



SMART Story

Dorchester Two school district

Professional development leads to achievement in the Dorchester Two school district

When fourth-grade language arts teacher Kelly Parker was invited to a SMART user group session, she hesitated. What benefit could she get from seeing K–2 lesson activities? But off she went, and now she owes one of her most compelling language arts lessons to second-grade science teacher Melissa Odom, also of the Dorchester Two district in Summerville, South Carolina.

“I took the idea of what Melissa had done and adapted it to my classroom,” explains Parker. When she saw how Melissa had taught a lesson on animal classification, Parker knew she could borrow those techniques for a biography lesson.

Ask Dorchester Two’s instructional technology coordinator, Wade Flinner, what makes this sort of teacher collaboration succeed, and he points to the district’s view of professional development as an exercise in sharing and modeling. The district’s administrators feel that professional development must work on several levels for technology to have an optimal effect on teaching and learning. So at Dorchester, where teachers each have their own SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard, sharing and modeling never stops.

Teachers often begin with online training resources provided by SMART. Working at their own pace, they get hands-on practice as they familiarize themselves with the technology. From these practical training sessions, they springboard to more in-depth, pedagogy-based development programs.

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Shelly Bostwick,
Instructional Technology Specialist,
Dorchester Two School District



Kelly Parker teaches an interactive lesson on the life of Martin Luther King, Junior.

"Our teachers aren't left to fend for themselves, and that can happen with a district," says Flinner. "Yes, they spend money on hardware and software, but they forget about the training aspect, and that's what's on my superintendent's brain."

Motivated by this development-driven philosophy, the district has implemented several levels of training, sharing and collaboration programs. Each school has an instructional technology specialist (ITS) – a teacher who helps other teachers use classroom technology products effectively. And Flinner keeps in constant contact with Shayla Rexrode, a SMART education consultant who shares information about SMART product use with Flinner and his teachers.

It was a SMART user conference run by Rexrode that inspired one of the district's key development programs – SMART user groups. Shelly Bostwick, an ITS, attended the Charleston-area conference and was thrilled with the chance to share lesson activities and techniques.

"It's when you see the SMART Board being used in its content area that it's really the most effective," says Bostwick. "For example, teachers realized they could pull up a math problem, record it, walk away from the board and let it continue to play back so they could work with students."

When she returned from the conference, Bostwick and her fellow ITS's were keen to help teachers in the district benefit from these collaborative sessions. So she sat down with Rexrode and the other technology specialists, and they developed a plan for creating user groups in each Dorchester Two school.

Now the SMART user groups thrive across the district. Teachers from the same grade levels and subject areas get together and showcase their best lesson activities, then receive feedback from peers.

The result is a vast bank of lesson activities posted on the district's shared drive for all teachers to use or customize. The quality and interactivity of these lessons seems to rise daily. "When you know someone else is going to be looking at your work and using it, you're definitely going to step it up," says Bostwick. "Often, our teachers are exposed to a different way of teaching at our user groups – a more interactive way of using the SMART Board, and in the long run they see that the lessons guided by student interaction with the technology are much more beneficial than more basic, teacher-guided lessons. They see a difference in student feedback and in assessment."

The benefits of Dorchester Two's intensive professional development program can be experienced by walking through the door of Kelly Parker's classroom. What strikes you first is the sheer number of hands waving in the air. A video of Martin Luther King, Junior's life is playing on the SMART Board, and even the shyest students are anxious to come up to the board and experience what it might be like to be the man's photographer. One by one, students choose a significant moment from King's life, capture it in a still photograph, and create a graphic timeline.

"You could put pictures in their hands and say, 'put these in sequential order,'" says Parker. "But this way, they really take ownership of the lesson. I can see scores go up when I do a follow-up on King's life. The kids are genuinely excited to be learning about him."

And it all began with a second-grade lesson on animal classification.

Quick facts

Location Summerville, South Carolina

Technology SMART Board interactive whiteboards, SMART Response interactive response systems, AirLiner™ wireless slates

Impact on learning

Professional development programs enable teachers to provide more compelling, interactive lessons that help improve student achievement