

Interactivity means more activity for students

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The British government has invested more money in Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs) in its schools than any other government in the world. But is this huge investment worth it? Have the new data projection technologies allowed students to learn more effectively? This is the subject of recent research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

'These IWBs have had a meteoric rise in popularity in schools,' says Sara Hennessy who carried out the project with Rosemary Deaney of Cambridge University. 'But, until recently, assumptions about how they have transformed teaching were not based on hard evidence.'

The system consists of a computer linked to a data projector and a large touch-sensitive board, which displays images, graphics, animations and videos. You can write captions directly onto the board and instantly convert your handwriting to type. You can create suspense by hiding and revealing text and graphics.

They can also be used with a special camera so that pupils can develop their own written ideas and images, and then share them with the class by projecting their work onto the IWB.

'We explored how teachers might use projection technology to give space, time and status to pupils' contributions to lessons. We wanted to look at the ways in which it could be used to challenge and develop pupils' thinking,' Dr Hennessy says. The research also discusses the dangers of technology-driven teaching and warns that time constraints

can lead to superficial use of the technology.

In the study, English, history, mathematics and science teachers used interactive whiteboards and data projectors in various ways.

A unique strength of IWB technology is that it allows teachers and students to revisit previous sessions of saved activity, which helps to reignite and build on earlier learning. The researchers also found that using IWBs can:

The project has provoked interest from academics, trainees and teacher educators. A series of 5 interactive CD-ROMs have been developed for teachers. These are designed to stimulate debate around key issues rather than offering models of 'best practice' and they are already proving influential in teacher education. The researchers are confident that the project will be welcomed by policymakers seeking a return on investment.

'We have shown that in the right hands the IWB can be a motivating and immensely powerful tool,' says Dr Hennessy. 'It allows teachers and pupils to build and test complex ideas together, and supports active learning in new ways.'

Source: Economic & Social Research Council

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