

Not just all play

A team of teachers at Belmore South Public School recently used action learning in a *Quality teaching action learning project*, one of the whole-school and cross-curricular programs funded by the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme*. The goal of the action learning team was to explore new and innovative ways of teaching writing, especially narrative. This was an identified area of need, as this school had a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Interactive whiteboards proved to be an important tool for achieving the team's goal. Two members of the team, Pina Faggidae and Vanessa Jenkins, talk about some of their experiences:



Pina Faggidae

From games to stories

In my Stage 1 class, I had a game from the lego.com website up on the whiteboard and the kids absolutely loved it. It required them to work with a character in a particular scenario, to solve problems and get the character to a resolution. So I started to think about how I could tap into this motivation to get them to write a narrative. With the students working in groups, one group played the game at the whiteboard while the others played with actual Lego to build their own setting, such as a park or shopping centre. Part of that included creating a character, and deciding upon something that the character needed to do within the setting. Then, the students worked out the ending; how their character would achieve what it had to do. Next, they filled in the details of the setting, character, complication and resolution for the story they had created on a proforma, which they then used to write their own narratives. They were so motivated by using the game on the whiteboard that they really wanted to write their own story and became completely immersed in the process.

Pina Faggidae

Engaged with learning

The action learning team all started with the same goal of improving students' language skills, but we soon moved into other key learning areas. When the board is on in my classroom, which is about one hundred percent of the time, there is always one group, one child or two children using it. There is never any off-task problem behaviour. Rather, there is a lot of problem-solving, language learning and talk about the topic. The whiteboard is a great focal point for class discussion. You have virtually all the class fully engaged, rather than just two or three students participating.

Vanessa Jenkins

Relevance and significance

Before this project, many of my students did not want to write a narrative. They would write about one line, and that was it. The interactive whiteboard gave relevance and significance to their learning. When they were at the whiteboard, they were interacting, problem-solving, talking together, on-task and really enjoying what they were doing. The big change, in comparison to what happened before, was that they wanted to tell their stories because they had become so immersed in them. Both the interactive whiteboard and the game provided them with that connection.

Pina Faggidae

Letting go

When we got our whiteboards, the action learning team members did a lot of sharing. We went into each other's rooms to critically observe what others were doing, commenting on that, and then trying things out for ourselves. Offering advice about 'where to go next' was really important. The biggest and most positive change in my practice as a result of this project has been the ability to let go. I always knew that children learn best when they're doing it themselves. Learning is now so much more student-directed. The students take it to where they want to go. Technology is embedded into everything I do. It's no longer a separate entity. When planning lessons, I know that, with the interactive whiteboard, the learning can go along many different pathways. It has just opened things up so much.

Vanessa Jenkins



Vanessa Jenkins