

Literacy Smarts

*Simple classroom strategies for
using interactive whiteboards
to engage students*

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Contents

Foreword by David Booth 5

Introduction 7

The 21st-Century Learner 8

Chapter 1: Rethinking Literacy 11

Understanding Our Students 11

Teaching Our Students 12

The Foundational Skills 13

Listening, Speaking, and Viewing 14

Reading 15

Writing 19

Valuing Linguistic Differences 24

Identity Texts 24

Second/Added Language Learning 25

Chapter 2: Using the Interactive Whiteboard 29

Interacting with a Blank Document 29

Organizing Documents 30

Interacting with Ink: IWB Pens 30

Quick Pen Tricks 31

Using Clickers 33

Interacting with the Basic Toolbar 33

Options for Interaction 33

Interacting with Graphics 34

Quick Tricks with Graphics 35

Interacting with Movies 37

Interacting with Other Sources 38

Using Information from Other Sources 40

Chapter 3: Collaborating 41

Organizing for Collaboration: Incorporating the Social 42

Whole-Class Organization 44

Attendance Routines 44

Managing Behavior 46

Independent Learning Centres 47

Small-Group Organization 49

Connecting in the Classroom and Beyond 51

Virtual Field Trips 51

Reading Blogs	53
Connecting with the Local Community	54
Connecting with the Global Community	55

Chapter 4: Communicating 59

Teaching with Graphics	59
Teaching with Photos	60
Teaching with Movies	62
Teaching with Online Videos	65
Netiquette	66
Teaching with Websites/Pages	68
Using the Four Resources Model	69

Chapter 5: Creating 75

Starting the Creative Process	75
Organizing Ideas: Using Graphic Organizers	77
Connecting to Create: Incorporating Other Digital Tools	81
Creating with Digital Cameras	81
Making Movies	82
Creating with Web 2.0 Tools	85
Taking Action on Our Learning	91
Creating Social Action	91

Chapter 6: The IWB as a Tool for Assessment 93

Assessment <i>For</i> Learning	94
Feedback	95
Student Response System for Assessment	97
Assessment <i>As</i> Learning	98
Assessment <i>Of</i> Learning	100
Performance Tasks/Products: Sharing and Assessing Student Learning	100
Assessment and Critical Thinking	103
Graphic Organizers	103
Electronic Portfolios	105

Chapter 7: Reaching All Students 107

Reaching the Whole Class	107
Reaching Small Groups	108
Reaching All Individuals	109
Incorporating Multiple Modalities	109
Other Challenges	111
English Language Learners	111
Students Who Experience Difficulties	114
Challenging High-Ability Learners	117

Acknowledgments 121

Professional Resources 123

Introduction

“Any growth requires a temporary loss of security.”
— Madeline Hunter

The world of education is changing at a rapid pace, and much of that is due to advances in technology. New digital texts are always being created and our students are constantly interacting with them. There is no way for any teacher to know how to use every digital tool and keep current with every new text, application, or program. This book is not about staying current. Instead, it is about keeping an open mind to the amazing possibilities that technology—and specifically the interactive whiteboard—affords teachers and their students.

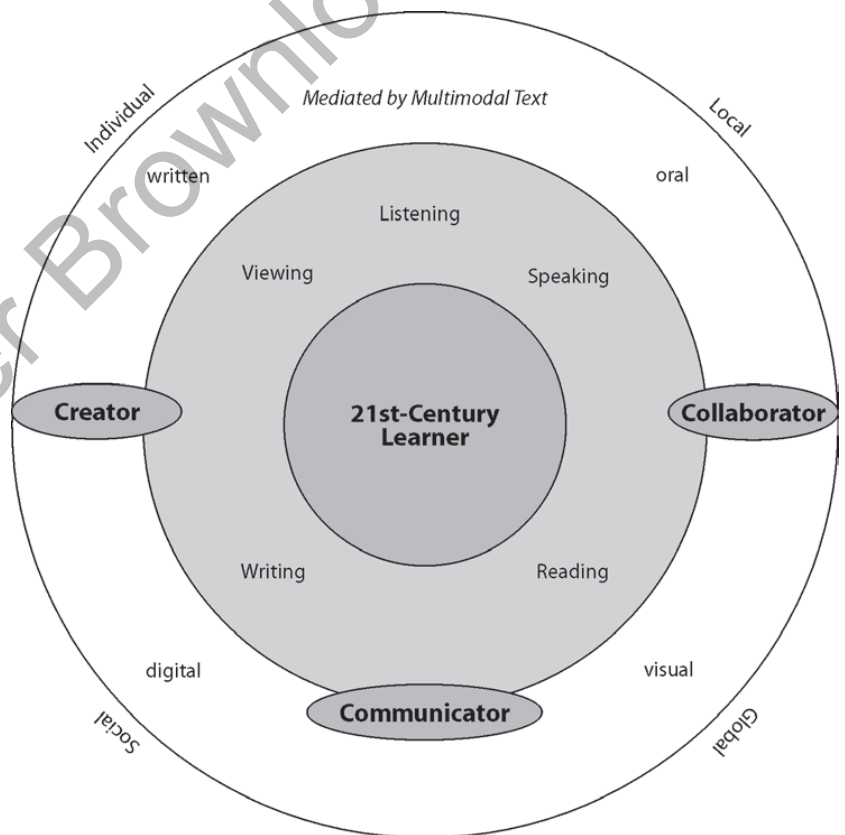
We know that our students are knowledgeable about and comfortable with technology. They are exposed to it every day. They play games on the computer. They receive and send e-mails. They text. They search for information on search engines and print out pictures and information when they are interested in a topic. They work, play, and socialize online. Even our youngest learners see their parents and family members on laptops, smartphones, and tablets. Digital technology is part of their home lives and, increasingly, part of their lives at school.

Interactive whiteboards, computers, and digital technology in our schools keep us in touch with the world of information that is an irrefutable part of our students' lives. The interactive whiteboard (IWB) creates virtually endless possibilities for teaching and learning. It provides access to graphics, photos, videos, moving images, and Web 2.0 tools. It allows the teacher to explain complex concepts to students by instantly accessing a world map, showing a video of a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly, or highlighting the patterns on a hundreds chart by a simple touch of the screen. It leads us into the future of learning—interpreting, managing, exploring, and expanding our students' thinking while enabling authentic learning.

This book not only builds on what we know about literacy development but also deals with the necessity that students think, interact, and engage with a wide variety of texts across all the content areas. Through the computer and the interactive whiteboard, the world is accessible from school. Not only are math, science, social studies, and the arts important content area subjects, but the literacy skills they require must be integrated when instructing the 21st-century learners in our classrooms. Literacy is embedded in almost everything we teach, whether it be planning a guided reading lesson focused on a particular reading strategy or framing questions on how students can apply their basic addition facts. As educators, we also know that literacy is a crucial part of how students learn. From reading a social studies text and having a student explain his/her thinking, to determining a solution in math and explaining it to a small group, to writing a nonfiction report, the basics of literacy are an essential part of student learning. The foundation of literacy development will always be based on the ability to use the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. With the interactive whiteboard, we can build a solid foundation in literacy skills and incorporate the texts, content, and pedagogy that engage and educate our students.

Although the interactive whiteboard has often been used as a glorified whiteboard or a screen to show movies or slide presentations, it has the potential to be much more than that. In addition to being a tool to access the wide variety of textual resources available, the interactive whiteboard can be used in assessment *for*, *as*, and *of* learning. It can be used to easily place, organize, sort, and expand on ideas. Steps in a process as well as final products can be saved, revisited, and ultimately evaluated using the interactive whiteboard and other digital tools. The interactive whiteboard is capable of giving specific, timely, and accurate feedback to learners as they interact with content and practice skills. It is a safe space for students to learn, make mistakes, and expand their learning. It is a place for collaborative learning communities to work, provides opportunities for oral language practice, and offers a space to scaffold all areas of content and literacy instruction. The interactive whiteboard opens a window to the world by linking the classroom community to the Internet and all the information, creativity, and innovation that interaction allows. Our objective is to share ways to use technology—specifically incorporating the interactive whiteboard—to attempt creative, engaging activities that deepen students’ learning and critical thought, but also incorporate the important elements of effective teaching that all teachers know about, think about, and plan for.

The 21st-Century Learner



This graphic represents the 21st-century learner, and starts with the foundational literacy skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. These skills can be taught in a variety of creative ways; can be meaningful to learners; and can be applied to authentic reading, writing, and oral experiences, both at home and in the classroom. We no longer need to teach writing in a bound notebook with “red-blue-blue” lines, or define reading as the skill of “saying the words” in an English print text. The definitions of reading and writing have expanded to encompass a complex ability to decode, make meaning, and use text appropriately, in multiple languages and across many genres.

We conceptualize our students as creators, collaborators, and communicators who mediate their learning through interaction with multimodal text. With the 21st-century learner in mind, we will explore how the interactive whiteboard and other digital technology available in classrooms can serve as comprehensive tools for teaching and learning.

Literacy learning occurs in contexts that are individual: each experience has particular meaning for each individual, and that meaning depends on the individual’s culture, history, background, identity, and language. But we know that literacy learning is also social: language and literacy truly have meaning only in a social context, as students interact with others. When a teacher reads aloud to a group of students, he or she must activate sufficient background knowledge to set the stage for each individual to understand a text, whether through listening or reading. That background knowledge might look different in each case, and the social setting (which includes the students in the class, the teacher, curricular demands, familial expectations, etc.) is an important component of how students understand and process language and information. The local community, practices, and purposes are an important part of the context for learning. Students and teachers are also influenced by the global community, to which we have immediate access through technology.

This book is organized in a way we hope will provide practical support for teachers. It interweaves educational theory, ideas, and strategies that offer suggestions for transferring traditional teaching into the digital world and that are supported by activities and lessons using the interactive whiteboard. You will find specific examples of Interactive Ideas; screenshots are included to illustrate some of the visual, graphic, and textual possibilities available to teachers using the IWB.

So join us on this ride along the path of 21st-century learning using digital technology and the interactive whiteboard. Remember that the ride might be bumpy at times; ultimately, you will reach a destination that will transform your teaching and your students’ learning. As the great psychologist Jean Piaget said, “The principle goal of education is to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done.”