

Interactive Whiteboards and Slates – Either or Both

by Nancy Knowlton

Educators sometimes speak to me about interactive whiteboards and whether wireless slates are a viable alternative in the classroom. Often they see interactive whiteboards as the central presentation station and wonder if teachers can use wireless slates or tablet PCs instead, so they can move easily among their students, away from the front of the classroom and the invisible tether of the whiteboard.



Invaluable Tools

In the twenty-plus years that we have been in business, we have given great consideration to how people use technology products in shared spaces. Just as a hammer is not the only tool for building a house, an interactive whiteboard is not the only tool in a technology-enabled classroom. They are each part of an ensemble cast needed to complete the larger task.

The interactive whiteboard is a special-purpose tool that is particularly valuable in whole-class teaching and learning, and some small-group work. It is not intended to be used 100 percent of the time.

Single or multiple wireless slates can be used with or without interactive whiteboards, and each combination has different effects on teaching and learning. Before making any purchase decisions, it is important to understand the classroom needs being served by these two products and the effects of using them together or alone.

The Teacher as a Visual Aid

When students can easily focus on the teacher and the material being presented, the lesson is reinforced and better understood. Teachers provide visual and auditory focus for learners by interacting with content on an interactive whiteboard, talking about the lesson material and encouraging students to participate. In this classroom scenario, the interactive whiteboard presents a powerful opportunity to connect the teacher, lesson and students – all with one dynamic, interactive tool.

Position at the Interactive Whiteboard

A few simple teaching habits will further increase the effectiveness of interactive whiteboards as a whole-class teaching and learning tool. Standing on the left-hand side of an English-language presentation is better from the viewer's perspective than standing on the right because of

the way that English and many other languages are written and read – from left to right. Of course, during a presentation in Arabic, the opposite would be the case, as Arabic is written from right to left.

This position allows students to more easily follow the teacher's lead through the lesson material and absorb the information on the interactive whiteboard.

Gross Motor Movements

Students often struggle to follow a small cursor moving around on a projection screen. The deliberateness of gross motor movements required to operate the interactive whiteboard means that all students can easily follow along.

Wireless Slates and Interactive Whiteboards

There are three situations in which a wireless slate is a useful supplement or alternative to interactive whiteboards.

- Teachers may wish to move around the classroom to work with small groups or individual students. Using a wireless slate means they can be mobile and still interact with the interactive whiteboard at the front of the room.
- In some classrooms it may be difficult for students to move to the interactive whiteboard to contribute. Passing them a wireless slate can provide the means to participate without disrupting the class.
- If the budget is insufficient to outfit all classrooms, it is possible to start with a wireless slate or tablet PC to get a base level of interactivity. There are, however, significant trade offs, particularly for younger students, for whom coming up to the interactive whiteboard is a crucial part of the learning process.

Working Together

Other products can certainly supplement and support an interactive classroom environment, but care needs to be taken when choosing other options as long-term replacements for an interactive whiteboard. There are some key benefits to using an interactive whiteboard that replacement tools simply cannot offer.

Using a wireless slate alongside an interactive whiteboard offers an enhanced solution with long-term benefits for both teachers and students.

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