



My Experiences with Interactivity

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Sep 1, 2005

URL: <http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=169400628>

Ever since I started teaching first and second grade, seventeen years ago, I have spent an unbelievable amount of time scrounging for visual images large enough for the children to see and with which to interact. In my first year, I created my own posters, coloring with markers on posterboard into the wee hours of the morning. I would then use rolls of clear laminate to cover the posters and let the children write on them with permanent markers. Of course, then I had to clean them off with that stinky hairspray. After working a year, I was able to buy some posters and I even had them laminated for protection. I learned to have the children use colored overhead markers to write with, as they easily cleaned off with water.

In the meantime, computers appeared in the classrooms and we were eventually able to use the Internet to find large, colorful images to print and make posters. Using the television screen hooked up to the computer to show pictures from the internet was even more exciting, except that the images still weren't large enough. The only time I was truly satisfied was when I borrowed the projector and hooked it up to my computer and displayed the pictures on the movie screen in my classroom. Yes, it was big enough, but the children could only sit and look at it. I started to miss the old reel-to-reel movie projectors. There had to be something even better!

Imagine my surprise, when I attended one of the sessions at the VSTE conference in March 2004, and, there, at the front of the conference room was a large interactive whiteboard doing everything I had always hoped for. The images were BIG, the children could write and they could draw on the board, and they could even click and drag images across the board! They could go to a Web site and do everything that one could do at a computer. This wonderful invention was called the ACTIVboard. I was in love!

My principal, being the supportive administrator that he is, agreed to purchase an interactive whiteboard to be piloted by myself, a teammate and the technology specialist at our school. The technology specialist even helped us write a grant and we won money to buy an intriguing set of accessories for the ACTIVboard, called ACTIVotes!

Planning lessons for the ACTIVboard became a time-consuming compulsion for me. I'm sure I was more excited than the children, although they cheered every time the whiteboard was listed on the daily schedule. We happily clicked, dragged, wrote, drew and created with and on the ACTIVboard. It was everything I had ever imagined or hoped for. I taught spelling, writing, math, science and social studies using the ACTIVboard. I created some lessons, but there were hundreds of lessons and activities already available. After each lesson, I asked for the student's reactions, and invariably, they commented on how much fun it was and how well they could see everything!

A few months into the 2004-2005 school year, our ACTIVotes arrived. Each child answers questions typed on the ACTIVboard flipcharts with these hand-held mouse-sized objects. For example, if a flipchart was created about the Powhatan Indians, then at the end of the informational section, questions could be typed to test the students' understanding of the concepts/ information presented in the flipchart set. Each child can answer A, B, C, D, E, or F by pointing their ACTIVote at the ACTIVboard and pressing a lettered button. This vote is recorded into the ACTIVboard software and is tallied and presented in graph form. Then the correct answer is given and the children are given immediate feedback on their answer.

Of course, the children were thrilled with this new educational toy. They easily mastered the ability to use the ACTIVotes and were eager to share their knowledge. Imagine that! They were excited to be quizzed! The ACTIVotes enabled even shy students to contribute their answers to a group discussion. As I learn more about the ACTIVboard and its' possibilities, I'm sure I will discover even more ways to use the ACTIVotes.

So, how has the ACTIVboard and ACTIVotes impacted the learning of my second grade students? Using the nine categories of instructional strategies identified by Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, I found that six of the nine strategies were supported in MY lessons through the use of the ACTIVboard and the ACTIVotes.

Speaking specifically of the ACTIVotes, I would like to focus on strategies three and six, "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition" and "Cooperative Learning". "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition" deals with students' attitudes and beliefs. It discusses how important it is to reward students for achieving specific goals. The ACTIVotes do this by rewarding students because it is fun to use and gives them immediate feedback on their progress. Strategy six, "Cooperative Learning" involves using informal or formal groups as a powerful instructional strategy. As the children use the ACTIVotes there is much discussion about the answer they are going to choose. They spend a minute sharing their ideas/opinions with their classmates before choosing an answer. Sometimes they learn that they should have trusted their instincts and sometimes they wish they had listened to the majority. But it is all learning and it is all very exciting to see.

The ACTIVboard is the most innovative teaching tool I have used since I first turned on an Atari computer in my classroom seventeen years ago. It enables me to teach students using a brand new, exciting hands-on method. The entire class can easily see everything on the board and the students can interact with the information that is presented to them. It has completely changed the way I present new social studies and science topics. Using the ACTIVotes with flipcharts hooks the child into enjoying learning because of their active role. Imagine learning about American Indians, famous Americans, the Sonoran Desert and the ancient empire of Mali sitting in a darkened room, watching larger-than-life size images of people, places and things, Not only are the images easier to see than in a book or on a computer screen, the ante is upped when I hand the child a cool tool to record their answers. When not using the ACTIVotes, students can use a stylus to circle answers, draw lines to connect like objects, and write, draw, type and access numerous clip art objects. The ACTIVboard has done more for advancing the art of teaching, and, consequently, the art of learning in my second grade classroom than anything I have ever used.

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