

Blended Learning: using technology in and beyond the language classroom

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This third update focuses on interactive whiteboards. It looks at New Inside Out Digital, software designed to run on interactive whiteboards, and then provides a ‘glossary of terms’ for teachers using interactive whiteboards in their language classes.

Interactive whiteboards (Chapter 6)

1. New Inside Out Digital - Elementary

Since the publication of Blended Learning, ELT publishers have launched more software for use with interactive whiteboards. Macmillan are currently launching New Inside Out Digital. The home page <Figure 1> offers users four options: *Digital book* / *Teacher’s area* / *Video* and *Printable resources*.



Figure 1: Home page – New Inside Out Digital

The *Digital book* is the interactive version of the elementary course book. Users can select any of the 16 course book units by clicking on the title. Teachers can scroll chapter by chapter through the digital version of the book and locate the page they wish to use in class.

The icons are fairly intuitive. For example, to access the ‘home’ page, click on the house symbol; to close the program, click on the red cross. These buttons can be accessed from anywhere in the program.

The toolbar on the right of the screen is user-friendly, and includes many of the features described in Chapter six, such as the **pen** and **highlighter** tools, and an **eraser**. <Figure 2> Teachers can enlarge any part of the page using the ‘**zoom in**’ tool, or the ‘**drag zoom**’ tool. One impressive feature of the software is the quality of the images, which is excellent.



Figure 2: Unit 1 - New Inside Out Digital

'More tools' provides teachers access to further, useful tools. These include a 'Notepad', allowing teachers to build up a series of re-usable 'lesson pages', as if on a flip chart. The 'Gap fill' tool can be used to erase words from the screen; the 'Gap reveal' tool replaces the words. It is easy to see how creative teachers can produce practice tasks using the course book material. 'Stopwatch' is a popular feature, allowing teachers to set specific times for activities. As described in Chapter 6 of Blended Learning, the **screen-reveal** tool is a useful way of getting students to 'predict' content. Teachers can play each **audio** recording by clicking on the loudspeaker symbol <Figure 2>. They can also reveal the audio script, and select short pieces of language to play.

The *Teacher's area* provides a space for teachers to create material either on a blank flip-chart < Figure 3> or using a pre-defined template. Such templates make the creation of common multimedia exercises (such as multiple choice) very easy for teachers, since they only need to devise their own examples and then key in the relevant text.



Figure 3: Teacher's area - New Inside Out Digital

One of the main advantages of using a software package such as Inside Out Digital is that users can not only use the course book material, they can also import their own material (texts and pictures, for example) and then create exercises using the authoring tools. Getting used to the tools becomes easier with practice. The software is designed to run on any type of whiteboard, and could even be displayed to students using an electronic projector if no IWB is available.

2 Interactive whiteboards – a short glossary

For anyone who is considering purchasing an interactive whiteboard for their institution or, much more likely, is faced with using an interactive whiteboard for the first time, there are a few terms which regularly crop up. This short glossary provides a non-technical description of some of them.

Calibration – part of the installation process and allows the whiteboard to work accurately with the point of a pen or finger.

Connection panel – used to link computers, DVD players and other devices to the whiteboard.

Digital ink – refers to the electronic image of the marks you make when you write on an interactive whiteboard.

Handwriting recognition – software that allows you to write on the board and then convert this to editable computer text.

Integrated system – whiteboard packaged with a projector compared to a system in which an existing projector is linked to a board.

Mobile / fixed – whiteboards can be mounted permanently on the wall of a room or on a floor stand which allows it be moved from room to room.

Packaged software – software included with an interactive whiteboard is usually installed on a computer which is connected to the board. It can be used during lessons or can be used to prepare materials prior to lessons.

Pen / finger-driven – most boards are controlled using devices that resemble and are used like conventional whiteboard pens; a small number of boards can be operated by touching and dragging on the board using your or the students' fingers. Some boards have a touch-sensitive surface, others use an infrared system to identify the position of the pen tip.

Shadowing – a person using an interactive whiteboard often throws a shadow over part of the board depending on their position and the position of the projector.

Size – measured across the diagonal of the whiteboard like a tv screen.

Sound system – some whiteboard come with integrated speakers.

Time lag – there may be a small delay between the movement of the pen and what appears on the board.

For more on the manufacturers of Interactive Whiteboards, please visit the author's blog at www.te4be.com