North Tyneside Council Adult Learning Alliance: Using Interactive Whiteboards for Adults with Learning Difficulties

Summary

North Tyneside Council Adult Learning Alliance (NTCALA) has three Promethean Interactive White Boards (IWB) installed in one of its centres to improve the delivery of sensory focused activities for adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The IWBs are also successfully used to create a sensory or ‘snoezelen’ room. This is a room which provides sensory stimulation and relaxation in the form of light, music and textures. Using the IWBs has increased learner’s engagement as well as tutors’ e-confidence, which has been evidenced during formal observation of teaching and learning.

About North Tyneside Council Adult Learning Alliance (NTCALA)

NTCALA is the adult learning arm of North Tyneside Council and is responsible for the delivery of adult learning courses in North Tyneside. It offers a wide range of programmes to suit the needs of individual residents, the community and voluntary
sector and employers, including programmes designed to support residents with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The challenge

Jo Knight and Keiran Steedman are responsible for the delivery of music, drama and arts sessions to adults with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities.

As part of her dissertation, Jo consulted and interviewed support workers and researched a number of suggestions to enhance the delivery of life skills classes. A recurring theme was the need to improve the range of sensory stimulus embedded into sessions for adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties. A lot of learning materials were paper-based and lacked multi-sensory stimulus. It was also very time consuming and costly to create them.

The activity

In May 2008 the Adult Learning Alliance submitted a successful bid to NIACE to secure capital funding for e-learning technology. The bid centred on the installation of interactive whiteboards in the Alliance’s learning centres to create an inspirational learning environment. Research and direct experience had previously shown the Alliance that tutors have embraced e-learning when given the opportunity and support.

It was decided to purchase Promethean products because they had been in use in the majority of schools in North Tyneside and had proved to be highly effective in facilitating the delivery of e-learning. It made sense to ensure the equipment purchased and training provided would allow tutors and other staff to be able to access whiteboards already installed in a number of community locations and thus be able to work in all venues in the borough.

The choice of supplier was based on their proven track record of supporting North Tyneside schools which included a commitment to same or next day call out to solve any technical issues. This was an important element of their successful bid; they were not the cheapest supplier!

Presentations and practical demonstrations were provided to all tutors and initially four training sessions were delivered in house to approximately 40 staff. Jo and Keiran attended these starter sessions and realised the potential this technology had to improve the quality of the learning experience for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. This was followed up with additional one-to-one support and confidence building.

The outcomes

Both Jo and Keiran use the IWBs extensively for a wide range of activities, including:

Sensory Stimulus
Elizabeth Fitzroy’s ‘Sensory World’ is an interactive website especially developed for people with learning difficulties. The website is displayed using the large screen of the IWB to create a sensory room. The Sensory World website has a number of areas based upon a sensory house, which can be entered by clicking on doors and objects using the whiteboard pen.

- A popular feature is the ‘Sensory Room’ which is equipped with Virtual ‘Snoezelen’ equipment. This equipment is designed to stimulate the senses (sight, sound, touch). Learners are encouraged to use the whiteboard pen to interact with bubbles, lava lamp, projector and sound equipment.

- The Music Room allows learners to manipulate their own virtual band, giving them control of the musicians, backdrops and lighting. It is also regularly used in conjunction with live instruments and is very effective in teaching rhythm and beat making skills.

Music and sound CDs are played via Windows media player and use the IWB’s integrated speakers. The ‘visualisation’ facility includes a library of graphical themes and animations that respond and react to a live sound input.

**Engagement and interactivity**

- The IWB is also used to display (live) video footage of learners taking part in music and dance activities to review and assess what they have learned and stimulate group interaction.

- Keiran and Jo regularly use the IWB to display images and backgrounds related to a particular activity. Keiran has created a number of presentations containing images and patterns related to world art, to introduce culturally diverse themes. The Active Studio software allows learners to paint, create shapes, and patterns directly onto the IWB.

The IWBs are also used by other tutors to show step by step guides illustrating how to cook or bake dishes at the cookery class.

**The impact**

Using the IWB has improved the delivery of sensory focussed activities, increased learner engagement and made it possible to create a sensory room in a well used centre which doesn’t have space to create such a room on a permanent basis.

'It is very apparent that the learners clearly enjoy watching the fruits of their labour on the big screen, learners with profound learning disabilities watch the screen with interest’ - Jo Knight, tutor

The introduction of the IWB has also led to an increase in e-confidence for staff. Before gaining access to the IWB Keiran and Jo had functional ILT skills, the requirement to source and produce appropriate resources has resulted in a general increase in e-confidence. Specific improvements in the use of PowerPoint, accessing

[www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
and harvesting web information, hardware troubleshooting and the use of video technology and editing software have all been observed.

‘In the short time that I have been using the system I have noticed how learners have began to enjoy using the interactive whiteboard and look forward to having a go themselves. I also feel more confident using this technology and will be hoping to learn more in any further e-learning training’ - Keiran Steedman, Tutor

Updated skills and the impact on the learners have also been recorded during formal observation of teaching and learning and best practice is now being shared with other tutors.

“The Adult Learning Alliance is delighted at the effort Jo and Keiran have made to embrace the new technology which has further enhanced the learner’s experience. The innovative way in which the equipment has been used will be shared with all teachers during training sessions to ensure that the Alliance remains at the cutting edge of delivery” - Sandra Girvan, programme coordinator for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Tips and general advice on using the boards from Jo and Keiran:

- “Don’t be afraid, the whiteboards don’t bite”
- “Pick up the pen and use it”
- “Just practice”
- “Even the simplest things work!”

Useful links

Jisc RSC Northern
CAMeL Project
North Tyneside Council Adult Learning Alliance
Sensory World

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