



Interactive whiteboards – connected for learning

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Editor's note

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It can't just be used as a big TV on the wall.

This comment about interactive whiteboards was made by one of the teachers from a school featured in this edition of the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme* newsletter. By tapping into the immediacy, flexibility and interactivity of this exciting technology, teachers have the capacity to change the way they teach, and students can change the way they learn. The stories in this newsletter illustrate some of the ways that schools are meeting the challenge.

At Belmore South Public School, an action learning team used interactive whiteboards to change the way that writing was taught. Meanwhile, Stage 2 mathematics learning was transformed in a project undertaken at The Illawarra Grammar School. Teachers at both schools remarked on the need for initial and on-going professional learning about interactive whiteboards in order to fully utilise their potential for pedagogical change. Without this kind of professional development, teachers could fall into the trap of using an interactive whiteboard as just another chalkboard or fancy overhead projector, or, as mentioned above, see it as no more than a big television on the wall.

Fundamental to the introduction of interactive whiteboards at St Canice's Catholic Primary School, Katoomba, was teacher professional learning. Sometimes the smallness of a school can create problems but, at St Canice's, the size of the school made the process of whole-school professional development straightforward. Apart from some preliminary formal sessions, ongoing learning was as simple as the school's 10 or so staff sitting around a table to share their discoveries.

Another part of the teachers' on-going professional learning about interactive whiteboards took place in classrooms, with the students themselves teaching the teachers. At all three schools, teachers noted that their technical ability to operate digital technology was often the result of the help that they received from students. In this way, the roles of teacher and student were often interchangeable, an empowering message for students to experience and absorb.

The three schools reported that both teacher and student motivation increased dramatically with the introduction of interactive whiteboards into lessons. This motivation did not diminish once their inevitable novelty value wore off. Instead, the teachers reported that, rather than being an extra, or a flashy add-on, the use of interactive whiteboards became embedded into student learning. Having on-hand access to the whiteboard in the classroom was an important factor here. The more that students engaged with the technology, the more teachers could see a change from teacher-directed to student-centred learning in their classrooms.