

# Early Education

**EDCompass** newsletter

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## An Early Start to Engagement

By **Kim Hamill**

"Working by themselves, sitting at a desk, is not what 21st-century learners should be doing" is Diane Ireland's viewpoint.

And she should know. Ireland teaches a room full of students who were born in the 21st century – they don't remember what it was like before iPods and Google™ entered classrooms around the world.

So in Ireland's second-grade classroom at [William R. Davie Elementary School](#) in Mocksville, North Carolina, her students have access to the kinds of classroom technology that enable them to collaborate, engage in lessons and get excited about learning.

One of the ways that Ireland facilitates these types of learning experiences is by incorporating the [SMART Table™ interactive learning center](#) into her lessons.

"I feel the SMART Table is an asset in the 21st-century classroom and allows the teacher to become the facilitator as the students become the true learners. Tools like the SMART Table provide opportunities for the learners to engage, problem solve, communicate and collaborate," Ireland says.

The multitouch capabilities of the SMART Table help Ireland facilitate collaboration and sharing, and she says that the applications themselves increase cooperation in the classroom.

For encouraging collaboration, Ireland especially likes to use the SMART Table activity, [Addition](#), because it requires each student to communicate and contribute to the answer. Students answer addition and subtraction questions by placing the correct number of fingers on the interactive table surface.

"If they are doing a 12-minus-7 problem and the answer is 5, you have four kids that have to figure out who's going to put down how many fingers to get the right answer," Ireland explains.

"They all have to work together because automatically they all want to put five fingers down, but then if you have four kids, the answer is 20. So they have to figure out, okay, if you just put one finger down, and I'll put two down, and the rest of you put one down, then it will work," she laughs.

The SMART Table is a success in Ireland's classroom because it's specifically made for the age group of her students – its colorful activities and innovative design enable early elementary students to build the important social and academic skills that are necessary for success in future grades.

And the SMART Table is not the only way Ireland adds interactivity to learning. She often starts her lessons with an activity on the [SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard](#), and then uses the SMART Table for small-group reinforcement and further exploration of the topic. Recently, she's been experimenting with another SMART product designed for early grades – the [SMART Response™ LE interactive response system](#).

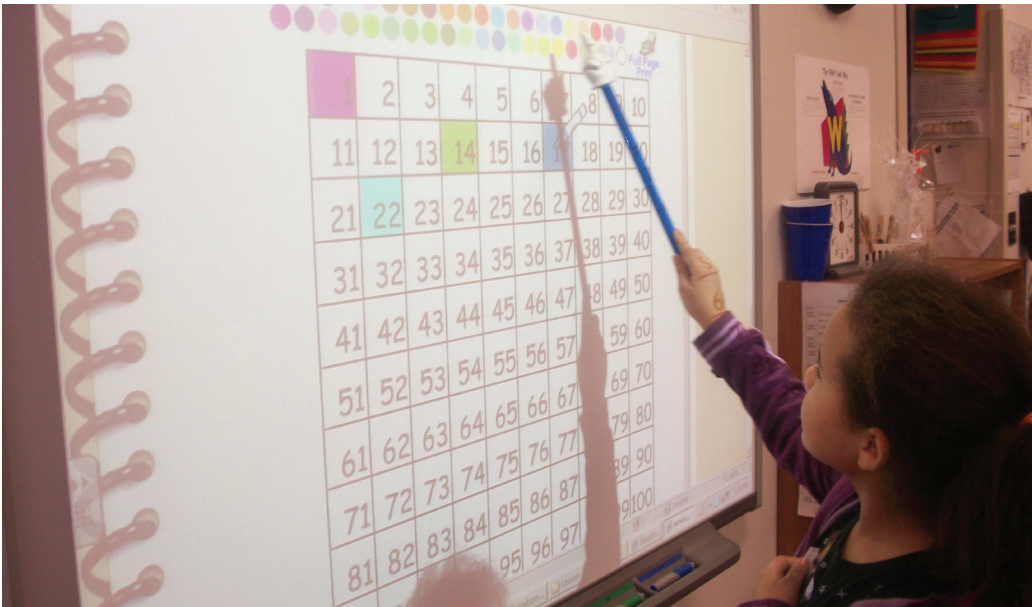
The SMART Response LE system is a new addition to her classroom, and she currently has 12 remotes (or clickers), so with 17 students in her class, it means her students have another opportunity to cooperate and build consensus skills by pairing up to answer questions using the colorful symbols on their remotes.



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**Diane Ireland**

Second-Grade Teacher  
William R. Davie Elementary School  
Mocksville, North Carolina



Using SMART products has increased the engagement and involvement outside of Ireland's classroom, as well. When she first started using the SMART Table, parents began inquiring about the new product and actually came to the school to see what their children were using to learn.

"This type of new technology intrigued the parents, and they were so appreciative of their children being able to use the SMART Table in order to become lifelong learners and explorers at William R. Davie School," she says.

"Parents would even bring younger siblings into the school in the mornings and afternoon to 'play' on the SMART Table. This is one benefit about having a new tool like the SMART Table in your classroom – more parent involvement."

### Empowering young learners

Lara Lindsey, Director of Instructional Technology at [McKinney Independent School District \(ISD\)](#) in McKinney, Texas, is also seeing a dynamic shift in her district's elementary schools since they started using SMART products.

McKinney has SMART Board interactive whiteboards in every kindergarten through fifth-grade classroom. The district also has nine SMART Table interactive learning centers, which are spread throughout their K–3 classrooms and the early education center.

Many of the McKinney elementary classrooms received the interactive whiteboards and the [SMART Document Camera™](#) as part of a pilot project in 2009. Lindsey says that not long after the pilot started, they were seeing some amazing results, so they rolled out an initiative to put an interactive whiteboard in every classroom.

"We were noticing that it wasn't the teacher doing the teaching anymore – it was empowering students to be their own teachers. Obviously they were more engaged. Teachable moments became much more engaging. It wasn't the teacher standing in front of the room anymore, it was students guiding their own learning," Lindsey says.

She says that the introduction of SMART products has resulted in classrooms with a stronger sense of community, more student-centered learning opportunities and a more inclusive atmosphere.

"SMART Boards are empowering students, it's encouraging their use of imagination," Lindsey says. "In most instances, there are right or wrong answers, but taking the risk isn't quite as scary if something is exciting and fun."

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#### Lara Lindsey

Director of Instructional Technology  
McKinney Independent School District  
McKinney, Texas



The SMART Table is having the same effect on teaching and learning in the district. Lindsey says when she sees younger learners working in groups around the SMART Table, there's a sense of community – each student is working together toward a common goal. For McKinney ISD, the ability to include every student in the learning process is one of the key benefits of these interactive learning centers.

“Before SMART rolled around, I taught in black and white. I had a white piece of chalk in my hand and I wrote on a blackboard. And what SMART provided for me, it created a world that was now in color.”

**Keith Comeau**

Third-Grade Teacher  
and Acting Vice Principal  
Gretna Green Elementary  
Miramichi, New Brunswick

“We have a lot of kids that are special needs [at the early education center], and they have not always been able to participate in the same activities that other students have,” Lindsey says. “It’s the fact that everybody is on a level playing ground – that they are touching the screen. Even if the teacher has to facilitate that by moving the child’s arm, he participated that day. And that’s always exciting, to see kids that normally are not participating doing that with the SMART Table.”

Students aren’t the only ones seeing the benefit. Teachers, according to Lindsey, are comfortable using SMART products, and it’s resulted in a paradigm shift in the way they are thinking about teaching. In fact, Lindsey jokes, if the district ever took away the SMART Board interactive whiteboards, she might have a “mutiny” on her hands!

“It has changed the way elementary school teachers teach school,” she says. “It’s changed everything about the way they do business in an elementary classroom.”

**Creating vibrant learning experiences**

Educators at [Gretna Green Elementary](#), a [SMART Showcase School](#) in Miramichi, New Brunswick, have also seen the impact that SMART products can have on teaching – an impact that translates into more engaging learning experiences for students.

“Before SMART rolled around, I taught in black and white. I had a white piece of chalk in my hand and I wrote on a blackboard. And what SMART provided for me, it created a world that was now in color,” says Keith Comeau, a third-grade teacher and acting vice principal of the school, who has been using SMART products for over eight years.

“I’ve got these interactive lessons that kids can go up and interact with shapes and forms and words, language and sounds, audio and video. That never existed prior to SMART Boards rolling in the classroom,” he adds.

Creating active, engaging lessons is particularly important for Comeau, because his students are enrolled in the French immersion program.

“I am an early educator and on top of that, I teach a second language. And as a second language teacher, you really have to provide opportunities for kids that are visual. You need to have an aspect



of audio, and I always felt it needs to be kinesthetic. When I teach, I tend to teach in five- to eight-minute chunks – there’s a lot of movement, there’s a lot of interaction,” he says.

Comeau is a strong believer in project-based learning, and often uses SMART products, like the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, [SMART Response PE interactive response](#) system and the SMART Document Camera to facilitate this type of learning.

As part of their projects, Comeau’s students are encouraged to make their own lessons using [SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software](#) and share them in the classroom and beyond.

Recently, he connected the junior reporters from the school’s [GG Times](#) with two other schools in the province. The GG Times team shared their tutorial-style lessons created in SMART Notebook software with these other schools to show them how to begin a successful junior reporter program in their schools. This session has led to ongoing discussions and follow-up among the three schools.

“When students are creating their own authentic learning experiences, they are creating that through SMART content. If we [as teachers] create SMART lessons to teach a lesson, they in turn create their own SMART lessons to teach each other, and it’s a wonderful learning opportunity for everyone,” says Comeau.

Extraordinary moments like these are not uncommon in Comeau’s classroom. He recalls when he was teaching fifth grade and started using the SMART Response system in his classroom.

“I can still remember one little boy that I had who struggled from kindergarten to grade four, and he was in my grade-five classroom. He looked at me, and he had that remote in his hand, and he said, ‘Mr. Comeau, this is the first day that I can ever remember, that a teacher made learning fun.’ And those are the moments that you’ll never forget,” he says.

For Comeau, Ireland and Lindsey, it’s times like these that show the value of using SMART Board interactive whiteboards, the SMART Table and SMART Response systems in early elementary classrooms. **EC**

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