



Good bye chalkboard, hello SMART board

Jennifer Van Alstyne

April 15, 2009

The chalkboard is about to be a thing of the past.

Those large black writing surfaces that left the scent of chalk dust in the air and scared the pants off you as a Grade schooler when you were required to solve a math problem in front of the entire class, are about to join the list of endangered school supplies.

While the extinction of the chalkboard may soon be in sight, 13 year old Robert Boyce, proves there is little to mourn over.

The special needs student at Chimo Elementary School has proven that the new SMART board technology, an interactive white board that projects a computer screen, has largely improved his ability to perform both academically and socially.

Dave Balfour, an elementary learning resource teacher at Chimo said the inclusion of the SMART board into the school is a part of a pilot project initiated by the ministry.

Ten schools within the Upper Canada District School Board were granted to the opportunity to purchase the equipment which would follow one special needs student through the duration of their school career.

These students were identified by their respective schools for having severe communication disabilities.

Boyce would act as the selected student to receive the equipment.

Balfour said he first recognized the benefit of technological learning when he introduced his students to a Nintendo Game Cube as a fun activity one afternoon.

"As I watched the kids, I noticed how well they were interacting with one another," he said.

At this point in time, Alex Dunn, an UCDSB speech pathologist had been working in Balfour's classroom and also picked up on the change in student behaviour when interacting with the game console.

Having previously experienced the use of SMART technology while working with special needs kids within the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, Dunn suggested Balfour attempt to implement the use of the equipment at Chimo.

Shortly after this discovery, Balfour and Dunn, along with Dr. Alison Inglis, chief psychologist with the UCDSB,



SMART. Robert Boyce, a special needs student at Chimo Elementary School plays a game on the SMART board in his classroom. The SMART equipment was purchased with a Special Equipment Amount grant and will follow Boyce throughout his school career. *Jennifer Van Alstyne*

applied for a Special Equipment Amount grant that would allow the school to purchase the SMART equipment.

Today, the SMART technology has a major presence in the special needs classroom at Chimo.

Boyce, and his seven classmates use the technology to discuss and learn about a number of different topics including English, music, history, current news, weather and more.

"Instead of kids sitting in individual desks, working on individual projects they are working together and interacting," he said.

Boyce explained that SMART technology was originally developed for corporate purposes; however once the learning curve for these white boards was recognized, the equipment began popping up in university settings and gradually within elementary and secondary schools.

"What is unique for us is that we are using the technology in a populated class of kids with special needs," he said.

Due to the successes of the SMART technology with the special needs students, teachers at Chimo felt compelled to implement usage of the equipment in their own classrooms.

As a result, the administration came together to purchase a second SMART white board that travels between classrooms at the school.

"You put this board in the class and what might have been a behavioural problem is eliminated," said Balfour.

He noted the importance of embracing student with the tools in which they are most familiar.

"Technology brings out the best in them," said Balfour. "If you give the students the right tools, they just flourish."

Since the arrival of SMART technology to Chimo, Balfour said the children have not only succeeded tremendously in their own studies and social interaction, but encourage and challenge one another – ultimately bringing forth a degree of positive competitiveness in the classroom.

"The kids really feel like they are a part of the classroom," he said.

During a visit with Smiths Falls This Week and the special needs class at Chimo, the students played games, laughed and danced while using the SMART white board.

Boyce showed off his skills with a math game about sausages and even danced to his favourite ABBA song.

As each student took their turn at a SMART program, the remainder of the class sat attentively – encouraging and assisting one another along the way.

"There is no way we could have anticipated how amazing [the SMART technology] has been," he said. "It is just wonderful."

This article is for personal use only courtesy of YourOttawaRegion.com - a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.
