

## **FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE FARM**

One of the key requirements of the National Curriculum is that 'pupils should be given opportunities to apply and develop their ICT capability through the use of ICT tools to support their learning in all subjects'.

Kevin Cotter, Senior Teacher at St Davids Church of England Primary School in Devon, has taken this advice to heart. His careful choice of equipment has enabled children as young as Year 2 to incorporate ICT in a wide range of lessons, from collaborative writing projects to field trips to locations such as the local organic farm.

"We believe ICT should be out there in the field and wood, not just bound to the inside," explains Kevin.

"Using ICT to create text is often seen as just typing at a desktop PC or laptop, but it can be created for different purposes both around the classroom and outside. The ICT shouldn't restrict what the children can do."

Making this possible at St Davids is the Neo from AlphaSmart, a light, rugged word processor that effectively acts as an electronic notebook and can be used in any location. Anything written on the Neo can then be sent via infrared or a USB cable to the school's printers and desktop PCs, and hence displayed on electronic whiteboards.

Kevin discovered the Neo devices in a search for low cost high use devices that would allow more children to access ICT than would be possible in a conventional desktop/laptop solution.

The Year 2 class at St Davids, for example, used the Neos in a collaborative story writing project. They were working on the Gumdrop stories by Val Biro, and created a plot outline as a class, made up of six sections.

The children then worked in pairs, each taking one section and developing the story detail. At the end the sections were put together to make up a whole story.

"By using ICT to edit and extend the text, the children could develop their story sections very easily," explains Kevin. "Because we used Neos, they could work

anywhere they chose in the classroom or even outside, giving lots of flexibility in the writing environment as they didn't need cables or power points.

"The most significant benefit came at the plenary session, when the children watched the story being put together on the data projector as each Neo sent their work to the word processor on the desktop computer.

"This gave us text which we could edit further in the following session. The class discussed the work and suggested changes. Children were able to accept changes to the text when they saw it on screen that they might not have done if it was simply on paper."

Kevin has found that the quality of discussions about children's writing is certainly raised through this process. This in itself is leading to an improvement in the writing.

While taking work outside can be a challenge even with 'rugged' laptops, Kevin found the Neos to be ideal for this purpose. He is closely involved with the Arts and Education Centre OrganicARTS, which is based at West Town Farm in Ide, near Exeter.

When small groups of children visit the farm, Kevin takes along a Neo and a digital camera.

"We want to capture both text and images digitally, which can easily be put together in a PowerPoint presentation," he explains. "The children look for interesting shots, and create captions for them on the Neo as they go round the farm. It's much easier than using clipboards and trying to read smudgy handwriting when we get back to school!

"The Neos are light and durable, so they're ideal for farm explorations, and they don't mind the bumpy coach journey.

"The groups only have a limited time on site, so we needed an easy to use solution. Saving is easy as the Neo saves text automatically - we simply create eight files via the F1-F8 keys, one for each photo."

When the groups return to the school, they send the text into PowerPoint and create a Text+Image journey of the farm. Kevin often puts this up on the whiteboard for parents to see when they come in the next morning!

OrganicARTS were so impressed with the Neos that they looked into buying their own. Fortunately one of AlphaSmart's resellers, 2simple, kindly donated two older models. These are used by visitors to the farm to create a collection of images and text which is then presented to other visitors. The organisation is now exploring additional ways to use the Neos in the field.

"ICT has to be seen and used as an embedded part of our learning to justify the money spent on it. A device like the Neo, demonstrating as it does robust design and ease of use, makes this process so much simpler to carry out."

## **ENDS**

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