

James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation Teaching Awards Narrative application for Erica Butler, Illinois Valley High School

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to be considered for such an exciting possibility in my teaching career. I have a passion to engage my students in the classroom through the use of technology and hands-on science experiences. I am confident that this award will help me to improve my classroom environment and lessons.

My proposal is a two part proposal.

Part 1 - I am blessed to have a Promethean Interactive Whiteboard (ActivBoard) in my classroom. It is an amazing tool and every week or two, I am discovering a new feature I can use to enhance my lessons and engage my students. I realized recently that there are times I am stuck at the board to “click” this or “draw” that. The layout of my classroom does not lend itself to me getting far away from the board if I need to use it often. I have a long counter in the front of the room, which is great for demonstrations and labs, but not so good when it comes to moving quickly around my classroom.

I would like to purchase an ActivSlate which would allow me to move around the room, be closer to my students and still control the ActivBoard at the front of the room. The ActivSlate can also be used by students to engage them in the lessons and allow them to use the technology themselves. While I was student teaching I was able to observe students using an ActivSlate and they could hardly get their hands on it fast enough. It was something new and innovative and it got the students actively participating in the lesson, even the shy or usually uninterested students. I believe an ActivSlate will help me develop more interactive lessons and allow me the chance to be closer to my students in order to handle classroom management issues in a more private and efficient manner.

Part 2 - This summer I would like to attend the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) 2012 Conference in San Diego, CA. The conference is held at the San Diego Convention Center from June 24th - 27th. The conference is four days packed with information about improving education, networking with other educators, and sharing ideas for use in the classroom. In addition to the regular presentations and exhibit hall the conference offers two days of workshops on everything from current research to “bring your own device” hands-on sessions. I believe these workshops will give me specific information I can take back to my classroom and work with smaller groups of educators to share ideas and information.

This proposal fits in nicely with my district’s (Three Rivers School District) goals for educators. Each year, in my own personal goals, I focus on two - technology and engagement. Let’s face it, students are consistently ahead of adults in the use and understanding of technology. They are a generation comfortable with technology and have a desire to understand the world around them through using technology. Some people say this generation is too focused on technology and have an overzealous need

to be entertained constantly. I believe this is not a completely negative statement. It allows teachers, administrators and education as a whole to re-evaluate previous methods used, like lecture-based courses, and develop methods that create an engaged approach with the teacher and students working together to learn and understand.

As educators we need to feed upon this desire and create lessons that include technology to prepare students not only to graduate, but for their future beyond the school setting. We have a responsibility to create a workforce that is ready to effectively use technology and quickly adapt to changes, upgrades and new technology that hasn't even been dreamed up yet. Building that skill set throughout a child's educational experience will give them an advantage in college and the workforce.

I consistently use the tools available to me, but I know there are many other uses and other ideas I haven't considered that will help me use technology more efficiently and bring the world and a greater understanding of it to my students. I have recently started using the ActivExpression "clickers" and have seen some great results in student engagement. I was able to quickly check each student's understanding of recent lessons and know the information I needed to re-teach. The ActivSlate and attending the ISTE conference will allow me to continue to develop and increase the use of technology in my classroom by both my students and myself and to create lessons where all students can succeed through increased engagement.

I am excited when I think of networking with other teachers and gathering ideas to help my students. Recently, I was able to work with other science teachers around the district, many of them seasoned educators, who willingly shared activity and lab ideas with me. I was able to use one activity in the last week and it made learning about radioactive isotopes and fossils so much easier to understand (and the students got to eat M&M's so they were quite excited all the way around!)

The second goal the Three Rivers School District has is to consistently engage students. I work hard to develop lessons that include everyone. Science lends itself to hands-on experiences through labs and activities, but it is not feasible nor is it good teaching to do this daily. There are times when direct teaching is required. It is during those times that I must pay particular attention to engagement. I have tried and used many different tools, some with success, others I have tried a time or two and thrown out the door. I believe the opportunity to network with educators from all over the nation, and world, will give me the boost I need to think outside the box and try new, innovative ways to engage my students in their learning.

Our school district is adopting a proficiency-based learning model and will be implementing this across the district for the 2012-2013 school year. I am excited at the prospect of working with students on a more individualized basis, on-a timeline that is comfortable for them, but still challenging and pushing them to be their best. I know technology will help me organize the lessons and educational tools for my students with easy access to them for re-teaching, small learning groups and reviewing information.

There will be many opportunities to share what I have learned at the conference with colleagues in my building and throughout the school district. Towards the end of each summer, teachers have the opportunity to attend a two or three day technology boot camp. Different topics are covered including but not limited to: Promethean Board training, teacher websites, Google calendar and more. I have attended this previously and would be encouraged to share my experience with those who attend. Throughout the school year we have professional development days during which I can present and share this newfound knowledge.

However, I think the best forum for sharing will be with those I work with on an informal basis. For example, there are many times when I touch base with my science colleague and we share information about teaching practices and ideas. Many times during this school year, I have asked our health teacher to show me how to better use technology. In the spirit of learning from each other, we have been encouraged by our administration to work with other educators in our own and in other buildings through collaborative groups. I am confident that, through these new experiences, I will be able to help others just like they have been able to help me.

I know the ActivSlate will help me with my classroom management and engagement of students. The more I am able to refine these pieces of my educational pedagogy the more comfortable I will be and the more I will grow in other areas. Learning more about technology in education and networking with other educators will give me the shot in the arm I need to continue to develop my lessons and give me new ways to make my classroom a positive, engaging learning environment for ALL of my students.