



Hwb+ CASE STUDY

Can networks like Hwb+ help to improve teaching? By Merlin John.

You might think that a teacher rated "outstanding" by school inspectors might be tempted to keep on keeping on, so to speak. But Ceri-Ann Clark has felt her effectiveness as a teacher grow as she has added the judicious use of technology to her teaching mix, and that includes her involvement in leading her school in the pilot of Hwb+, the 'private' part of Welsh national digital network for education.

A Year 6 teacher at Cadoxton Primary School, in Barry, south Wales, Ceri-Ann feels she has got to know her children much better as she has gradually moved away from whole-class teaching. This has increased her effectiveness in her number one priority – helping children to learn.

"Two years ago we had an inspection and I was teaching whole-class lessons," she explained. "I was observed five times during the two-and-a-half days they were here in class with us, and my teaching was judged to have been 'outstanding' in every single lesson I taught. Yet I feel that I am a more effective teacher now in the way that I teach than the way that I was then.

You are dealing with the children in a smaller group every so often and not whole class, so you get to talk to the children more. ***"You get to find out what makes them tick, and then you can obviously feed that back into your teaching."***

It's this different, richer feedback loop with learners which Ceri-Ann Clark identifies as the key to her own improvements. "I am not saying that whole-class teaching is wrong because two years ago it was judged to be outstanding, but I feel more effective now," she emphasised.

Although teachers are naturally reluctant to talk about their own achievements – it usually takes some persuasion – this professional theme was clearly present in other Hwb pilot schools. That's because increased effectiveness can bring immediate rewards, like better engagement of children and heightened job satisfaction.



Up in north Wales, ICT teacher Elfyn Anwyl had also noticed the changes in his own teaching since he started using online

collaborative services which he then incorporated into his work with his learners in Hwb+.

Putting students in charge of the learning gave him more space to monitor their work as they did it, and get closer to them to better support them. It's not simply that using digital tools changes teacher practice. It wouldn't, on its own. It's teachers being willing to try new ways of teaching and discovering how the digital world can help them. Like Sonny Singh, head of science at Bassaleg School, Newport, who says that his own teaching has changed "massively" over the past four or five years.



One significant moment came when he changed the way he introduced Bernoulli's Principle – how planes fly – to his students. "It's a huge mathematical derivation," he explained, "and I would normally have taken them through it on the board, which would have taken about 40 minutes for the derivation. "Instead he used shared video resources online for them to see before the lesson. They were also presented with questions in a survey. "I got their responses in real time and fed them into my planning, grouping people according to the answers they gave and – boom – they were doing the activity. They were explaining what they had seen, breaking it down into different sections. They were doing it. Traditionally, I would have explained it and they would have written it all out."

Sonny Singh is resistant to current debates about "flipped learning"; he sees this kind of work as simply another option for teachers as they engage children in "learning anywhere".

Another moment came when he engaged his learners in an investigation based on photos and facts about the planets. He was startled to hear two of his students, otherwise disillusioned about learning, in a heated discussion about the temperature of Venus: "It was a groundbreaking moment for me – they were engaged and involved. "Everything has to involve what is happening in the classroom and what they are learning. Other than that, if it's not improving what they are learning there is no point in doing it."