

Displays for the primary school classroom

While traditionally, Irish classrooms have displayed examples of published posters and teacher-generated charts on the walls, with changing constructivist methodologies which value the involvement of pupils, further learning and integration of subjects, interactive displays are becoming more commonplace in Irish classrooms today. With interactive displays, pupils are much more likely to pay attention to the display if they have to do something with it, rather than just looking passively at it (Moon, 2005, p.146). The level of interaction can range from simply involving pupils in displaying their own work, to writing/recording open-ended questions and answers, to creating a game or competition based on the display or using the display as a summary to reinforce learning on a chosen theme. By creating a multi-sensory approach to displays, the learning generated can involve visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities where pupils look, read, discuss, record, think, touch and taste. This print-rich environment not

only supports content and language learning, but encourages pupils to appreciate a physically attractive learning environment and learn beyond their class textbooks.

This article will define and identify the components of an effective display, along with providing examples of what to display, ideas on how to make your own display and recommended sources to further consult.

What is an effective display?

"Display does not just mean putting up a few pictures or posters on the wall to make it look nice. It is an attractive collection of things which are arranged in a meaningful

way with a clear learning purpose." (Moon, 2000, p. 145) If changed regularly, an effective classroom display has the potential to create a stimulating environment which attracts and motivates students of all ages for learning.

An effective display has...

- ✦ A theme.
- ✦ A clear focus on student learning.
- ✦ Meaning.
- ✦ Connection with the current curriculum topic.



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References

- Clayton, M.K. & Forton, M.B. (2001). *Responsive Classroom* Vol. 13, No. 3., Northeast Foundation for Children.
- DeBono, E. (1999). *Six Thinking Hats*, US: Little Brown.
- Moon, J. (2000). *Children Learning English*, UK: Macmillan Publishers. <http://www.thevirtualvine.com/displays.html>, retrieved 24.2.13.

- ✦ New content and language.
- ✦ A combination of teacher and student generated work.
- ✦ Relevance to the lives, culture and interests of the learners.
- ✦ Simple and clear language.
- ✦ Clear, appropriate sized writing (using either the handwritten school script or computer-generated headings e.g. using *Microsoft Publisher*).
- ✦ Interactivity e.g. a question, game, competition.
- ✦ Labelled resources and students' work.
- ✦ A clear structure e.g. headings; sub-headings, adequate spacing between letters/words/sentences/pictures.
- ✦ Visual contrast, colour and creativity e.g. 2D/3D displays.

However in some primary school classrooms in Ireland, there is limited wall space due to classrooms being in old or in pre-fabricated buildings, and as such teachers may need to adapt their idea of a traditional effective display and improvise how and where they erect their displays. This can be done by using the ceiling, windows or back of door to display students' work as well as hanging students' work from a clothes line, tied across the classroom itself. Alternatively, for older pupils, their work can be stored in a portfolio, which can then be presented to parents as evidence of pupil participation, on-going development and ability level at subsequent parent-teacher meetings.

What to display

While displays have traditionally focussed on subject areas or particular themes such as the seasons of the year, children's learning is most likely to be extended from those displays that feature an in-depth exploration of a topic from a variety of subject perspectives. Current local, national



and international topics of interest can be structured into an interactive display and be explored from a variety of different perspectives. An example below of a display structured on 'The Titanic', in this the 100th anniversary year of its sinking, is a good example of how to construct a three dimensional display that will attract and motivate students to learn more about the topic.

The example displayed ensures children can be active in their exploration of the theme of the display, as illustrated by the variety of activities. It's three dimensional nature ensures it will capture students' attention and provide a focal point for discussion.

Classroom displays can also consist of:

- ✦ Word walls/word banks/topic terminology.
- ✦ Examples of student work e.g. writing, art, stories/poems, student booklets, written presentations.
- ✦ Posters, mind maps, summaries, class rules, diagrams, charts, timelines, celebrations.
- ✦ Flashcards on equipment/classroom objects/extension box.
- ✦ Message Board with lists of 'things to do' or 'messages' for students/parents.
- ✦ Signs, logos, key vocabulary.
- ✦ Topic table: displaying objects related to a topic/theme.
- ✦ Table display: e.g. music/mathematical/scientific/IT aids.

How to make your own display

"Classroom displays are one of the most powerful and overlooked tools for teaching." (Clayton, M.K. & Forton, M.B. 2001) Making your own display requires courage, planning, time and energy and some teachers fear their lack of artistic skills. However, images may be photocopied onto overhead paper and traced using ei-

ther an overhead projector or document camera. Also Microsoft Publisher can be used to create banners and headings and some websites give permission to download images for free.

The following steps are involved in making a display:

- ✦ Decide on theme/focus
- ✦ Make a draft of layout
- ✦ Choose backing paper & borders - choose bright contrasting colours, using the colour wheel below:
- ✦ Create visual impact with mounting:



- ✦ Involve all the students, regardless of ability levels: use the display as a motivator for their examples of work.
- ✦ Label pieces of work, include sub-headings.
- ✦ Reflect on and discuss curricular topic.
- ✦ Include an aspect of on-going interaction to maintain student interest and extend learning e.g. a competition, cloze reading/writing exercise; a question box; changing/adding information to display.
- ✦ Change regularly (Using a thematic approach, based on curricular topics or to coincide with religious holidays, if applicable).

Useful websites

Below you will find some useful resources for ideas on the construction of displays, themes for displays and content for chosen themes. <http://www.davidmawfield.com/assets/img/classroom-display-vine.com/displays.html> - example displays and links

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History
Stories of passengers of the ship

Mathematics
Timeline of events by the hour/date

Geography
Map of the route

Creative writing
Sample menus of food consumed by passengers of the Titanic with opportunity for pupils to construct their own.

DeBono's Six Thinking Hats To promote deep reflection and questioning of the content.