Projecting a Better Image
by Casie Morris

Interactive whiteboards enhance technology in the classroom and help both teachers and students.

In Melissa Turner’s computer lab at Monroe Primary School in Monroe, Ga., kindergarten students are going to an imaginary camp where they earn merit badges for learning the letters and sounds of the alphabet. A little dog, wearing a backpack, leads the way as these five- and six-year-olds learn the basics of reading.

For the past five years, Turner, Computer Lab Specialist at Monroe Primary, has been teaching her kindergarten, first- and second-grade students how to use JumpStart Phonics and other educational software on a PC. This year she began using an LCD projector and a Webster™ Interactive Whiteboard to bring the software to life. Turner is now able to project software images from her computer screen onto the four-by-six-foot wall-mounted whiteboard.

Using Technology to Teach Technology

"The whiteboard is like a magnet; these kids are so drawn to it," says Turner. "It really captures their attention and gets them excited about the impending lesson."

Turner uses the whiteboard to introduce new software to the students before they use it on PCs in their classrooms. Any software program can be brought to life on the interactive board. This process prepares students to learn reading, math and other primary learning skills using the technology in their regular classrooms.

"We’re using JumpStart Phonics, KidPix and Math Concepts 123," says Turner. "The children especially love Millie’s Mathhouse, which teaches adding, subtracting, sorting, making patterns, counting money, telling time and even some division. We’re also using KidsKeys, which is a precursor to kids learning keyboarding skills. We are giving the students lots of opportunity to use technology here so they are proficient by the time they go on to elementary school."

The Webster Interactive White-board, manufactured by PolyVision Corporation, was installed in Monroe Primary School’s computer lab earlier this school year. Approximately 700 students use the computer lab each week. "Since that time," says Turner, "the whiteboard has made both learning and teaching a more streamlined process."

"It makes a huge difference," says Turner. "Before the whiteboard, much of my class time was spent running from student to student to cover the basic information with each. Now all the students are able to see the software on the big screen and follow my step-by-step directions. They can see firsthand how to navigate and they can follow along. The children really seem to get a better grasp of the software and are able to model the procedures more easily. It makes teaching much more interactive."

Turner adds that Monroe Primary School recently purchased a whiteboard on a rolling stand for teachers to begin using in the regular classroom. "It will be a wonderful tool for the teachers," says Turner. "They will be able to teach other subject matter in the same way we are teaching the use of the software here in the computer lab."

A Window on the World

Monroe Primary School is but one example of how teachers around the world are using innovative technology tools to engage students in the learning process. As computers have become commonplace in the classroom, interactive whiteboards have become an essential tool that complements the process of learning with technology.

"Imagine a classroom with a large-screen television and computer screen combined that allows teachers to use a CD-based curriculum," explains market analyst Jeannette Braine-Sperry. "The purpose is to help teachers effectively use their time. Since all functions can be performed at the board, the teacher does not have to interrupt a lesson to go between the whiteboard and the computer. This helps the students stay focused and engaged in the subject being taught."

Braine-Sperry, who is a former teacher and school board member, says students who are using technology in the classroom don’t necessarily focus on the technology itself, but instead on the learning activities they are capable of doing because of the technology. "It’s not a matter of do you use technology, it’s a matter of do you use it effectively?" says Braine-Sperry. "Technology is part of our everyday world and it is how our children will function and succeed in the future. In fact, we have a generation of children who are better at using technology and know more about technology than many adults."

Braine-Sperry says one of the obstacles that PolyVision Corporation has succeeded in overcoming is creating a technology product that does not require hours of staff training. It is very user friendly, which enables schools to save money on training teachers.

Teachers can use interactive whiteboards in a range of options that not only help students learn more
effectively, but also help teachers teach more effectively. Sallie Eckles, computer lab teacher at Monroe Elementary School, says using the whiteboard to instruct her third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students has allowed her to cover more material during each 45-minute class session than was possible before. "When I introduced the Academy Reading and A+ Math programs to the students this year, I could take them through the steps to get everyone up and going on the PCs using the whiteboard," says Eckles. "It's amazing to be able to get 28 children on task within a couple of minutes. We are able to do twice as much, because it eliminates the time factor of me going to each computer to help each child get started. We're now using our time to the fullest extent."

As a class, Eckles and her students have assembled a dinosaur skeleton, learned about sentence structure, learned the Roman numerals and solved division problems on the whiteboard. Currently, students are using the board to learn about the solar system and its planets using the Internet and Encarta, an interactive CD-ROM encyclopedia.

"It opens up a whole new world by allowing us to view Internet sites together as a class," says Eckles. "I've also used it to do Internet research on topics the students are studying in their regular classrooms so everyone can participate at the same time. The response of the children is unbelievable because the interactive whiteboard heightens the sensory awareness. Webster is an integral part of the children's learning process and something they benefit from every single day."

Casie Morris is a freelance writer based in Atlanta, Ga. In addition to her writing, she has been involved in early childhood education for the past five years.

A Few Free Resources

- ADL-- The Anti-Defamation League can provide to school administrators high-quality training and/or resource materials relating to hate groups -- 212/490-2525.
- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms is the nation's lead federal law enforcement agency in the area of illegal explosives. ATF personnel can provide free training of the highest quality in many areas of the country. The agency also produces printed materials that are well suited for school staff -- Arson and Explosives Division, 202/927-7930.
- United States Postal Inspectors have a great deal of knowledge concerning mail bombs. They can provide assistance with printed materials focused on prevention efforts and in many areas of the country, they can also provide training -- 800/654-8896.
- National Resource Center for Safe Schools is a federally funded school safety center that can provide a wide range of high-quality resources to schools without charge -- 800/268-2275.
- The School Safety Project of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency - Office of the Governor -- has 13 full-time school safety experts on staff. GEMA personnel offer a wide range of free technical assistance, training and response capabilities to all public and private schools in Georgia. The agency also shares its information by allowing out-of-state personnel to attend its seminars without charge, and by providing information on its general and secure Websites -- 404/635-7000.

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