



Feature Article

Promethean and Cisco Bring Learning to Life for '21S' Schools

21st Century Schools Initiative continues to help Hurricane Katrina-affected Gulf Region

February 20, 2007

By Jenny Carless, News@Cisco

Most people can think back to their school days and easily remember a class in which learning was particularly fun. Not coincidentally, that class probably seemed easier, as well. When education is lively and engaging, it helps us learn - and it can stay with us throughout our lives.



Cisco is working diligently, through its 21st Century Schools (21S) Initiative, with many other companies and organizations to help improve schools in Hurricane Katrina-affected areas of the U.S. Gulf Region. One aspect of this collaborative effort is providing technology-based tools to whet the students' appetites for learning, in an effort to create a life-long love of learning that will help them succeed in life.

A number of companies and organizations are working with Cisco in the \$40 million, three-year 21S Initiative. When combined with the power of a Cisco network, these tools bring learning to life for the children in 21S schools.

"The 21S program goes far beyond these individual tools and Internet access, however," says Lori Bush, Cisco's 21S partner and relationship manager. "It's about creating a safe, engaging and successful learning environment. That means developing partnerships with teachers, families, communities and businesses - all working together to improve education."

There are three main building blocks in the 21S program - Connected Schools, Connected Learning and Connected Communities - that build on each other. Connected Schools provides the network foundation (e.g., data, voice, video) required for 21st century learning. The Connected Learning effort builds on this foundation by implementing technology-enabled teaching programs aimed at improving student engagement and achievement. Finally, the goal of the Connected Communities element is to establish the school as the hub of the community.

Bringing Learning to Life

One popular Connected Learning initiative that has already gained high marks from 21S teachers and students is the result of Cisco's teamwork with Promethean to deliver and install Promethean's 'Activclassroom' learning system in 21S schools.

"We call it the Activclassroom," explains Dale Viola, Promethean's regional manager for the Southern United States and Caribbean, referring to the company's interactive whiteboard system, which includes Activboards (electronic white boards), hand-held response/voting devices, educational software and other

teacher tools. "It's a bridge between the old system of teachers writing on blackboards with perhaps some productivity software (e.g., Microsoft Word) and the multimedia-rich digital world the students of today inhabit."

With the Activclassroom, teachers can create exciting, interactive lessons from a rich supply of searchable resources, including pre-designed lesson plans, activities and many other tools.

Students have the entire world within their reach, for example, when a teacher uses the Activboard as a large monitor so the entire classroom can see the same software program, video clips, Website or interactive application like Kidspiration®. Children can take an online field trip to the museum, fly over the Colorado River using Google Earth® or display and use an online scientific calculator in front of the classroom. Learning becomes engaging when teachers use the Activote system, combining the idea of a game show with audience participation; and teachers get immediate feedback on what students do and don't understand, allowing them to modify or alter their lessons to connect with students.

The boards come with a number of resources, including 15,000+ images, photos, interactive modules, maps and works of art - all free. And because the system is an open environment, teachers can collaborate with fellow educators around the world - sharing lessons, experiences, and resources and inspiring each other through Promethean Planet (www.prometheanplanet.com).

Promethean and 21S

Cisco and Promethean are installing the Activclassrooms initially at Rowan Elementary School, Forrest Agricultural High School and Moss Point High School in Mississippi and then, over time, at many of the other 21S schools in Mississippi and Louisiana.

"The local Promethean team was impacted personally by the storm. So we went to Promethean at the global level and asked if we could pledge considerable resources to assist Cisco," explains Viola. "We felt we could be more powerful working as a collaborative group than on our own - and we were in complete agreement with what Cisco is trying to accomplish."

Promethean, in conjunction with some of its partners and resellers, has donated Activboards and software - including comprehensive training for teachers - to the 21S schools.

"We've probably trained several hundred teachers so far, and we haven't even begun the full implementation of the professional development we've got planned," reports Viola.

Rowan Elementary

Rowan Elementary School in the Hattiesburg (Mississippi) School District has close to 375 students in Kindergarten through 6th grade. Because it is a 21S model school, Cisco is installing baseline network technology and support for interactive class activities, individualized online learning materials and assessment administration and reporting. The Promethean Activclassroom is part of that network-centric learning environment.

Kristen Frierson, who teaches 1st grade at Rowan, reports that the Activboard sparks her students' interest in learning. "This brings something visual for them to work with and captures their imaginations," she explains.

It has also helped the students in very specific areas. "We tend to have a deficit of vocabulary skills here," she reports. "But this visual system is really helpful. Sometimes it's hard to find a picture to show a feeling, for example, but with Promethean's extensive resources, I can almost always find an appropriate image."

"We live in an electronic age," she continues. "The Activboard system is great because it allows me to slip into that mindset; I can catch - and retain - their interest."

Frierson uses the powerful combination of the board and the network to address some of her most challenging subjects. As an example, she recently found a creative lesson on rhymes, submitted by another teacher, on Promethean Planet.

"At the beginning of the year, we had a lesson about what it means to be a good citizen," Frierson explains. "We talked about communities and neighborhoods. With the Activboard, I could show photos of actual local neighborhoods, which made the lesson much more relevant to my students."

Moss Point High School

A second school that has installed the Activboards is Moss Point High School in Mississippi, with more than 1,100 students in 9th through 12th grades. Lewis Sims, a teacher there, has been working with the Activboards for two years.

"The great thing about this system is that I can touch virtually every student's learning style - whether they are visual, tactile or global learners," he explains. "I can also record a full lesson, so students who miss a class can work through the same steps we did as a class, just by sitting at a linked computer."

Sims particularly likes the Activote system, which provides immediate feedback from the students. "I can monitor their learning and adjust on the fly around what they understand or what they haven't grasped," he says. "And if everyone 'gets' the concept, I can push forward - or enrich the day by doing something special."

Of course, bringing learning to life for these children will have effects far beyond the classroom - into the families, communities and the greater world these students will enter upon graduation.

"The power Cisco is bringing to the table here will have far-reaching effects," Viola predicts. "Mississippi and Louisiana are competing in the world economy - not just against other states in the region. For them, this is helping bridge the digital divide. I really believe this will open doors and begin a trend, on a large scale, that will serve the students - and Mississippi and Louisiana - well into the future."

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