P.23 Using interactive teaching equipment in assemblies

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Aim

To consider the use of our interactive teaching equipment in assemblies to

a) engage the children more positively in assembly

b) improve the visual elements of assembly

Background

I am the deputy headteacher of Furze Infants' School in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. We are a four form entry school and have twelve classes of 28 pupils (336 pupils in total) and a nursery with 104 part time places.

Our assemblies are taken in a range of ways. The headteacher takes the daily assemblies for three days a week for the Key Stage 1 pupils. The fourth day's assembly is taken by each class in rotation and their parents are invited to watch. I take the final assembly on a Friday which is a celebration of achievements throughout the week and the children's birthdays for that week. I repeat this assembly for the reception year group. For special occasions the whole school has an assembly in the hall together but as we are such a large school it is difficult fitting everyone in. This can contribute to the children being easily distracted.

I wondered whether the use of the Testbed technology in my assembly would reduce the number of children who became distracted and would enhance the range of activities which could take place in assemblies.

Since the children at this school are very young (3-7 years) I decided to gather my evidence by talking to them directly. I asked the teachers to suggest children in their classes who I should interview and I subsequently recorded the children's comments.

Findings

I decided to use the visualiser in the assemblies. A visualiser is an interactive display device that enables live images of objects and text to be projected onto the big screen.

In Friday's achievement assembly the children are allowed to bring in anything they have achieved out of school time. When this has involved them bringing in something small like a swimming medal or even a certificate it can now be shown on the visualiser and everyone can see it clearly. Previously it was held up and the child walked in front of the children on the floor, which meant that some were able to see and some were not. The children like this because *'everyone can see it properly instead of just the person holding it'* (Jack, age 7) and *'If it's teensy weensy, but it's special, I think the person who's got it is pleased that everyone can see it'* (Karishma, age 6)

The visualiser has also transformed the use of books by providing the means by which all the children are able to see the pictures or a selection of pictures or small objects on the large screen.

I feel that using the TEST-BED equipment has been, and continues to be, a huge learning curve for me. Despite our Test-bed manager's protests that there was such a thing as 'death by power point' I wanted to present my Friday assembly with a backdrop using power point.

At an ICT INSET I put together three main slides. I have used the slides to link together the practical aspects of the assembly that we already had. The first slide was a birthday cake illustration taken from the internet, made large and put on a turquoise background with the wording 'Golden Book and Birthday Assembly'. The second slide says 'These children had birthdays this week…'. When the button is pressed again the names of those children come up one at a time. I have to amend this for each assembly. The named children come to the front while we light the appropriate number of candles on the plastic, but very lifelike, birthday cake, sing the birthday song, clap the right number of times with an extra one for luck and give them a birthday sticker. The next slide is just a gold background with the words 'Stand up if your name is in the Golden Book…'. I then read out the names of the children who have done something well that week from the actual Golden Book which the teachers have written in for their classes. When the children are standing everyone claps, the last key is pressed and a shooting star comes onto the screen.

When I introduced my presentation to the children I had the first slide ready on 'no show'. I explained to them what I had done and then pressed 'show'. There was a quiet gasp that went across the school with a *'wooow'*. In my conversations with the children across the year groups none of them had any criticisms. They had their favourite moments which ranged from *'I liked the cake on the screen'*, to *'The best bit was when everyone was standing up and the star came up'.* The helpers enjoyed being involved. Of course children are used to high level of sophistication in their entertainment these days so I do not know how long the life of this presentation will be. I expect to have to moderate it and perhaps get the children themselves involved in that process.

But given staff and pupils comments I think that the improvements made to assemblies by the technology are considerable. The children have obviously enjoyed helping with the presentation and each week two different children are chosen to help with the assembly. There has never been a shortage of volunteers! When we have established the use of the current presentation I will work with the children to see if they would like to make any changes or improvements.

In conclusion

Overall, I would sum up the main issues as being:

* We do not have any staging so the large screen has meant that everyone has been able to see for the duration of the assembly. This has had a considerable effect on improving behaviour as the children are more focused and less easily distracted. This has been commented on by several of the teachers who felt the children seemed *'really engaged'*, *'more focused'* and they observed that it *'improved their* (the children's) *attention'.*

* In class assemblies teachers are encouraging the children to use the equipment to present their work in a variety of ways e.g. using the microphone (which has ensured that everyone can hear – a previous complaint of class assemblies was that parts were not audible), using specific backdrops, accessing their work from computer files. The equipment is available in the same place and is easily accessible. This and the fact that the equipment can be set up by a technician has helped to cut down on teacher preparation time.

* The children's knowledge, understanding and use of ICT have increased.

* By using a combination of observing each other's assemblies and specific INSET the teachers' understanding, knowledge and use of ICT has increased. However, a small minority of staff still find the whole process daunting and are unwilling to 'trust' the equipment to deliver on class assembly day. Of course, everyone remembers having the audience ready and no sound! A small matter of flat batteries…

What will happen next

* We need to ensure, through training, that all teaching and support staff feel confident in using the interactive teaching equipment in assemblies.

* We need to increasingly involve the children in using the interactive teaching equipment in the production of assembly resources.

* It will be interesting to see if the novelty of the equipment will wear off or not. However, it is hard to imagine the fascination the children currently have with the equipment diminishing given the enthusiasm and excitement with which they interact with it now