

Transforming Teaching and Learning

by Nancy Knowlton

It has often been said that if someone had fallen asleep 100 years ago and awoke today, the only thing that might be recognized is what takes place in a classroom. While that may be true in some locales, a transformation is quietly taking place in hundreds of thousands of classrooms around the world.



Over the last 14 years, schools all over the world have been introducing interactive whiteboards into classrooms with varying degrees of success. As with any new tool, educators experienced an early learning curve with regard to how best to implement it. For them, imagining how interactive whiteboards could be used was the first step in creating a compelling vision about transforming teaching and learning. Many of their early experiments with interactive whiteboards helped us identify what needs to be considered when creating a vision for this remarkable tool. Following are the most common and crucial.

An Interactive Whiteboard in Every Classroom

For teachers to commit to technology, it needs to be consistently available. Permanently mounting the interactive whiteboard on the wall ensures that it is there, ready to go, for every class.

Adventuresome Teachers First

When funds are limited and not every teacher can have all of the technology tools, put the products in the hands of teachers who like to experiment and explore. Not only will they delight in the opportunity, but their colleagues will be eager to have the same opportunity when they see the success of the technology adventurers.

Every Subject, Every Grade

Not only mathematics and science classes can benefit from interactive whiteboards. Literally every subject at every grade level can benefit from a focal point for those parts of the lesson that involve whole-class teaching and learning.

For Teachers and Students

Interactive whiteboards encourage a very participatory model of instruction. In fact, many educators would argue that students should use the interactive whiteboards more than the teacher, particularly in the lower grade levels.

Just-in-Time Training

Ensuring that teachers learn at a comfortable pace can really make a difference. Spread professional development out over a reasonable period. Start with the simplest functions first, such as writing, saving and printing. Then move on to the more elaborate functions, such as importing Macromedia® Flash® files into Notebook™ whiteboarding software.

Time for Sharing

Teachers learn and grow when they can spend time with their colleagues, sharing ideas about what works and what does not. Coupled with appropriate amounts of professional development, this practice can ensure that a teacher's technology use grows effectively.

Infrastructure

Having a connection to the Internet in the classroom and digital content for each subject are often-cited elements that make for successful implementation.

Technology in Its Place

As important as technology can be in the teaching and learning process, it is not an end in itself. It is there to serve the needs of students and teachers, and aid the learning process.

A Comfortable Transition

Like no other technology before it, interactive whiteboards have the power to transform teaching and learning. While many teachers are comfortable with the sage-on-the-stage model, many more believe that a guide-on-the-side model leads to deeper understanding and true learning.

Interactive whiteboards are providing teachers with a comfortable transition between these two teaching styles. Guiding pupils to take charge of their own learning through greater in-class participation is just the start. Opening the universe of learning to them and making them eager to reach out and grab it is our responsibility as members of a civil society. In taking this responsibility to heart, we all help to ensure that a well-educated, competitive workforce is prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

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