



INTERACTIVE TOOLS 'VOTED' A SUCCESS



Figure 1 The Promethean ActivExpression pod

Michele Grimshaw shows how electronic voting devices can prove a useful and manageable tool in science activities and assessment

For teachers in English primary schools faced with an increased focus on initiatives such as Assessment for Learning and Assessing Pupils' Progress, the amount of paperwork involved can be quite overwhelming. However, there are tools that we can use to simplify assessment procedures, while still ensuring that children's understanding of a concept within a lesson has been clearly assessed. These are electronic voting devices. Using these, each child has a voice; the opinions, thought processes and feelings of each class member can be shared instantly and addressed accordingly.

Last year I moved from teaching year 5 children (ages 9/10) to year 6 (ages 10/11), a daunting prospect as I had never

encountered the dreaded end-of-year-6 SATs tests at first hand. I was concerned that children would spend a lot of time completing written assessments, taking time away from vital practical science sessions.

I was given a class set of Promethean *ActivExpression* pods and decided to make full use of them in my science lessons. These pods are a learner response system whereby children are able to respond to a question by pressing a button on the pod (Figure 1). Each child has his or her own pod designated by name or number so it is easy to see at a glance who has got the correct answer and who needs more input on a particular topic.

The benefit of the *ActivExpression* system is that it

enables children to input not only in numbers and letters but also in complete sentences. I found this to be a really useful tool when giving children the answer to a question and then asking them to text what they thought the question was. For example, for the answer 'evaporation', they might text 'the process where water turns to a gas'. This system has been invaluable in identifying common scientific misconceptions that can sometimes be missed when children work collaboratively. It is also easily administered in that it can be used with a prepared flipchart, which the teacher can format, or it can be used spontaneously by writing the question on the board and asking for an instant response.

Results can be viewed at a glance in graph format to instantly assess and record each child's progress during lessons – a real aid to formative assessment procedures. *ActivExpression* is also an original way of stimulating class discussion; it proved really useful during a lesson on Darwin's Tree of Life and evolution. Children could

text their questions to the whiteboard and not worry about whether they were 'silly'. I have also found voting pods really useful in follow-up sessions on 'growing up' talks. The system has the facility to record children's true/false responses and also has a Likert scale which allows children to express their feelings via a scale system (Figure 2). As science coordinator this has been an invaluable tool to use with all year groups to record their attitude to science. The results can be saved and analysed and areas for development quickly highlighted.

Another benefit of using these voting pods is the enthusiasm shown by children in using this technology. The design is not dissimilar to a mobile phone and as most children are adept at text messaging they find the pods easy to use. Even the most reticent children are keen to join in and the tool is especially useful for encouraging those who are not confident enough to answer verbally. The fact that the

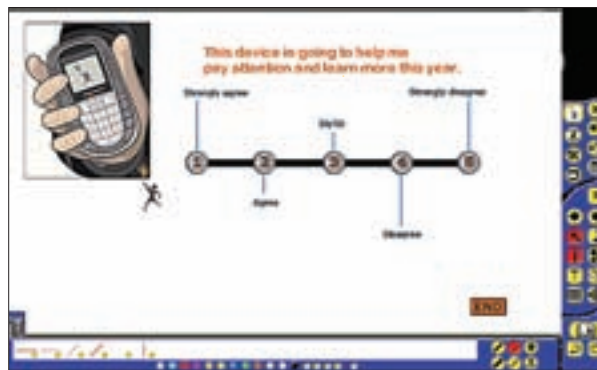


Figure 2 The software has a Likert scale facility, which allows children to express their feelings via a scale system

devices can be used anonymously, with only the teacher knowing who has answered, allows all abilities to contribute to the lesson. On the other hand, it is also possible to view the speed of responses from each child and this was a feature I used with a high-ability group during SATs revision.

The potential for using these voting pods obviously spans the whole curriculum and I have used them on a daily basis within my classroom. They are not inexpensive and interactive whiteboards are needed in the classrooms too. As the primary

curriculum is about to undergo another change that will inevitably lead to many new resources flooding the market, I would say these tools are well worth the money. They will be able to be used as part of the creative curriculum as well as fitting in with new assessment procedures.

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