

Launching a Successful Interactive Whiteboard Implementation.

Strategies and Tactics for Effective Teacher Training

Author: Todd Trombley
Principal, Performance Improvement International

Contributor: Bryan Goodwin
Vice-President, Communications, Marketing and Business Development
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

The proliferation of interactive whiteboards in the classroom has brought many challenges, not the least of which is how to properly prepare teachers to take full advantage of the technology. This is no small undertaking, given the usual obstacles of time, money and teacher attitudes. In addition, there is an inherent Catch-22: teachers must be comfortable with the technology to use it, and they must use it to become comfortable with it. The only way to address this issue is to implement a formal and sustained training program. This white paper offers a model for a successful approach to training teachers in the use of interactive whiteboards.

■ Defining Basic Training

Initial training (often referred to as foundational training) is typically a formal, scheduled event for a group of teachers. These sessions are led by an expert—usually supplied by the vendor—who is well-versed in the IWB software as well as the client's classroom environment, teaching practices and curriculum. In addition to introducing the teachers to the hardware, the trainer typically covers 6 to 12 topics related to the software. Ideally, the software will already have been loaded on teacher laptops, even if the IWBs aren't in place yet. The trainer will have teachers create lessons that demonstrate their understanding of covered material, then return with the lessons at a subsequent training to ensure retention. This method combines spaced repetition and practical application, two key learning methods. It also allows teachers to try tools, identify problem areas and bring issues to the trainer before they give up.

■ Scheduling of Training Sessions

Foundational training averages six to eight hours: a two-hour orientation that covers opening software and using basic functions, and at least another four hours on more

specific topics. For each of the topics introduced, the trainer will spend about 15 minutes demonstrating and explaining the tool's common curricular use. Then each teacher will spend about 5 to 15 minutes trying it, and the group will close with about 10 minutes of discussion.

Best practices indicate most training should be done as close to beginning usage as possible, then two to three follow-up sessions should occur within the first year. As a minimum, the first session should be three to six hours, perhaps as part of a professional development day or in-service. The second training is about two to four hours during the first academic trimester; the third and fourth sessions are about an hour or two each during the last two trimesters. The following year, an in-service refresher of between two to four hours is held before school starts.

■ The Role of the Principal

One person must spearhead the IWB implementation, setting the tone and pushing for the change. In most cases, this is the building principal. The principal's key role is to send the message that whiteboard use is not only expected, it is valued and will benefit teachers as

well as students. One valuable strategy is to convey these expectations in writing, through a document—signed by the principal and the teachers—that sets forth shared goals and non-negotiable commitments for training and use.

The principal also has a public relations role. He or she must spread the whiteboard news to parents, school boards and the community. This reminds teachers that everyone knows about the technology and is expecting to see it being used. The principal must reinforce these messages during regularly scheduled staff meetings—initially devoting about a third of the meeting time to the topic, then gradually reducing time spent at subsequent meetings. These meetings should include teachers sharing their experiences, successes, applications and challenges.

■ Train-the-Trainer Models

Throughout an IWB implementation, the most important training is conducted by lead teachers, technology specialists and other peers. It is advisable to formalize this approach with a “Train-the-Trainer” model, where these mentors and coaches are instructed in how to provide ongoing assistance to teachers. Train-the-Trainer sessions last about three times longer than teacher-training sessions, because trainers must be highly competent in many areas. The trainer should be familiar with the curriculum and use actual content during training. The trainers and the building principal should meet regularly to discuss implementation strategies and professional development goals.

■ The Importance of Classroom Observations

Foundational training is followed by less formal professional development or classroom support, which is largely observational. The observer—often the building principal—sees teachers using the whiteboards to enhance instruction and improve lessons. The principal’s role in classroom observations may be supplemented by a lead teacher or technology support specialist who also can observe and provide coaching support to teachers in the classroom.

Scheduled observations ensure teachers will use the technology and know which tools to demonstrate and when. During preparation, teachers should be

encouraged to seek assistance from support personnel and coaches, which leads to the creation of a learning community and to increased and better use of the IWB. Observations also allow principals to identify teachers who are under-using their whiteboards and address their concerns.

■ Creating a Certification Program

Teachers can be motivated to use whiteboards by seeing their peers being recognized for success. Thus, the training and implementation process can be enhanced with a certification program, whereby teachers can be certified at levels of competency and then mentor peers. Vendors should assist with this certification process, as this support will lead to broader implementation and success. Certification can be part of a broader recognition program that casts a spotlight on teachers who are successfully using interactive whiteboards. This builds momentum for the implementation by encouraging others to use the boards.

■ Understanding Teacher Technology Profiles

With IWBs, as with other educational technology tools, teachers fall into one of three groups: early adopters, reluctant joiners or disinterested resisters. Your training and implementation plan should address all three groups. In an ideal deployment situation your initial focus should be on early adopters. They will finish the initial session and eagerly learn more on their own, and their enthusiasm and success will encourage the more adventuresome of their colleagues. Reluctant joiners will need more time, follow-up and coaching to fully understand and appreciate the technology. Disinterested resisters will be most difficult and time-consuming to reach; they will be brought into the fold only after seeing their colleagues reap the rewards of successful IWB use. For some in this last group, the school principal may need to make clear that implementation is not an option; everyone must use the whiteboards. But even with this group, carrots are better than sticks. The principal needs to help these teachers visualize the new reality—how the whiteboards will improve their lives and those of their students. The appeal can be factual (this will help instructional strategies) or emotional (this will be a really good thing that will make lessons more interesting).

■ Managing Expectations

Infusing IWBs into every teacher's daily practice is a worthy goal, but one that may take two or three years to accomplish. In some schools, whiteboards are provided only to selected teachers based on their technology profile. In this situation, training becomes easier because it is more focused and you are mostly dealing with early adopters. In other situations, there may be a full adoption—where all teachers in an entire grade, or an entire school, are expected to use the whiteboards regardless of their technology profile. In these cases, because of the mixed nature of the cohort, the district must prepare for extra training and support. In either

case, it is imperative that you not implement more boards than you can support at any given time. One reasonable approach may be to install 20 whiteboards the first year, then have those 20 teachers help the next group use them in the second year, and so on.

It is also important to manage expectations about how frequently IWBs should be used. Whiteboards don't need to be used all day, every day. Sometimes it is better to start small—for instance, suggesting that teachers use just some of the whiteboard's features or that they use the devices for just some subjects. Over time, teachers will branch out as they see the instructional benefits.

Assessing Return-On-Investment and Ensuring Success

The ROI of a whiteboard implementation can be measured in different ways: Are student outcomes improving, as measured by test scores or observation? Are teachers using the IWBs effectively within their instruction? Is the level of technology usage increasing? Knowing how you will assess the ROI of your whiteboard implementation in the planning stage will help you determine the appropriate focus of your training, implementation and ongoing support efforts. Moreover, setting metrics for ROI assessment at the outset of the implementation will also help you avoid a common mistake: opting out of training because of lack of personnel, time or money. This short-sighted view will doom the program to being used below its potential or not at all. By defining your ROI and addressing it in a training plan, you will be able to justify what amounts to a small percentage of the purchase price to provide support necessary for success.

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For more information:

www.hitachisolutions-us.com/starboard

contact@hitachisolutions-us.com

1-800-HITACHI