

Magic in the Elementary School Classroom

by Nancy Knowlton

There's a certain buzz in an elementary school classroom – 20 or so little bodies bursting with energy, barely able to stay in their seats or sit still. Unbounded energy, an excitement for life and generally sunny dispositions greet elementary school teachers every day. Putting all of that energy into the task at hand and focusing it on learning are the elementary school teacher's challenge.



Certainly in a student's early years, a teacher's job starts with the most basic of behavioral challenges – getting the children to concentrate or at the very least not disturb others. Elementary school teachers have shared with us a variety of techniques that they apply rigorously, day after day, so a pattern of behavior is established and routines for good classroom conduct laid down.

Add a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard to a classroom, and another option comes to life. Younger children are particularly keen to participate. They love being chosen to use the board to show what they know or to perform a task. Teachers tell us often about children bursting with enthusiasm while staying focused.

Early Experiences

Back in the early and mid-nineties, when the SMART Board interactive whiteboard was being introduced, elementary school teachers saw an immediate application for whiteboards in the classroom. They had long been asking students to come to the front of the classroom to solve a problem on a chalkboard or whiteboard. For those teachers wishing to bring the added dimension of technology to teaching and learning, the interactive whiteboard was a comfortable extension of a tried-and-true teaching strategy.

Very quickly, elementary school teachers became devoted users for several reasons:

- They witnessed firsthand the power of the SMART Board interactive whiteboard to engage and motivate students
- With a board mounted on the wall in their classrooms, primary teachers had full-time access to the whiteboarding system for all their lessons, so they quickly developed their skills
- They saw the perfect match between the way the board worked and the needs of their students

Meeting Special Needs

Beyond handling the usual attention challenges in an elementary school classroom, teachers must also address the special needs of this age group. Through the years, we have seen how SMART Board interactive whiteboards can meet these needs in a large number of children.

- With no special pen tool to manipulate, children are able to use their finger to control or write on the board. This simple aspect of the product has been cited many times over as one of the keys to its suitability in an elementary classroom.
- In Notebook™ whiteboarding software, the menu may be moved from the top of the page to the bottom to give even the smallest of students access to the menu commands.
- Sometimes younger children lack the fine motor skills required to operate a mouse. With a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, they simply and directly touch what they want.
- With deaf children, the teacher can stand beside the board and sign with no special tools in her hands. There is no need to activate or deactivate a special pen tool again and again, so shifting between signing and using the board is seamless.

A Rewarding Experience

Teachers have shared with us many strategies for using the interactive whiteboard to gain cooperation and attention. Here are two that put the fun into learning while meeting the needs of teachers and students:

- One child or a group of children can be responsible for getting the board up and running, and for shutting it down each day.
- If things are put away properly or everyone pays attention, the day might end with 20 minutes of *Jeopardy* or *Speller*, two fun games that can test students' knowledge.

One of my favorite expressions is "A mind is like a parachute. It works best when it is open." Igniting the will to learn in those open minds is the magic that elementary school teachers make every day.

Nancy Knowlton is the CEO of SMART Technologies Inc., the world's leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy's husband and co-founder of SMART, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard category. Together they have built a company focused on delivering easy-to-use, feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at NancyK@smarttech.com.