

## Bringing New Life to an Old Language with a Smart Board

### Ancient languages; modern methods

The traditional method of teaching ancient languages such as Hebrew is drilling in grammar and vocabulary, working deductively from a textbook. In this world, audio-visual innovation is presenting the grammar using PowerPoint! It is perhaps unsurprising that many students struggle with both motivation and retention. Revd Dr James Robson, who teaches at Wycliffe Hall, decided to address this problem through introducing some of the modern methods of second language acquisition and providing an interactive, dynamic and multi-sensory engagement with the language and texts of Biblical Hebrew.

Having used an Epson interactive projector in his classes for a couple of years, James went on a Smart Board (interactive digital whiteboard) course at IT Services. He arranged the procurement and installation of a Smart Board at Wycliffe Hall, and set about redesigning his teaching around the use of the board.

### Active learning with the Smart Board

James used different functions of the Smart Board for classes at different levels of study.

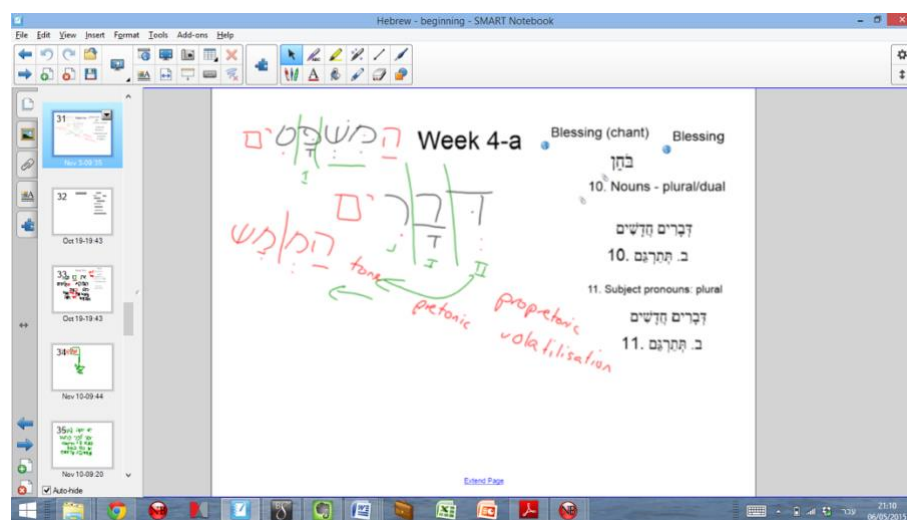


Figure 1 Annotations hand-written directly onto the board.

For **Introductory Hebrew**, he created pages in the Smart Board software in advance of the classes. These gave an outline of the class, with hyperlinks to songs, games, texts, PowerPoint presentations and to other pre-prepared Smart Board pages where particular teaching points or tasks could be found. Students could then engage directly, sometimes coming to the board to identify features.



### Transformed teaching; engaged students

James' new approach ensured variety in the classroom and enabled much greater student interaction and participation. He noticed that they appeared very engaged during class. Student feedback includes: 'The use of technology really lets us get on with the job of learning... so much more packed into the 50 minutes.'

The unanimously positive reaction of students has been reflected in the high levels of take-up and continuation of Hebrew. Furthermore, during the period in which James has used the Epson projector (two years) and Smart Board (one year) seven of the nine students who sat Final Honours School in Theology have achieved first-class marks on the elective Hebrew paper. Two of them have also won the Hebrew prize.

James has subsequently initiated at least one colleague into the benefits of teaching with a Smart Board. He tells us:

*When I was on research leave last term, a post-doc kindly taught Hebrew for me. I introduced him to the Smartboard, gave him access to the software, and showed him the kinds of things that could be done. He has observed that it transformed his teaching.*

### Top tips

James highly recommends anyone interested in using a Smart Board to go on a course, but he also advises experimentation and having fun!

Further Information

- The [IT Learning programme](#) in IT Services offers a hands-on introduction to the Smart Technologies interactive digital whiteboard (Smart Board).
- Revd Dr James Robson also features in a case study in this collection on [supporting tutorials with WebLearn](#).



*Honourable Mention, OxTALENT 2015 award for Innovative Teaching with Technology. This award recognises people who have made creative use of digital technologies other than WebLearn in their teaching. The text in this case study has been adapted from Revd Dr James Robson's entry for the OxTALENT competition.*