, however a crepe bow is also a type of bow tie worn around the neck. As doves regularly crowd public places like pigeons it could symbolise that the narrators sadness is such that all the birds should wear black bow ties as a symbol of their remorse. this could show that the narrator wants everybody to show that they are remorseful, a bit like when football players wear black armbands to show how they're sorry.

Hope this helps!

Posted Jun 27, 2008 11:04 am - [\[delete\]](#)

The exploration of this poem was carried out totally independently by all students; they all read the poem and joined in a number of discussions, asking and answering questions with absolutely no input from me. Although it was clear that some of the students initially had a very basic understanding of the poem, the very fact that they were 'discussing' it meant that their understanding was developing. Others' ideas were built on and challenged. The following lesson, I set some questions on the poem and was astounded by the level of understanding and inference that nearly all students of all abilities had. Not only this, but through their responses they were linking in and comparing the poem to 'Havisham' through themes and character. For year 8s I think this speaks for itself.

These results were reiterated by the experiences of my colleague using wiki as part of her year 10 coursework. For her class also, the discussion forum gave students a safety net to ask questions and clear up their understanding of things in a way that they perhaps did not feel comfortable doing in a classroom environment.

Warnings and potential problems

Like many things, creating a wiki has obvious negative points. Firstly and most importantly is the issue of Internet access. Fortunately, when I asked the classes involved in my project, nearly all of them had access to the Internet at home or knew somewhere where they could go to complete on line learning. The computer facilities in my school are also excellent so, for me, this did not prove a problem.

As with all approaches, this style of learning suits some and not others. Although my year 8s all seemed to enjoy learning in this way, my colleague who tested this with her year 10s found that some of them did not enjoy it. However, as long as the wiki is to *aid* your teaching, it can be left up to the students when and how they use it.

The time it took to initially start the wiki is a potential problem. However, I would recommend starting small and building up the site gradually. Getting students involved in helping you do this is also a good tactic; they will know far more about it than you anyway! Again, this in itself could be a problem as it means that students can edit the pages and therefore upload inappropriate things. However, you are emailed any time anybody makes any changes and can therefore keep a tight control. My rule was that

anybody who abused the site would not be a member. I had no problems with this. As yet, no one has abused the site.

Clearly, such an enthusiastic response from my students can be put down to the fact that this was something 'new'. While there is nothing wrong with this, I am aware that in order to maintain the momentum, the wiki will need to be constantly updated and reinvented. There are a number of tools available on wiki pages that I have not yet been able to play with. This is something which I will be doing when developing this resource.

Conclusions

When I looked back at my original aims and intentions, and at the things which the group originally stated were 'hard topics', I realised that the wiki had met more of these objectives than I had originally intended. It had certainly made the topic of poetry easier to teach; in fact, I'm not sure how much 'teaching' I actually did: I merely facilitated their learning.

As illustrated above, students not only appear to help to teach content but, more importantly in my view, develop the all important learning skills that so many of our older students in the school just do not have. One of the biggest criticisms of students in our school is that they are 'spoon fed' and 'cannot do anything for themselves'. Using the wiki totally transformed a number of these students' views on English and, more importantly, on themselves in a very short space of time. The skills that the wiki had developed in the students were:

- seeing implicit meaning/ reading between the lines
- understanding metaphorical language
- seeing alternative readings
- developing critical thinking
- research skills.

I can confidently say that all students who have used the wiki have made progress in all of these areas. The responses to the poems which I assessed made this clear; students achieved at a much higher level in this assessment than students from last year.

Basically, wiki works because it is fun. The students are curious and it is a medium with which they are familiar – it's like learning through Facebook! A wiki is also useful because it encourages students to be more independent, to be creative and to think for themselves, asking questions as well as answering them. It allows them to be co-constructors and therefore gives them a sense of ownership of their learning.

This project was so rewarding and I and my department are 100% convinced that wikis can enhance learning. Although initially it took a lot of time setting up, it now completely runs itself and I am in the process of getting a group of students to take ownership of the Wiki and giving them the responsibility of adding to it and updating it as necessary.

Next steps

The success of this project has inspired me to take the project further. My planned next steps are:

- to create a team of students to develop and update the wiki;
- to use the wiki with one class and not another and see what happens to results;
- to make better use of the other resources available on wikis such as:
 - polls and surveys
 - live 'MSN' style chat rooms
 - slide shows
 - audio and video files.

The potential of having a site like this is endless and I really would recommend everyone to have a go.

Appendix: Wikispaces: a guide to setting one up for use in the classroom

Wikispaces: a guide to setting one up for use in the classroom

What is a wiki?

A web page which can be edited by all users, making it perfect for collaborative learning.

Getting started

The first thing you need to do is to go to www.wikispaces.com and create your own space. On the right hand side of the page is a light green box which asks you to enter a username, password, email address and a space name.

The screenshot shows the Wikispaces website. On the left, the Wikispaces logo features a small green plant in a red pot next to the text 'wikispaces' in green and 'wikis for everyone' in black. Below the logo, it says 'Create simple web pages that groups, friends, & families can edit together'. There are links for 'Tours', 'Pricing', and 'Private Label'. A statistic states 'Over 1,000,000 members and 450,000 wikis!'. At the bottom, there is a quote: 'Wikispaces totally rocks and their customer'. On the right, a light green 'Join Now!' form is visible. It has four steps: 1. Pick a username, 2. Set your password, 3. Enter your email address, and 4. Space name (optional). There are input fields for each step. A 'Join' button is at the bottom right of the form. A 'Terms of Use' link is also present.

Your space name will be the name of your wikispace so choose this carefully. Your username is displayed on all the message boards so choose something that will allow your students to recognise you.

When you have entered these details, you are asked to choose what kind of wiki you would like. There are three options to choose from:

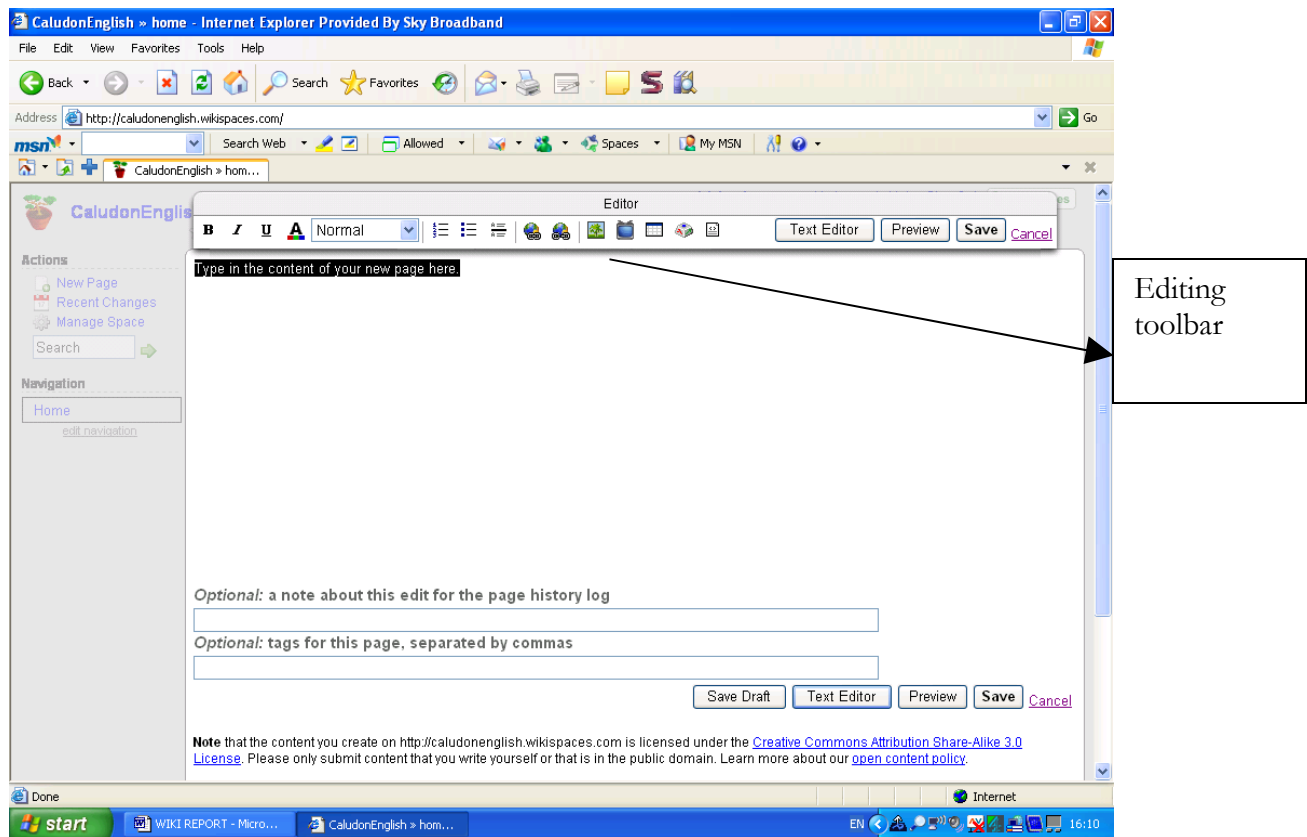
- **Public:** anyone can view or edit your wikispace.
- **Protected:** anyone can view your space but only members can edit it.
- **Private:** only members can view or edit your space.

Wikispaces allows teachers to set up private areas for students, so make sure you click on the link to 'Wikispaces K-12 Educational Plan' (this is an American site, so the reference is to students in compulsory education). It is possible to upgrade to the educational version later; either way you will need to use the site to submit a request and wait a short time for confirmation. This allows you to select a private space where you can control who views and edits the content.

Following this you are presented with a page entitled 'Getting started with your wiki' which gives you a quick and easy guide to all the things you can do. You can access this page at any other time to help jog your memory should you forget by going to the 'help' tag at the top of your wiki page.

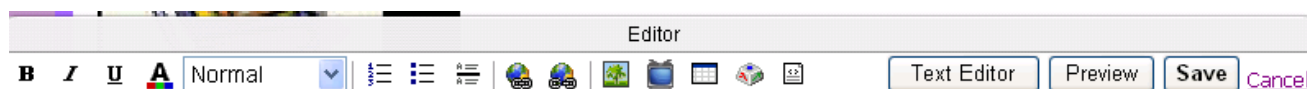
You then get to what will be your 'Home Page'. You can customise this and make it your own by going to the 'manage space' link on the left hand side of the page and then head in to 'look and feel'. This allows you to customise colour, upload logos and so on. Really, the best way to get to grips with this is to just have a play.

To add content to your page, you then need to click on the link 'Edit This Page', which brings you to a page which looks like this:



You are then free to type or copy and paste in any text that you want on your home page, you can format it with bold, italics, font, headings and more. Remember to click save when you are done.

The most important thing to understand how to use is the tool bar at the top of the page which allows you to create new pages, add in links to Internet sites and import documents, files and pictures of your choice.



On the left hand side of the tool box are the tools you need to edit your text: change the colour; font size; font; spacing.

Adding images/files to your wiki

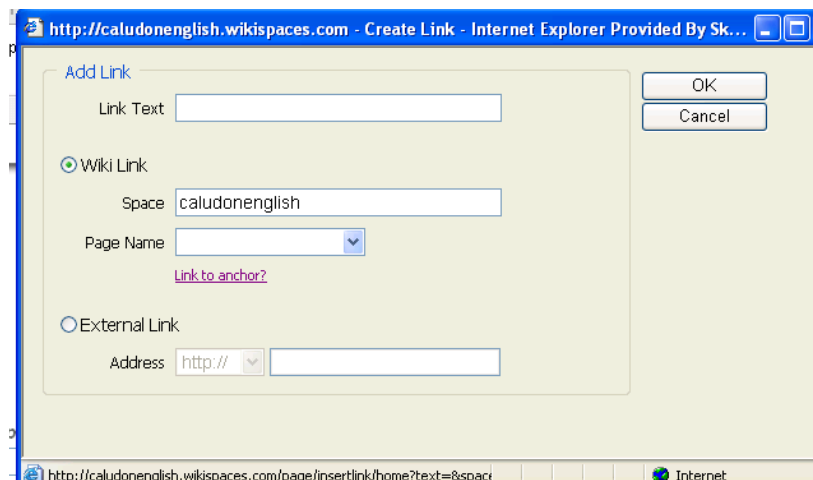
- Click **Edit this page**.
- Click the icon that looks like a tree.
- Browse your computer for the files of images you want to upload (just as if you were attaching files to an email).
- Place your cursor where you would like the image on the page.
- Double click and the image/a link to the file will appear on the page.

Adding media to your wiki

- Click on the icon that looks like a TV in the toolbar.
- Choose the object you would like to embed.
- Follow the instructions for embedding the media device.
- Click save.

Adding pages and hyperlinks to your wiki

There are two little world/globe shapes next to each other, one for adding in links and one for removing them. If you click on the first world, it opens up the following:



- This is the tool you need to create additional pages on your website. You need to add in the name of the page, say for example, 'Poems from Different Cultures' and write this in to the box that says 'link text'.
- Click OK and then save your edited page and you will now have a 'Home' page and a page called 'Poems from Different Cultures.'
- The link to this page will appear in the navigation box on the left hand side of your page and when you click on the link it will take you to your new page.
- You will then need to edit and add in different pages for all the poems.

12 The GlobalDover wiki project

Amanda Monk Peak, Dover Grammar School for Boys

Overview

Working with a large group of boys who were voluble but often reluctant to write, Amanda sought to develop writing skills – including writing styles and writing for different audiences – by building a wiki about schools across the globe and using technology to reach other communities. Students soon became engrossed and created a large number of pages on a wide range of topics. They also accepted suggestions and corrections from their peers and kept each other on task. Students' feedback was an integral part for the project; comments online were more honest than their 'official' feedback to the teacher. The project now moves to the next stage: contacting schools in other towns called Dover around the world.

Introduction: the context of the project

Kent is unusual in that it still has grammar schools and Dover Grammar School for Boys (DGSB) is one such selective school on the very south coast of England. Dover is a fascinating town. Steeped in history and centred on the highly successful port, the town is not especially wealthy and is currently bidding for various regeneration projects. The surrounding countryside was badly affected by the closing of the rural mines and whilst the situation has improved, the area has not completely recovered. A reasonable percentage of the boys that attend DGSB fit into the category of 'white working class boys' that so often feature in the press and in government guidelines when it comes to literacy.

This means that there is still quite a broad range of ability within the school. Some pupils are highly motivated but, as everywhere, there are a few who are not as keen. The class that this project focuses on is the top class in Year 8 who, along with the rest of their year, took their SATs early. They are a very able, very voluble class of 34 boys and they can be very enthusiastic if given the chance.

Aims of the project

New to teaching and in my first year, I wanted to find ways of using ICT in the teaching of English. I had come from a background in marketing and was used to using all kinds of media to engage with colleagues, businesses, the public and politicians. In particular we had been developing web services when I made the move to teaching. Increasingly the web was not an optional extra but a central component of communication and so it was logically the way to go.

It was at this point that several things combined to create an idea. I had been listening to an American podcast on iTunes called *Teachers Teaching Teachers*. Their use of ICT was amazing and I was desperate to try out some of the ideas. Matt Morris, new to the DGSB Media Department, gave us some CPD training on wikis, blogs and podcasting and around the same time I saw this project and decided to get involved.

The teaching target

Having worked in marketing, I had got used to writing and to writing accurately but it seemed that my pupils were very reluctant to do this. They had grown up on a diet of Bebo and MSN and as such were used to high speed communication with no punctuation, constant abbreviation and (to my eyes) weird spellings. I spent some time learning this method of writing and taught a few lessons explaining that it was good to write in different ways for different occasions or different media. This was interesting but they clearly needed a modern medium in which to really write. This is where the wiki came in. Would building a wiki help with teaching Key Stage 3 pupils to write?

Setting up the project.

Just after SATs, Class 8/1 and I embarked on planning the wiki. A wiki is just a modern name for an encyclopaedia that you build or write yourself and there are a host of websites that will help you build one. I decided to use Wikispaces as it was the one that was demonstrated in the CPD session. It is incredibly easy to get started. All you need is an email address, a username and a password (the last two of which you make up) ([Appendix: 1](#)).

Once 8/1 had brainstormed the sections they wanted to cover, over the weekend I consolidated the ideas and set up the wiki ([Appendix: 2](#)). You set up pages by using the 'New Page' function. The 'Manage Space' section is where you rename your pages and delete them when you discover you've got too many or have inadvertently called them daft things.

Once set up, all the students in the class used their school email addresses to join rather than personal ones. They were told they were not allowed to join any other wikis and a couple that did very quickly got out of them again. I gave the class a clear briefing on Internet safety. One student then dryly queried if it was wrong of him to have posted his mother's credit card details and date of birth on a website and I realised that I was being a bit heavy handed. They knew far more than I had been banking on – they would be fine. They spontaneously used random images for profile pictures rather than real pictures which is something I would ask a class to copy in the future.

The wiki, which is still a work-in-progress, can be found at www.globaldover.wikispaces.com and we welcome visitors and comments ([Appendix 3](#)). It covers what people from another school, area or country might want to know about life in an English school and DGSB in particular. It also includes a mini guide to living in the UK. As the aim was to encourage writing, students were asked to write their own copy, proof it and amend it. I struggled to resist the urge to interfere but got better at it as time went on. Some sections are still not complete and students are planning to finish them over the Summer.

Method: The technical bit

Having started with ten or so DGSB pages and teams of students working on them, we quickly created more pages on the UK. This arose because the students were writing too fast and were overwriting each other's pages and losing corrections so we needed to reach a situation where there were no more than two people working on any one page. There was some cutting and pasting from the web but on the whole it was noticeable and those who did cut and paste did work on the text as well. Everyone wrote something, most people wrote a reasonable amount and some wrote at length! Some were writing directly onto the wiki and some writing in Word and cutting and pasting it in. One of the most useful exercises was printing the wiki off and getting every one to proof it and then amend it. My year

seven class also spent a lesson critiquing it and writing comments and suggestions – a process the year eights disliked enormously.

The ‘History’ function was invaluable as it meant I could see exactly who was doing what, or not. It also meant that other teachers or parents could see what pupils had written. The ‘Discussion’ facility was not used at first but, following inspiration from Carol Weale from Dane Court Grammar in Broadstairs, I used it for feedback and evaluation on the project. I posted some questions about the project around the wiki and the students commented back. You can look at it and see their comments for yourself. Most interestingly they were more honest in their feedback on the wiki than they had been in their ‘official’ feedback to me. Whether this is because it felt like it was to peers or because it removed the demand characteristics needs further research. Either way it was useful to get some genuine feedback.

Key findings

The best bit has been channelling the enthusiasm for writing that students demonstrate on their Bebo profiles into a school project. It’s been wonderful to see all kinds of students writing about a whole range of topics. It’s been great when they’ve corrected each other and got each other back on task. It’s also been fantastic when they’ve rushed up and said, ‘Shouldn’t we do something on x?’ thinking of a new topic area, or even when they’ve rushed home to show their parents what they’ve been doing.

All in all everyone has enjoyed the freedom to just get on and write. Some students needed more structure to the process and a few wanted less. Everyone wanted to write about their own favourite thing which will be great for a future blogging project but wasn’t quite possible with this one. It was also great for the students to know that the wiki had a real audience. It’s visible to the world but only amendable by the group.

Next steps

The next stage of the project is to get in touch with other schools in other towns called Dover around the world. We have initial contact with six already and a big list of others to contact (a Town Council initiative). We hope to see if they would like to join in and link wikis. Another idea is to link up with the Girls’ Grammar School for a joint project.

I would highly recommend using wikis and blogging in English lessons. As with all things I’m sure students could get bored with it in the end, but for now it is new, exciting, and carries with it an energy and enthusiasm which results in motivated English students. What more could you want?

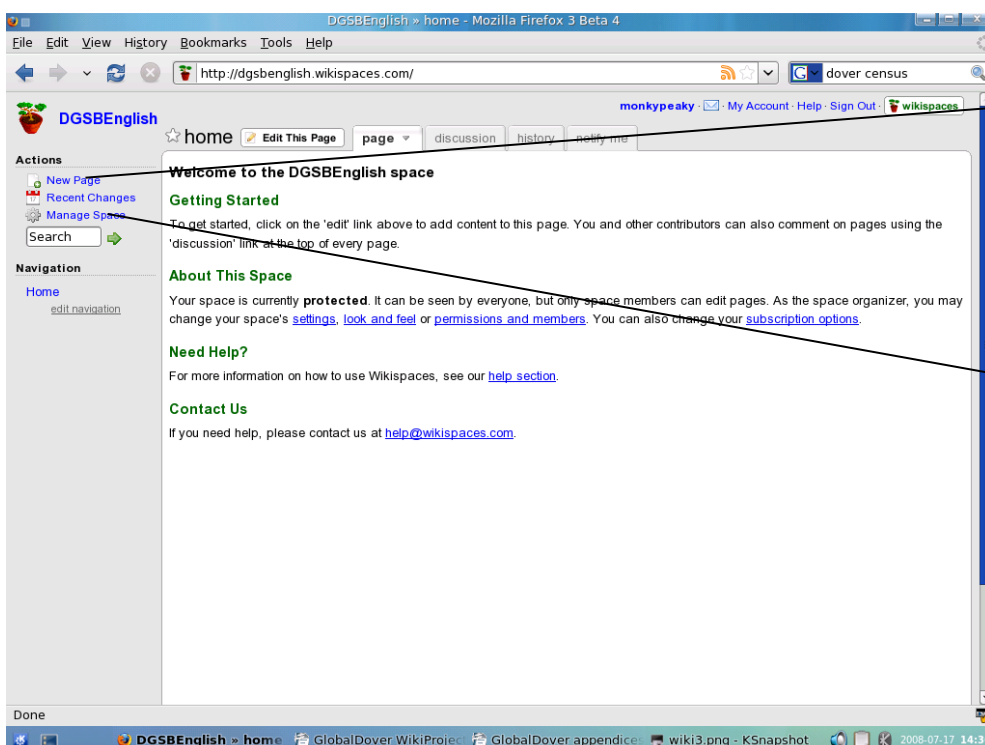
Appendix: GlobalDover Wikiproject - setting up and using a wiki

1 - Setting up a wiki



This is where you create your account

2 – An example of a shiny new wiki prior to any content being added.

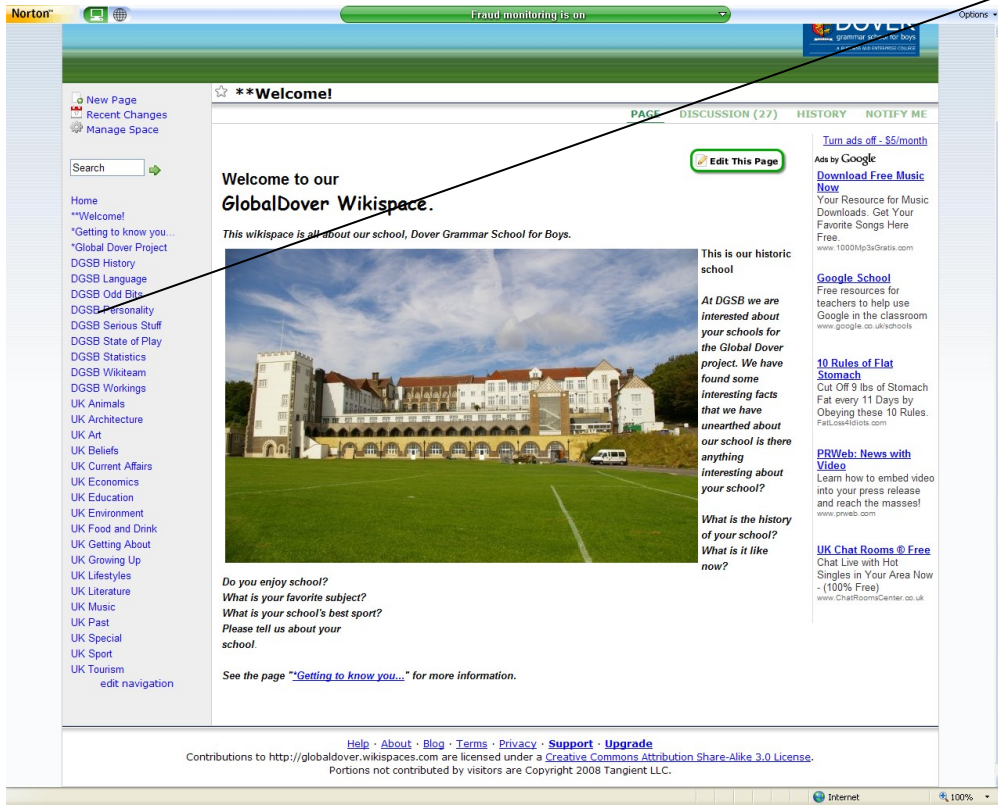


“New Page” function for setting up your pages.

“Manage Space” function which enables you to change page names, delete them and change the layout of your pages.

3 - The GlobalDover Wikiproject home page

All the different pages we created



13 Wikiteers, wiki-wars and the AQA Anthology

Carol Weale, Dane Court Grammar School, Broadstairs, Kent

Overview

Faced with the task of engaging GCSE Literature students in the study of 28 poems and exploring the use of language, form and structure in a sustained manner, Carol Weale sought to create an environment for stimulating and interesting student-led discussion. By setting up an AQA Anthology wiki where students can explore each other's interpretations, she utilised the 'MSN' communication culture that her students were familiar with to engage their interest in posting responses on the site and so engage them in the participation of a literary community. The unfolding open discussion and analysis of each other's work that resulted was a fascinating demonstration that students were willing to devote considerable time and energy outside the classroom to continue the discussions.

Introduction

There are some parts of the curriculum that make most English teachers groan, as students find them the hardest to grasp, but I began to wonder if ICT could provide another line of attack? Anyway, was there a particular area that makes students shudder? If anyone knew the answer to this, it had to be the students who were about to put this to the test: my GCSE classes. Within nano-seconds of the question being presented, they chorused back with a unanimous voice: the AQA Anthology. And, strangely enough, my heart was with them. I'd heard of using a Wiki in education (Wikipedia) – it is not a new concept, just new to my classroom – but the question was, could it provide a way of meeting this challenge?

My school, a mixed grammar, is in an area of social and economic deprivation with mixed ability classes. I've got a Year 10 group who are usually up for anything and full of the enthusiasm of those who have not suffered coursework burnout; and Year 11 who can't wait to be released from pre-exam burnout! Both classes faced examinations imminently so we all had a focus.

Aims

So how do you engage students in the study of 28 poems? How do you get them to explore the use of language, form and structure in a sustained manner? How do you elicit that personal response that has not come out of a carefully rehearsed answer? The aim of my AQA Anthology wiki was to:

- create a student-led environment for stimulating and interesting student-led discussion where they could explore each other's interpretations;
- use the MSN 'communication culture' to engage their interest in posting responses and so involve them in the participation of a literary community.

Method

Web 2.0 offers opportunities for collaboration and communication and seemed to be the obvious platform upon which to create my student-led environment as it subsists entirely on collaboration to create a community charged by a student voice. One of the positive aspects of wikis is that they invite different levels of participation which may increase as confidence grows and self-interest takes over. If I

was lucky, as they became more familiar with how to edit the pages and add widgets, the wiki would become voluntary and self-censored, creating its own rhythm through involvement and, if I dared to hope, even excitement.

Learning takes place most effectively when it is done voluntarily and as we faced the leaden weight of the Anthology, I decided that an unorthodox approach might tap into their natural curiosity. Plato said that *'education should be a form of amusement'* so although I thought that the wiki would 'amuse' them, I did ponder whether my Head would think it might not have a quantifiable benefit. Time would tell ...

The first task was to acquire a wiki space. On recommendation, I joined www.wikispaces.com. When prompted to start a new space/wiki, I scrolled right to the bottom of the page and clicked on the 'Find out more' button under K12 Educator which allows you to have a completely free wikispace which is locked and private. I had a chat with senior management and got them on my side. That was an important step because anything that involves outside sites or Web 2.0 excites their suspicious minds and child safety issues must be looked at before inviting students in. That is the next step and it is a good idea to have a policy about usernames and passwords. I asked mine to join using their school ones to ensure a degree of formality and enable contributors to be identified.

Description

Introducing the idea to my GCSE classes was interesting as they had very different reactions: the Year 11 class who were about to go into the exam hall were the most cautious but were curious enough to give it a go. The Year 10s were the most enthusiastic as they had survived a diet of ICT strategies and saw that they had everything to gain. I explained the objectives and asked them to join Wikispaces as homework.

We had a few lessons generating revision notes on key poems and agreed a 'house style' so that everyone would have a writing framework (see Appendix A). Then, full of confidence, I booked a series of sessions in the ICT suite (having arranged to temporarily disable the filters for Wikispaces and YouTube) and taught them how to add new pages, edit other people's notes and add images or widgets (applications such as videos from YouTube, audio or polls to mention just a few). I organised them into pairs to add items to their chosen poem page which, as it turned out, ended up as the only teacher-led activity of the entire project. What happened next was frustrating, but led to the most fruitful and unexpected bonus of the project: the school network routinely blocks pop-ups and the Wiki editing toolbar is a popup so my initial lesson ground to a halt. Out of sheer desperation, what was to become the real driving force of the wiki came to light. Unable to add notes easily in school, the students clicked on the discussion tab behind each page and found that *they* were filter-free. And so the wiki-wars began!

I had placed a couple of questions or thinking points on a few pages and soon the students were intensely engaged in trying to answer them. Their journey could be charted through the progression of their language: at first it was awkward as they seemed to be in 'worksheet' mode (See Appendix B) with responses to a question on 'My Last Duchess' as to whether the Duke was mad or bad, eliciting:

The Duchess is guilty of inappropriate behaviour because she is married to him but she flirts (and more) with alot of men 'she has a heart...too easily impressed'

But as their friends responded, they became more confident and were prepared to start interpreting and what was more important, arguing a case:

And finally Lydia, you said the mother is ‘sad’ because ‘her daughter doesn’t have such a need for her as she wishes,’ which is wrong, the rope of love is red, signifying passion or hate (ie passionate hate), sadness is the colour of deep blue. I rest my case.

Wiki wars finally broke out over one afternoon in an ICT suite. I had asked them to contribute to the site in some way and I was expecting more of the gentle joshing of each other’s ideas. Suddenly, from various corners of the room, I could hear their volleying shots as they battled for a lead position:

Just a few, yeah you got owned :)

When asked whether they actually held the opinion that they were strongly arguing, one girl replied that she didn’t, but just enjoyed debating the point! (See Appendix C.) Looking at her wiki involvement that afternoon, it became clear that she had taken part in four separate, simultaneous wiki-wars – which is typical of the toggling managed by MSN participants.

Normally, it is difficult to engage students in the Anthology, but I had decided upon a new policy. I would not interfere with the spelling or grammar as I saw my place in the controlled environment of assessed essays; neither would I intervene if a student made an incorrect point as the wiki became self-regulating. This gave them a new freedom and as the platform was within familiar MSN type of territory, they soon forgot that I was there (see Appendix D). I did not set homework during this period either as they should have been revising for exams, but I was rather hoping for student participation at greater levels than just the classroom and I was not to be disappointed! The morning lesson had been and gone, but the wiki wars continued: another response was posted during a different curriculum lesson in the afternoon:

Right Lydia let’s settle this

And continued after school

I have more but I’m going out now :p

And into the late evening

If I had time I would prove you wrong, but we’re going out now :(

And even into the early hours (12.17am) as they attempted to have the last word. What was more surprising were the types of students who were the most active. One boy had steadfastly refused to cooperate throughout the year, hated writing so his coursework was routinely late or undeveloped. Suddenly, he had an outlet and a desire to ‘speak’ and it was to one of his friends – one of the quiet girls whose essays were usually top A*. He wanted to argue with her and now motivated by that thought, he relentlessly thrashed out issues concerning a range of poems until exhausted, she amicably conceded defeat. Until the next time ...

So the quiet and the unmotivated suddenly came to life and the wiki was populated with their quips, wit and analysis without fear of censure from a teacher. Only once did another student go off task and he was quickly whipped into line with

Yeah Bruce be quite! This poem has nothing to do with the slave trade – it’s about a man killing his wife! Woo! Go me and Tanya

A few students’ contributions remained at a low level as they preferred to ‘watch’ the discussions either because they were inhibited or still found the poetry difficult to grasp but it had made a significant difference to the majority of the students. I followed up in lessons with wiki updates using extracts

which I re-broadcast so they were not only aware of their own contributions but those of others, which generated a new sense of respect to those who had been dismissed as quiet.

While the wiki-wars raged in the classroom, I decided to use homework to edit the main pages so, in a very short space of time, our wiki had a working skeleton of revision notes, videos, mindmaps, essay plans, and my stash of exemplar essays. We'd all pitched in together and it was time to see if it had all been worth it: had it merely 'amused' or 'educated' or both?

Key findings

The Year 11s sauntered confidently into their GCSE final exams having been merely spectators in the wiki world, but the wiki usage logs showed a series of raised yellow spikes just before the Literature exam, indicating that they had been poring over the site as part of last minute revision. The wiki had achieved its objective there. Next on the scaffold were the Year 10s. Again, a similar pattern of spikes emerged in the days leading up to their mock but the real validation came in their performance. Not only had they used the site to revise, it had appeared to noticeably improve their grades. In the previous year's exam, the boys had achieved an average of C while the girls came in with a B; this year the boys zoomed up to an average of an A, with surprisingly little difference in the girls' performance. I re-checked the figures: the previous year, only three boys had scored a B grade or better, whereas this year that had improved by 300% as nine boys were in this category. What could have made such a difference? The intake was similar so I asked and they said that making the vodcasts/podcasts and the wiki were the significant events that '*offered a different dimension to revising*', '*It gave me more views to take on when writing my essay. I got an A, surprisingly!*' and it was summed up by one boy, '*I think it should be for everyone as they would gain vast amount of different interpretations giving us a wider knowledge of the poems.*' (See Appendix E)

So they had been 'amused', 'educated' and it had made the difference to their achievement. But the after-effects went further: it gave them a sense of control over their learning and a metacognitive response to how they learn best. The three learning styles were catered for but the kinaesthetic style dominated as students were the contributors as well as the editors: they had made the materials that were being used by their peers for important exams. This is not achievable in a normal classroom environment where interaction is primarily auditory. Finally, it provided a real opportunity for autonomous self-motivated learning but this did lead to a digital divide as those who were most active gained the highest grades, possibly inspiring others next year? Perhaps the words of an ancient Chinese proverb holds the key as to why a wiki is such an effective tool:

'I hear I forget; I see I remember; I do I understand!'

Conclusions

Wikis offer a fluid learning process which promotes creative thinking (see Appendix F) rather than a didactic, linear structure as they create collective knowledge and with this comes the mutual respect as they comment on each other's work. This generates a surprising emotional involvement with their learning as a sense of fun finally envelops the Anthology experience. Most important of all, they have become producers rather than consumers and it is this active learning role that makes the difference. ICT simply offers the opportunity to activate it. The process of collaboration is not really about the end product – the exam result – as we did not anticipate the outcome; it was a journey of discovery.

It was not all plain sailing though and apart from Internet filters and e-safety issues, the main concerns are about control: control over who joins as the teacher can block or ban contributors; control over the make-up of the group itself as opening a wiki to other year groups might be inhibiting; and control over the content to make sure that nobody posts anything inappropriate or irrelevant. I had expected the last area to be a possible problem but no-one overstepped the mark and they were not exactly angels! Other hiccups affected page content as clumsy editing resulted in deleted material but this was easily rectified with the History button on each page which allows you to revert to earlier revisions. Simultaneous editing of pages is to be avoided as they can accidentally erase each other's ideas but careful planning avoids this (the discussion pages are not affected). Most of all, I would advise wikiteers make friends with the ICT department so that Internet filters don't thwart the process!

Next steps

Would I do it again? Definitely! I believe that this approach is adaptable in most schools or groups, not just top sets as they get so much more out of the process. Next steps for me include using the wiki to debate poetry questions rather than setting an essay, start a wiki for the Different Cultures Anthology as well as *Lord of the Flies* at the request of Year 10 who have got a taste for the action ...

Appendices

- A: Wiki student notes on the poems
- B: Initial entries showing students' tendency to respond in worksheet mode
- C: Wiki-wars
- D: Self-generated discussion on 'Patrolling Barnegat'
- E: Student thoughts on taking part in the wiki
- F: Thinking skills pyramid 2001

Wikiteers, wiki-wars and the AQA Anthology

Appendix A: Student notes on the poems - in the 'house style'


☆ **Affliction of Margaret**

[PAGE](#) [DISCUSSION \(3\)](#) [HISTORY](#) [NOTIFY ME](#)

IDEAS:
 Portrayal of obsessive and tragic woman abandoned by only son/child. Universal concept so stands for mothers everywhere. Affliction is not only loss of son but not knowing what has happened to him. Poem focuses upon her present feelings.

STRUCTURE: 11 stanzas of despair – each stanza devoted to an aspect of the woman's psychological situation, culminating in final desolate conclusion

LANGUAGE: 'I have no other earthly friend'
 Formal dramatic monologue with poetic diction mingled with rhythms and colloquial speech. Contrast of positive language concerning her son 'an object beauteous to behold' and negative images of the 'unkind' world 'chains tie us down by land and sea'.
 Focuses upon her feelings and role as a mother 'kind mother have I been, as kind as ever breathed.'
 Supernatural elements as Wordsworth was a Romantic poet but they are not Christian elements yet there is a feeling of the afterlife 'fowls of heaven..'
COMPARE: *Catrin, First Sonne, Digging*



Edit This Page

Appendix B: Initial entries



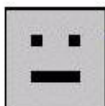
[dc04daeche](#) **Laboratory and My Last Duchess**

'The Laboratory' has a similiar subject to 'My Last Duchess' - a person who kills, or who is about to kill, her rival in the presence of her lover. The lover seems to be connected to the speaker in some way - perhaps her husband or an ex-lover who has spurned her for the rival who is soon to die.

The form of 'The Laboratory' is a monologue, and the silent listener is important. He is an expert in poisons (like the apothecary in Romeo and Juliet) who sells his services to a wealthy woman.

Henry

 Posted Apr 28, 2008 11:38 am - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04howard](#) re: Laboratory and My Last Duchess

ANCIEN RÉGIME refers to an old rule or gouvernement siggesting that the speaker comes from a past age. We do not know for certain that the speaker is actualy female but this is then suggested in the 5th stanza she will carry her poison ("...an earring, a casket/A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket..."), and by her offering a kiss to the poison maker , when he has finished his gruesome work.Browning explores the jealousy and vengefulness of someone disappointed in love. and how this makes them vengeful.

Appendix C: Wiki-wars

This argument may seem a little stupid but it's hard to come up with reasons :(

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:55 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[DC04Woodburn](#) re: did the duke over react to the duchess'"spot of joy"?

It's hard to come up with reasons, because deep down inside you agree with me too ;)

Sure women were treated badly back then, but a stray blush shouldn't be a reason to kill someone. This rash decision merely suggests that he has in fact over-reacted.

[I'm running out of ideas now :(]

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:59 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[Joe Brooker](#) re: did the duke over react to the duchess'"spot of joy"?

Good Mwahahahahaha! He did over react to her spot of joy but who cares? She deserved it because it's obvious she didn't really love him and just married him for the luxury and wealth!

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 3:19 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[DC04Woodburn](#) re: did the duke over react to the duchess'"spot of joy"?

You just agreed with me there.

You fail Joe.

Appendix D: Self-initiated discussion about 'Patrolling Barnegat': Good or Evil?



[dc04giles](#) Good or Evil?

Is this poem made to show the power of evil or the the power of good that can be provoked because the TRINITY could refer to the Father Son and Holy Spirit but in the poem it also says about the Demonic laughter which conjures up images of evil.Which one of these do you think it is trying to depict or maybe you think both? please expand on your answer.

Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:13 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04ilett](#) re: Good or Evil?

Evil!!! I think this might be an inverted trinity. The imagery used suggests that this trinity is more destructive then productive and therefore not one of God. Why would God destroy what he has created?? The demoniac laughter also supports this! the word demon is liek a creature from hell, not one from heaven. An maybe the weird forms could be the demons??

Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:20 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04daeche](#) re: Good or Evil?

This poem really shows the hostility of nature to the natural world. Whitman is trying to show everyone shaw power, and force of nature, and that nothing or no-one can even think to face nature head on.

Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:20 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04ilett](#) re: Good or Evil?

But do you think that it is natural?? or more supernatural?? I think this is a supernatural side of the world not the natural side necessarily.

Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:22 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04howard](#) re: Good or Evil?

It certainly seems as though Whitman is trying to depict the the evil side of nature and how it could be linked to a religious sign of God's wrath. Evidenece for tis is the many s and t sounds , these portray the storm of being very harsh and full of wrath. The ING endings also reiterate the harshness of the storm

which link in with the one view of the savage trinity the father son and holy spirit , the supernatural religious evil side to Walt Whitmans poem because it sounds as if the storm is incessant with never ending battering of the shipwreck in the poem and Walts mind

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:23 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04ilett](#) re: Good or Evil?

Yes, you seem to think between me and daeche Tom but, the verbs used are very violent and almost personified, for instance, fitfully. This makes it sound like it is quite violent. The trinity, not one of the son the father and the spirit, but maybe its not that, because this trinity is not out to destroy! I think it is the hells version of this and he gets this along. Also, the red signal flaring, a flare glows, the colour red indicates hate and makes it seem eerier and more hellish than originally thought.

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:27 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04daeche](#) re: Good or Evil?

Yes, that is true, it is even too powerful to be supernatural! The 'savage trinity' really shows the hell, and the dark side of nature, also the hostility!

The supernatural force rebels against all of God's laws, they're too powerful for God! Hell has the supernatural force of the 'Savage trinity lashing' 'Waves, air, midnight'. The nature is EVIL! Whitman wants us to loathe the weather, and how unpredictable it is, which is shown by the structure, and layout of the poem, the commas show the storm is endless, it's unstoppable, it's HELL!

By the way this is a reply for Lukes!

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:28 pm - [\[delete\]](#)



[dc04howard](#) re: Good or Evil?

i do agree with most of this but the red signal flaring , red could also be passion and awe that Walt Whitman feels towards the storm and in reply to Henry Rorke daeche Walt perhaps does want us to see the force and hatred of nature but he also he wants us to see the supernatural and amazing side of

nature and perhaps it clenches the evil of hell by doing destructive things

 Posted Apr 30, 2008 2:33 pm - [\[delete\]](#)

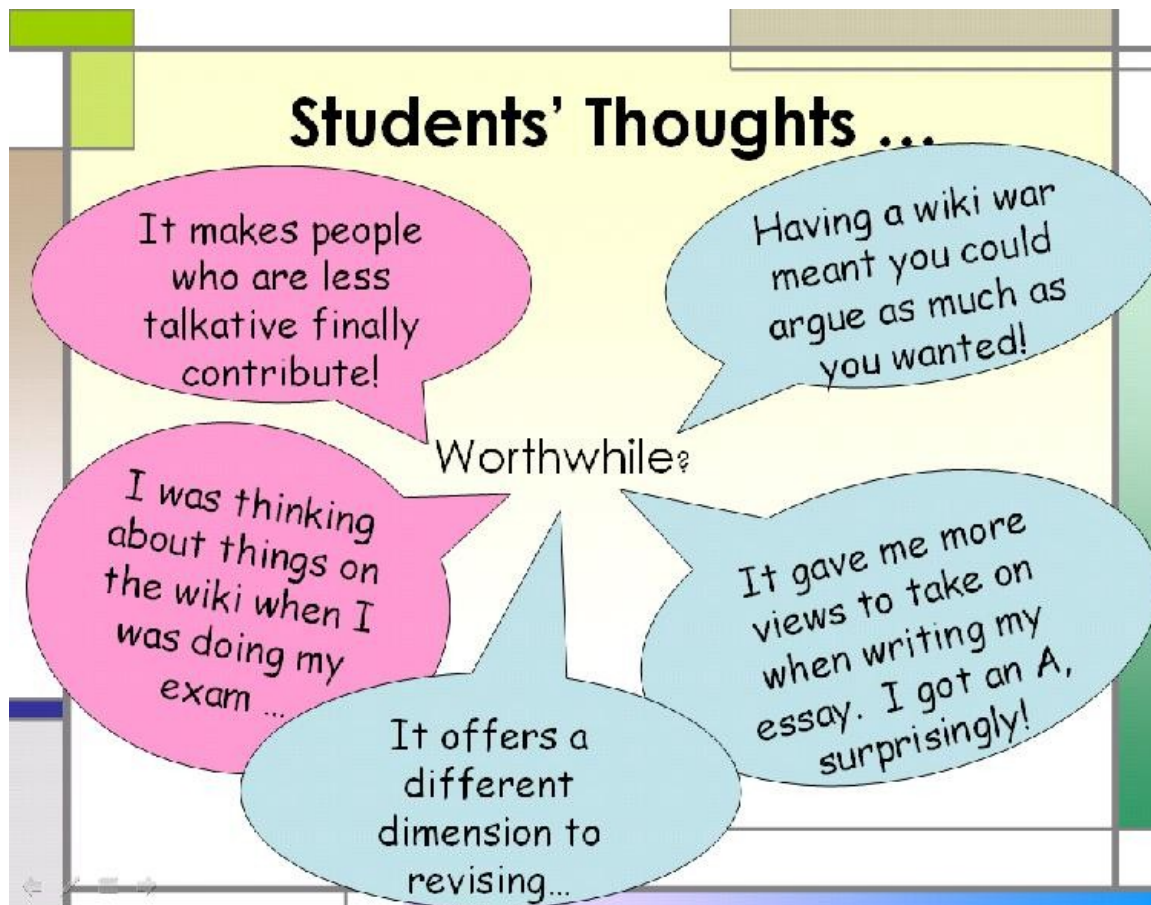


[dc04ilett](#) re: Good or Evil?

Maybe though, it's not anything in real life. Maybe it's his mind. I got this idea from the undertone muttering and demoniac laughing. This gives me an idea of schizophrenia and paranoia. The storm could be a metaphor for a storm of emotions, or a storm of voices in his head. The trinity could be not waves air and midnight, but that could be a metaphor for uncertainty, emptiness and darkness in the mind?? maybe?? i don't know haha

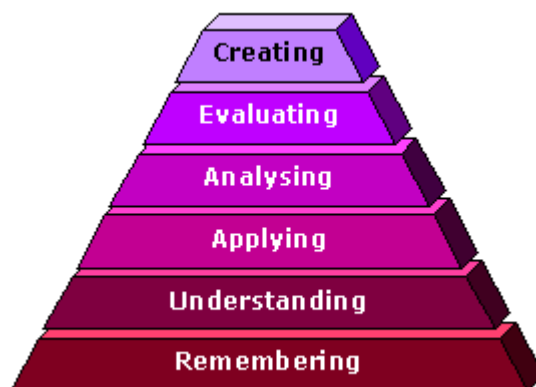
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Appendix E: Students' thoughts on taking part in the wiki



Appendix F: Thinking skills pyramid 2001

Revised taxonomy of the cognitive domain following Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)



Atherton J S (2005) *Learning and Teaching: Bloom's taxonomy* [On-line] UK: Available at: <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm>

14 Active revision strategies for C/D borderline students using ICT

Sam Custance, Holsworthy Community College, Devon

Overview

Revision can often mean more of the same, typically in the guise of some rather dry and unexciting worksheets. Just at the time you want them to concentrate the most, they lose interest! Here Sam Custance tackles this tricky situation and explores how ICT can help to make revision an appealing process in which students actively engage with and develop their understanding in preparation for an examination. Through employing a range of websites and strategies, often based around the use of an interactive whiteboard (IWB), Sam has made revision an opportunity for students to build confidence and a positive approach to their examinations.

Context and aims

Holsworthy Community College is a small mixed comprehensive secondary school in rural Devon, with about 700 students from 11-16; it has technology college status. During the period of this case study, I had two GCSE classes. The first was a C/D borderline group, made up of 14 students, with half the class targeting a C grade. The second class consisted of 29 boys, with predicted grades ranging from A* to E. My aim in using ICT with these classes was to engage students with their revision lessons, enabling them to recall and then develop their understanding, so that they reached and possibly exceeded their target grades.

Hard-to-teach topics: reading assessment objectives

The 'hard-to-teach topics' that I have addressed include: comparisons and cross references, explanations, examination language. The strategies that I shall be discussing in my case study are designed to aid students with their preparation for GCSE Paper 1 Section A, where their reading skills are being assessed.

Method and description

The following activities were used both during lesson time and during two separate revision days, one during the Easter holidays, the second during the May half-term. Student feedback from both the class and the revision days was very positive, due to the variety of strategies used.

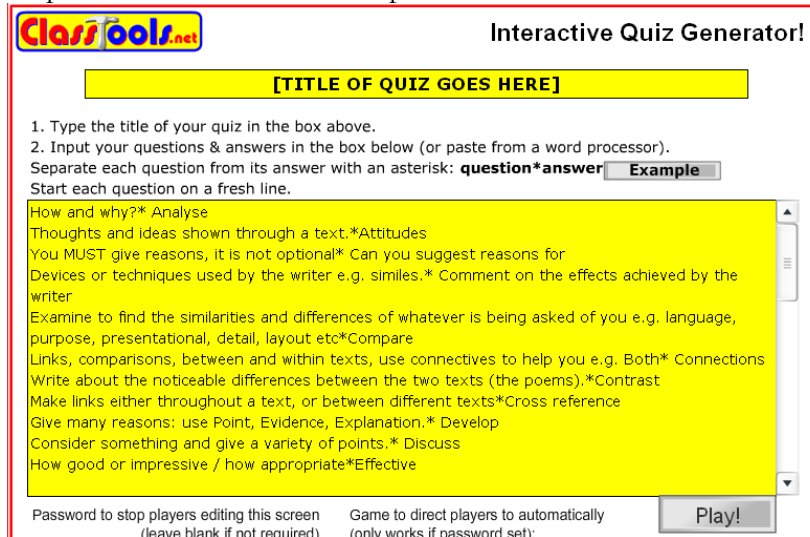
Interactive games

In order to reinforce my students' familiarity with examination language, I used www.classtools.net. This fabulous website is free to use and is very easy to set up so that multiple computer games can be played with the same set of questions and answers. I would recommend that you type up the questions and answers in a Word document, as then this can be copied and pasted into the yellow box. The questions and answers need to be separated by a *, as in these examples which give a description of a term, followed by the term itself:

How and why? Analyse*

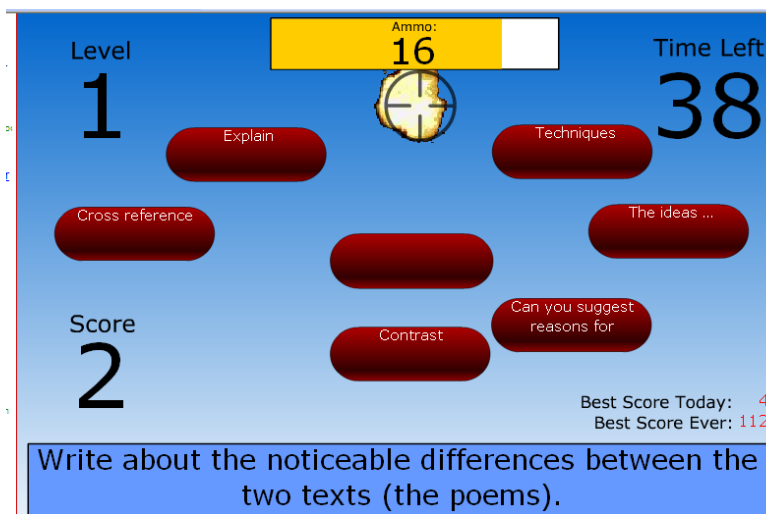
*Refers to something that happens (in the poems)*An event
Thoughts and ideas shown through a text.*Attitudes*

You need at least ten questions and answers. I typed up the questions and answers and placed the resulting Word document (see Appendix A) into a drive which all of my students can access. They were then able to copy and paste them into the correct place.



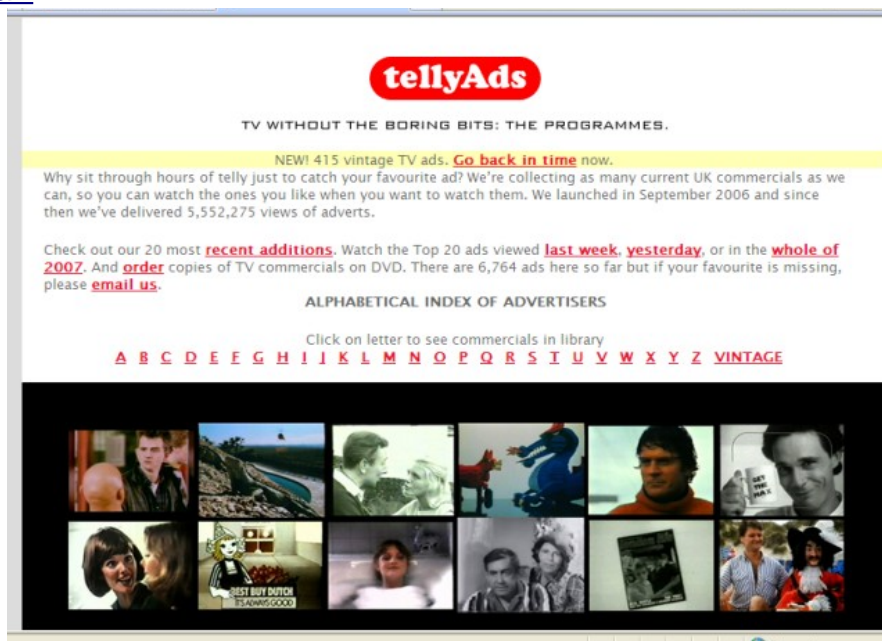
An example of how to input the questions and answers or, in this case, descriptions of terms followed by the terms

There are many different games on www.classools.net, my favourite being Word Shoot. This allows you to create a version of Space Invaders, whereby the question appears with the remaining answers, and when you fire at the correct answer, it rather satisfyingly blows up. The second and third level becomes harder, from a gamer's point of view, as the answers move around. The games were played both individually, in a computer suite, and on an interactive whiteboard with pupils lining up in two lines to play against each other in teams. Word Shoot limits both the time and the ammo, which means that the player does better if they are not taking random guesses. With the same set of questions and answers, other games which can also be played on this website include: Manic Miner, Cannon Ball Fun and Matching Pairs.



An example screen from Word Shoot

Another successful revision game we played was Persuasive Bingo, where students would use the Teachit Persuasive Bingo template to look for the persuasive techniques being used on adverts from www.tellyads.com.



A possible resource for 'Persuasive Bingo'

PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES BINGO CARD

EMOTIVE WORDS	FORCEFUL PHRASES	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS	CHATTY STYLE	STATISTICS	CRITICISE THE OPPOSITE OPINION
CLUSTERS OF THREE	PERSONAL PRONOUNS	HUMOUR	PLAY ON THE READER'S SYMPATHY	EXAGGERATION (HYPERBOLE)	REPETITION OF WORDS/ PHRASES
CATCHY PHRASES OR SLOGANS	FIGURES OF SPEECH	CONTRASTS	MAKE POSITIVE POINTS PERSONAL	ANECDOTES	MAKE NEGATIVE POINTS IMPERSONAL
EMOTIVE PICTURES	SHORT SENTENCES/ PARAGRAPHS	PLAY ON THE READER'S GUILT	IMAGERY	QUOTE A RELIABLE SOURCE	SHOCK TACTICS

Persuasive Bingo template

Podcasting

One of the websites that I admire is www.podcastrevision.com. Podcasts are recordings made available on the Internet for people to play back on computer or personal media player. The idea of being able to create my own podcasts really appealed to me, as a number of my students had such strong aural memories. Having read the 'Make your Own' section on the website, I thought, 'I can do that!' Luckily for me, a physics teacher at my school had already been creating his own podcasts to assist students through the science text book. He helped me get the sound levels right and found me an amplifier (borrowed from the music department). I purchased a microphone and was off. I was hooked. The facility to prepare readings and commentaries of the AQA 'Poems from Different Cultures' for Cluster 2 meant that I could guide my students through the poem with annotations and making comparisons between poems without digression. The sheer novelty of hearing my recordings had my group spellbound.



Podcast revision gives advice on how to make your own podcasts

In creating the podcasts, I tried to keep them between two and five minutes long (the length of a song). Any longer would risk losing my audience's attention. I didn't write a script but kept the poem in front of me with the annotations that we had made and a couple of revision guides. I realised that I 'ummed' and 'erred' but I decided not to make each podcast perfect, preferring to just talk into the microphone as I would if they were in front of me in a class. I encouraged my class to listen to the podcasts repeatedly and know that for some of my students, this might be the only independent revision they would do, outside the classroom.

Whilst teaching this unit to my Year 10s, I have introduced the podcasts at the time of teaching this unit, rather than for revision only, as I would like them to use my podcasts as a model and hopefully go on to create their own. The only disadvantage to the podcasts is with the cringe factor, although I do believe the positives outweigh the negatives.

Music to revise by

The assessment objective to *read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to text and developing and sustaining interpretations of them* meant that I needed to enthuse my students with the idea of engaging with the texts. To start them off, as a class, we created a list of language devices that we needed to revise and chose a song which would help us to think of each device. The results were an eclectic mix of 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' by the Verve to revise oxymoron and 'No Woman, No Cry' to remind students about repetition. This blossomed into a way of helping us to revise the Poems from Different Cultures, with 'Unrelated Incidents' being revised using 'I'm Gonna be (500 miles)' by the Proclaimers, to remind students of accent and dialect. We ended up with an anthology called 'Music to revise by'. The music was played when I was encouraging them to plan their writing, revise key ideas, or when we played some of the revision games. Students were then able to apply their understanding of the language devices to other texts, for examples with leaflets, newspaper articles, travel brochures etc.

Independence and collaboration

To encourage my students both to read a variety of texts and to recognise that exam texts follow a theme, I allowed them to select their own theme to practise their revision. The students were provided with a list of generic questions for any non-fiction and media texts (see Appendix B). The topics chosen varied from a debate about 'Size 0' to advertising cars and whether the driving age should be raised. This meant that the students were able to revise their understanding of the exam questions, as well as developing their confidence in reading, making appropriate references and sustaining their interpretations.

As a class, we practised our exam skills, and together we created the best model answer to Paper 1 Section A from 2006. By writing the answers together and then marking them together, my students could see where they gained marks, but also where they were needlessly losing them. Exam tips like reading how many marks the question was worth and answering all of the bullet points quickly became apparent when they realised that they were no longer scoring the necessary marks. Sharing the writing process meant that each member of the class could contribute but that we developed and sustained the ideas, rather than simply writing an answer and then moving on which is the technique that so many of them had used in their mock exams. The model answer was then distributed to the students, to remind them of the level of detail that they were all capable of producing.

Who's the biggest slapper?

The second assessment objective - *distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented* - is an area that was revised at first with a quiz, to see if students could identify the difference between a fact and an opinion, and followed on from our active reading lessons. When evaluating the presentation of information, past experience showed they tended to comment on one or two aspects but failed to develop their responses. To help sustain their responses, we played a game called: 'Who is the biggest slapper?' This required two plastic fly swats, non-fiction and media terminology projected onto my IWB and the class divided into two teams - a team lined up on each side of the IWB. I held up different types of media texts in turn including: magazine front covers, film posters, front pages of newspapers, leaflets etc. The student at the head of the each line held a fly swat and used this to slap or select the feature they wanted to comment on. The team whose word was hit first, was allowed to go first. So, for example, if I held up a poster the student might slap *picture* and then had to comment on how the picture was used, e.g. to attract attention, establish a mood, etc. Each team also had a scribe, to jot their ideas down. (The scribe's notes could then be used to review students' understanding; students

could then attempt to answer exam style questions about the text in full sentences.) Another student kept score between the two groups by tallying the marks up between each team. Once they had attempted to slap a word with the fly swat and use it correctly, they had to pass the fly swat onto the next member of their team. This game was so successful that I then introduced connectives for comparison and contrast so that students drew upon their previous statements and developed their ideas.

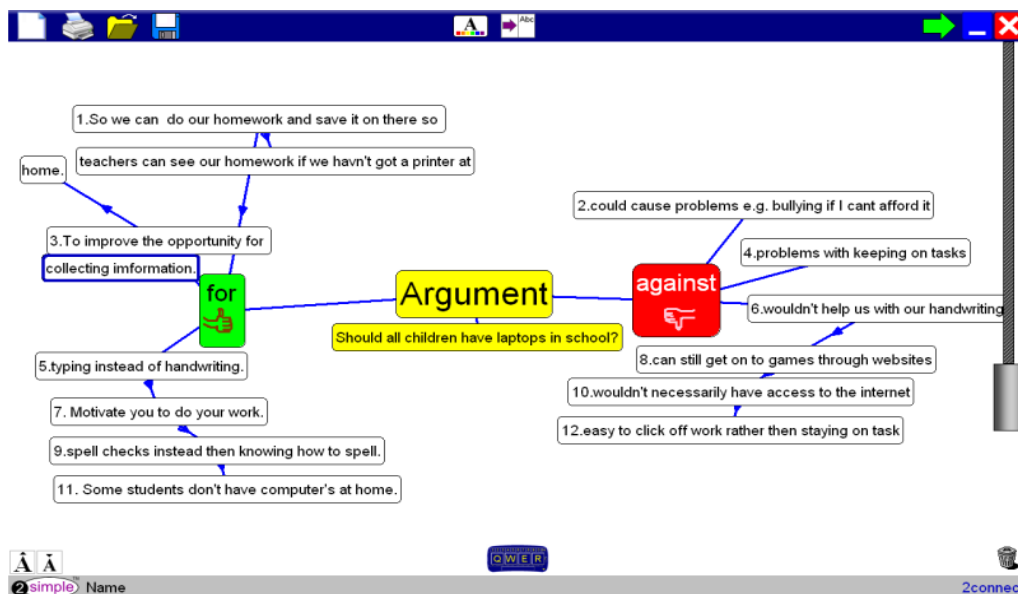
Media vocabulary	
bold	italics
broadsheet/tabloid	logos
bullet points	masthead
by-line	photographs/pictures
capitals	paragraphs
charts	slogans
colour	sub-headings
cropping	text
diagrams	wrap
font styles	quotations
headlines	

Terminology used in the 'biggest slapper' game

The use of ICT was simplistic – the projection of different sets of words – but it enabled the students to develop their understanding. This was so successful that I developed the game to include phrases and language devices for the different writing triplets. This was especially useful for students who were finding it difficult to start their sentences in different ways, but also to develop their abilities to discuss a range of presentational features.

Getting planning in shape

The different writing triplets were also revised using planning shapes. The software 2simple 2connect is on our network, which utilizes Sue Palmer's writing skeletons. This allowed the students to use the planning templates to show their understanding of the structure of a piece of writing.



An example of planning an argument

This followed neatly into revising the third assessment objective: *Follow an argument, identifying implications and recognizing inconsistencies.* When selecting reading matter for this learning objective, in the past I have used writers who create humour effectively such as Bill Bryson who has been used in the exam. Charlie Brooker is probably a little too risqué for the examination boards. However, my students find his dry wit entertaining.

We started off by annotating the text simply by writing a + for positives and – for negative points. This allowed us to follow the ideas that were being discussed. We were also able to annotate the text using a key which allowed humour to be broken down. Looking at Brooker’s sentence structure and how humour was created was also an interesting exercise. This led into students writing their own ideas for an argument. We used a table in Word, which allowed statements to be picked up and transferred from the middle into the left or right. The table allowed students to compare and contrast statements regarding the Poems from Different Cultures; statements in the middle were about both poems, statements either side were about one poem. Students were then able to sort the statements and then build the essay slowly by transferring the statements to the bottom of the page and building upon their Point, Evidence, Explanation paragraphs.

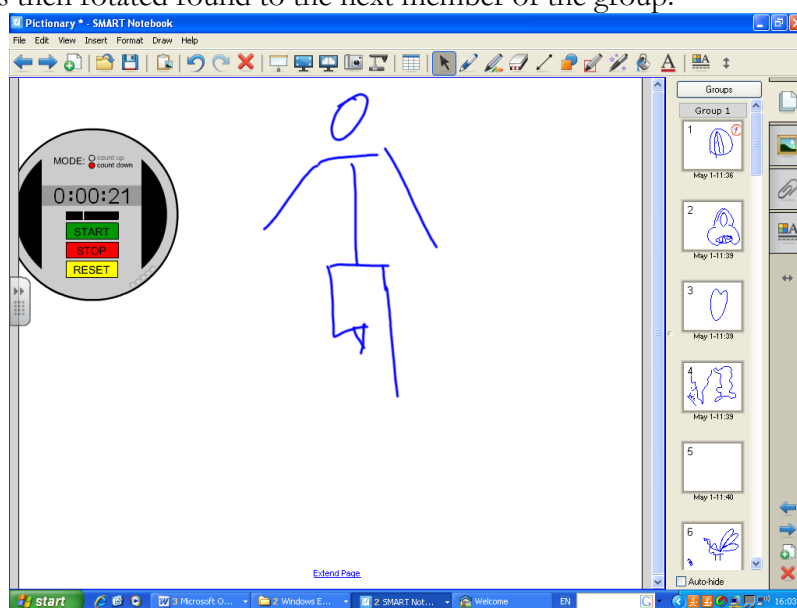
Pictionary and Taboo

The fourth assessment objective demands that students: *Select material appropriate to their purpose, collate material from different sources, and make cross references.* I was keen to ensure that my students saw the poems from different cultures as a collection, rather than as individual poems. To aid their ability to collate material from different sources and to make cross references, students created visual PowerPoints of the poems. As students saw the pictures relating to time, movement, locations and language, clear connections and cross references were made.

The students were able to make the links but their capacity to explain them needed to be developed. I attempted to do this by playing two games: Pictionary and Taboo. To create both games, students were

given two pieces of A4 paper which were each cut into eight pieces. Each student was then assigned a poem and asked to select the key words, ideas, themes, images and poetic devices etc. Students were given the advice that the fewer the words on the card, the easier they would find the next task. The cards were then collected in and shuffled. On the IWB I used a timer (from the SMART board Gallery) and each team was given a space to tally up their scores; one point for each correct answer was awarded.

Students were then placed into groups. We played Pictionary first. One person from each group was given a board pen and the stack of cards was placed inside a pot (no cherry picking was allowed). The student then had to do a drawing which explained the writing on the card. If a member of their group guessed correctly, the 'drawer' then took the next card and tried to generate as many points for their teams in the thirty seconds as possible. The scores were then collected at the end of each round. The role of 'drawer' was then rotated round to the next member of the group.

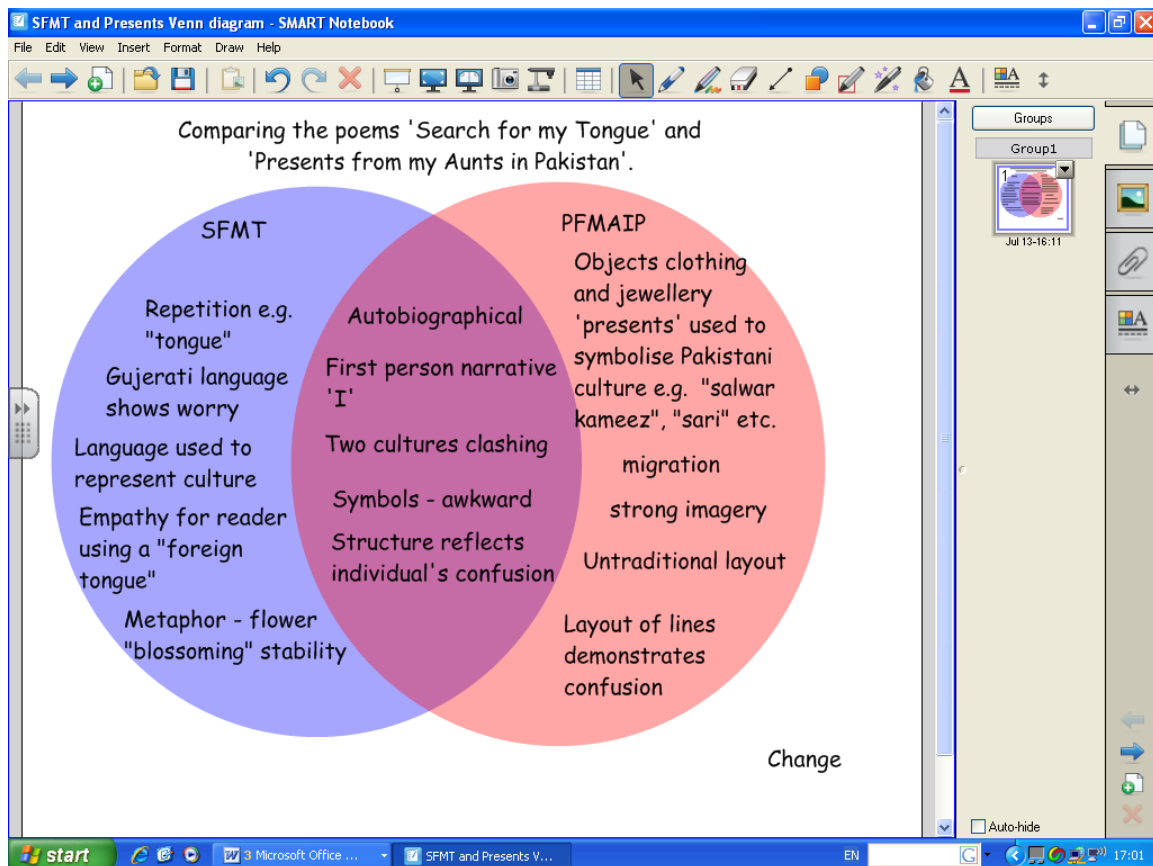


Playing 'Pictionary' on the IWB

The game of Taboo is played in the same way, with the same resources. Students were encouraged to focus their explanations not on the abstract but to use the poems to help explain what is on the card. They were not allowed to use any of the words on the cards to aid their explanation. If you wanted to make this game even harder, you could also add on the obvious clues onto the card so that they could also not be used, to ensure that the students worked harder on their explanations.

IWB tools

I used the IWB annotation tools with students to highlight key words in the question and texts then I created a Venn diagram. In SMART, this involves just drawing two circles freehand, or with the shapes icon. The same can be carried out in Word, using Insert, Picture, AutoShapes and selecting the circles. The concept is that the place where the circles overlap is where key words denoting similarities are written. This ensures that the students make comparisons immediately, in their introductions rather than waiting until the conclusion and writing about the poems separately.



An example of a Venn diagram, showing similarities between poems in the overlapping section

We also played the 'Who's the biggest slapper?' game again, mainly to generate statements to support the students' ability to make the comparisons. My D/C students were able to create statements which included:

- 'Search for my Tongue' uses Gujerati, whereas 'Presents from my Aunts' uses place.
- Both poems involve emotions.
- They both write about being lonely.
- Similarly, the feelings are of isolation from being away from their culture.
- 'Search for my Tongue' uses another language, whereas 'Presents' illustrates the differences through clothing and objects.
- Extended metaphors are used in 'Search for my Tongue' to illustrate the growth of her mother tongue, whereas similes are used to show the comparisons between the British and Pakistani cultures, through the clothes.
- Both tell the story of their lives, they are autobiographical.
- In the same way, they are both worried about the about they way they live their lives.
- Likewise the conflicts are within themselves.
- To conclude: the conflict is resolved in 'Search for my Tongue', whereas the conflict is unresolved in 'Presents from My Aunts', she is still 'unfixed'.

Being able to make cross references between two poems enables them to achieve a C grade.

Some IWBs have a 'banner' or 'tickertape' facility which scrolls across the board. I used this to continually remind my students of the connectives which signal comparisons and contrasts. This could

also be used for the lesson objective, spellings, or reminders about anything for students to use that lesson.

Key findings

My main finding is that using these teaching activities led to my students adopting a more confident approach to the exams. The lessons were pacy and feedback from students was largely positive. The class made up of boys appeared to be keen to come to my lessons and their behaviour, I felt, improved.

After their exams, I surveyed my students for feedback. My D/C borderline students seemed confident in gaining the C grade (see Appendix C). My students gave me ten out of ten for the teaching styles that were used. They also believe that they have reached their target grade C in their exams. 30 students (C/D borderline) chose to give up two days of their holidays to revise with me and all those who returned the feedback questionnaires said that they would recommend the revision days to other students.

The final results were pleasing. Of the C/D borderline group in which half were given a C target grade, just over 50% gained a C, with the rest all gaining a D grade. The all-boy class also did well with 19 meeting their target, 3 failing to meet it and 6 actually exceeding their target grade.

Next steps

I will continue to build a repertoire of teaching and learning techniques, particularly to enable revision to be active, engaging and interesting. Furthermore, I have been adapting the techniques described here for Key Stage students, especially to improve their reading skills.

Appendices

- A: Examination language games
- B: Active reading chart
- C: Sample student evaluations

Appendix A: Examination language games

Using <http://www.classtools.net/>

1. How and why? * **Analyse**
2. Thoughts and ideas shown through a text. * **Attitudes**
3. You **MUST** give reasons, it is not optional * **Can you suggest reasons for**
4. Devices or techniques used by the writer e.g. similes. * **Comment on the effects achieved by the writer**
5. Examine to find the similarities and differences of whatever is being asked of you e.g. language, purpose, presentational, detail, layout etc * **Compare**
6. Links, comparisons, between and within texts, use connectives to help you e.g. Both * **Connections**
7. Write about the noticeable differences between the two texts (the poems). * **Contrast**
8. Make links either throughout a text, or between different texts * **Cross reference**
9. Give many reasons: use Point, Evidence, Explanation. * **Develop**
10. Consider something and give a variety of points. * **Discuss**
11. How good or impressive / how appropriate * **Effective**
12. Find or judge the value of the text * **Evaluate**
13. Make clear and give reasons for. * **Explain**
14. Provide details and discuss a variety of ideas. * **Explore**
15. How is the narrator feeling, consider the variety of emotions e.g. concerned, confused, inquisitive, remorseful, etc. * **Feelings**
16. In what ways? By what means? Which techniques are used? * **How do ...?**
17. Plan or thought formed, belief or opinions. In the Poetry section it refers to the poem's themes. * **The ideas ...**
18. What are the methods used? * **In what ways ...?**
19. Do not only use quotations, summarise and explain your thoughts, supported by references. * **In your own words**
20. Choice of words, type of language e.g. formal, informal, emotive, scientific, persuasive, argumentative, instructional anecdotal * **Language**
21. Use of language features e.g. figurative language such as similes and metaphors * **Linguistic**
22. Which way? Which devices? Which techniques are being used? Which stylistic features * **The methods used ...**
23. Visuals e.g. pictures, images etc. * **Presentational**
24. Use quotations to support your answer * **Refer to**
25. How the text is put together. * **Structural**
26. Methods a writer can use * **Techniques**
27. Clearly explain the main points and select appropriate quotes to help you explain your ideas. * **What are the key points...?**
28. Give your own opinion which must be explained * **What do you think...?**
29. How does the text make you feel when you read it? * **Your reaction**
30. What do you think the text is about? * **Your response**

Appendix B: Active reading chart

Task: As part of your revision, collect at least three texts which all have a similar theme. Try and complete the chart below. This will help to focus your reading.

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
What is the purpose of each item?			
Who is this item for? (Audience)			
What is the format?			
What are the presentational features?			
What type of language has been used?			
Pick out one fact.			
Pick out two opinions.			
Pick out four words that show this text's point of view.			
How effective is each text? Why?			
How are texts 1, 2 and 3 similar? How are texts 1, 2 and 3 different?			

Appendix C: Student evaluations

The responses here (in *italics*) are from two students in the group.

Student A's evaluation

1. What did you think about the teaching styles used during your revision?

Great

2. Which activities helped you learn the most from and why?

10 because she made them fun and enjoyable which meant you wanted to go.

When had guess what is being drawn.

All whiteboard games.

3.

- What is your target grade? *C*
- What grade do you need for your future? *C*
- Overall, what grade do you think you have achieved in your exams? *Dunno*

4. If you attended the revision day(s) did they help you towards achieving your target grade? *Yes*

5. Using 10-1 please rate your effort grade during the revision lessons? *7*

6. What kind of revision activities would you like to have more of? *None they were all great and Miss gave us lots of choice.*

7. If you attended would you recommend the revision days to friends in the year below you? *Yes*

8. Before Paper 1, I gave a PowerPoint presentation. Give a mark out of 10 for it, to say how helpful you found it.

9. Did you listen to the podcasts? *Yes*

10.

- Did you use your revision book? *Yes*
- Give a mark out of 10 for how useful you found it.
- What were the most useful items from the guide? *The circles and learning words*
- Please share any further comments or thoughts about your revision below: *Miss Custance was really great throughout she helped us in as many ways as she could. Thank you x.*

Student B's evaluation

1. What did you think about the teaching styles used during your revision? 10

Please give reasons

They were very helpful, helpful on the questions by making different activities fun.

2. Which activities helped you learn the most from and why?

Playing the Pictionary helped a lot it made you think about what the poem was about.

3.

- What is your target grade? C
- What grade do you need for your future? E
- Overall, what grade do you think you have achieved in your exams? C I'm hoping

4. If you attended the revision day(s) did they help you towards achieving your target grade? Yes

5. Using 10-1 please rate your effort grade during the revision lessons? 8

6. What kind of revision activities would you like to have more of? *Not sure we revised all the revision a lot.*

7. If you attended would you recommend the revision days to friends in the year below you? Yes

8. Before Paper 1, I gave a PowerPoint presentation. Give a mark out of 10 for it, to say how helpful you found it. 8 *It reminded me to PAFF and AFOREST and punctuation.*

9. Did you listen to the podcasts? Yes

10.

- Did you use your revision book? Yes
- Give a mark out of 10 for how useful you found it.
- What were the most useful items from the guide? *Practice questions*
- Please share any further comments or thoughts about your revision below:

15 Analysing the language of poetry through podcasts

Kate Murphy, Batley Girls' High School, Kirklees

Overview

Seeking to engage Year 9 students in working collaboratively on the language of poetry, Kate asked them to produce podcasts. She developed a structured series of lessons that allowed students to work in groups without disturbing other recordings. Students' conversations as they compiled their scripts revealed detailed consideration of the language of the poems; Anna concludes that the *process* was important as well as the final podcast. The students developed speaking and listening skills, learnt new ICT skills, really engaged with the poems they were studying – and perhaps most importantly seemed to be having fun. Her next step is to encourage other teachers to involve their groups in creating podcasts that can become a shared resource for all GCSE students.

Introduction

The target group for this case study was a class of Year 9 students after their Key Stage 3 examinations. We have already developed a module which introduces students to the *Poems from Different Cultures* section of the Anthology for their GCSE exam. The GCSE course often does not leave enough room for teaching the poetry in an in-depth and engaging way – mostly because there is just so much to get through! A more creative approach can be adopted in Year 9 and then revised in Year 10 or Year 11.

The class that I have chosen for the project is a middle to low ability class, partly from necessity as it is the only Year 9 group I teach, but it is often the lower ability students who find analysing language a particularly difficult task.

The hard-to-teach topic

Students find language difficult to talk about as often they are unaware of what they already know. As the task asks students to indirectly look at the language by asking them to create a reading of the poem, this should give students the confidence to create a reading of the poem which reflects the meaning. One of the main reasons behind this approach to teaching the poems is that it constantly asks students to be thinking about the words used without actually asking them to analyse the language. Their choices in regard to how they read the poem will all unconsciously be centred on an appreciation of the language without the barrier of having to explain their decisions straight away. This project will therefore focus on the 'hard-to-teach' topic of analysing language.

Aims

- To encourage students to work collaboratively
- To use combinations of word, image and sound of a particular text
- To help students engage with the language of texts

Intentions

- Students to work collaboratively in groups on a reading of the poem to reflect content and meaning employing pace, sound effects, background music.

- Students to also prepare a summary of the key points – with a particular focus on language.
- Place the podcasts on the common drive for department to use – in this way there will be more than one podcast of the same poem which will promote discussion about why each group might have chosen to present their poem in a particular way. This may be for development after the project deadline.
- Develop the project to include the whole of Year 9 to create a department resource.

Method

A general scheme of work for the whole project is included as [Appendix 1](#); this section will focus on the teaching of the podcast section.

The students who took part in the study had never used Audacity before (it is a free program available on the Internet which allows you to create voice recordings and edit by adding music and sounds) and so I felt it would be beneficial to have a trial run before we attempted to record the final version of their poems. As errors sometimes occur when using new technology for the first time, this would also reveal any technical problems which might be encountered at a time when it would not ruin the whole project. I made sure that the room we were to use for recording the podcasts was capable of running Audacity and arranged for the microphones to be set up by an IT technician before the lesson to minimise disruption at the beginning of the lesson. She was also available to support during the lesson which was a great help.

Some preparation before the lesson was needed. In order to make sure that the students had sounds to use (I did not think that the school system would allow them to download sounds), I downloaded likely sounds that they might need from Microsoft Office Online and saved them on to the Common Drive. The students were then able to access these in the lesson and insert them into their projects.

The students were making podcasts based on the *Poems from Different Cultures* in the AQA Anthology. We had previously studied the poems as a class so that the students were familiar with all the poems I had chosen to look at. At the start of the lesson we discussed how to make the reading of a poem effective and what to avoid. I split the class into groups of three and gave them an A3 size print-out of their poem. Their first task was to create a working script – they needed to think about which words they would emphasise and why, and consider which sounds could be inserted to enhance others' understanding of the poems.

The second task the students had to complete was to write, and then record, a script which covered the key details of the poem and explained why they had emphasised certain words and why they wanted to add sounds. They needed to say what they thought the poem was about and talk about the most important features. This meant that the recordings could be staggered because when they had finished recording they still had tasks to do. The project needed to have another piece of work running alongside it though, because when they had finished their script as well, they were without a task to do. This problem was solved because in Year 9 we start a piece of creative writing coursework: the students continued this when they had completed the tasks for the podcast.

When most of the groups had finished recording, the whole class was able to use the ICT room again and the last few groups were able to use my classroom to record instead. The final stage of the project was to insert any remaining sounds that they thought were necessary. Again, to prepare for this stage, I went over what they needed to do, using the SMART board to demonstrate in my classroom first. Students then inserted their sounds and edited their recordings to cut out any errors.

Technical and classroom management issues

I have found that the best way to introduce new programs to students is to demonstrate the program on the SMART board before taking the class to the ICT room and then give them 'how to' sheets to take with them. This means you have their attention without the distractions of different logging on speeds and the students have seen what the program should look like. When they get to the ICT room, the students can then use the help sheets and what they remember in order to get started. Once most of the students had finished, I introduced Audacity to them on the board. We then went to the ICT room to start to record the poems.

The one thing I did not do was to show the students how to open the saved version of their project. This became a problem later when one student corrupted her whole project and had to start again. Audacity saves the files in two ways: as the actual project which can be edited and as an accompanying folder which contains all the individual elements of the program. One of my students opened up the folder and was deleting the parts she did not like from there. Unfortunately I did not know what she had done until she had corrupted her project and we were unable to retrieve the files so she had to start again from scratch.

The trial lesson was a good idea because it revealed a major difficulty with the room we were recording in. Because of the close proximity of the different groups in the room, all the recordings were picking up the other students' voices. This meant that I had to think carefully about how to manage the recordings so that the room was quieter. In order to solve this problem, I arranged for just two groups to use the ICT room at once whilst the rest of the class worked in my classroom (it would have been even better to have just one group at once). This was possible because we have a small ICT room attached to the English department and because I had the help of the ICT technician: she supported in the ICT room with the small groups. The students were each given a time slot to record their poem (the students found this very hard to stick to though because they spent too much time re-recording from the beginning when they had made a mistake rather than just pausing and then continuing).

Key tips

- Make friends with your ICT technician – if they are available to set up and put away the equipment it is really handy and if they can support in the lesson it is great!
- Demonstrate the program using a projector first to familiarise the students.
- Show the students how to open their file.
- Prepare sounds/download sounds and save them on a common drive.
- Have a secondary piece of work running alongside the project.
- Make sure there is somewhere quiet for the students to record.
- Carefully consider the time of year for the project. The Summer term was perhaps not a good choice because the ICT technician was needed for the ALAN exams and Year 9 were actually taking some GCSEs. As there also seem to be a lot of CPD activities which go on in this term, I missed a few lessons due to training. This affected the project because it lost momentum in the middle and dragged a little in the final stages. It's very hard to set cover for recording lessons because some staff would not be comfortable with the program. Again, it was valuable to have another piece of work running alongside the project to overcome this difficulty.

Findings

Most of the students finished their podcasts in the allocated time and gained a good understanding of what the poem was about. When listening to their conversations about what to include in the script and where to insert sounds, it was obvious that they were considering the language of the poems. Some of the recordings were not very polished and it was very hard to hear some girls if they had not spoken loudly enough, but the *process* involved in making the podcasts was important as well. The students were developing their speaking and listening skills, learning about a new ICT program and really engaging with the poems they were studying – and perhaps most importantly seemed to be having fun! I asked the students to write one sentence about what they thought about the project and I have included all their responses below.

I thought the podcast project was really fun although I kept deleting my work, so I had to keep recording my work on the other hand I really had fun with this project.

I thought the podcast project was fun we had to work hard but had fun working together with my partner. Hopefully we will get a chance to podcast again sometime.

We thought the podcast was okay but it was a bit boring in the middle.

The podcast project was very interesting and I enjoyed doing it.

The podcast was good but only the recording and the sounds were hard to put in and difficult to find.

I really liked it at the beginning but later on it got boring because we didn't know what to do. I would want to in the future do something like this again because it was fun.

I really liked doing the podcast at the beginning while recording but I found it hard to put the sounds effects in the right place.

It was good but we spent too long recording and didn't get finished.

Podcast Revision (www.podcastrevision.co.uk) has been an excellent site to use with Year 11 this year because students can hear the poems and a brief summary of the key ideas in each poem. Students have engaged with the poems and enjoy listening to the podcasts. Students will also be able to hear their own work in Year 11 which will engage them in their own learning and work as an aid to memory.

Next steps

I think podcasts have many applications as a form of revision within English and other curriculum areas as they help students to revise in two ways – firstly by creating their original podcast and then (hopefully!) listening to it again. I would like to run this project throughout the English department and save all the podcasts to the common drive so that all the students can access them and so that they can return to their work when they come to revise the poems for their GCSEs.

Appendix

Medium term plan for the podcast revision project

Some of the finished podcasts will be posted with the online version of this case study.

Additional materials on using Audacity

- Students were given a help sheet on the sound editing software by Anna Barker which can be found on the Teacher Resource Exchange (<http://tre.ngfl.gov.uk>) – search for ‘Audacity cribsheet’.
- Phillip Lloyd has also created a series of PowerPoint slides for students on using Audacity; his file will accompany the online version of [his case study](#).

Appendix: Analysing language: medium term plan

Week	Activities
1	<p>Read and discuss ‘Presents from my aunts in Pakistan’. Discuss use of images in the poems and the language used. Read ‘Half Caste’ considering what is important about the language of the poem and experiment with reading it in different ways and with the emphasis on different words. Annotate the key details of the two poems. Homework: write a one paragraph summary of the content and key ideas of each poem.</p>
2	<p>Read and discuss ‘Blessing’ and ‘Island Man’. Show images and discuss use of images in the poems and what sounds are important in the poems. Particularly focus on the sound effect of the alliteration in the poems. Discuss and annotate key language features of the two poems. Homework: write a one paragraph summary of the content and key ideas of each poem.</p>
3	<p>Explore the poems we have studied so far and consider how to read the poems aloud effectively. Students to use blank copies of the poems to create a working script – underlining / highlighting words they wish to emphasise and why, including sound effects and strong visual images inspired by the poems. Podcast tutorial (include a variety of sounds on common drive). Students to work in pairs to experiment with recording one of the poems and adding sound effects. Review what students learned from their first experience recording their poems to inform what they need to do for their ‘real’ podcast.</p>
4	<p>Listen to two different podcasts of ‘Vultures’. Discuss how differently the poem is presented and why hearing it in this way can help our understanding of the poem. Compare to their own podcast poems – how could they adapt their reading of the poem to really reflect the key ideas in the poem? Listen to the analysis of vultures which follows the reading of the poem and make a list of the key points to focus the students’ analysis of their own poem. Discuss and annotate ‘Two Scavengers in a Truck’. Homework: write a one paragraph summary of the content and key ideas of ‘Two Scavengers’. Group students into pairs or threes and give them one poem to focus on (differentiated by ability) Homework: to find/record music/sound effects for their given poem.</p>
5	<p>Students to work in pairs to create a script for their podcast which includes how they will read the poem as well as the analysis at the end. Students create podcasts (which will include a reading of the poem and a summary of the key ideas and language used). Save podcasts to ‘Common Drive’. Listen to and discuss effectiveness of podcasts as a class. Homework: complete evaluation of the project.</p>
6	<p>Possible extension task: students to use PowerPoint to create a slideshow to accompany their podcast. The slideshow should combine images and key words and phrases from the poem and their podcast.</p>

16 Using podcasting to improve close analysis of language in poetry

Carrie McMillan, Kingsmead Community School, Somerset

Overview

Podcasting requires a computer, a microphone and recording software; with these tools, anyone can be a broadcaster. Carrie McMillan uses them to help her GCSE classes explore the language of poetry in closer detail. Making her students the ‘experts’, she provides them with the technology and a real audience, before setting them off on some in-depth analysis of three poems. The results appear to show pupils talking engagingly, enjoyably and knowledgeably about poetry – often with the increased awareness of language that Carrie is seeking. Especially interesting are Carrie’s observations of the different outcomes of running this project with both Years 10 and 11.

Introduction

Kingsmead Community School is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school of 700 students in rural Somerset with languages and humanities specialist status. The English Department teaches in mixed-ability Year 11 and Year 10 groups. The school is truly comprehensive and consequently these groups contain students with Fischer Family Trust GCSE predictions ranging from F to A*. The two groups that worked on this case study had GCSE predictions between E and A*. Regular work sampling led the department to set a curricular target to improve students’ understanding and explanation of word-level analysis in Literature. While this was a target for improvement with students at all levels, it appeared to be a particularly crucial skill for C/D borderline students. This became the focus for our work on using ICT to tackle a hard-to-teach and possibly hard-to-learn subject.

Project outline and aims

Lesson observations had shown that students in our mixed-ability classrooms were surprisingly comfortable talking about their ideas about Literature. Possible theories for this could form another action research project but in looking into how we could move students on in our curricular target, I felt we could capitalise on our students’ skill and enthusiasm for group exploratory talk. Therefore I decided that the technology we could make best use of would be podcasts – digital audio files, made available on the Internet for download by computer or personal mobile devices. Podcasting technology as a teaching tool I felt could have a number of payoffs.

Firstly, Kingsmead’s local community is fortunate enough to have a lottery-funded local radio station which broadcasts to ten local villages, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Unsurprisingly, students are full of enthusiasm for generating content for the radio station. Producing podcasts in English lessons I felt would help us tap into some of that enthusiasm. As a school, we are keen to encourage students to see themselves as user-generators of online and broadcast content, prepared for real audiences with the local radio station. Producing revision podcasts, to be recorded and broadcast first for radio then available on a revision website, I felt would encourage students to take an active approach to creating material helpful to themselves and others.

Secondly, I was keen to capitalise on students’ confident speaking and listening skills to encourage greater depth of analysis of GCSE Literature poetry. I hoped that using the medium of podcasting would help us to raise attainment of all students by focusing their talk on our curricular target of

improved word-level analysis. The 'hard to teach' concept in this case study is what the NATE/Becta document *Entitlement to ICT in secondary English* (2003) terms:

'Responding and interpreting – In English, pupils respond to and interpret literary and non-literary texts in spoken and written language and so develop and demonstrate their understanding and appreciation.'

Specifically we wanted our students to improve at word-level analysis and show that they are able to 'use a wide range of analytical and critical techniques' (*Entitlement to ICT in secondary English*).

Method

The story of this project then isn't entirely driven by the technology; rather it's driven by the desire to improve students' analysis of texts and subsequently, their enjoyment of reading and exploring language. This study isn't entirely centred on the use and creation of podcasts, but the end product of a podcast radio show certainly overshadows everything else that took place.

Initially, this project took the form of very recognisable English lessons, plans for which are attached as [Appendix 1](#). The project began by introducing students to three poems from the AQA English Literature Anthology: Carol Ann Duffy's 'Anne Hathaway', Simon Armitage's 'I've made out a will' and Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130'.

The first lesson in the sequence focused students closely on word-level analysis, which was modelled by the teacher using an interactive whiteboard to record thinking about key lines. This scaffolded students' analytical skills as they became involved early in discussion of the sub-text of specific words and phrases.

The next lesson saw students grouped by ability within the mixed-ability class to emulate the same detailed word-level analysis with a key quotation from one of the three poems. These discussions were recorded on sugar paper in an effort to mirror the effect of annotating a line on the interactive whiteboard. As an extended plenary, students shared their discussions, having been encouraged to be specific when referring to certain words within their given quotation.

Once all students had worked in groups like this, I introduced the idea of a poetry radio show, to be available as a revision podcast. The third lesson in the sequence discussed with students how this sort of radio show would sound, using a podcast of an episode of Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour' as a starting point for discussion. Students were already familiar with radio show structures from their work to date on the local radio station and so simply needed to refine their ideas regarding the purpose and audience of their proposed programme. When this was agreed, groups of students rehearsed shows in which they, as 'experts', discussed the three poems. They then recorded these onto iPod nanos, using a voice memo device.

What happened next differed between the two groups in the project. I ran the three lessons with a Year 11 group, early in the Spring Term. That group was incredibly motivated by the discussion aspect and by the end-product of a revision podcast. They were less interested in the editing process, choosing instead to simply hand the recordings over to me to deal with. The Year 10 students, however, undertaking the project in the Summer term, were highly enthused by the prospect of tailoring their work towards a teenage audience. Selected students, highly skilled at editing but not necessarily the highest English achievers, began the editing process. In both cases, it was down to me to assemble the

final recordings for broadcast and podcast. This was done on the iMac using iWeb software to publish to a .Mac account (see [Appendix 2](#)).

Description

The outcomes from both groups could not be more different. Generally, the Year 11 group coped better with the challenging material of the poems themselves, making the leap into detailed, explorative analysis of key words and phrases more readily than the younger students. In one podcast (see [Appendix 3](#)), Student B explains of ‘Anne Hathaway’:

the line ‘his touch a verb dancing in the centre of a noun’, this explains that a sentence only needs a verb and a noun to make sense and it also interprets that Anne Hathaway and Shakespeare were incomplete without each other and it also refers back to sex.

For this student, working up to this point at B grade, it was important to recognise that one line could have different interpretations and this brief reference to a challenging line was her first attempt at this.

Year 11 also appeared to cope better with the challenging subject matter of these poems - both the sexual imagery of ‘Anne Hathaway’ and the extended play on imagery of ‘Sonnet 130’.

Student A: Could you explain what you think the poem is about?

Student B: I feel the poem is about love and sex.

Student A: Sex, how do you mean?

Student B: Well, the first three lines ‘the bed we loved in was a spinning world of forests castle, torchlight, clifftops, seas, where he would dive for pearls’. This could easily be about role play. I don’t see why Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway couldn’t have a bit of fun in the bedroom!

The Year 11 podcasts, with their informal, relaxed discussion, showed greater impact on the curricular target than I could have hoped, with students genuinely undertaking insightful, personal analysis of the specific language of these poems, as the transcript extracts show. Their discussions were effective as pieces of work and displayed enjoyment of the process of analysis. Pressure of time meant that the students showed no interest in editing these recordings and as a result, showed only a token nod to the idea of targeting their talk at a specific audience and tailoring it to a specific form.

Interestingly, Year 10 coped less well with the material and produced generally less effective analyses, despite having the same lead-in lessons, although some groups performed better than others. They had only completed two of their three pieces of literature coursework and this project formed the start of their work toward the Literature exam, so it’s possible that they started from a lower analysis skills baseline than the Year 11s. Students from the C/D and A/A* groups showed more progress than the C/B group, with the A/A* group unsurprisingly coping best with the sustained focus on close language analysis (see [Appendix 4](#)):

Student N: The main theme of that poem is pretty much all about sex, so why do you think it focuses on that so much?

Student P: Well, I think it's, well it talks so much, all about bed so I mean, bed as we kind of know, is the intimate place where sex happens. They talk about happiness and love a lot and um, like, fantasy realms where you could expect where they played out their drama. Um, they talk about pairs and like how similar they were, and well, it's just mainly themed around the bed. And obviously the bed is where sex happens.

Student Q: Well there could be many sexual innuendos within this poem, things that relate back to sex. The main one obviously being the bed. And her saying about how he held her – this could be one of the things she remembers being most happy about him. And the intimacy of him, the words 'his touch' implies intimacy and love. And of course the words 'my lover's words were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses'. This implies a certain sense of romance and happiness about the two. When he rhymes, it seems to be, like, about pairs and being similar to each other and obviously refers back to Shakespeare and him being a writer and possibly him being good at sex.

Although generally the Year 10's analysis was less natural and confident than the older students, there was evidence of them having gained confidence as 'experts' on the material and as explorers of text.

For example, Student H in the C/D borderline group (see [Appendix 5](#)) showed that he had learned to link his explanations firmly in the text, something that had been lacking in his earlier Literature coursework:

Student G: Now we're going to analyse how Shakespeare uses language. So H, what do you think Shakespeare means when he says 'if snow be white, why then her breasts are dun'?

Student H: Shakespeare thinks that all normal women should be pale white and pure. He shows this by saying 'if snow be white'. But this woman is tanned and um, (*sound of someone entering room – H pauses, then speaks more quietly*) Shakespeare doesn't like this.

The Year 10 students, however, were much more motivated by the concept of targeting of a teen audience through a radio show. As a result, when groups were given iPods with the looming presence of one solitary iMac at the back of the room available for editing, there was a palpable rush to finish the discussions in order to be first to edit. This naturally led to less detailed analysis and less exploration than I had hoped, as well as lots of errors that made their work unusable as a revision aid. This extract from the C/B grade group (see Appendix 6) illustrates the problem:

Student L: Yo yo yo this is Student L on Ten Radio. Yeah, I got a special guest today, it's Carol Ann Duffy everyone! (*cheers in background*) Yeah and I've also got our special interviewer, all the way from London, Student M!

Student M: Er, hi.

Student L: Now over to Student M.

Student M: So hi Carol Ann, I've read a few of your poems. So which one's your favourite?

'Carol Ann': My favourite is 'I've made out a will'.

Student M: So what inspired you?

'Carol Ann': basically, it's about a relationship with my husband. He had a heart condition which unfortunately led to a pacemaker.

Student M: So do you fancy reading the poem for our viewers?

'Carol Ann': Yeah sure...'

Nevertheless, the skills with which students used Garage Band software to edit their work with the target audience in mind were beyond anything I had expected. In this respect, the outcome I received from the podcast editing had more to do with students' understanding of how media products target their audience than with how poets use language for effect. Student M's streetwise introduction to the poetry programme shows just how much fun the group were having devising a poetry show that would appeal to teens.

The project is still on-going, with some students' work finished and available as podcasts from the school .Mac account website. Unfortunately, while the sound files are accessible from computers at home, they cannot be accessed and therefore showcased within school. The reason for this is not entirely clear. My first response was to assume this was down to some blocking or filtering on media file content within school, but further investigation indicates that it is simply down to the need to update the school's QuickTime software. Stumbling blocks like these are an inevitable frustration for teachers trying to do something new with ICT. Barriers within the school ICT infrastructures exist for very good reasons but are often inflexible to the point of obstruction.

Fortunately for Kingsmead, we do not have to rely on students accessing the podcasts solely at school. A large majority of our students report that they have broadband Internet access at home and so can access the material there, which is of course a more independent use of the material. But we're doubly lucky in our access to the local radio station. This project will continue when current Year 10 enter Year 11. The intention is for the project group to broadcast their discussion show live for the radio as a pre-mocks revision show. This live broadcast will force students to focus on the quality of their discussions, rather than on the flash and style of their editing. And of course, the material will be available to all without the constraints imposed by the existing school ICT infrastructure.

Key findings

To conclude, this was a small study with findings that suggest podcasting in English can be a valuable tool for teaching the 'hard-to-learn' subject of close textual analysis. This study did find that students are motivated by the concept of creating their own personalised, user-generated material for revision purposes. It further emphasises what English teachers know already, that students regard speaking for a real audience as motivating. Providing opportunities for students to generate real revision content for their peers is a valuable way of giving them an audience. The knowledge that their work would be heard by their peers led to a more serious approach for the Year 11s – they wanted their work to be useful and valued by others.

The editing process can be very motivating for students, as this is the 'magic' by which their classwork is transformed into something professional and mediated. However, it comes with a health warning: the rush to edit can impede the quality of analysis. It is important for the classroom teacher to hold the reins when using this technology, to ensure that students really meet the lesson objective rather than allowing the technology to take over. If the objective, however, is for students to learn how technology

can be used by the media to target an audience, then the editing process is a vital tool. The key is to ensure the technology serves the learning objective.

Finally, with any use of ICT in school, it's important to work closely with ICT technicians and those members of staff responsible for policy and infrastructure. Discussions in advance about what is possible within school, and what should be possible, can save a lot of time and frustration.

Appendices

1. Lesson plans for English Literature exam preparation
2. How to Podcast using iWeb
3. Extract from a Year 11 podcast
4. Extract from a Year 10 podcast
5. Extract from a Year 10 C/D borderline group
6. Extract from a Year 10 C/B group

Appendix 1: Lesson plans for English Literature exam preparation

Kingsmead Community School - English Literature Exam Preparation: 'Anne Hathaway', 'I've Made Out a Will', 'Sonnet 130' - three lessons

Lesson 1

Lesson objective: to make connections between the structure and themes of these three poems.

Starter: Display on board the question 'What is the most important part of the body?' (Available as Smart file on Gateway.) Give think time for pairs to discuss then take responses. Expect responses to generate discussion ranging around heart, lungs, brain (and thumbs!) leading to comments about soul, mind, what makes us human etc.

Read 'I've made out a will' to them. Discuss why the poet/voice wants the heart left alone. How do they know? How does the poet/voice feel about the rest of the body?

Read Sonnet 130. Give pairs key lines and five minutes to explain in their words how the poet feels about his mistress' body. Take feedback and discuss – what are this poet's feelings about bodies/people's attitudes to them?

Finish with a reading of 'Anne Hathaway'. Sum up briefly (the poem's origins in Shakespeare's will, who Anne Hathaway was) then give pairs think time – how does this poem link to the other two? Display on board the line 'my body now a softer rhyme to his' to generate and steer discussion.

Plenary: Take brief feedback then set challenge – structurally what is similar about all three poems?

After 5-10 minutes, collect ideas on the board. Students should have noticed the 14-line structure; some use of rhyme (though inconsistent between the poems); they may notice the roughly 10-syllable beat and the exploration/argument of theme or idea of bodies and love. Point out that all of these poems take the traditional sonnet form.

Lesson 2

Lesson objective: To compare how three poets use metaphor to explore their arguments in sonnets.

Starter: Re-read 'Anne Hathaway' together. Display on board line 'my body now a softer rhyme to his.' Annotate this line together with ideas from previous lesson (example available as Smart file on Gateway). Emphasise appropriate use of metaphor, why Shakespeare's wife would use this metaphor, the difference between hard and soft rhyme etc. To finish, emphasise how heavily annotated just one line from this poem has become, the denseness of metaphor used in this way.

Students should re-read 'I've made out a will' and 'Sonnet 130' to themselves.

Split the class into six groups and give each group a large piece of sugar paper. The following lines should already be written, one to a piece, on the paper:

- ‘My lover’s words
were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses
on these lips;’
- ‘his touch
a verb dancing in the centre of a noun.’
- ‘the loops and coils and sprockets and springs and rods’
- ‘the face, the case, the cogs and the hands’
- ‘If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;’
- ‘And in some perfumes is there more delight
than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.’

To differentiate, give the more able the Duffy lines, the middling H tier the Shakespeare lines and the F tier the Armitage lines.

Groups get ten minutes to make detailed annotations on the use of metaphor and to begin to think about why the metaphor is being used.

Plenary: Groups to present on the board their analysis of the metaphor they were given, to suggest why the the writer has used them and how successful they are. (Could they have thought of a different/better one? Would the line be more effective if it said what was meant straight out?) Everyone to annotate their Anthology for each line. Take in their sugar paper for use next lesson.

Lesson 3

Lesson Objective: to be able to organise a comparison of the methods and themes of three poems.

Starter: display on board these connectives: *whereas, however, although, similarly, in contrast to...*

Discuss what these words are commonly used for. Using AQA Anthologies and displaying their sugar paper annotations, students have three minutes to write a short paragraph about the three poems. They must use at least two of the displayed connectives (or ones of their own). Hear some and discuss the power of the connectives.

Explain that they’re going to make revision podcasts about these poems that could also be used for Ten Radio. Listen briefly to the podcast with Duffy talking about her new poems on Woman’s Hour (it’s not necessary to hear it all!) http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2002_37_thu_01.shtml

Discuss the format: a presenter setting the scene, the poet reading, the presenter asking questions, the poet responding with analysis. Explain that they will be preparing/presenting something similar.

Return them to their original six groups. Nominate a presenter – the rest will be ‘experts’. Give each group a big question as follows:

- The two Duffy groups – ‘How does Duffy use the sonnet form in ‘Anne Hathaway?’ Compare this with two other poems.
- The two Shakespeare groups – ‘How does Shakespeare surprise us in this sonnet?’ Compare this with two other poems.
- The two Armitage groups – ‘How does Armitage use language in this sonnet?’ Compare this with two other poems.

The rules are that both the presenter and the experts need to work in as many comparison connectives as possible – like ‘meeting cricket’! Also display on board the key words/phrases for analysing literature (available on the school’s Gateway network and on yellow coursework sheets).

Groups should use the rest of the lesson to prepare/practise, using their Anthology notes. One additional lesson will be needed to record these on iPods.

All of this can be followed up with a timed writing lesson answering the same question in writing.

Appendix 2: How to Podcast using iWeb

This tutorial assumes you have signed up to a .Mac account. This can be done at <http://www.apple.com/mobileme>.

Step One:

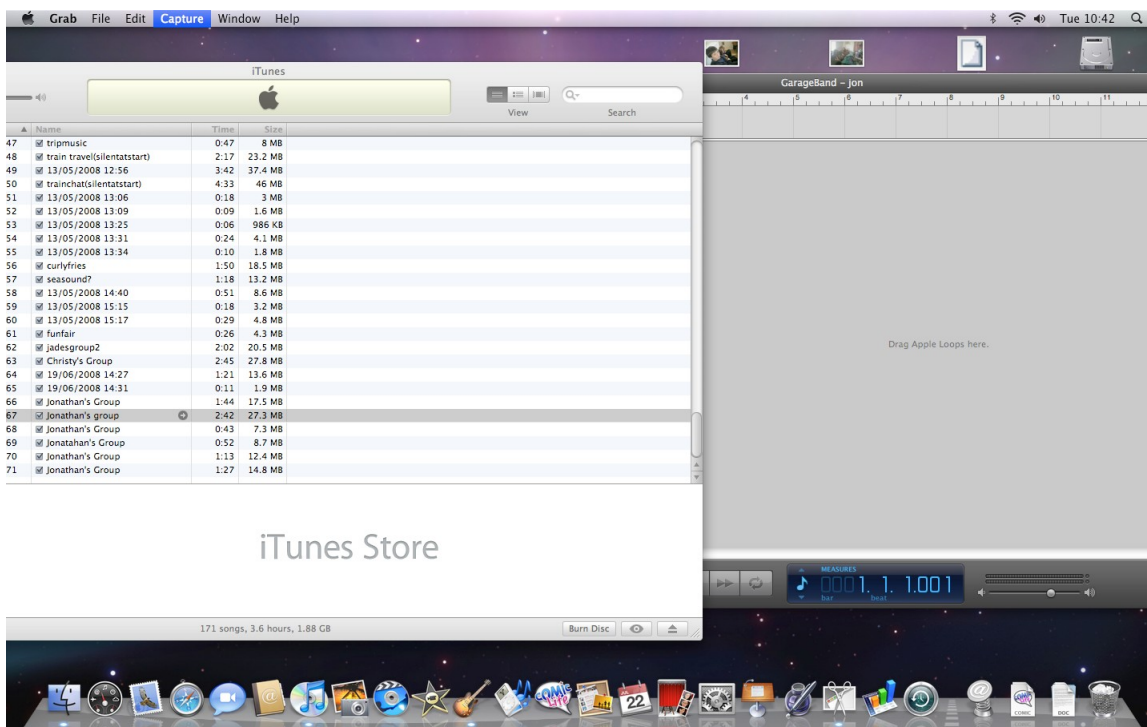
Use iPod nanos with voice memo microphones attached. When the microphone is attached, the menu automatically gives you the option to 'record', 'pause' and 'save'.

Step Two:

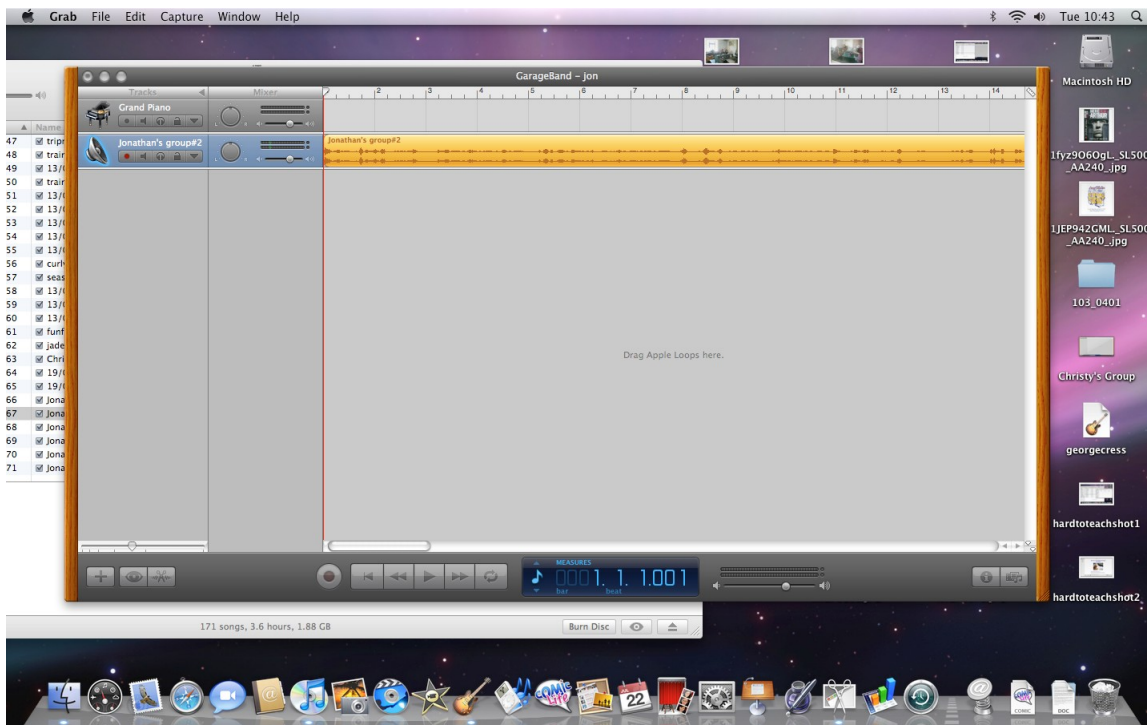
Download the voice memos to the iTunes library.

Step Three:

Open GarageBand. In iTunes, click on the sound file you want to podcast.



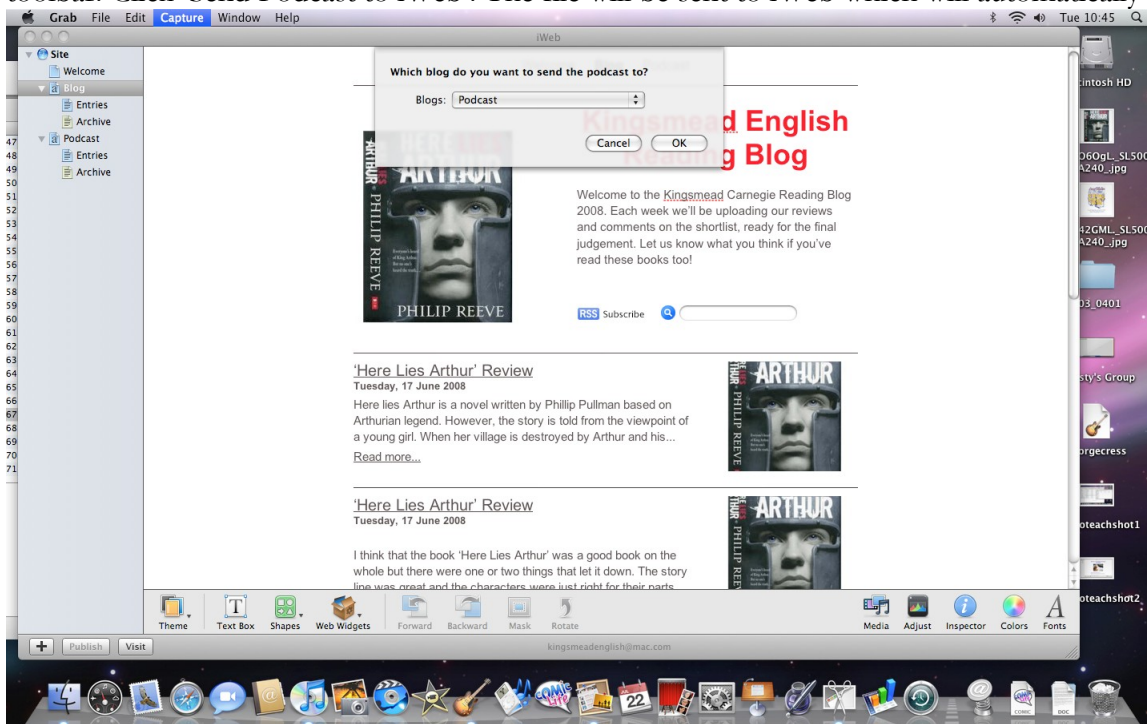
Drag that file into the GarageBand window.



The file will be editable in GarageBand.

Step Four:

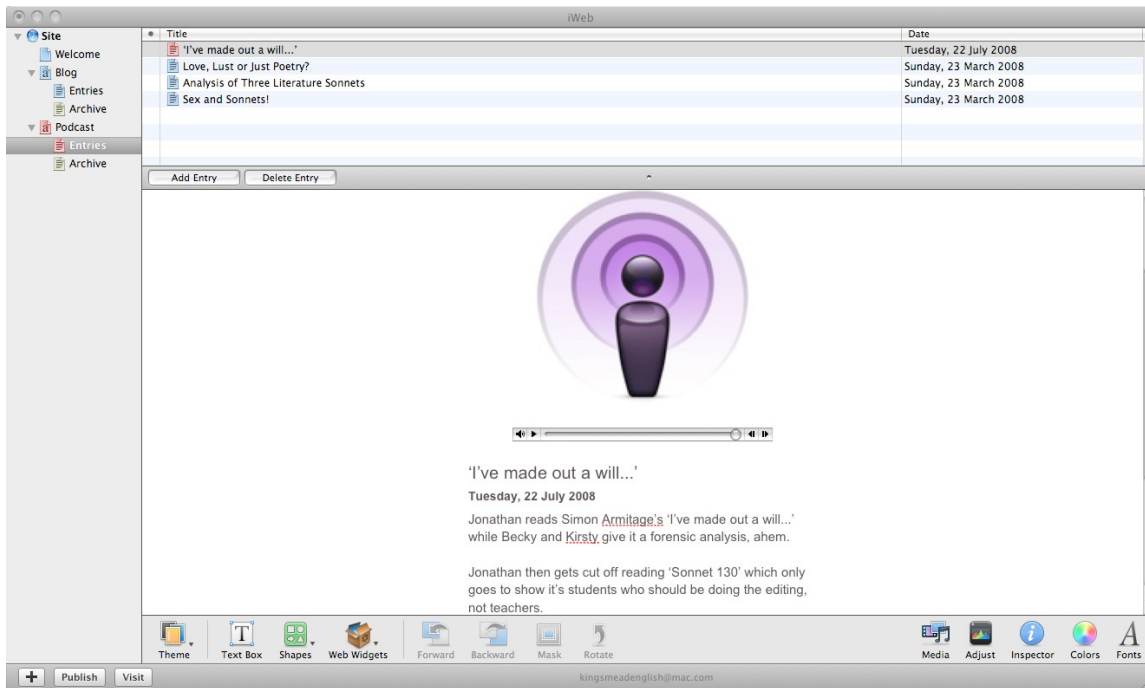
When you are ready to podcast, click on the file to highlight in. Next, click 'Share' along the top toolbar. Click 'Send Podcast to iWeb'. The file will be sent to iWeb which will automatically open.



Choose 'Podcast' from the drop down menu.

Step Five:

Edit the text boxes to give your podcast a title and description.



Step Six:

When you are finished and ready to publish, click 'File' on the top toolbar. Select 'Publish All to .Mac'. Your site will automatically be loaded to your .Mac webspace, including your new podcast.

Appendix 3: Extract from a Year 11 podcast

Student A: Welcome to our podcast about poems that will be useful for our GCSE English Literature exam. The poems we are looking at will be ‘Anne Hathaway’ by Carol Ann Duffy, an untitled poem by Simon Armitage which we shall call ‘I’ve made out a will’, and also ‘Sonnet 130’ by William Shakespeare. Here with me I have the top three leading experts on these poets. Please welcome Student B, C and D.

Morning guys, alright?

All: Hiya!

Student A: Firstly I’d like to talk to Student B who is the best expert on Carol Ann Duffy in the UK. Student B has chosen ‘Anne Hathaway’ to analyse in depth. Please would you read it for us?

(Student B reads poem)

Student A: So who actually was Anne Hathaway?

Student B: Anne Hathaway was Shakespeare’s wife, um, Shakespeare left her his second best bed in the will. We’re not too sure why but we believe it was a final wink to her to show their love and Carol emphasises this in the poem. Duffy’s poem was also a clever interpretation of their relationship.

Student A: Do you think they had a close relationship?

Student B: Yes I do, as does Carol Ann Duffy. However, when he was very successful, he left her to move to London.

Student A: Could you explain what you think the poem is about?

Student B: I feel the poem is about love and sex.

Student A: Sex, how do you mean?

Student B: Well, the first three lines ‘the bed we loved in was a spinning world of forests, castle, torchlight, clifftops, seas where he would dive for pearls’. This could easily be about role play. I don’t see why Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway couldn’t have a bit of fun in the bedroom! Also, the line ‘his touch a verb dancing in the centre of a noun’, this explains that a sentence only needs a verb and a noun to make sense and it also interprets that Anne Hathaway and Shakespeare were incomplete without each other and it also refers back to sex.

Student A: Are there any other poems which connect to ‘Anne Hathaway’?

Student C: Yes, Simon Armitage’s untitled poem which is ‘I’ve made a will,’ and Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 130’.

Student A: What connects them?

Student C: Well all three are sonnets and they all explain about bodies. ‘Anne Hathaway’ is about her body, it’s about their body, ‘I’ve made out a will’ is about his body, and ‘Sonnet 130’ is about his mistress’ body.

Student A: What exactly is a sonnet?...

Appendix 4: Extract from a Year 10 podcast

Student N: Hey, welcome to the radio station. I hope you've had a banging weekend and thanks for tuning in. The time's ten to eleven and right now we've got three peeps brought to the studio tonight, making up The Poetry Posse.

Student O: And here today we've got the poetry legend, Student P. And now Student Q is going to read us the poem, 'Anne Hathaway'.

(Student Q reads poem)

Student N: The main theme of that poem is pretty much all about sex, so why do you think it focuses on that so much?

Student P: Well, I think it's, well it talks so much, all about bed so I mean, bed as we kind of know, is the intimate place where sex happens. They talk about happiness and love a lot and um, like, fantasy realms where you could expect where they played out their drama. Um, they talk about pairs and like how similar they were, and well, it's just mainly themed around the bed. And obviously the bed is where sex happens.

Student Q: Well there could be many sexual innuendos within this poem, things that relate back to sex. The main one obviously being the bed. And her saying about how he held her – this could be one of the things she remembers being most happy about him. And the intimacy of him, the words 'his touch' implies intimacy and love. And of course the words 'my lover's words were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses'. This implies a certain sense of romance and happiness about the two. When he rhymes, it seems to be, like, about pairs and being similar to each other and obviously refers back to Shakespeare and him being a writer and possibly him being good at sex.

Student R: Some people might have trouble understanding the language as it gets quite hard. Can you do some sub-text?

Student P: The words 'his touch a verb dancing in the centre of a noun' imply many things. 'His touch' could imply his, well ahem, his organ. Or possibly his love. 'Verb' – well a reference to his profession as a writer and a poet. 'A rhyme' being a pair, and similar to each other. The word 'dancing' was also used as a reference to sex in those days. It also implies happiness. A verb and noun are needed for a full sentence. This implies that they needed each other to make themselves whole.

Student N: Alrighty then, and comin' up next 'I've made out a will' read by Student S...

(Student S reads poem...)

Student O: Why do you think he wants to leave the heart where it is and what do you think it symbolises?

Student P: Well I think he may want to leave the heart where it is because it symbolises one of the most important parts of the body. Also, he might have an emotional attachment to it as that's where we symbolise love and that sort of thing with it. (Sounds of mock vomiting in background.) There will also be a safe feeling with having the heart – hearing the sound of the heart makes us feel safe and welcome.

Also, we kind of panic if we can't hear our own heart. Also, we're always being told to look after it. We're always being told to do certain things to reduce our blood sugar levels and to look after the heart, make sure it doesn't get clogged up with fat. Plus it is physically protected for some reason or another by the ribs so that implies it is a very important part of the body. It also keeps you alive and some people may believe that that's where the soul is. And as I said, it also symbolises love or sex. Generally I feel that this is a very good poem and symbolises a lot of things.

Student O: I totally agree. And why do you think teenagers would like this poem?

Student P: Well basically I think that teenagers can relate to this poem as it's quite, kind of, random. I mean, when you seem to think of a poem, you seem to think of Shakespeare and all, like love, and all that romantic stuff. But this one isn't, it's kind of about death which kind of makes it a bit different. Um, also, I think that teenagers could relate to the heart and wanting it left where it is as it may have been broken or damaged too much in the past. I mean I know that most teenagers at some point experience their heart breaking. Plus, at the moment organ donation is a very big issue and you may not be thinking about it right now, but at some point everybody has to die. So it could be kind of guiding you on the way you want to go when you're dead.

Student O: Well thanks for that. The next poem is Shakespeare's poem 'Sonnet 130'. It's going to be read for us today by Jonathan.

(Student S reads poem)

Student O: Wow, a lot of old style language going on there. Can you possibly help us out?

Student P: Well, the overall theme of the poem is that he's talking about his mistress who is at this point his wife 'Anne Hathaway'. Basically he's saying that although she's not really really beautiful, and not perfect, he still loves her. By saying that 'my mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun, coral is far more red than her lips red' well he's saying that she's not perfect, she's not beautiful but he still loves her. He's saying that her voice is not very nice to listen to but he still likes talking to her, that her breath isn't very nice but still he loves her. Back in those days it was really, like, in the fashion to be pure white and by saying that her 'breasts are dun' he's saying that she's slightly more tanned. But he's saying at least he's not lying to her and saying she's perfect when she's not.

Student O: Cool, so basically she's a minger, but he still loves her.

Student P: Yeah, pretty much.

Appendix 5: Extract from a Year 10 C/D borderline group

Student E: Hello, today we're going to talk about 'Sonnet 130'. I'm here with F, G, H, J and K. And the poem's written by William Shakespeare. Here's F to read the poem.

(F reads the poem)

Student G: Now we're going to analyse how Shakespeare uses language. So Charlie, what do you think Shakespeare means when he says 'If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun?'

Student H: Shakespeare thinks that all normal women should be pale white and pure. He shows this by saying 'If snow be white'. But this woman is tanned and um, *(sound of someone entering room – Charlie pauses, then speaks more quietly)* Shakespeare doesn't like this.

Student E: What do you think Shakespeare is implying?

Student J: What's particularly annoying about this poem is that he's implying that women should always be perfect with pale white skin, sleek straight hair and looking amazing in the morning.

Student K: Men are not perfect at all times so why should us women?

Appendix 6: Extract from a Year 10 C/B group

Student L: Yo yo yo this is Student L on Ten Radio. Yeah, I got a special guest today, it's Carol Ann Duffy everyone! (cheers in background) Yeah and I've also got our special interviewer, all the way from London, Student M!

Student M: Er, hi.

Student L: Now over to Student M.

Student M: So hi Carol Ann, I've read a few of your poems. So which one's your favourite?

'Carol Ann': My favourite is 'I've made out a will'.

Student M: So what inspired you?

'Carol Ann': Basically, it's about a relationship with my husband. He had a heart condition which unfortunately led to a pacemaker.

Student M: So do you fancy reading the poem for our viewers?

'Carol Ann': Yeah sure...

17 ‘Explain yusef wha yu mean when yu say podcast’: GCSE poetry podcasts

Phillip Lloyd, Laisterdyke Business and Enterprise College, Bradford

Overview

Teaching poetry to a challenging group of GCSE students, Phill Lloyd wanted students to engage in active revision. He sought in particular to address the difficulties students, whose own experiences were limited, had in grasping the cultural implication of the ‘Poems from Different Cultures’ cluster in their anthology. Podcasting offered a focused way to achieve this and, whilst there were difficulties along the way, the activity was productive. Examinations taken shortly afterwards demonstrated that students had a good grasp of the poems, which could at least in part be attributed to the podcast activity.

The school context

Laisterdyke Business and Enterprise College is a mixed 11 to 18 comprehensive school with 830 pupils on roll, based on a former middle school following re-organisation in 1999. The school serves an area of high social deprivation and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (41%) is well above the national average. A high proportion of pupils (almost 80%) are from ethnic minority backgrounds and almost all have English as an additional language. There are 15 pupils in the early stages of English language acquisition. Most pupils come from Pakistani backgrounds with smaller numbers from Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds. Other than English, the main languages spoken are Urdu, Punjabi, Pushto and Hindi. Overall standards of attainment on entry, although covering a wide range, are very low in comparison with schools nationally, with little or no difference in standards in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is 45%.

The class context

The class is a set 4 out of 7, known as 10 Lister. This group has some of the most difficult students in the year group. The academic context of this group is one that can speak English, but not necessarily write it down – or want to write it down. Attitude to learning is at times very poor and this impacts on the nature of results achieved. This group has been put together in a streamed fashion that takes into account their English, science and mathematics ability; so some are a lot stronger than others. The group has a range of students, from those who have the chance of gaining B grades in the Summer 2009 examinations to those who will achieve E grades. The most influential student in the year group is a member of 10 Lister; so his mood can easily sway the success of an activity. Also, there is language support for seven students within this group. At times, some students may, through choice, go for the whole school day without eating – this has an impact upon behaviour.

Aims and ICT

The overall aim of the project was to incorporate an interactive solution to the notion of revision. In this case, it was to create a podcast to aid revision of the ‘Poems from Different Cultures’ section of their GCSE course. The reason for this decision was threefold really. Firstly, it would fit nicely into the

curriculum map and serve as a revision tool before our Year 10 trial mocks. Secondly, it would act as a long term reminder for students allowing them to have their active thoughts recorded on an mp3 player or iPod for future use. Thirdly, as part of my own interest, I had previously done a lot of work with video and so wanted to broaden my own ICT horizons in the classroom.

The hard-to-teach topic

The hard-to-teach topic I chose was the 'Poems from Different Cultures' section of the GCSE anthology. This was not because teaching poetry is necessarily difficult, but because the concept of 'culture' is confusing and often alien to the students; so, I decided to focus on the cultural implications of the poems. This concept is hard to teach, especially to those who have a limited view of the world beyond Bradford's BD3 postcode area. The idea of 'what do they think?' and 'why do they think it?' and 'how that represents a body of people in terms of tradition, ritual and customs' is extremely complex.

Method

I had a long term plan with a short term usage of ICT. Having been previously involved in the National Strategies' 'Hard-to-teach concepts' working group, I learned that ICT, when used in longer periods, can have a negative impact on the quality of the work produced if pupils become bored with the task. Therefore, I decided to keep the ICT use short and sweet. The input of the poetry teaching far outweighed the time spent using ICT. Taking into consideration my knowledge of the group, I knew that they enjoyed ICT use but a long exposure to the technology might lessen the quality of the work and lead to off-task negative behaviour. Therefore, the ICT use followed the simple pattern of model, try, apply, secure.

The plan simplified:

- Teach the Cluster 2 poems using the SMILERS technique.
- Embed knowledge through comprehension tasks and exam style questions.
- Introduce podcasting as a concept and an active way to revise.
- Set a challenge that would bring the poems from different cultures and podcasting worlds together.
- Produce a product for own revision and consumption by others.

Description

The plan was in place and, in many ways, was dictated by the speed at which we progressed through the poems. The biggest issue was organising the ICT facilities in preparation for this task. The school has some fantastic resources with regards to ICT, but they are fundamentally under used or disregarded.

The project was initially intended to utilise the department's laptops. In March, I started to speak with the ICT technicians to ensure that they would be able to cope with the podcasting task. Podium was the software which I was intending to use. However, due to the constraints of the VLE, this piece of software was incompatible – a real shame as it seemed to do everything that I wanted the students to do. I was then put onto Wild Voice, another podcasting piece of software. This came highly recommended by the ICT consultants in Bradford. Over the months, I kept talking with the ICT technicians – who had to deal with not only my requests, but the whole school and a complete server

meltdown. It was only two days before the project actually took on the ICT phase that we found out the Wild Voice could not be networked and so I turned to Audacity to save the day.

To get a feel for the Audacity software, I planned for the students (in pairs) to record the story of *The Princess and the Pea* and then change it to give a new story using the program. Problems arose as the majority of the laptops failed to connect to the server – making this process pretty redundant. In order to progress and not wanting to look foolish, I decided to book an ICT room in order to ensure that the technology being used would be secure and safe. The group started the podcasting process with a short talk from me and a brief demonstration of what a podcast might sound like. After a short analysis of podcast content and the introduction of the ‘Poems from different cultures’ challenge, we moved to the ICT suite to start the process.

As part of the challenge, it was necessary that the students looked at the background of the poet and the culture from which they hailed. This meant some Internet research needed to take place. The results in many respects were quite pleasing as students did find some useful information and were able to cut it down to fit their purposes; rather than just copying and pasting from Wikipedia. A rough draft of what was going to be said was needed before any recording could take place.

For some, the research element took a reasonable amount of time, for others it maybe took too long; and this is where support was needed to speed up the process. The recording went well, with the initial silliness that could be expected with any new toy dying down quite quickly. The majority of the students were managing to record their ideas quite quickly and also limit their noise in order to prevent disruption to others. One of the noticeable features of this process was the fact that until the students were shown that they could edit mistakes out or cut out dead time, they preferred to go back to the beginning and re-record the whole podcast. Do’h! Back to the drawing board.

The room we worked in for the majority of the time did not have an interactive whiteboard so listening to the podcasts as they developed became an issue. This meant that pairs progressed without too much on the spot analysis or feedback about their own work and others. This would have been of great benefit. After the trial mock examination, the students still continued to work at good pace and with enthusiasm, but have been limited in their progress due to work experience interrupting the process.

Conclusions

From this whole experience I have concluded the following:

- It should not take two months to prepare the ICT element. You need to feel comfortable and be able to rely on all aspects related to the ICT.
- If the students were used to podcasting – the software and concept – previously this process would be a lot smoother.
- Did the students manage to consider the notion of culture? It’s difficult to say, but in the mock examinations all approximately reached the targets set for them for the end of Key Stage 4. Is that due to this process aiding their revision or good quality of teaching and learning throughout the year? Probably a bit of both.
- More time needs to be devoted to the whole process. More playing with the software, quieter recording conditions and more preparation in order to meet the needs of the challenge - in particular the cultural aspect.

Next steps

Personally, the experience and process has been useful and mainly positive, despite the technical issues faced. The students have enjoyed the opportunity to use ICT more actively in the lessons. However, there are a few further considerations:

- Taking into consideration time restraints, the podcasts need to be completed as best they can and uploaded to the school website. In reality, only a few might make it for public consumption. The rest will be available for individuals to use and complete as they see fit.
- Given more time, the use of music could be developed a lot further; with music tracks being selected to support content or even being created by the students themselves. Again, due to time restraints, music is an under developed feature within the finished products.
- In order to promote an idea of culture, country and identity, one original idea I had was to geo-tag the podcasts to something like Google Earth (or a map at least); so that when a student clicks onto it they can get an idea of sound, image and geography.
- Formal feedback needs to be gained from the students, in order for us to plan and refine this process for the future. We are planning a Year 7 scheme, due to run in mid-September, that will take the form of a *Desert Island Discs* podcast – but without the discs.
- The ICT framework is in place for this process to happen again if we use desktop computers. We need to ensure that it stays that way in order to prevent long delays and disappointment. However, the laptops need to be made more secure in order for us to be more flexible within the department.
- We could also develop the podcasts into video casts for further revision purposes. This process is not a concern with regards to my own skill level, but other members of the department will need training up. The biggest concern with this may be the ICT provision being secure in a shorter amount of time.

Supporting materials available online

These materials will be available with the online version of the case studies on the NATE site:

- Three student podcasts as examples
- Podcast challenge sheet issued to students
- Introduction to podcasting and Audacity: a PowerPoint presentation used with students

18 Teaching the literary heritage

Angus Weir, Ninestiles School, Birmingham

Overview

Working in a well-resourced school, Angus exploits the technology available to enable Year 9 students to produce short trailers for Stevenson's famous Victorian horror story. In this way, he sought to address problems students find in coping with pre-twentieth century texts as well as in developing speaking and listening skills and understanding media studies terms. In addition, analytical and comparative writing posed a challenge; he describes it as not 'so much hard to teach as hard to make interesting'. Working to a tight schedule, students researched, produced and evaluated their trailers. Student comments indicate that the activity had made them much more aware of the techniques both the author and they, as film-makers, had used. This case study and the accompanying online products demonstrate the sophisticated activities possible with the right resources.

Introduction

Ninestiles School is a mixed 11-18 comprehensive school of 1500 students drawn from across the ability range. Ninestiles has long been established as Specialist Technology School with a large wireless network and specialist e-learning support team led by Chris Silverton, with a DTP specialist and two web designers. This team was initially employed for the introduction of the VLE but they are now involved in creation of multi-media resources. They are in addition to the IT support team. The GCSE English course followed is the Edexcel pilot, which includes a media production unit.

The hard-to-teach focus of this case study

In my view, a number of topics and skills present themselves as being harder to teach than others and also as particularly ripe for an ICT-based approach. These are:

- comprehension and understanding of texts which use archaic or very formal 'old-fashioned' standard English, such as most Victorian texts;
- speaking and listening skills when students in a group do not, perhaps, have much confidence in their relationships with each other;
- Media Studies terms such as signifier, connotations etc.;
- the skill of writing in-depth analysis and comparison of texts (both media and literary). This isn't so much as 'hard to teach' as 'hard to make interesting'.

Studying *Jekyll and Hyde* with Year 9

Our case study has focused on teaching a Year 9 class *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. There were a number of reasons for doing this. Predominant amongst these was the need for students to be reasonably familiar with the text prior to producing a piece of GCSE coursework in Year 10; there was also the need to promote good working relationships amongst students in the class to allow them to have the confidence to express themselves in formal speaking and listening assessments during the Autumn term.

Students were also expected to extend their understanding of literary heritage by relating major writers to their historical context; as well as explaining the appeal of these texts over time. From a drama perspective, students were expected to convey action, character, tension and atmosphere when scripting and performing a play (albeit a short one).

Resources

At Ninestiles, we are lucky enough to have a fully resourced e-learning laboratory. They built a mini-site for our Year 9 Intranet area upon which all the resources for the project were posted. The resources were:

- copies of all the videos used as stimulus – this negated the need for students to go onto YouTube
- a copy of the rubric
- a copy of the letter from the NATE mentor
- model mind-maps
- links to dictionary.com and the websites used for storyboarding
- chapter 4 of *Jeekyll and Hyde*
- hard copies of the whole text of *Jeekyll and Hyde* were also available.

For the filming we used:

- high quality camcorder and tripod
- 4m x 4m green chroma key backdrop rig
- 3 x lighting lamps
- software: Adobe Premiere and Adobe After Effects.

Information on all the resources can be seen at <http://www.ninestiles.bham.sch.uk/greenscreen/>. The 'links' section contains the resources on *Jeekyll and Hyde*.

Process and methodology

At Ninestiles, we have begun to work towards introducing problem-based learning into our curriculum. This project drew on the theory of this method. It used a real-life document – a letter from the NATE mentor – to launch the project. Students then created substantial artefacts to prove their learning – these took the form of a trailer for a fictitious computer game based on *Jeekyll and Hyde* and a detailed justification and reflection document.

The process was as follows:

- Students were given the letter from the NATE mentor.
- Students were then shown the problem they needed to solve, in this instance they had four two-and-a-half hour lessons to plan, record and evaluate their trailers.
- Students were introduced to the rubric for assessment for the project.
- Students were then given the opening paragraph of Chapter 4 of *Jeekyll and Hyde* to read.
- Students were asked to produce a mind-map entitled 'What we know'.
- Students were then asked to produce a mind-map entitled 'What we need to do to be successful' – this then informed the rest of the tasks.
- Students divided into three groups – one group did guided reading of Chapter 4 and analysed it using De Bono's 'Thinking Hats'.

- Students were then given instructions to watch three video game trailers: *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill 2* and *Haunting Ground*.
- They then mind-mapped the conventions of these games.
- By the end of the first session students had gained the following: a clear understanding of the characters and plot events of *Jeekyll and Hyde*; the genre conventions of Gothic and Gothic-influenced computer games; a clear idea of what they were going to do in the forthcoming lessons.
- Students started the next session reflecting on the learning from the previous lesson.
- They then had to perform three tasks throughout the course of the lesson: learning the definitions of a range of Victorian words; storyboarding their trailers; reading the text of *Jeekyll and Hyde*.
- In session three students rehearsed and recorded their trailers.
- In session four students watched and evaluated each others' trailers and then wrote their justification and reflection documents.

Student testimony: Adam

Before doing the project I found understanding how to change written texts to video texts a problem. I didn't know much about the story of *Jeekyll and Hyde*. Without having to think about our storyboarding our work would have been much harder as it would have been much more difficult to identify the key parts of the story.

Previously my group and I have felt uncomfortable performing work in a drama studio-type situation. By using ICT and recording our work and creating something with special effects we've become more confident as our finished product is much better than it would be. As I can put the video file on my phone it allows my parents to see it and this also helps me get confidence.

Some of the language in the story is hard to understand and this sort of work is often difficult for teachers to teach as it is quite dull and boring. Choosing to have our trailer narrated meant that we had to concentrate on snippets of text and assess how dramatic they were. When you see our final video you can see that we've had to think about the affect the words have on the audience.

Having to write a reflection essay at the end of the project made me think very carefully about the techniques we'd used. Doing this at the end and having to talk about both the text and the project made it easier to think about what we'd learnt.

Having all the resources on the school Intranet means that the pace in the lesson is much quicker than it would have been which, I guess, makes teaching this sort of thing easier. If we know where to look, it means that we can concentrate on what's important rather than having to explore the whole Internet.

Reflections, obstacles and suggestions for further developments

- The primary obstacle to successfully completing this project will be a lack of IT and multi-media resources – however, instead of using green screen effects, students could still access the

stimuli and then film their performances for evaluation later. This would still leave them with an artefact and allow for some editing with sound effects, music etc.

- The essay part of the project will need some clear modelling in order to allow students to gain the higher levels outlined on the rubric.
- A starter activity in which students analysed connectives and sequencing words would work well.
- The difference between a good artefact and an excellent artefact is the costume and attention to detail students pay to their performance.
- Filming requires the teacher to work in role as a director and check students' understanding through intensive and assertive questioning. The role play element of this means that fairly brusque comments can be made without impacting on students' confidence.
- Given the strict time frames involved, any students not attending need to be marked down on the performance level of the rubric as their absence can adversely affect the work of others.
- Students need to have a mature approach to group work and this needs to be encouraged by the school – expectations should be made clear in advance.
- If time or students' ability allows, more in-depth comparisons of other literary heritage texts could be made.
- If using the online links to dictionary.com, it might be worthwhile linking the words on the Intranet to their definitions.

Appendices

1. Link to sample resources.
2. Launch letter to students from the NATE mentor.

Appendix 1: Link to sample resources

These resources on the school website give a flavour of the extra support put into our case study. At the time of writing it wasn't entirely finished. Click on 'Links' at the top of the page to see the stimulus material and sample of the work produced.

<http://www.ninestiles.bham.sch.uk/greenscreen/>

Appendix 2: Launch letter to students from the NATE mentor



National Association for the Teaching of English

A message to Mr Weir's Class at Ninestiles School

Welcome to the latest interactive project from the National Association for the Teaching of English and Becta, the Government's agency for ICT in education . We're delighted that you're taking part and looking forward to seeing the results. Each time I've visited Ninestiles I have been very impressed by the facilities and even more by the enthusiasm and hard work of the students. I'm sure you'll work with Mr Weir to create some great material for our conference next month. We want to be able to show a group of teachers, and others who work in schools and advise the Government, that using ICT can make a real difference to learning in schools.

Mr Weir tells me that you are going to be exploring ways of telling stories to capture the interest of modern audiences. Everyone loves stories – telling them, listening to them, acting them out, watching them, laughing at them, wondering what will happen next. What we would like you to show is how teenagers, who know about modern communication and ways of telling stories from books and films to graphic novels and computer games, can use the technology in interesting ways – perhaps updating old stories and using familiar settings in new ways.

Show us the best that you can do! And good luck!

Tom Rank

Manager, NATE/Becta Projects

12 June 2008

19 Collaborative work on Shakespeare

Steven Howell, Stretford Grammar School, Trafford

Overview

As a strategy to overcome the confusion students often feel when encountering *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as an attempt to encourage more collaborative working, Steven devised an activity based on the main characters. Students would create their own profiles and then review the work of other groups. Limitation in the school's network kept the ICT to a basic level but the activity nevertheless had interesting effects on the students, many of whom seemed to find the provisional nature of each step of their work liberating since they knew it could be revised, extended and improved by other groups. The activity confirmed Steven's desire for a more flexible, wiki-style resource that would make collaboration much easier.

Introduction

ICT helps pupils learn in English by enabling them to communicate, edit, annotate and arrange text quickly and flexibly.

DCSF

It's not working Sir!

Year 7 student

Although few of us as English teachers would disagree with the first statement, we probably hear the second statement enough to throw it into doubt. In the past at Stretford Grammar School it was not uncommon to say 'nothing's working', with the ageing ICT infrastructure creaking along on the technological equivalent of string and elastic bands. Luckily last year saw a huge investment in the school's ICT facilities, kitting out three ICT rooms with brand new equipment and making a commitment to developing the provision of distance learning.

Stretford Grammar School is a mixed 11-18 selective school in Trafford, Greater Manchester. It draws from a surprisingly diverse range of students through the 11+; the intake has been described as being a bit more streetwise than the average grammar school pupil.



The hard-to-teach focus of this case study

On considering my hard-to-teach topic I also wanted to consider what I found to be genuinely new and interesting about using technology to teach. I had taught Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the previous year to Year 7 and despite using a simplified version of the play I found that students reported much confusion as to which characters were which. Was that Helena or Hermia? Demetrius or Lysander? Who's in love with whom? What's with Puck? Although we had a lot of fun with this confusion, and particularly getting to know our favourite, Bottom, some students were put off with this encounter with Shakespeare. How could I use ICT to make their access to the play easier?

Using ICT to make access to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* easier

I think that one of the most exciting possibilities of using ICT is the ability to review each other's work over a network. Students have the ability to access others' work, change it, adapt it and save it. This is particularly powerful as a means of peer correction and group working, with some of the added benefits of anonymity – students who wouldn't normally work together helping each other – shy students contributing as much as the boldest. My Year 7 class would be typical of the school: bright, articulate with plenty of ideas but often slow to start writing and very reluctant to revisit and edit work. In addition, there were only six girls in a class of 28, which made it very boy-orientated so that boys could often dominate the lesson.

Method

I aimed for my students to have a clear understanding of the characters and their role in the play. I decided that the students should create a profile of each of the characters. They would use what they already knew from the play to fill in a proforma I created, complete with some guiding questions. I would have five folders with five character files already created. Students would then be directed to a particular folder, answer a particular question before saving it and then another student accessing that file and adding to or editing it.

The lesson itself could have been a disaster. The original plan had to be rewritten due to the school's shared space on the networked drives being read only, meaning that students would not be able to make changes to the master documents I had placed on the drive. In fact I was surprised to learn that there was no space on any of the drives where the students had this type of access. This ruled out any kind of collaborative work across a network as I had envisaged. Despite talking to the technician who agreed it was possible, I was told it would, not could, compromise network safety. This conclusion was reached ten minutes before the lesson was due to begin. 'Very well!' I thought, 'Time to improvise!'

What should have occurred was this: students would be guided through a PowerPoint presentation I had made about the creation of a worksheet. Periodically told to save their work, they would go to a preordained folder and select another character and another question. Over the course of the 40 minutes students would have produced 30 completed worksheets and have worked on all characters. Finally, for our plenary we would dip into the collective folder and chose characters at random and share good work. I would also print them off to create five character guides to be reviewed in class later on.

The lesson in practice

What actually occurred was a variation of an old classroom favourite of pass the paper. I've often had students completing a part of a sheet with guide questions and then passing the paper to the next person and so on until they have a completed page, so I decided to do the same in the ICT suite. Although, the computers couldn't move the students certainly could. So rather than saving work to the network and then opening a new document, the students would just swap seats. So simple, I wish I had thought of it first! Sometimes our experiments, or keenness to use ICT, can over complicate some things. Sitting at a desk, staring at a screen can be a dull pursuit. Far better to take a break every few minutes and move to the next work station to find a new character and a new question to work on.

This new approach proved to be a success with the students, providing a much needed kinaesthetic element to the lesson with students up and moving around at regular intervals. It also helped create an even more urgent deadline to complete the question as somebody else would be trying to sit at the computer you were on. Nobody wanted to be the cause of a traffic jam!

Each student was given a number and was guided to load that numbered worksheet up on their workstation, thus: 1 Demetrius, 2 Helena, 3 Hermia, 4 Lysander and 5 Puck. The first question proved easy: find a picture for your character. I had demonstrated this with Bottom to avoid any embarrassing situations, or the school's filter becoming overloaded. Some took pictures from productions, others found famous people they thought would play the character and some chose symbols such as love hearts for Lysander or a potion bottle for Puck. Inserting and resizing the picture proved to be more of a challenge, needing a quick tutorial on altering the properties of a picture in Word (Right Click – Format Picture – Layout Tight – Alignment other – OK!).

Students then moved to the computer on their right. At first this was bothersome for a few who hadn't heeded timed warnings but for the following questions this became easier:

2. Describe what your character would look like on stage.
3. Describe something this character does that affects somebody else in the play.
4. Describe something that happens to this character.
5. What do they think of one other character and what do they say?
6. What does one other character think of this person and what do they say about them?
7. Write three words that describe your character's personality.
8. What would constitute a perfect evening for your character?

Key findings

The questions tried to help the students stretch their knowledge as well as their imagination. Most proved to be accessible enough for the less able in the class while offering scope at the highest end for development. The interesting learning took part when the students moved on to another workstation. I constantly re-enforced the need for students to first read through previous answers to familiarise themselves with the character before answering the next question. I also made it clear students were to edit anything they thought was incorrect, add anything they thought necessary and make it as good as they possibly could.

This had several effects. One weaker member of the group found the experience of having others read his work quite daunting, particularly as they would be following him. Being able to access across the network would have randomized and completely anonymised this. Some liked editing and adding information, often saying they didn't know the answer to the question and on being reassured that it

didn't matter because someone would improve their contribution, feeling freed to write whatever they wished or just add to other questions. Some liked spotting the mistakes and changing them. This, however, did lead some to question whether things were changed always for the better; some suspected that some people didn't know the play and were 'correcting' right things into wrong.

The class feedback proved interesting: the majority of the class thought that using the computer room had helped them learn something more than if they had been in the classroom. But many expressed concern that their work had been altered by others. Co-operative editing breaks down ideas of taking ownership for work – some felt they were left doing all the work, correcting other students' sloppy workmanship.

One thing that came out of my teaching of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this year that hadn't previously happened was when I showed the film version as an end of term treat. Students often quoted lines they knew along with the DVD. Perhaps that was not entirely down to ICT but certainly evidence that the class had engaged with and enjoyed the text more.

Next steps

The obvious way to develop this would be some kind of wiki-worksheet which we could all go on line to edit. However I was pleased with the lesson itself and will repeat it this year with a few tweaks to randomise who is working on which worksheet!

Appendices

These materials will be available with the online version of the case studies on the NATE site:

1. Lesson plan
2. Student worksheet sample on the character of Bottom

20 Using SMART Notebook 10 for refining and presenting information

Sam Custance, Holsworthy Community College, Devon

Overview

Sam Custance had already written one case study, on [active revision strategies for C/D borderline students](#), when she asked to submit this additional contribution at the end of the project. Her focus is on how the introduction of a SMART interactive whiteboard to her classroom helped students with their problems in refining and presenting information. The interactive nature of the board encouraged students to contribute and share their written work in public. Tools also made it easier to illustrate planning and drafting and to focus on individual words or phrases. Sam provides a wealth of practical examples and concludes with a useful list of 50 teaching and learning ideas. Whilst her examples are from the SMART Board software, users of other boards will find much here which should inspire them.

The abolition of external tests at the end of Key Stage 3, announced shortly after the completion of the project, means that references here to the detail of the Year 9 examinations no longer apply, the skills that Sam develops with her students by using the interactive whiteboard remain important – and hard to teach.

Introduction

I work in a small rural secondary school. In September 2007 the college did not have SMART boards although we had several Cambridge Starboard interactive white boards. However, when it was revealed that the English department were to gain a second interactive white board and that it would go into my new room (having had one of the Cambridge boards in my previous classroom) I was given the choice between what I already knew and a SMART board. To help me make this decision, I visited a classroom in a local college which had a SMART board. Within moments I had written on the board, changed the colour, size and position of the text. I was hooked.

Lesson aims

The lessons that my case study will discuss includes those that led my Year 9 class towards their National Curriculum Tests and my Year 11 class's revision for Paper 1 Section B and Paper 2 Section B, as well as how I have used the interactive white board with a class of Year 8s who, at the start of the year, all had spelling ages between a five- and seven-year-old. My aim for all three groups was for them to experiment and develop their understanding of the importance of composition and effect. For example, for the Year 9 Writing Paper, composition and effect for the longer writing task is worth 14 out of a possible 30 marks and for the shorter writing task is worth 8 out of a possible 20 marks. Therefore, I needed to ensure that my students were able to maximise their understanding of the question and then writing their own response.

Deciding on a topic

The hard-to-teach topic that I have chosen to address is that of ‘refining and presenting information’. This seemed logical as this case study will focus upon the use of the SMART Notebook 10 software.

During the last academic year, my Year 8 students, whose spelling ages ranged from a five-year-old to a seven-year-old with their reading ages (NFER test results), ranged from a six-year-old to that of a nine-year-old. This class of 12- to 13-year-olds were all very reluctant writers and readers; teaching them was a challenge. However, when it came to asking for volunteers to write on the interactive whiteboard I never had a shortage of willing students. I think this is down to the interactive nature of the board. Students enjoy selecting the pen colour, the ability to delete, enlarge and move the text allows for a large number of opportunities. They were also far happier to share their written work in this manner rather than reading it out, or when peer marking was used. The nature of this collaborative software also meant that when students have had difficulty in spelling a word, they helped each other by spelling or sounding the word out. Students could see each other’s work and were keen to build on and develop ideas.

The visual toolbar of the SMART board encourages all learners to access and recognise the tools, this was especially important with my Year 8 class. Here is the tool bar for SMART Notebook 10:



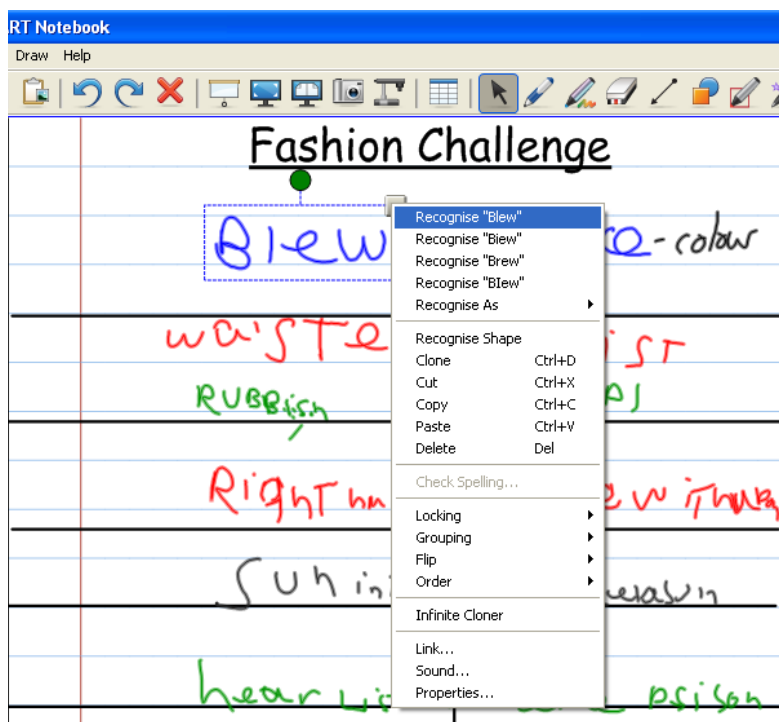
For this topic I have focused on text manipulation at word, sentence and text levels. This is an area where the interactive whiteboard can visually support students with their learning.

Method

I believe that a data projector allows students to access visual resources easily, and if there is the opportunity to use an interactive white board (IWB) then this may encourage students to ‘have a go’. I have found that the vast majority of my students are keen to experiment with the board and enjoy their learning experience. I only have to ask for a volunteer and suddenly hands will shoot up.

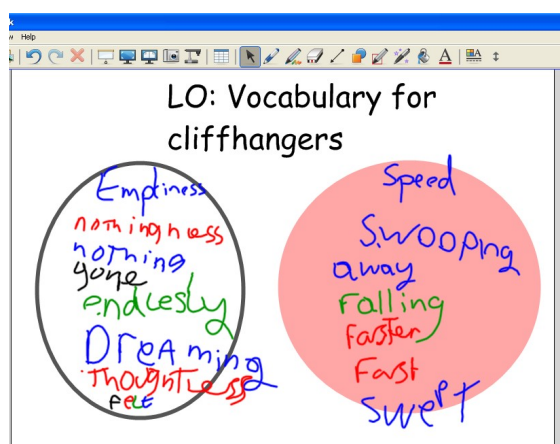
Converting handwriting

One of the rather clever tools that the SMART board contains is that of recognising handwritten words and converting them into a computer type-face. A number of my Year 8 students have handwriting issues. So encouraging them to use this tool meant they not only had to select the word that they wanted, which was a good process for drafting and editing their work, but for those whose letters were illegible, it meant they were encouraged to print clearly rather than scrawl. To make this change, is very straight forward: you simply click on the pointer (the arrow) then left click (or touch the board) touch or click on the arrow and a menu appears. The option to recognise is given, with a list of possible words. You simply touch the correct word. If the word recognition is incorrect, then you can select it, touch the word again and edit the text using the keyboard function. The process is illustrated below. To bring the keyboard up, there are two buttons at the front of the interactive whiteboard; you press the left hand one, which has the image of a keyboard on it. The keyboard can be used in other applications, not just in the Notebook software.



Using shapes

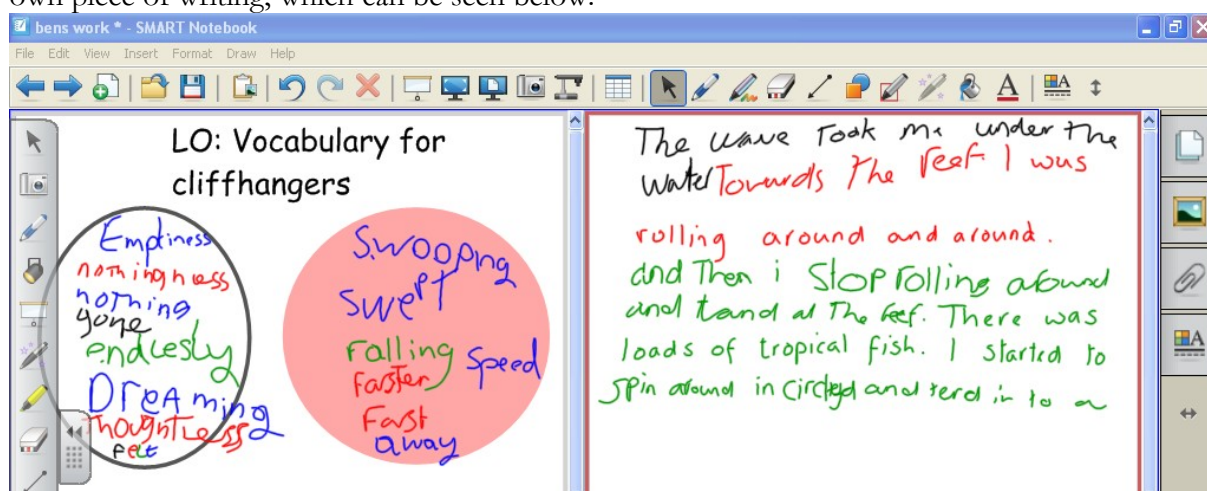
Encouraging students to plan their ideas is always important. The ease of being able to select shapes meant that asking the students to fill the shape with words always seemed to be an incentive and also meant that my weaker students had a visual expectation of the amount of vocabulary that I was expecting, rather than having a possibly intimidating white space. To select a shape is very straight forward, the icon on the right here is the one you require, and you can change the shape, colour, outline and transparency. If identical shapes are required, then using the clone feature helps with this process. For example, I used two circles with my Year 8 class when I was asking them to think about vocabulary that could be used to create tension. The screenshot below is an example from a starter, from my Year 8 class.



One of the great elements about an IWB is that once you have written a word the board recognises it as an object, which you can then move around, rotate, enlarge, copy, etc. This facility can lead very neatly into categorising and prioritising information so that the words can be placed in a rank order, or

sequence. If you want to group ideas together it is easy to do, select each object, press the arrow that appears on the top right hand corner, move down to grouping and you can then select Group, or Ungroup. If you are using a keyboard, then this can be achieved by depressing the Control (Ctrl) key and clicking on each item and then, with the Ctrl key still depressed, click on G and all of the objects will be recognised as one group. This means that if you want to move a group of ideas together it is easier to do so. They can also be ungrouped by pressing Ctrl R. One piece of advice that I would give before you work on a page is to go to the Gallery and clone the original page, so that you still have your original slide. Alternatively, if you use a prepared slide with another class, then this can easily be saved into your gallery.

The screen shot of this shared vocabulary led to one of the students using the board to produce their own piece of writing, which can be seen below.

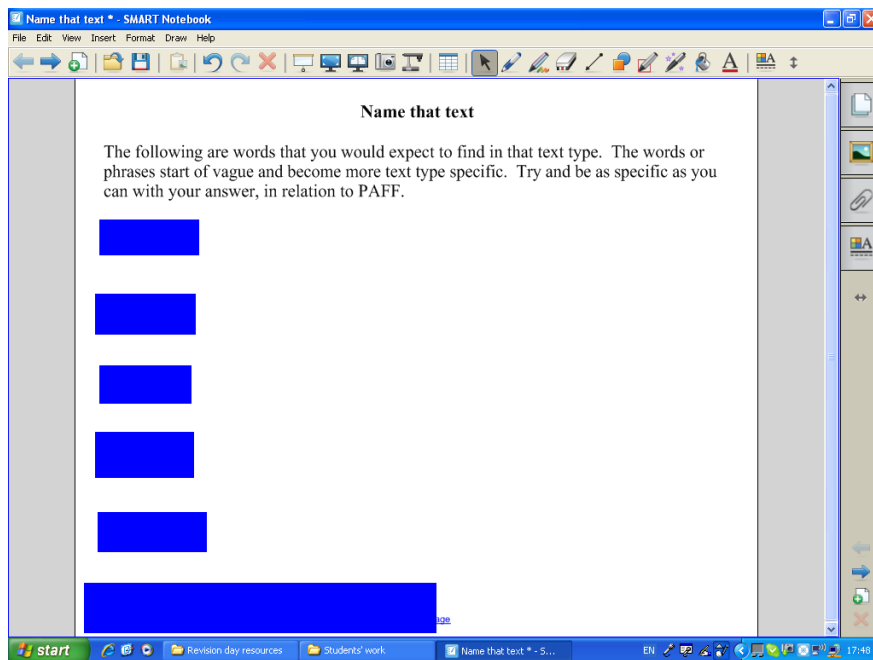


If you want to look at the screen without the toolbars or menus, select View and Full Screen, or press Alt + Enter. The second icon, allows you to see two pages at one time. There are numerous short cuts for the SMART board, which can be found in Appendix B.

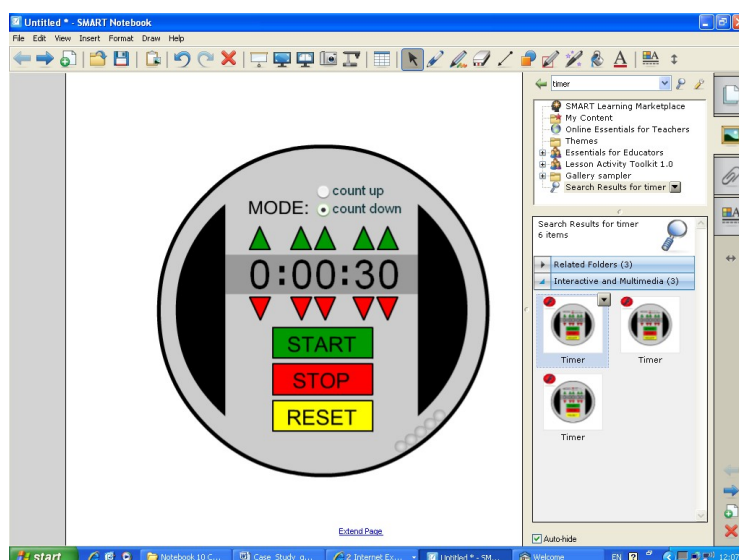


Not only would I encourage teachers to use the software, but once you show your class how to use it, they will want to use it and be able to do so independently. The visual toolbar means that even students with weak literacy skills can operate the software confidently. Providing helpful hints such as using the nail of their finger to move items, or to double check which icon is highlighted minimizes any problems that they might incur when they are in front of the class.

As well as using shapes for planning, shapes can also be used to cover and predict. I used this method for my Year 9s when we were revising composition and effect and the importance of ensuring that their choice of vocabulary matched the purpose and form of the question. In order to do this, I selected vocabulary which would indicate the form and once I revealed the blue rectangle, my students had to work out and write their response using mini whiteboards to relay their understanding to me. This activity worked a little like the old game show 'Name that Tune' but instead of selecting the number of bars, students had to try and 'Name that Text'.

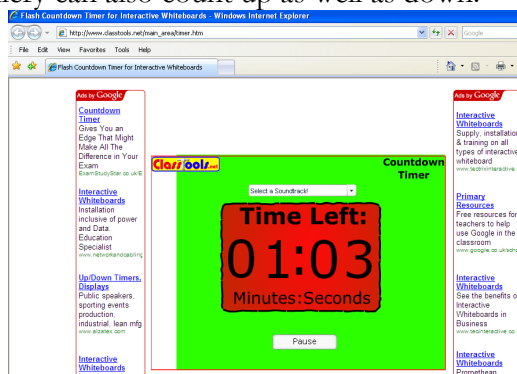


A further difference between an interactive whiteboard and a traditional whiteboard, is the ability to be able to save the work that has taken place. A maths colleague was delighted when she was able to prove to her class when the homework was set, as she quickly brought up the page on which she had written what the homework was and also, importantly for that discussion with her class, when it was due in. Other colleagues have commented upon the value of having an accessible timer. This can be quickly brought up by typing in timer into the Gallery (if you click on the icon that looks like a picture). To move anything from the Gallery to your notebook page is very straightforward: you can either double click on it, or drag it across. Left clicking the cursor on the five little circles on the bottom right hand side allows you to change the size of flash items, so that you can alter their size.



The ability for the timer to both count up and count down can be an incredibly useful teaching and behaviour management tool. There are others, one of my favourite websites also allows you to add

music to your countdown is: www.classtools.net/main_area/timer.htm, my favourites being 'Hawaii 5-0' and 'The A Team', as well as having the traditional 'Countdown' music. Please do expect your class to all go 'du do, du, do, didodeedo' - they won't be able to help themselves! This timer moves a block of colour from left to right, going through the traffic light colours. The length of time you have is dependent upon the length of music. The disadvantages are the adverts either side. This is great for getting your class to pack up quickly but I would probably use the timer in the Gallery for quieter activities. The timer in the Gallery can also count up as well as down.



Year 9 National Curriculum tests

When it came to revising with my class the work that we had done, it was great to select a variety of slides and then using the link function. I was able to recall the different slides, websites etc, with one click. Now this can take place if you call up the document and then minimize it, but I like the Link function as it means I can prepare this method. Being able to go straight to a website is time saving, being able to make hyperlinks is always invaluable. I realise that this is a function that Word has (by pressing Ctrl K to create a hyperlink), I just like that the Notebook 10 software allows the same function.

The Gallery

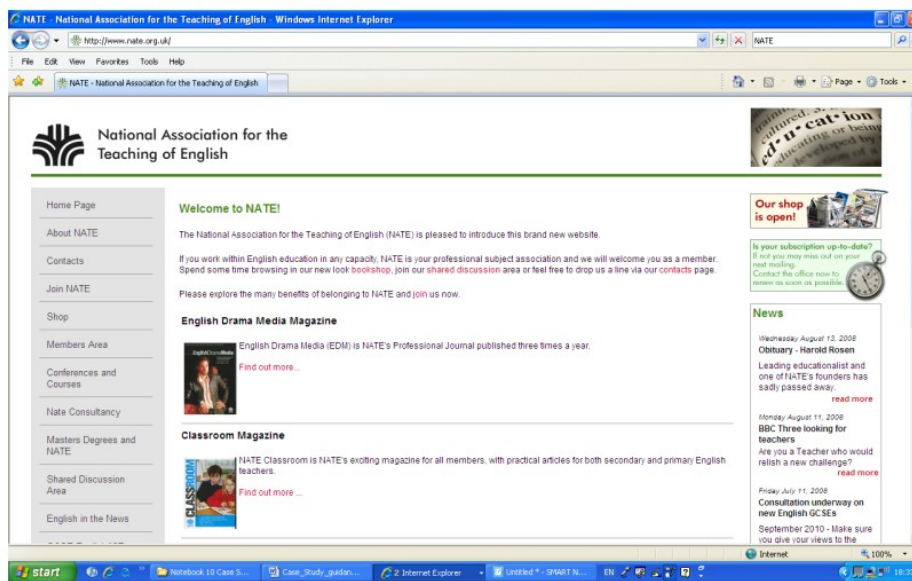
Like any museum, the Gallery of the Notebook software needs to be explored with an open mind to learning. I have found that if I am too prescriptive in what I type into the search bar, it can prevent me from finding what I am looking for. For example, if I type in 'sport' I gain five related folders to browse through and fifteen background pictures. If I type in 'sports', then nothing appears. This quirk in searching is irritating which is why I think browsing the 'Essentials for Educators' and 'Lesson Activity Toolkit' is far better. If I want an interactive Flash resource, then I can select the Interactive and Multimedia folder, of which there are many exciting applications, my favourites being the card sort, multi choice questions (which looks very similar to 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?') template and the dice. All of these are completely editable, including the dice which can contain any words or even images. The dice have been used to great effect when generating discussions. For example, when revising *Much Ado about Nothing* I would give each character a number, roll the dice and the students had to select an important quotation from the key scenes and explain how it related to the exam question that we were revising.

Capture tool

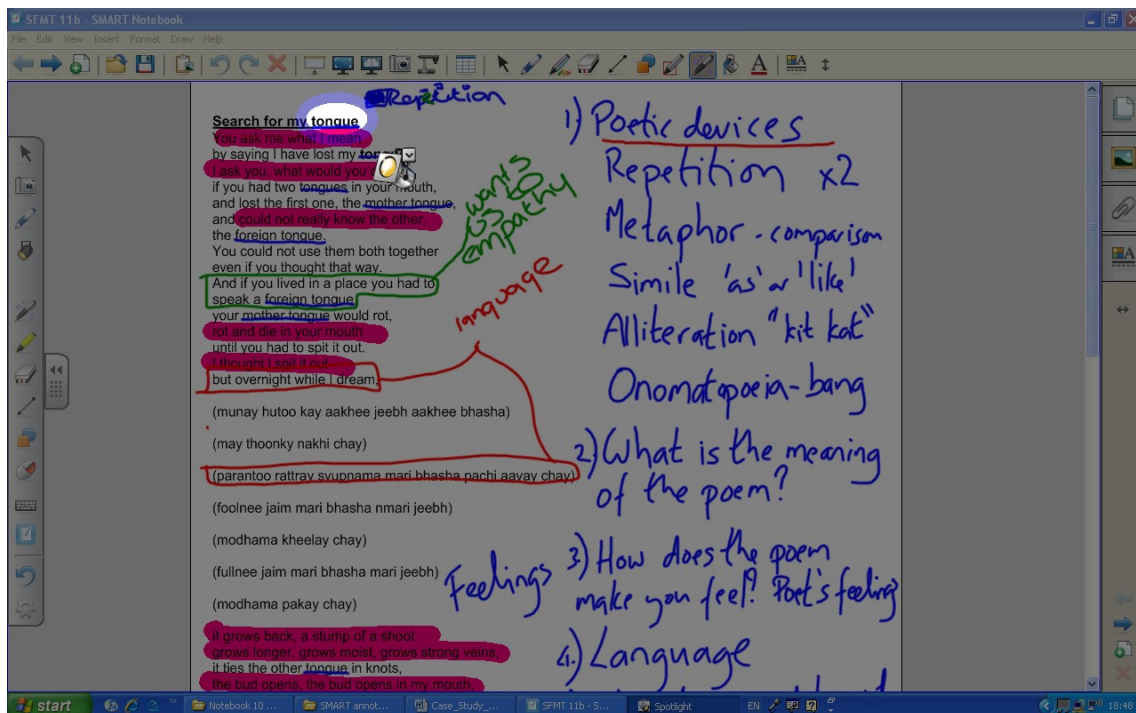
When using a SMART board, the Capture tool allows you to make a choice about selecting either a page, a rectangular shape, or even to draw around it. For example, you could draw around a particular word, line, paragraph or picture. The Capture tool also allows you to carry out this process in other SMART 'ink aware' programmes, which include Word, and also allows you to capture Internet websites. This is particularly useful if you are annotating in Word, as Word does not keep the annotations, when you move the toolbar down. When work is captured a Notebook page is automatically opened and the work that is captured appears as an object. As an object, this can then be manipulated, copied, pasted etc.



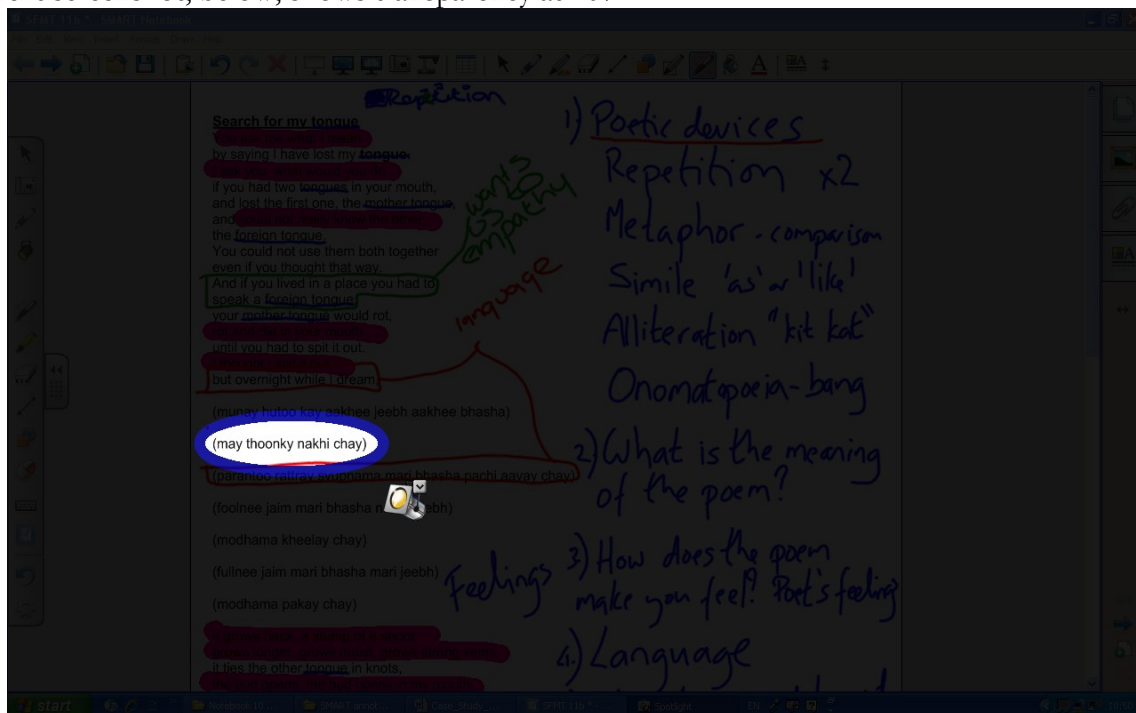
Here is the NATE website homepage captured to different degrees: the first is when I have drawn around a shape (the NATE logo) and enlarged it, the second is when using the rectangular shape and the third is using the Page Capture facility.



A further technique to draw attention to words, pictures or other elements is the spotlight tool. In Notebook, the spotlight tool can be used to draw attention to a word or phrase, or element of a picture. Changing the transparency means that you are still able to see the rest of the page, below this is set to 50%:



The next screenshot, below, shows transparency at 10%.

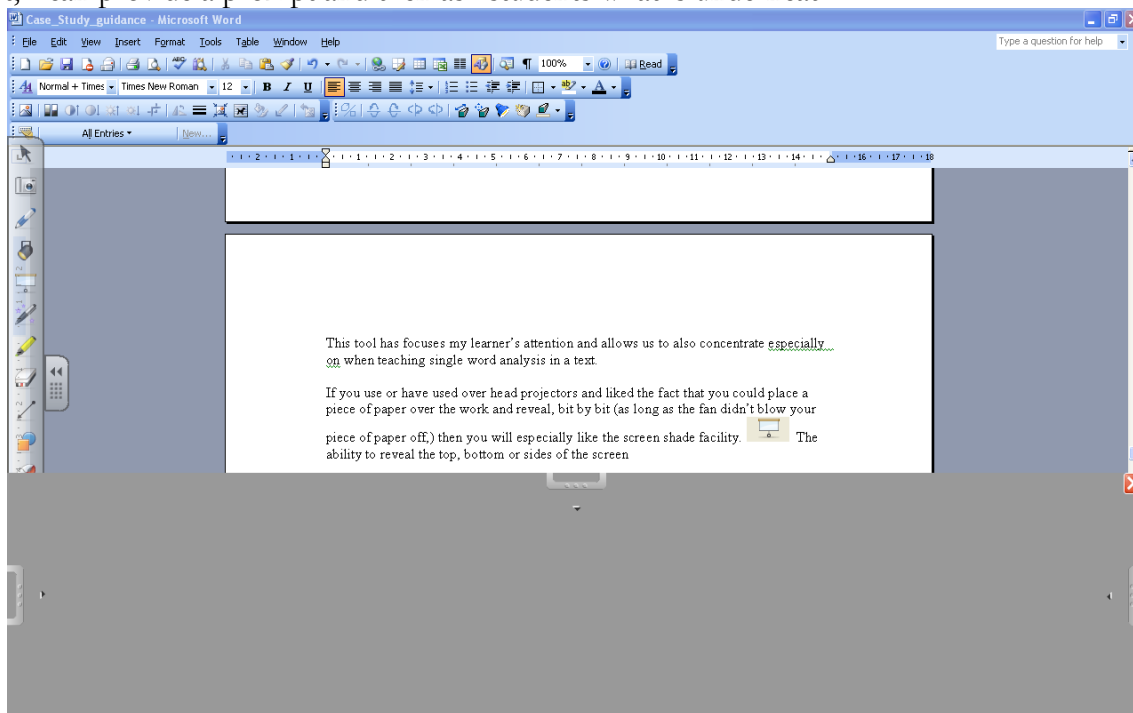


This tool has focused my learner's attention and also helps students to concentrate when you are teaching single word analysis in a text.


If you use or have used overhead projectors and liked the fact that you could place a piece of paper over the work and reveal, bit by bit (as long as the fan didn't blow your



piece of paper off) then you will especially like the screen shade facility, when you click on this icon you can then move the screen accordingly. The ability to reveal the top, bottom or sides of the screen also allows you to reveal and pace your lesson accordingly. This technique was useful when I was teaching my Year 9s about the Reading Paper and their own ability to pace and focus on each question. I have also found that with my Year 8 learners, revealing elements step by step, when it involves tasks that they may be reluctant to carry out is very useful. Also, if I am asking students to recall information, for example from the previous lesson, after bringing up the previous lesson's work and placing the screen over it, I can provide a prompt and then ask students what is underneath.



Key findings

The SMART software can be used when creating SMART Notebook files but also has a handy floating toolbar (see the left hand side of the screen view above) which means you are able to use the tools whenever it appears, or it can be called up – for = example in Word or the Internet. If the floating toolbar is not required then you can remove it; to do this go to the left hand section of the blue toolbar and look for this icon  which allows you to open the menu. 'Other SMART tools' allows you to access these tools: spotlight, screen shade, magnifier, calculator, pointer tool, screen capture toolbar.

What I like about Notebook 10 in comparison to earlier versions is that I do not have to be connected to my SMART board, for example at my desk at school. Also this means that if you do not have a SMART board, you can still have access to Notebook 10 as long as you have a key. You gain a key as long as you have one board in your school (the key can be found on the back of the board or the bottom right hand corner).

Next steps

I have been creating resources for 'Poems from Different Cultures' which have used the technique of revealing the missing word to help my KS4 students develop their single word analysis skills. I have

also been experimenting with the game layouts which SMART have provided in their Gallery. There are numerous interactive activities that can all be edited; to find them type in 'interactive' into the Gallery. They include interactive card sorts, multiple choice quizzes, timelines, word guesses and fully editable dice which can have any words, images or the traditional numbers and more than one die can be rolled. There is a question and answer tile, which is reminiscent of a 'Wheel of Fortune'. There is the ability to play a version of 'Countdown' with random consonant and vowel generators. There is also a voting tool (which is easier to use than tallying up ideas!) and to continue the game show ideas, there is the ability to play a version of Catchphrase, whereby pictures are hidden by tiles – but there is no Mr Fish!

I thoroughly enjoy using my SMART board and I hope that I have inspired you to explore the uses that an interactive whiteboard can offer. The teaching assistants at Holsworthy Community College and I have created a list of 50 teaching and learning ideas – we hope you'll feel encouraged to try some of them. Even if you have another whiteboard or an older version of the SMART software, many of these ideas can still be applied.

Appendix A: 50 teaching and learning ideas when using SMART software

Thanks to the teaching assistants at Holsworthy Community College for helping me create this list after they had received their training.

1. Sorting
2. Crosswords
3. Quizzes (of which there are many templates)
4. Snap – matching pairs of sounds (Soundwrite)
5. Dice – prefix and suffix, key words, key ideas to generate discussion.
6. Syllable sounds on the dice (Soundwrite)
7. Drafts / chess
8. Missing words – cloze activities
9. Cover up words with shapes and make predictions e.g. sounds – predicting sounds, or words in poetry, prose, or any text.
10. Definitions of words – match them up – template
11. Boggle (using dice)
12. Countdown game
13. Interactive timelines / number lines
14. Matching pictures to words
15. Link documents e.g. for revision
16. Capture work and small parts of a work e.g. of a picture – for points of view / art /
17. Annotating a document not in SMART (ink aware applications include Word, Excel etc.)
18. Annotating a web page
19. Annotating a paused image from a moving image e.g. to examine mise en scene, character expressions, body language or product placement, presentation etc.
20. Sequencing e.g. sentences into paragraphs – topic sentences, explanations, PEE
21. Developing punctuation skills – adding in and deleting to then discuss effect of punctuation.
22. Using software with children e.g. Nessy interactively.
23. Cut, paste, copy images, words etc into an annotating document.
24. Exporting into a PowerPoint or PDF format, for revision so that all can access even if don't have SMART software
25. Capturing work to make a collage
26. Playing word / image / number dominoes
27. Guess who?
28. Hangman – football games – spelling, key words, answers to questions
29. Revealing and hiding a word / image / sentence / idea
30. Animate objects e.g. words getting bigger to show importance
31. Banner (ticker tape) for key words, objectives, reminders, spellings etc
32. Venn diagrams for comparisons
33. Interactive maths tools to show students how to use them e.g. protractors, pair of compasses
34. Annotating images with many colours and line types
35. Selecting and identifying parts of an image to magnify
36. Spotlight on particular words, ideas, concepts, to isolate for discussion and analysis – magic pen circle
37. Sharing modelled writing
38. Mind mapping ideas with others
39. Talking ideas through
40. Annotating web pages

41. Clearer instructions with reminders and important points made
42. Focusing students' attention on the objective through repetition e.g. use of banner / ticker tape
43. Ability to recall what has been written on the board, for prosperity / revision / recall
44. Handwriting recognition tool to encourage clearer presentation
45. Flip, rotate, order shapes / objects
46. To use backgrounds, colours e.g. for dyslexics yellow background with black font is easier to read
47. Handwriting lines on a board, in gallery; as well as different types of paper background e.g. graph paper
48. Editable Flash objects e.g. timer, dice, card sorts, sequencing, cards, coins, quiz, dominoes, crossword templates
49. To change, move and vary words / objects to demonstrate the editing and redrafting process
50. Using the timer for organisational issues e.g. packing up, behaviour management tool, timing group work, games e.g. Pictionary

Appendix B: Shortcuts using the SMART board

Ctrl+ or Alt+ means the Ctrl or Alt key along with the letter or number given

File

New = Ctrl+N
Open = Ctrl+O
Save = Ctrl+S

Edit

Undo = Ctrl+Z
Redo = Ctrl+Y
Clone = Ctrl+D
Cut = Ctrl+X
Paste = Ctrl+V
Select all = Ctrl+A
Spell check = F7
Clear page=Ctrl+L

View

Page sorter = Alt+1
Gallery = Alt+2
Attachments = Alt+3
Next page = PgDn
Previous page = PgUp
Full Screen = Alt+Enter

Insert

Blank page = Ctrl+M

Format

Bold = Ctrl+B
Underline = Ctrl+U
Italic = Ctrl+I
Set Item Properties = F4
Unlock = Ctrl+J
Lock in place = Ctrl+K

Draw

Group = Ctrl+G
Ungroup= Ctrl+R
Select = Ctr+1
Pen = Ctrl+2
Creative Pen = Ctrl+3
Eraser = Ctrl+4
Line = Ctrl+5
Shapes = Ctrl+6
Text = Ctrl+7

Help

Contents = F1