## The Interactive Whiteboard Readiness Assessment

By Patrick Ledesma on October 18, 2010 9:11 PM

As a school based technology specialist, I'm sometimes asked what I think of interactive whiteboards.

Should we spend the couple of thousand dollars to buy some? Do they help students learn? Do they increase student engagement or motivation by getting the students out of their seats and moving around the classroom?

Opinions on interactive whiteboards vary. Some teachers hate them. Others love them. Some use their full potential and incorporate all the tools and features in their lessons. Some use their whiteboard as a projector screen.

"I love my whiteboard!" A teacher at a conference once told me. "It's really cool how you can tap the screen to advance a PowerPoint."

"Wow.... That's just...great." I said....

So, to maximize your technology investment dollars, today, I will share myUnofficial Interactive Whiteboard Readiness Assessment.
Step 1: Buy a fly swatter.
Yes, a fly swatter, the one you hit flies with. They are very cheap, maybe only a few dollars and it will help you decide if you should spend a couple of thousand more to buy an interactive whiteboard, or save the money for something else.



Step 2: Give the fly swatter to a teacher who wants an interactive whiteboard.
Step 3: Ask the teacher to design an instructional activity where students will use the fly swatter to learn or review an academic concept.
Step 4: Then see what happens.
If the teacher can use the fly swatter in an instructionally relevant way that doesn't result in any teacher or student getting swatted, then congratulations! Buy the interactive whiteboard!

If not, maybe the teacher needs something else.

Why a fly swatter?

That was my first step to an interactive whiteboard. When I first started teaching, during a time when we talked about 21st Century Skills and Technologies before the 21st Century, rather than ten years into it like we do now, I had my middle school special education self contained classroom with 10 energetic students with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, autism, and intellectual disabilities.

With block scheduling of each period an hour and a half long, a fly swatter was my life savior for re-energizing or spending energy, creating remediation activities, review games, or time fillers on late Friday afternoon waiting for that bell to ring.

No, I didn't use it in a way you might be thinking. I had the students use the fly swatter to stay engaged, move around, and stay focused.

Need a content vocabulary review activity? Have the students write the words on the board, then organize into teams, then the students answer questions by walking to the chalk board and hitting the answer with the swatter.

SPLAT!

Or, maybe the words were on posters around the room. The students search around the room, get out of their seat, then find the answer, and then swat the answer.

WAP!

For those students with extra energy, it's possible that I told them to walk around the room twice before going to the board and "hitting" his answer. They were always eager to do so. Some even did a graceful leap and swat, sort of Michael Jordan version of the slam dunk.

To borrow from the marketing words from one of my favorite technology companies, my fly swatter was truly a "magical and revolutionary" educational product.

Soon I received an overhead projector for my classroom.

Wow! I was in technology heaven. Now I could easily incorporate transparencies with graphic organizers, maps, pictures, and other visuals onto the screen.

Then, I got really crazy and bought another fly swatter. I had two of them!

Sometimes a student had a fly swatter in each hand swapping multiple answers on the screen and running around the room like a martial artist with two swords... Wap! Wap! Wap!!

Then, the next year, I received the first interactive whiteboard in the school.

Making the transition was effortless because I already knew how to design and manage an interactive classroom where students were moving around out of their desks. I didn't need technology to make that happen.

My fly swatter prepared me for the interactive whiteboard.

Unfortunately, that careful progression doesn't happen very often today.

Sometimes whole schools are built or renovated with an expensive whiteboard and LCD projector in every classroom, regardless if the teachers using them are ready, or if the tools even match their teaching style, or is optimized for their subject.

That's why we see lots of interactive whiteboards being used as glorified projector screens.

We focus on the technology to get the desired behavior, rather than focusing first on the teacher skills. We do that afterwards, when we now have two challenging tasks: helping the teachers learn the technology skills while also learning how to integrate the technology in an instructionally appropriate way that may or may not match their teaching style.

Some teachers make this transition, others continue their pre-existing habits.

A research study highlighted in this **article** about teachers who successfully use whiteboards described it best:
The teachers who were most effective using the whiteboards displayed many of the characteristics of good teaching in general: They paced the lesson appropriately and built on what students already knew; they used multiple media, such as text, pictures, and graphics, for delivering information; they gave students opportunities to participate; and they focused mainly on the content, not the technology.
So, in the future, before you buy that interactive whiteboard, see what happens when you give that teacher a fly swatter.

You might save some money.

And perhaps, as we have now seen the results of when we over rely on technology to shape teacher and student behavior, we will resist the temptation to believe that just buying expensive technology will solve our pedagogical challenges.

And just when I started to believe that level of wisdom is possible, I read that some want to buy "clickers" or "classroom response systems" to help teachers with keeping students motivated and engaged.

So, after hoping that interactive whiteboards will facilitate student movement, we "click" for motivation and engagement.

Oh well.... So much for lessons learned.

Does anyone have use for my old fly swatter?