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**Technology in the Classroom**

Over the last couple of years teachers have seen an explosion of technology in the classroom. Teachers have seen Ipods, blogs, email, webcast and Smart boards penetrate their classroom and new students coming in every year that know and expect to use this technology in the classroom. No longer will simple VHS videos, books on tape and overhead projection lessons keep students attention anymore. Teachers need to learn to embrace and use these technologies and understand the importance for using these technologies for the educational good.

When I started this project I reflected back to an earlier day when I was in school learning about writing. Man, was that a different time. My teacher used to call us up for a read aloud and we would talk about our story. Then depending on the day we would either work on grammar and practice writing sentences over and over or we would work on our story. I am sure this is done still in many classrooms across the nation, but these teachers are failing to utilize a whole bevy of technology at their disposal. Students can now be engaged through a whole course of different writing styles and genres. Students can be writing emails, blogs, and making PowerPoint presentations. Teachers can also be using different methods to engage and motivate their students in their writing lessons.

Smart boards have created a great way to engage students in their writing lessons. These interactive white boards allow teachers a handful of great ways to engage, motivate and teach students about writing. Read alouds can be recorded, drafts that teachers write with their students can be saved and recovered in an instant and students can physically manipulate writing. All these things were not possible a few years ago.

**My Project: Smart board in the Classroom**

Last year Charleston School District installed a Smart board in every classroom in its district. This has led to an explosion of technology based improvements for our students. In our grade level we spent the second half of the year creating Smart board lessons for every subject, trying to incorporate the standards and integrate it with the technology at our disposal. The one area we always seemed to have trouble intertwining technology and lessons was during writing. We found it very difficult to create lessons that fully utilized the technology that Smart boards can offer and often made lessons that just looked like overheads, and it showed with our students. They were not as engaged in the lessons by not participating in the Smart board lesson portion of the writing time.

When I started taking this course and reading Best Practices in Writing Instruction something clicked for me. The problem with our lessons is that we were focusing too much on the Smart board, forgetting about the writing, and over time this caused students just not to like writing. For writing, technology like the Smart board has to be used as a tool, not a main focus. Students still need to write on their own and develop their own styles. As I read What a Writer Needs and Best Practices in Writing Instruction I wrote down a list of items the Smart board could be used for.

* Modeling drafting, pre-write, rough draft, editing and revision and final copies
* Manipulating sentences
* Interactive Read Alouds
* \Students presenting their Writing
* Creating Story ideas
* Showing students how to research

These are some but not all of the ways that at Smart board can be used to help students become motivated, excited and participants in the writing process.

**The Project**

With the above in mind I took it upon myself to create some lessons or useful motivating parts to our first unit on Narrative Writing. I teach 4th grade in a Title I school in Charleston, South Carolina. With many Title I schools we have students that range from very experienced and motivated writers to students who can barely write or read at all. My goal with this writing project was to create lessons or at least an outline for teachers to follow that their students could use to interact with and manipulate during the first couple of weeks of school. The following are the standards we must meet at the beginning of the year.

**Research**

**The Future**

If one of the main goals of teaching is to prepare our students for the future then it needs to begin with technology and SMART technology in the classroom. “Seventy-five percent of the colleges main-campus lecture halls are equipped with the smart classroom technology, myriad high-tech tools including digital projectors, computers, and other devices designed for interactive learning.” (Wong, 2008) Our students are going to be expected to understand and know how to use this technology in advanced schooling and the workplace in the future. “Eighty-five percent of the school professors say they want to incorporate technology, specifically interactive whiteboards, in their classrooms.” (Wong, 2008) With all these professors asking for this technology I can only imagine what the college classroom will look like when my fourth grade students get there. My students are going to walk into a room with the instructor expects them to

know how to retrieve and listen to podcasts and come to a class where they understand how to interact with Smart technology.

**Benefits**

In her article Interactive Whiteboards: Creating Higher-level, Technological Thinkers? Jan Lacina highlights three benefits to gather interactive whiteboards in the classroom.

* Meeting the needs of visual learners
* More interactively teaching whole-class lessons, better engaging students
* Using a variety of multimedia within a whole-class lesson, such as video, pictures, diagrams, and websites

These are especially true when thinking about our group of students today. Today’s students are used to and experienced with many visual experiences such as television shows, movies, computer and video games that require students to acquire information visually. “Results support the large screen for delivering target information and learning of other students’ information and learning of other students’ information by making images more visible and increasing attention to the test.” (Mechling, Gast, et al. 2007) Teachers need to mimic these types of everyday experiences to help them learn. While not all students are visual learners many are and that are one way teachers can help their students. In the context of my project, writing is a very visual experience. Students have to visualize what they are going to write, create a story in their head or on paper, draw thinking maps and other visual representations of their thinking. Jan Lacina gave a description of a non-fiction writing lesson in which ESL (English as a Second Language) were read a piece of non-fiction and then had to fill out a chart on their interactive white board. She states “This particular activity was effective in discussing character traits- and non-fiction text- while also providing comprehensible input for newly arriving language learners.” (Lacina, 2009) Many people might say the same thing could have been done using an overhead projector or note cards but Lacina goes on to say “while the same activity could have been taught using an overhead projector, the students appeared motivated and engaged to us the IWB (interactive whiteboard)” (Lacina, 2009). The use of the interactive whiteboard to engage these ESL students shows the potential impact that this technology can have on students that are sometimes overlooked or forgotten. By simply adding this activity to the interactive whiteboard the students became motivated to learn and engaged with the activity.

“Research shows that students learn most when they interact with their teachers and classmates, and technology fosters that interaction.” (Wong, 2008) This is exactly what interactive whiteboards can do in the classroom. When teachers use this type of technology to have students interact with their fellow classmates and their teacher learning can really happen. One way I have seen this happen in my classroom is when we revise and edit. Often I put a piece of writing up with many mistakes in it on the interactive whiteboard. I pair the students up and I have them discuss what needs to be fixed and how it can be fixed. Then after letting them discuss for a couple of minutes I call on certain group to come to the interactive whiteboard and using the red pen mark what I had done wrong. “Increased motivation is seen as a key benefit of whiteboards. Reasons for this include…the high level of interaction-students enjoy interacting physically with the board, manipulating text and images” (Mohan, 2008) Once the students have found the mistake then they have to manipulate the work so that it no longer has that mistake. The students really enjoy working with each other and then getting to come to the board to fix the teachers mistake. It also keeps the other students involved. They are watching one of their fellow classmates to see if they got their answer or to see what the answer is, “higher student interaction is both teacher directed and group-based exchanges-one can interact with the tool at the front of the classroom and everyone can feel involved…the interactive nature of the product…allow for development of classroom activities that are engaging for students.” (Mohan, 2008) I enjoy because I get to listen to the student as they explain what they mistake is and how they are going to fix it and get a real understanding for their learning.

In a writing context the interactive whiteboard can benefit in both the group setting and individual setting if planned correctly. In my classroom writing is divided between three sections, a read aloud, short mini-lesson and then individual practice with student conferencing. As discussed earlier during the read aloud and group mini-lesson the interactive whiteboard can improve student confidence, motivate and engage the students. Kennewell and Beauchamp state “the supportive culture was evident in many of the students selected to work at the board. If they were unsure of what to do on the basis of their knowledge or skills, they tentatively tried on possibility after another, gauging the reaction of their peers and undoing each time they perceived they were wrong. The features of provisionality and feedback can be beneficial to learning as they reduce the risk of failure for learners.” (Kennewell and Beauchamp, 2007) This ability to let students in your class becomes risk-takers, especially in writing when risk taking is of up most important. During the read aloud students can write responses on the white board and saved to be examined later. Another example can be the teacher showing students how to create a story web and making one with the class. Students can then come up later and make their own on the whiteboard and saved for later. Over the next couple of days students can then share their writing from their rough draft and the teacher can pull up their web and have the class examine it and give feedback to the students.

In an individual setting or small group setting this can also be used as a very useful tool. For one the teacher can find an area a small group of students may be struggling with (leads, questions marks, etc) and create a quick lesson and activity to work with those students on and keep them engaged. Also the teacher can keep up a list of instructions and examples of what the students are too be working on when the teacher is conferencing with individual students so as not to be disturbed. At the end of the year in my class I would post the instructions with examples and if students were confused or needed help they could walk up to the board and manipulate to find out exactly what they would need to do. This saved me a lot of time from having to answer questions while my main focus was working with my student during the conference.

**Drawbacks**

One of the more obvious drawbacks to interactive whiteboard technology is the amount of money and the accessibility. Many teachers will not have enough money to go out and purchase one on their own, “these costs include not only buying a whiteboard (prices range from about $800-2,500) but also an LCD projector($450-1,500), a computer, new software, and technology support.” (Lacina, 2009) We all know that teachers don’t get paid enough money to make a purchase like this on their own. That means the money has to either come from their school district, and in economic times like these it does not seem likely, or from a grant or private donors.

If you are lucky enough to have an interactive whiteboard in your classroom there are still a couple of more drawbacks. One is creating a interactive lesson that engages all of your students. This can be particularly hard in a writing class because the nature of writing is very private and small group. Even after whole group instruction the main part of writing is the students with their paper and pencil. One beneficial way to combat this is too create writing groups that you work with at the interactive whiteboard so students get the teaching they need in a small group setting and the rest of the students can be working on their writing. “The size of the group are extremely important…three children at the IWB, which enabled them to all access it easily whilst not allowing any of them to take a “back seat” whilst the other did the work.” (Warick and Kershner, 2008) This example shows an important dynamic to the use of interactive whiteboards. Students want to be engaged by this technology so it is very important to make sure all students chances to physically interact with the whiteboard.

One last drawback to interactive whiteboards is the teachers over reliance on the technology. Amazing technology is not the maker of an effective teacher, an effective teacher will make technology amazing. The teacher still has to provide a safe, engaging classroom where the student is free to make mistakes and the teacher is there to provide advice and feedback to make the students learning real. Too many times teachers become over reliant on technology and then become angry or confused when their student do not learn or show growth. Interactive smartboards can be a great asset in the classroom, but it doesn’t have to become the teacher.

**Connected Teaching Project**

When I first emailed you my teaching project I said that I would be developing the first unit for our Narrative Writing project. However, as I gathered my data I realized that we didn’t need a prescribed unit for writing. What we did need was interactive whiteboard resource that a teacher could go to and get ideas for students who are struggling or just to give ideas to teachers. So this is my development of my slides that are included in the lesson.

Slide 1 and Slide 2:

This is a list of ten narrative stories that teachers can use when they decide to have read aloud for their class. On slide two there are examples of activities for the students to do when done reading or before the story. One example of an activity come from What a Writer Needs and it involves the students going back and rewriting the ending of the story they are familiar with. This teaches the students about different styles and types of writing and gives them an overall better understanding of writing.

Slide 3:

This is an interactive storyboard that the student and teachers can use together. This activity is very similar to one we found in Best Practices in Writing Instruction, Chapter 3. “The aim of these activities was to help children become explicitly aware that stories consist of a sequence of discrete events.” (Graham, McAuthur, 2008) At the beginning of the year we are already working with our students on the basic elements of stories when we read and write. By having this available on the smart board we will be able to have the students interact with the story board and manipulate if they need to fix something.

Slide 4:

This is an interactive timeline that students can create on their own. They can either be given a sequence of events and put them in order, or they can put their own ideas in order to see how they can go. This is often troubling for our students and it would be a great visual for the students to see their stories in order.

Slide 5 and 6:

These two slides involve students sequencing parts of a read aloud or parts of their own story. These slides are great because they can be done as a group or during independent practice.

Slides 7 and 8

These two slides the teacher can use to show and explain the writing process to their students. On slide 7 the teacher can show students how to create a web to organize their thoughts. This can be saved and used when the teacher begins their rough draft and used to show how to take information from their web and create their draft. Students can then interact with this by coming up and writing their own parts or manipulating and moving parts.

Slide 9:

This slide is the culmination of the entire student’s hard work. Students should be rewarded for completing their work and be willing to share their work. For students who wish too they can come up and read their work to the class. The class can then share what they liked about their writing. I realized while reading The Poetry Café is Open that students need to see what can happen when they finish writing a piece of work and should be given the opportunity to share with the class.

**Conclusion**

Teaching is a complex and ever changing profession. Nothing is more evident than the inclusion of technology and interactive whiteboards in the classroom. The technologies are a great addition to the classroom when used correctly. Students become more engaged and motivated while interacting more with their teacher and fellow students. In a writing context students can be exposed to tons of writing, manipulation of writing, listening to authors and gaining an unknown perspective the students before them never got to do. Teachers need to make sure they don’t overly rely on interactive whiteboards and continue to make their students enjoy writing and become exposed to as much writing as possible. The slides I have created for interactive whiteboards shows that when used correctly teachers have access to some creative and helpful ideas. For my grade level the teacher will be able to access and use these with their students to hopefully engage and motivate their students at the beginning of the year.

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