

Blogging at Lawrence Sheriff

Introduction

At Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby, a Y7 ICT, a Y7 Science class and a Y11 ICT group used Honeycomb to record and share their learning. This series of lessons provided an alternative to presenting their findings using a DTP package or simply as a written exercise.

School

Lawrence Sheriff School is a selective boys secondary school committed to academic excellence. There are approximately 800 boys aged between 11 and 18 at the school and, since 2000, GCSE pass rates at grades A* - C have been between 97 – 100%.

In September 2003 the school became a specialist college for Mathematics and Computing, with outstanding achievement in these two subjects. However the school also strongly believes in offering fresh and exciting opportunities for every part of the school not just their two lead subjects. The breadth of its academic achievement was reflected in OFSTED's decision to name Lawrence Sheriff as a 'Particularly Successful School' in 2006 - one of only a small group of schools to receive this accolade twice.



Teachers

Year 7 ICT

Chris Jolliffe, who is co-ordinator of ICT across the curriculum teaches the Year 7 ICT group trialling Honeycomb.

Year 7 Science

Sheila Poppa, Head of Citizenship was teacher of the Year 7 Science group.

Year 11 ICT

The Year 11 Applied ICT group is taught by Ann Simmonds who is Head of ICT at the school.

The group of teachers volunteered to trial Honeycomb with their classes because they were keen to try out the new technology and to give students the opportunity to try different ways of working.

During the pilot project, the Year 7 classes have been supported by Ann Byrne, a secondary e-Learning Adviser from Warwickshire LA, but the individual teachers planned and delivered all of the sessions themselves.

What they did

Initial planning by the Three teachers allowed them to each start a new topic soon after the October half-term and to allow 4 – 6 weeks to work on Honeycomb within each of the topic areas.

Year 7 ICT

Covered the topic of Global Warming. Their teacher Chris, set up her own blog that gave students week by week instruction. She also used a blog entry to provide the class with a simple overview on how to use the features of Honeycomb



Year 7 ICT

Sheila's Year 7 Science group covered the topic of Puberty and Reproduction. Using the blog pages gave the group an excellent and highly motivating way to cover a range of topics that could have otherwise been quite difficult with a class of 30 eleven year old boys!

Year 11 ICT

The Year 11 Applied ICT group were carrying out research for the controlled task entitled 'ICT in Society'. The class only had two weeks due to time constraints and were given an open remit to simply use Honeycomb as a method of recording their research.

Impact and benefits

Chris Joliffe, ICT Coordinator commented, *"I am always on the look-out for new ways to deliver the curriculum & Honeycomb seemed like the perfect opportunity. It gave me the chance to experiment with web 2.0 technologies using an intuitive interface so I could concentrate on the lesson delivery instead of having to master complicated software. It created a learning environment that captured the imagination of the students."*

"...I am amazed at the enthusiasm it has generated with the boys." Ann Simmonds, Head of ICT

In general the boys at Lawrence Sheriff found the Honeycomb software very easy to use and were highly motivated by such a simple but different piece of software. The Year 7s liked being able to personalise their work and present their work in a unique way.

"The pilot is going really well with my class of yr7's - they have taken to it really well after just a session and a half (I have even heard that they are trying to use the computers at lunchtimes to log into it!)" Sheila Poppa, Year 7 Science Teacher

In the early planning stages discussions over security meant that the staff had few concerns over e-safety. The classes were given clear guidelines when it came to reviewing and evaluating each others work, and so in general, the boys were sensible when looking at each other's work.

The Year 7 students were all keen to access their blogs at home and the staff felt that there could be many areas in which Honeycomb could be used in other topics giving the added bonus that parents could see what their son has been working on during his school day.

A couple of comments from the pupils highlight their enthusiasm;

"I like that you can congratulate people for doing good work" Joe, Year 7

"... you can just have fun with it" ... Jack, Year 7

Collaboration with feeder schools in order to ease the secondary transition was another area that the staff felt that Honeycomb could provide benefits.

The groups all enjoyed looking at their classmates work. The software presented a simple method to encourage students to carry out both self and peer review and to actually learn from the work of others.