



The Original Smart Board - The Slide Rule

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New forms of technology are invented each day. They pop up in the most peculiar places and sometimes in disguise. Some teachers are instantly leery of gadgets. I remember in elementary school, we got new math textbooks that had a page where students could practice using calculators. Some teachers skipped this page, saying it was unimportant or worse, cheating. But that was the page in the chapter students were most excited about. Calculators were eventually accepted as a legitimate educational tool; however, when calculators programmed with games arrived, it was a slippery slope from there. This has been the pattern in education for the past twenty years or more. Is technology a tool or a game? Is it educational or is it entertainment?

Schools during the early 2000's began to ban cell phones in class because they were deemed to be a distraction; but it became more complex. Then came music players that doubled as phones and tripled with internet access. Technological advances kept coming so rapidly that some teachers began to visibly age before our eyes as they tried to keep up to the latest technology and maintain the interest of their students. When students are used to megabytes of information coming at them in nano-seconds, the teacher's lesson plan has to be pretty snappy to compete! As a grad class caught in the transition of the literary era to the technological revolution, our teachers turned to us in desperation, searching for methods that would capture the attention of their future students for one hour and fifteen minutes.

First we have to recognize the technology that hinders the teacher. Since the release of the iTouch and its quick consumption of the teenage mind, teachers have suffered increased difficulty keeping the focus on curriculum. The trivial high school drama that once passed through the conventional gossip mill into the eager ears of eavesdroppers now spreads like wild fire. Secretly passing notes takes on a whole new level of speed and range. Students squirm in their seats waiting for the bell to seek the source of the tale. The texting frenzy added to the millions of iTouch game applications is what teachers are up against. In a battle between Louis Riel and Rainbow Unicorn Attack, the odds are, students will be engaged by the latter. With such a wide variety of distractions the teacher has to match with an equally interesting variety of attractions.

Secondly, we have to analyze the group we are targeting. These younger generations have been born into technology. They have never known a world without it. It has followed them from birth in the forms of auditory brain games, which savvy marketers have enticed their parents to buy. The coming generation has been raised not with bedtime stories but with *Leap Frog Learning Toys* and *Educational Gifts*, which means they respond not just to visual and auditory learning but more importantly to interactive "techy" and flashy games. The days of word searches and connect the dot photocopies that preoccupied my childhood are gone. Teachers have to accept this reality to be able to reach the student of today.

Added to the teacher's challenge is that the old paper model of lesson plans, textbooks and homework are becoming obsolete. Websites such as Moodle and ebooks have begun to replace paper in hopes of reaching out to engage kids. And the teacher should not write these technological advances off as simple entertainment and distraction. Conscientious students are not so naïve as to think e-books are mere

entertainment. Today's students are more and more concerned about a sustainable world as a paperless society is encouraged at every turn. A wise teacher would be hard pressed to deny the importance of this.

But hope is not far off! It hangs from the wall and is hooked up to laptops. Already installed in six of my school's most used classrooms are SMART Boards, more commonly known as interactive white boards. Something about an enlarged computer screen on a wall can attract eyes like bees to honey. The SMART Board, appropriately named, can allow visual learning through the use of topic related pictures, videos, as well as allowing the teacher to write up notes clearly in place of a dingy overhead projector. This allows visual learners to process the information being portrayed to them more efficiently. It also allows for auditory learning, which aids those accustomed to learning by ear through sounds or music. But the most beneficial element of the board allows for student interaction. Teens are thrilled by the hands-on response of touch screens. Perhaps down the road, this will become old news, but currently having the privilege of writing on the SMART board of presenting to the class using it, creates a sense of elation and confidence. Students get the message they are trusted and their style of learning is valued.

While cell phones and iPods detract from student engagement, teachers are learning to fight back. By responding to the learning styles of students, teachers who embrace SMART board and similar technology will engage their students. My grandfather, an engineer, hangs onto his slide rule to calculate logarithms and trigonometry. And he always teases my grandmother, saying the reason he married her was because not only did she know how to type, but she owned her own typewriter! My grandmother, a teacher, learned how to make copies on jelly pads at Normal School. She marveled when mimeograph machines were brought in. I wonder if these tools were once considered too advanced to have a place in schools. In their day, were they considered to be too much of a distraction; simply entertainment at the students fingertips? Were the slide rule and jelly pad once considered a hindrance to student engagement? Teachers who can embrace change and stay current with the use of technology will ultimately control the masses fighting fire with fire, engaging students with the allure of their poison: technology.
