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Simple Techniques for Creating Effective Lesson Activities

By **Wendy McMahon**

Aly Fox didn't instinctively know how to create engaging, effective lesson activities before she started using her **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard**. But after some exploration and investigation, she's now a **SMART Exemplary Educator**, a **SMART Trade Show Teacher** and part of the reason **Palmview Elementary** is a **SMART Showcase School**.

"I've learned by doing," says Fox, who has taught second grade at Palmview in Pompano Beach, Florida, for five years. She is just one of the education professionals that we spoke with while putting together this content creation guide. They've shared ideas, techniques, tools and tips for preparing all types of digital content for the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and **SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software**. And in many cases, they've even shared complete lesson activities as well.

Start simply

The educators and experts we spoke with agree that digital content doesn't have to be complicated to make an impact. In fact, even the simplest learning resource can enhance learning when you employ the features available in SMART Notebook software and use the activity effectively.

"I could have words up on a page, and I could circle the word. But how much more powerful is it when I use the magic pen to highlight the text?" asks Heather Lamb, SMART's education consultant in Texas. Lamb has also presented at many SMART content creation seminars, which are regularly held in cities across the United States.

Lamb says using color can also easily boost the power of a lesson, and one of her favorite color techniques is called Hide and Reveal. For example, Lamb created a lesson activity for a science class that asks students to identify the parts of a cell. In this activity, Lamb labeled the diagram in white text to match the background, rendering the words invisible. She then used the ordering feature in SMART Notebook to send the text to the front. During the lesson, students can move a blue circle, which contrasts with the white text, to reveal the correct answer.

"That's interactive," explains Lamb. "It's not really that anything I'm doing is extremely difficult, but it's those techniques like using color that can enhance a lesson."

Shawn Beard, a coordinator and instructor with **The Eighth Floor**, a technology and learning center for educators, agrees with Lamb's simple approach to using digital content.

Because Beard's primary role is to show teachers how to effectively use SMART products, he sees plenty of teachers who are new to using SMART Board interactive whiteboards. New users are often intimidated because they aren't sure how to best create and use digital content.



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Education Consultant
SMART Technologies



But as Beard knows from his experience with The Eighth Floor and his time spent as a classroom teacher, even a simple piece of clip art or a three-minute video can reinforce and add to the lesson. “Maybe the digital content is a SMART Response™ question or a multiple choice activity from the [Lesson Activity Toolkit](#) that reinforces what they just learned. “It doesn’t have to be extremely complex,” explains Beard.

“When I would teach, I would create content pages where we would talk about the specific detail of the content. Then I would follow up with maybe a short clip or a hands-on lesson activity on a page so the students could come up and put into practice what they just learned,” says Beard.

A simple way that Beard says you can make your content more effective is to use the title and lesson pages from the Lesson Activity Toolkit. He says this small step can not only make the lesson go more smoothly, but provides other teachers who may use the lesson with information on its objective, the topics covered and any standards that might apply to it.

When asked how she garnered her talents for putting digital content to good use on her SMART Board interactive whiteboard, Aly Fox gives a simple response. “I imagine that anything can be done.”

When Fox originally started using SMART products, she focused on creating math activities and lessons. “I found math was easiest for me because in math, traditionally there are a lot of manipulatives,” she explains.

“Any actual manipulatives can be digital manipulatives on the SMART Board. For any lesson where you would have to haul out the little clocks or the bags of money for every student, you can make a SMART Notebook lesson that will last you year after year that has the same effect,” says Fox.

Teach interactively

Focusing on making lessons that are student centered rather than teacher centered is another way to ensure your digital content has a powerful impact on students. For Beard, this means giving students the opportunity to come up to the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and interact with the lesson, creating a hands-on experience for students. “You often learn by doing rather than hearing,” he explains.

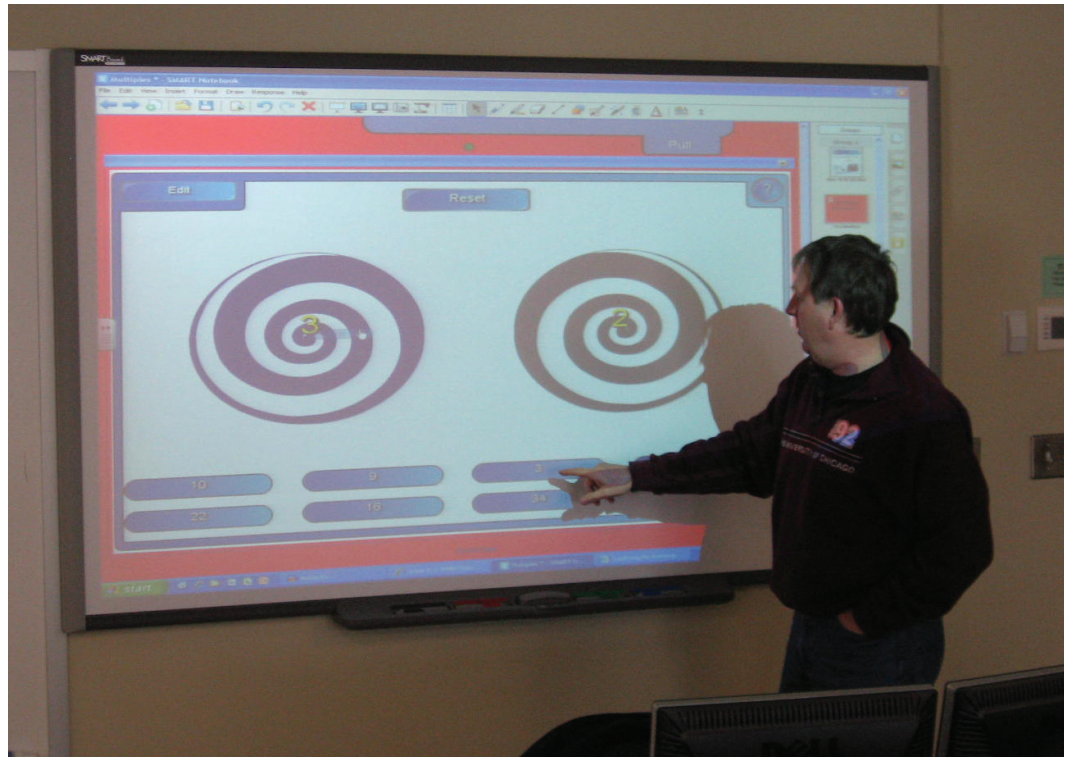
“Any actual manipulatives can be digital manipulatives on the SMART Board.”

Aly Fox

Teacher

Palmview Elementary

Pompano Beach, Florida



Great resources

- The Eighth Floor has a [community wiki](#) designed to provide educators with access to resources that work well with the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Resources include SMART Notebook lesson activities for most subjects and links to interactive sites.
- Aly Fox has a great [website](#) where she shares a host of resources including some of her best SMART Notebook lesson activities for reading and math
- Heather Lamb recommends that teachers visit [Pics4Learning.com](#), a great resource that offers thousands of high-quality images for teachers and students
- Search the [SMART Exchange](#) website for lesson plans, images, web pages and more. You can easily search all 40,000 of the available resources by grade level, subject and file type.
- Download our [Lesson Activity Toolkit](#) Quick Reference Guide to see how you can use the toolkit to create engaging lesson activities

For instance, Beard explains that in a science lesson about DNA, you might create an activity in SMART Notebook software where students can drag and assemble the components of a DNA molecule. Beard says the Lesson Activity Toolkit is a great source for these types of hands-on activities and he uses them often in his classes.

Lamb agrees with Beard's thoughts about ensuring your digital content creates interactive learning moments for students. "Not only do you want to touch the board, you want your students to touch the board, too. It's about having students remember what I taught. This way I'm not giving students the answers. They're telling me what they think," she says.

Think digitally

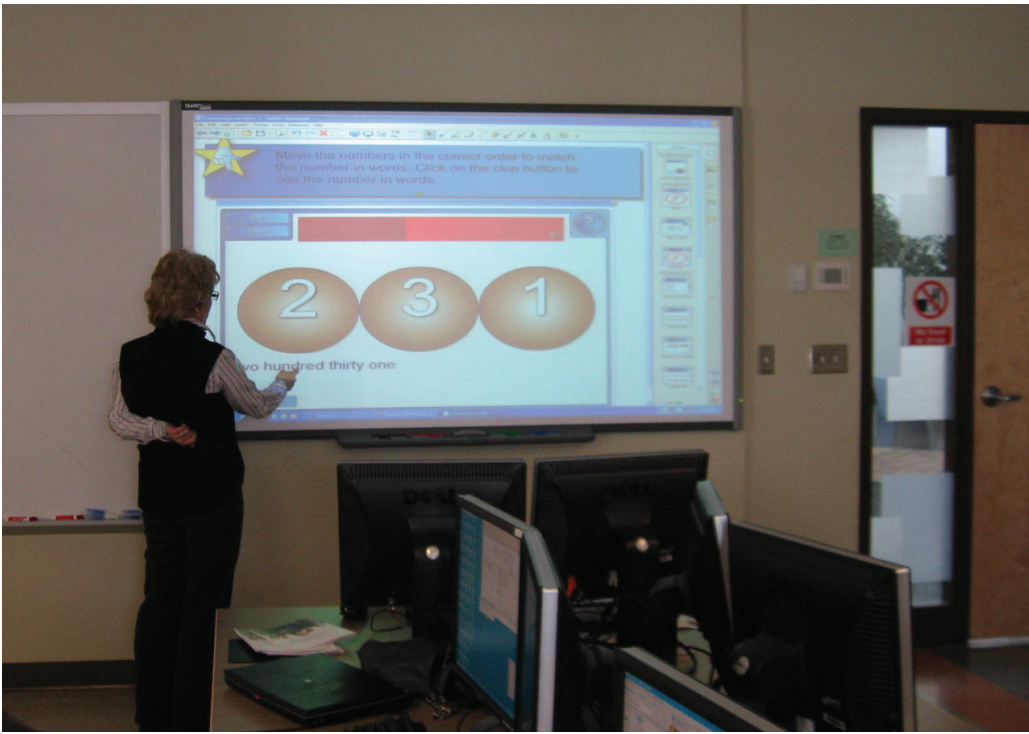
Once you're comfortable with the basic techniques for incorporating and applying digital content in your lessons, your creativity will soar.

Fox, for example, has recently gone digital with her second-grade reading curriculum. For each day of the unit, she's created a five-to-six-page SMART Notebook file that includes lessons and practice. The lesson activities cover everything from reading and comprehension to grammar and oral comprehension.

"It's proved to be useful not just in my classroom but my entire grade level," explains Fox. "It's great because now that it's made, there's not much else to be done besides keep it up to date and add more to it."

Fox explains that converting to digital curriculum wasn't a daunting task. It just took a bit of ingenuity.

"If the teacher's edition was telling me that I needed to take out the letter cards for our spelling lesson, I would make letter cards within SMART Notebook and infinite clone them. So, instead of arranging cards in a pocket chart, the students could come up to the board and pull down the letters for our phonics lesson. Still very tactile – but in a digital way," explains Fox.



Search wisely

Along with some new tips and techniques for your teaching repertoire, the educators we spoke with also wanted to share some of the trusted sources for quality lesson content.

Fox does a lot of online searching when she's looking for digital content, particularly for interactive games, which she creates links to in the lesson activity. "If we're doing a lesson on adjectives, I can do a Google search, say, for interactive adjective games for second grade. I have a favorites folder where I save stuff that I want to explore later," she says.

Fox has also created a [website](#) where she shares some of her favorite resources and ideas for educators.

Beard highly recommends that the teachers who attend his classes visit the [SMART Exchange™ website](#) to download teacher-created content such as lesson activities, Gallery files and SMART Response question sets – especially for educators who are new to digital content and want to see what other teachers have already created.

In fact, on top of the existing 40,000 resources on the SMART Exchange, this month you'll find thousands of new pieces of content on the website including new content for SMART Notebook, new activities for the [SMART Table™ interactive learning center](#), and new images, manipulatives and videos.

Share regularly

Once you've started creating your masterpieces in SMART Notebook software, don't forget to take the next step and share your files, whether you do it through SMART Exchange, a school wiki or by creating your own website. As Heather Lamb explains, "Sharing your lessons is huge, when you create something and share it, you're supporting other educators. Another teacher may not teach the same subject, but they can take the basics of your activity or lesson and modify it to meet the needs of their classroom." **EC**

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Education Consultant
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