

Power to the pupil

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Whether it's used to teach special needs children to express themselves or for demonstrating accelerated learning, PowerPoint is proving a real hit. But can you have too much of a good thing, asks Heather McLean

Tiana presses her head to the interactive whiteboard and looks at it out of the corner of her eye. She is distressed and upset, as she sometimes is, but remains intrigued by the pictures of a Greek band playing merrily on the board. As she inadvertently touches one image, her favourite Greek music plays loudly for a few bars, encouraging her to touch another picture for the same reward.

Music speaks louder and often more fluently than words, according to Andrew Beswetherick, head of sixth form at the Bridge school for children with severe and complex special needs. The school campus, based in Clerkenwell, London, is home to Beswetherick and his trusty PowerPoint resources. He has developed more of these tools to encourage his students to express themselves than he can remember, and is adamant that PowerPoint is alive and kicking.

"It definitely isn't dead," he says. "PowerPoint can be completely transforming for students in some cases. It has various effects, depending on the student. It's about differentiation in order to make them learn. Tiana is learning cause and effect, that touching a picture will result in the sound of Greek music. All the students have their own program that plays their favourite music."

Another of his pupils, 18-year-old Gabriel Hardisty-Miller, has cerebral palsy. Beswetherick designed a program for him to improve his sense of achievement, as well as understanding cause and effect and physical aim in touching the board. Gabriel is placed in a standing frame in front of the whiteboard and is shown six CD cover pictures on the screen. He has to touch them to hear a song.

"He kept pressing the screen again and again," Beswetherick says. "I wanted him to stop doing that and listen to the music, so I redesigned the PowerPoint program so that if he touches the board before the song is finished, it stops and goes back to the main picture menu. You have to use PowerPoint to suit each child's needs."

Beswetherick has designed another program to help students learn to use a mouse. A small picture of their head on a white computer screen makes a pleasant, sparkly sound when the mouse hovers on it. When they click on the head, they are rewarded with a fun sound such as a burp or a drum roll, and the head appears on a different part of the screen. This program is graded according to students' abilities, with a larger head moving around the screen for beginners, and a smaller head for the more advanced. If they find that

easy, the sound that tells them they have the cursor over the head is removed.

Sound and vision

Images, sound effects and music are also important for Charlotte Raby, teacher for gifted and talented children at St Marks primary school in Brighton. She uses PowerPoint to introduce students to new books in literacy by layering features on each other over the course of a week, building up to a big discussion about the book.

To introduce Neil Gaiman's frightening fantasy, *Coraline*, on day one, Raby put a picture of a spooky house on PowerPoint and asked her students to list 20 words describing it. On day two she added eerie music to the picture and they thought of more words. Day three entailed happy music, which changed the children's perception of the house and made them start talking about the concept of genre. By the end of the week, the students were familiar with the picture of the house and the ideas of mood and atmosphere, part of the curriculum for poetry and writing in years 5 and 6.

The following week, she added other pictures and sounds to the presentation in a lesson that introduced the characters of the book through pictures associated with them, such as buttons and cats. Raby explains: "We discuss what sort of book would have these elements. They tend to get quite excited about it all. Then I ask them what books they know well on which they could make a similar PowerPoint presentation, which they then go and do. That allows me to find out what they know and means the kids who normally find it hard to express themselves in class can show me what they can do. It's a very powerful, interactive use of PowerPoint for both me and the children."

Getting students to work on PowerPoint presentations themselves is a great way of making the software really interactive. Peter Sewell, a science teacher at Sprowston high school, Norwich, uses PowerPoint to open up Assessment for Learning. He gives his pupils a detailed task that involves individually creating a PowerPoint presentation. Each student is given a written outline of exactly what details and facts the finished presentation must contain, and what points will be awarded for each area.

Sewell says: "Assessment for Learning is an encouragement, really, but in this case I'm not asking the pupils to second guess what we're after. They know what they have to do to succeed. This makes them critical of their own learning process."

When the pupils have finished their presentation as homework over a week, they split into groups of two and grade each other's work, adding comments to the slide notes feature of PowerPoint. As well as listing three points that were really good about the presentation, students must decide what their peer must do to improve the presentation and increase the final grade. The student who created the presentation then has to make those improvements.

Accelerated learning

At Monkseaton community high school in Tyne and Wear, a group of three year 11 students created a PowerPoint presentation on the heart in a test project by their headteacher, Dr Paul Kelley, to see if PowerPoint could accelerate learning. The idea was to take a difficult set of concepts from core GCSE science, create a feature-rich PowerPoint presentation that could be integrated into a lesson, then test it on 60 year 10 students, with a further 30 as a control group being taught normally.

The results of the test were encouraging. Even though the presentation ran for three eight-minute slots in a single lesson per test group (compared with three one-hour lessons to convey the same information to the control group), three students out of the 60 did as well as the top scorers in the control group when tested on the heart, and many others did well.

Karl Renney, one of the year 11 students who created the presentation, said his group learnt a lot from the process. They revised what they had studied the previous year and also acquired new skills in PowerPoint, including creating moving diagrams.

With older children, Raby has come up with even more original ways of using PowerPoint. In one example, she uses film images of the helicopters on the beach scene from *Apocalypse Now* and the accompanying audio that says: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." She juxtaposes this with a following image of a war child in someone's arms.

"You can imagine how strong those images are for students," she says. "You can get year 5 and 6 children talking and writing madly on that. This method works brilliantly on PowerPoint, if you get the right elements together, and can work for younger students as well, maybe using a scene from *Harry Potter*."

Stella Kaloudis, modern foreign languages teacher and ICT implementer at Poltair community school in St Austell, Cornwall, has used PowerPoint to teach new words, familiarise pupils with countries on the map, and increase the pace of the class. She sets PowerPoint to tick through a series of pictures automatically, showing a map of a country for children to identify, then words and animations of what those words mean, which the children have to familiarise themselves with. If the country in question is France or Spain, Kaloudis will only talk to the students in that language, increasing learning.

Soundclips from Quicktime and Windows Media work well with PowerPoint. The software itself works well on computers and interactive whiteboards for large groups. Hyperlinks to websites and other PowerPoint pages can be used to create multi-pathway, interactive stories that students can take part in or write themselves. The only area in which teachers say PowerPoint falls down is in its inability to play DVDs.

Raby uses PowerPoint exercises with her class regularly. But she warns that too much PowerPoint is not a good thing: "I wouldn't want them to have a

whole PowerPoint lesson; it loses its power. You have to use it very selectively."

Good

- Using still or moving images, animation and film clips to illustrate a point and encourage discussion
- Adding audio tracks from films or playing appropriate music to increase the presentation's power
- Thinking about your audience and their ability to read different types and colours of fonts on white or coloured backgrounds
- Getting students to create their own resources, which can be posted online to share best practice afterwards
- Using hyperlinks to create multi-path narratives to increase interactivity
- Creating quizzes using actual TV gameshow soundtracks for added excitement
- Using the automatic timing feature of PowerPoint to add pace to the lesson
- Turning mechanical processes, such as threading a sewing machine, into PowerPoint presentations that students can access as they need them

Bad

- Hyperactive presentations that use all the software's capabilities in one go
- Putting all the information on one slide
- Talking over the slides too much
- The printed page approach, in black and white, which is then read out word for word
- Too much animation

Suggestions from Naace members and Richard Hammond, head of teaching support schools at Becta