

A Symphony of Change – the IWB Journey at Woodcroft Primary School....Judy Beal....Woodcroft

(transitions and transpositions with a very quick time signature)

What began as an adagio for a small quartet becomes a monumental symphony to inspire a captive audience.

How many instruments does it take to make a bandwagon? Are we going to make beautiful music together with these new technologies or will the instruments remain in discord through lack of tuning or an effective conductor?

There are many musical metaphors we could muster but suffice to say – our interactive whiteboards were going to require us to embrace a change of key and transpose a range of learning environments.

The story so far...

Context: Woodcroft Primary School currently has more than 900 students and is remarkable for its close knit feeling despite its size. The students and staff are very engaged in their learning and staff professional development activities are particularly well attended. At the start of 2006, the school had no interactive whiteboards but was already extremely well equipped with a range of ICT tools and skills. I was appointed to begin my contract at the start of the 2006 school year as, ‘Assistant Principal – Learning in the Digital Age.’ I had recent and relevant experience in using interactive whiteboards in two previous schools and was aware that two new boards had been purchased at the end of 2005 to be installed in early 2006. Teachers were ready and willing to participate in the journey as it began although many were not familiar with the technology. Let the music begin.

A Symphony of Change - The first movement:

‘Usually, the first movement of a symphony is a fairly fast movement, weighty in content and feeling.’

Overture in PD - The first two IWBs arrived in the school during the summer holidays. A decision had been made to place one of these in the resource centre and for it to be available to all classes. I arrived at about the same time as the first two boards and many of the children since know me as the ‘smart board lady’. My Assistant Principal role required me to work 0.6 of my time in a classroom, but the Principal, in her wisdom, placed my teaching load in the Resource Centre along with the other two librarians. Although I am not a trained librarian, this allocation of duties has been of enormous benefit to staff, students and myself as both as teachers and learners. It has also meant that teachers have been able to access the support my skills and experience bring in a familiar environment, with a curriculum focused agenda. There has been provision of professional development activities around **interactive whiteboards** and a range of other ICT skills and explorations provided in line with surveyed needs’ analysis. Far richer however, is the embedded professional learning that is taking place on a daily basis through explicit teaching through Resource Based Learning. This happens with the support and integration of the interactive whiteboard. The tool is an integral and yet seamless part of the teaching and learning process in the Resource Centre and class teachers and students are becoming very comfortable in using the new technology as their learning has been continuing with active support.

This movement certainly had content, was weighty, and the feelings were very mixed and somewhat emotional. It led well into the challenging decisions of where the second board would be placed. It was vitally important that the process be overt and collaborative and that staff feel that they had a part to play in the development of the process and the decision itself.

Second Movement: Where do we put the second board?

‘In most symphonies, the second movement will be slow and solemn in character.’

Context: It is term one and the transition has begun. Our opening was celebrated with exciting phrases and the audience response to our first board included amazement, excitement, engagement and curiosity. Many staff were more excited than they thought they might have been. Many teachers had not seen or understood what this tool was or what it could do. But there was another board in the school and it needed to be placed. Shared space or classroom? Access for all, or access for an expert to develop further? Perhaps staff should apply for this opportunity – what would our criteria look like?

We gathered a team of interested staff and developed the following set of criteria for teachers to write to in their application for the second board:

How would you see a smart board being used in your room?

How would you integrate the smart board across the curriculum into your programme?

What do you see as the benefits for you and the children you teach?

How would you best be able to share new learning with others?

Three applications were received – all had significant merit. The two applications from classroom teachers were difficult to separate and yet the leadership team had to make a decision. Our third application was from a specialist teacher and would allow greater access for all students across the school. As a key player in analysing the applications and presenting my thoughts to the leadership team, my experience told me that it was vital that the board becomes a seamless part of a daily routine programme and that it not be seen as a novelty. Physical constraints of classrooms and whole school vision were also issues that played a part beyond the decision process. Two of the learning spaces were portable buildings and the ‘bounce’ factor as students move through the rooms, which could misalign the projectors, was a possible problem. If we wanted this expensive new technology to ‘hold up’, (and to avoid continual orienting) and through the placement, provide a model for best practice in teaching and learning, we needed the environment in which the board was placed to be solid and uncompromised by excess movement of walls or ceiling. A decision was made to place to board in a Year 4 classroom (which adjoined another for team teaching) where there was a very experienced classroom teacher (with extensive ICT experience) with passion and vision, and where the walls were less likely to wobble, and the roof was thankfully flat! There was disappointment from some staff of course but reasoning and discussion points were shared overtly so that the process was clear and well understood.

There was significant success in this location and as visitors came to see our boards the open door policy of this room created a welcoming and innovative learning space. It did however, come at a price. The folding doors between the rooms needed to be closed more often rather than less often due to the inevitable distraction of the new technology. The novelty has since dissipated somewhat and there is now greater opportunity for collaboration as was the original intention.

It was at this stage of the process that I wrote an article for a national conference titled, ‘When 2 is all the budget will buy’, which was intended to explain the process of allocation I had experienced in the three schools and the importance of ‘classroom’ placement and teacher professional development. By the time this article went to publication there were some momentous changes afoot. The seamless professional development had led to significant dialogue about the possibilities and opportunities these new technologies afforded and demand was high for time on the shared board – which was already fully booked. Successful usage of classroom computers and our multimedia suite of machines was increasing significantly due in part to successful modelling through RBL of Integrated Units, Digital Learning Objects, Websites and web based tools, effective software use and innovative planning for presenting and

assessment of student work and learning experiences in ICT – using the interactive whiteboard. We were growing as a school together with the technology and our Symphony was beginning to show promise as an outstanding work in our repertoire.

Third Movement:

‘The third movement of a symphony is, in most cases, a Scherzo.’

I went to visit the principal with a suggestion. Electroboard, the providers of Smartboard interactive whiteboards, were offering a very attractive ‘package’ which was hard to pass up. Our very experienced and incredibly able technician (who installed the first two boards – and built a step for the library board) and I had been working on our budget. We believed that we could make our budget for 2006 stretch to three more boards sooner rather than later. It was still only first term and although we did not have a great deal of hard, rich, local data about the successful integration, we were confident anecdotally that there was reason to move forward with more boards. Our meeting with the principal caused us to smile as we left having found funding for four more boards – we were going to be able to make quite a few people happy.

We opted for the same application process with the next boards and received 10 applications (or 39 if you count the whole class set of letters). The significant increase in applications was indicative of the embracing of the new tools and these applications represented 14 different staff with some working in team teaching situations. We even received a complaint letter about the process of application where a class applied – the application form did say teacher or team of teachers as the applicants. This was a clear indication of the passion with which people held their desire for this new tool – with good reason. The decision was significantly more difficult and required quite some deliberation at a leadership level. Our first two applicants who had missed out both led the way in their application and were provided with two of the next boards - (a Year 5 and specialist Japanese). The next two were placed in a 2/3 and a double year 1 classroom. There was some resistance to the two Year 1 teachers having access to this new technology as some staff perceived them as less technically literate than others, but their application was not about fancy technology but about rich curriculum and open ended possibilities. It also provided a team approach with three teachers working in this team across the week. In hindsight this placement has provided very rich learning for teachers in learning from and with one another. This rollout did leave year 6 and 7 students without a board which was of some concern – access for these classes to the library board was seen as a priority.

This movement of the symphony really began to take hold once all the boards were up and one of our ‘smart board custodians’ suggested we have a regular weekly meeting in order to share our learning with one another – a fantastic and incredibly rewarding idea. Our smart board lunches have been rich in dialogue not only about curriculum but also about ‘nuts and bolts bugs’ with their use. The meetings have supported tackling of the peripherals and the sharing of current best practice and sources of more reading or ideas. Other staff are more than welcome to join in with our lunch as we move from location to location and we have been gathering regularly and very successfully. Together, in an ensemble, the music is more in tune with the needs of the teachers and the students.

Throughout this third movement we have also been sharing our composition with others in a range of ways. Our district e-teacher who has the Year 5 class and one of the second round of interactive white boards, has been creating amazing e-teacher events using ‘moodle’ and sharing these through TSoF and across our district. The Japanese teachers have been sharing with a range of Language teachers and researchers their use of IWBs and Learning Objects including their research for the learning federation. Our Year 4 teacher and I have been running IWB PD sessions through CEGSA which have been regularly full to capacity. We have shared our practice at State and National level and our journey has been shared with a remarkable 9 groups of visitors from other schools, and this is still on the increase. Our reputation for exemplary practice with the new technology is growing.

My original thoughts of gently, gently (andante – an easy walking pace) with the IWBs have been pushed onto a rollercoaster speed ride – accelerando to presto – perhaps it was always meant to be a scherzo as third movements in a symphony often are – ‘Scherzo - Pertaining to the sonata form, a fast movement in triple time.’

The fourth movement - The finale!

‘composers have used many different forms for their finale movements’

And what a finale! We began moving into budget preparation for 2007. We have held some finances in reserve for replacement PCs, as a new offer from Electroboard just arrived across our desks. In Week 3, term 4 the technician and I believed, with a little fiddling, we would be able to purchase next year’s four boards this year instead and have them installed sooner, leaving our PC purchasing until the 2007 school year, rolling the new PCs out in the new year when security is often less challenging than during the summer holidays. We had managed, after successful lunch discussions, to place our seventh board in our staffroom as part of our Professional Development Budget – it has only been on the wall for two weeks but is already making technology use more visible and professional dialogue more engaging. We went again to the principal and after asking for four more boards we walked out with another 7 – doubling our number of boards. (Actually now 8 including one for our neighbouring Kindy) And so to a massive crescendo!

One short meeting and we are getting towards a one between two classes ratio. In 2007 we are likely to have 34 classes but I would be surprised if we rushed out again after more boards. We do not want to be the school in the area with one in each classroom – the South already has at least one of those – but what we **do** want to be known for is our support as a whole school for teacher professional development with emerging technologies. This month’s IWB net newsletter <http://www.iwb.net.au/> has discussions about the innovation of the blackboard (chalkboard) and compares it with the digital age IWB transition. It makes interesting reading alongside the push towards many schools heading towards a ‘board in every room’.

What if these are a fad? What if some teachers don’t want them? (This happened in one school!) What if we all go back to what we have always done albeit with digital talk and chalk - which after all can be very comfortable – andante suits many of us just fine.

Right now Woodcroft Primary cannot stand still. The school has always been a place of positive and vibrant energy and this point in our history is no exception. As we build and support our 21st Century citizens into the Digital Age, it is important to consider the teachers as the change makers of the future. Spending money on new technologies is sadly wasted if matching funds are not spent on effective Teacher Professional Development. We would not expect people to create beautiful music with a violin without lessons, time to play and lots of practice and nor should we expect teachers to get on board without at least an introduction to the instrument and regular and meaningful lessons about how to move forward with their practice. With such support, the teachers and students and in fact the whole community at Woodcroft Primary are moving into the Digital Age tunefully and we are beginning to make beautiful music together which will provide an awesome symphony for the 21st Century.

Musical Quotes from <http://library.thinkquest.org/22673/forms.html>
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Useful links

<http://www.tsof.edu.au/resources/iwb/index.asp> Technology School of the Future web page – many good links to quality research and CEGSA article ‘When 2 is all the budget will buy’

<http://www.electroboard.com.au/> Electroboard – sell Smartboards but also have useful training materials – Contact Beth Measday for more information

<http://www.interactivewhiteboard.net.au/> Some great resources here and an online newsletter (Smart biased)

<http://www.iwb.net.au/> Interactive Whiteboard Net – good resources and info and newsletter (Promethean Partner) – talk to Lockleys North Primary about Promethean

<http://www.center.k12.mo.us/edtech/SB/templates.htm> Smartboard template samples created by teachers