

Engaging Students in their Learning

SMART solutions for promoting accessibility



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Engagement is a watchword in education. And it's particularly relevant in additional needs education, where students don't always feel successful nor have the opportunity to enjoy learning. Finding ways to get these students engaged in learning is the first step in helping them to achieve their social and academic goals.

One way that educators boost engagement is through the use of technology in the classroom. In Brunswick, Ohio, Paula Jones, assistant director of additional needs education for Brunswick City Schools, says incorporating SMART products, like the SMART Board® interactive whiteboard, into her district has resulted in students who are better able to participate in learning.

"The SMART Board helps broaden the knowledge and interest of students with special needs. They're able to grasp concepts that they couldn't before. And when they feel successful, they can enjoy learning," Jones says. "To be able to see concepts presented in a different way, visually or more interactively, has just taken learning to another level."

The right tools for the job

Rachael Delfing is an intervention specialist at Brunswick High School. She works with students with a variety of needs, including mental, emotional and physical. Delfing says that her SMART products are providing all of these students with support, whether they need to learn through different modalities or need the technology to be accessible.

"I have the SMART Board that is height adjustable because I have some students who are very tall and I have other students in wheelchairs. Being able to move the SMART Board up and down has significantly improved their accessibility to learning," Delfing says. "In general, SMART products have helped motivate my students to learn in different ways. They're more excited, more engaged and more social whenever we're using the SMART Board for a lesson. They communicate more and are more focused."

Challenge

For teachers in additional needs education it can sometimes be difficult to motivate students to engage in lessons. Often, students with additional learning needs can't enjoy the learning process because they have difficulty understanding the material being presented to them.

Solution

Incorporating SMART products into the classroom has helped additional needs education teachers to present lessons in ways that make learning more accessible to students.

Results

When students with additional learning needs are able to access learning, they are more motivated to engage in lessons. And by doing so, they are able to find the joy in learning.

About half an hour up the Interstate 71 motorway, in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Monica Fisher is also seeing increased motivation since incorporating SMART products into her class. Fisher, who is an intervention specialist at Monarch School for Autism, says that her SMART Response™ interactive response systems are giving her students more motivation to participate in lessons.

“Once we introduced the SMART Response systems, participation went through the roof. When we were asking children to raise their hands to choose an answer, they’d look around the room to see how other students were answering before they’d vote. Or they wouldn’t respond at all,” Fisher says. “Now all the students are participating. They’re independently choosing their answers and we don’t have to be afraid of them refusing to participate. They want to.”

Technology that works together

This increase in motivation and participation spans not only differing needs, but differing age groups as well. As speech and language pathologist in the Brunswick City Schools district, Katie Deneke works with students as young as nursery pupils and as old as secondary school students. This gives her a unique perspective of how SMART products can impact students, regardless of their age.

“The biggest difference I’ve seen since I’ve started using the SMART Board, both with my kindergarteners and my high school students, is the amount of interest and attention that I get when I’m using it or any of the other SMART products,” Deneke says. “Even the students who aren’t actually up at the SMART Board are more engaged. I see them expressing their knowledge of the question under their breath frequently. It’s engaging the whole class versus just the one person who might be up taking a turn.”

By taking software applications typically used in individualised learning and sharing them on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, Deneke is able to engage the entire class – not just the student working on the problem.

“I use a lot of interactive software and when students use those programs on my laptop they’re not as excited. But when it’s up on the SMART Board, they think it’s the greatest thing ever,” Deneke says. “They can touch it and it involves more students than just the one who is doing it on the computer alone.”

Delfing, too, believes that being able to use other software on the SMART Board makes that software much more impactful and engaging for her students.

“I found an iPad app that’s wonderful for life skills and social skills videos. One thing that I really enjoy is being able to connect the iPad to the SMART Board because I’m able to show my whole class those videos,” Delfing says. “When the technologies work together like that, it makes the lesson go smoothly.”

By making learning more accessible, motivating students through interactive lessons and integrating multiple technologies, students are getting the opportunity to find the enjoyment in engaging in learning.



Students at Brunswick City High School collaborate on a SMART Board interactive whiteboard.

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Katie Deneke

Speech and language pathologist
Brunswick City Schools
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About SMART

SMART Technologies is a leading provider of collaboration solutions that transform the way the world works and learns. We believe that collaboration and interaction should be easy. As the global leader in interactive whiteboards, we bring more than two decades of collaboration research and development to a broad range of easy-to-use, integrated solutions that free people from their desks and computer screens, so that collaborating and learning with digital resources are more natural.

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