A document camera, for those unfamiliar with this technology, is basically a small camera mounted on a stand which is hooked up to an LCD projector. Then, a presenter is able to place objects or documents under the camera and project its image onto a screen for the audience to see. It functions somewhat like a overhead projector on steroids. However, a document camera offers enormous advantages over an overhead projector. The cost of a document camera is about $700 and up. LCD projectors cost about the same, bringing the total cost to about $1500 or more per teacher/setup.

That's a lot of money. However, because the impact on students is so amazing, I believe there are very few better investments. Read on to learn several powerful ways my colleagues and I are currently using document cameras. Many of the ideas you will read below come from the creative teachers at Railroad Canyon Elementary School in Lake Elsinore, California.

**Writing**

**1. Essay Writing** Students write for homework. The following day, the teacher randomly selects 3 students' papers. These 3 papers are placed under the document camera one at a time for grading. The teacher does a "think-aloud" grading of each paper, and, when the students are ready, calls on them for input. The assignments are given a letter grade on the spot. These three students receive a grade and all others receive credit/no credit. If a student is called upon to have her paper graded when she is absent, another student may volunteer to have his paper graded. If a student is called upon for grading and he does not have the assignment, he receives an F on that assignment. This procedure sends a clear message to the students, "Your writing may be published at any time, so you better do your best work just in case. The quality of work increases greatly, and the students benefit so much more from the teacher's hard work grading papers. The teacher is able to do impromptu mini-lessons based on student weaknesses rather than some arbitrary selection method. Also, this cuts down tremendously on teacher workload. The teacher no longer must edit and grade every student's homework. The quality of work increases in spite of the fact that each paper may simply be "stamped" as complete.

**2. Dictionary Skills** Teachers and students can easily model dictionary usage, layout, etc. by placing an actual dictionary under the camera.

**3. Modeling Writing** Good writing teachers model writing for the students on a regular basis. A document camera makes that modeling very genuine because no longer is the teacher writing on a transparency or a giant piece of paper. She is
writing on a paper just like the students will be writing on! She is then able to model correct paper organization, handwriting, etc.

(4) **Off-Task Student** Have a student who struggles focusing on his/her work do the assignment under the document camera. With a writing assignment, there are no "right" answers, so it doesn't really matter if the other students can see. Using this method, the teacher is able to check progress on this student from anywhere in the room with a quick glance.

(5) **Whiteboard Lines** Project a blank piece of lined paper onto your white board. Now you and your students can write directly on the white board and keep the writing straight and neat.

**Math**

(6) **Manipulatives** can be placed under the camera for all to see clearly. Consider how easily you can teach using a ruler and protractor as well as base 10 blocks, clock, etc.

**Reading**

(7) **Shared Reading** Every book is a big book when you have a document camera! I use the document camera daily for shared reading with 4th and 5th graders. This means that my students can all see the text that I'm reading aloud. They are expected to read along mentally. Every couple of sentences, I drop a word as I'm reading and expect the students to all chorally fill in that word. The students and I are able to intelligently discuss text features, comprehension strategies, spelling rules, and new vocabulary when all students are able to see the text. Every page or so, I stop reading aloud and tell the students to read a certain section mentally. I then hold students accountable for their reading through journal responses, pair share, and whole class discussion. These methods also improve reading fluency as students are encouraged to decode more rapidly than they normally do in order to keep up with the teacher's reading pace. Another bonus is that all students can quickly and easily see the pictures during a read aloud.

**Classroom Management**

(8) **Worksheets, Forms, Text Book** Rather than wasting precious class time running around making sure all the students know where you are in the book, on the worksheet, etc. you can simply point if you use a document camera. Having the students fill in forms is now a snap as well.

(9) **Giant Timer** Use the document camera to project a countdown timer. Sure you can buy an overhead timer for about $40. But when you have a document camera, the old kitchen timer works just fine. Use it to keep the kids focused on the task, knowing that the clock is ticking, and they will soon be out of time for that assignment.

**Ethics**

(10) **Forgery** When, and if, you ever catch a student forging his/her parent's
signature, place the forged signature under the document camera. Poll the class as to whether or not the signature looks genuine. This will make a clear impression that the teacher is not picking on the guilty student...after all, the whole class agrees that this signature has been forged. Also, it sends a powerful message to the other students, "Don't even think about trying this yourself!"

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Geography

(11) Maps You will no longer need the pull down maps for geography and history discussions. Simply slap a book map under your document camera and away you go!

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Science

(12) Science Demos When the teacher does a science experiment, point the document camera at the materials for all to see. For example, let's say your experiment measures liquid in a measuring cup. Tilt the camera so that it points at the side of the cup. Now all of your students can easily read the measurement and more clearly understand how to determine an accurate measurement.

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Drama

(13) Drama Stage Set Students can draw the background scenery for a play or skit they will perform in class. Move your projector at a 45 degree angle to the white board. Project the drawing onto the white board, angling it behind the actors. The image will naturally distort, but the overall effectiveness is well worth it.

Next Article>>