Blended Learning: using technology in and beyond the language classroom

Pete Sharma and Barney Barrett

Update 10: October 2011

Chapter 6 of Blended Learning is about using Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs). Recently, we have joined forces with IWB trainer Francis Jones, collaborating on a new book in the Macmillan Books for Teachers series, 400 Ideas for Interactive Whiteboards. This latest bulletin is a special edition dedicated to IWBs and looks exclusively at this exciting area of language teaching.

400 Ideas for Interactive Whiteboards: four approaches

Approach One: Using regular programs

There are many pieces of software used every day by you and your learners for preparing lessons, during lessons, doing self-study and doing homework. These include word processor and presentation programs, electronic dictionaries and other interactive CD-ROMs from coursebooks, media players and websites. Running these familiar programs through an IWB allows teachers and learners new to IWBs to start using the equipment quickly and to exploit the advantages of interacting with those programs in a different way.

For example, instead of relying on printed handouts, you can display and edit documents on the IWB. You and your learners can copy text and images from different sources into documents and presentations. You can use the IWB pen to annotate images and text and save those annotations for future reference (see Figure 1, below). You can have your CD-ROM dictionary minimised and ready to go whenever there is a question about vocabulary or pronunciation.

Figure 1: Approach 1 – using regular programs

Approach Two: Using the IWB software

Included with each IWB is the manufacturer’s own software. Part of this package is a collection of ready-made and easily adaptable lesson activities. These are stored in a gallery, library or toolkit and are activated by being dragged onto the screen. Some, such as maps, dice, clocks and timers, can be used instantly. Others require customisation, such as inputting the target vocabulary for your lesson or the phonetic symbols you plan to focus on in your lesson. The result is interactive crossword puzzles, pelmanism and various types of
games. These resources are especially interesting to CLIL teachers of maths, geography, history and so on.

Figure 2: Approach 2 – IWB software

**Approach 3: Using published materials**

The coursebook is at the centre of many language classrooms. Increasingly, publishers are also creating IWB versions of these books. There are variations in how complex these programs are and the degree to which the teacher can customise the material. They all provide images of the pages of the book. Standard features are the ability to zoom in on the part of a page you wish to focus on, and audio and transcripts that can be accessed directly, and many programs also allow you and your learners to enter and check the answers to exercises via the IWB. The principle benefit is that your classroom becomes a ‘heads up’ learning environment instead of each student being bent over their book.

Figure 3: Approach 3 – publisher-produced 'courseware'
Approach 4: Creating and adapting your own materials

Once you and your learners are confident with using an IWB in the classroom you can start to employ the manufacturer’s software to create your own materials. These programs allow you to use layered shapes, colour and text to create interactive exercises. These can be locked in place on the screen or dragged as part of the activity. The layering allows elements to be hidden and revealed. Text can be edited easily to suit the subject of the lesson or the levels of the learners. As you become more proficient, you can start to build up a set of materials that you can use again and again.

![Figure 4: Approach 4 – DIY](image)

Learner response systems

In Blended Learning, we talked briefly about learner response systems. These voting devices, sometimes called 'clickers', work in conjunction with IWBs. The teacher issues a clicker to each student. Students can respond to a question (for example, by choosing option A, B, C or D). The results of the vote can be viewed immediately on the IWB, and can be displayed in formats such as bar graphs and pie charts. Imagine the audience voting in the popular quiz show ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire’ and you get the idea!

Promethean has a system called ActiVote. There is also the Promethean ActivExpression device (see Figure 5, below), which enables students to respond in full sentences as well as with numbers, symbols, maths equations, true/false and other options. The student response is sent to the IWB wirelessly.

![Figure 5: Voting systems](image)

These voting systems can be used in a huge number of different and exciting ways, such as:

- finding out students' opinions at the start of a discussion lesson; monitoring how these views may be changing during a debate; holding the final vote
- checking the comprehension of a teaching point (active or passive? past or perfect?)
• preparing fun quizzes before a language lesson, or holding ad hoc 'yes/no' votes at any point

Voting can be anonymous. This aspect is often very popular with students. My students, working in an EAP context, created their own questions to vote on, including some fairly risky and controversial areas (see the activity below).

In Chapter 1 of our book 400 Ideas for Interactive Whiteboards, we include an activity called 'Controversial Issues' which uses learner response systems. Here is an extended version of this activity.

**Activity name:** Controversial issues  
**Level:** Upper intermediate  
**Interaction:** individual / group / whole class  
**Aim:** to discuss controversial issues and to see which arguments can change people’s opinions  
**Language focus:** speaking  
**Technology:** Learner Voting Devices

**Before the class:**
1. Check that you have a learner voting device (LVD) for all students. Choose the option where students can vote: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5.
2. Prepare a digital flipchart. Write a number of controversial statements on the whiteboard, e.g. *Downloading music for free from the Internet is stealing.*

Depending on your students, you may wish to use more obviously ‘controversial’ statements, as appropriate.

**Procedure:**
1. Introduce the following scale to learners, using the IWB screen: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = not sure; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly disagree.

Issue students with individual LVDs. Test the devices by making a controversial statement and asking students to vote, such as: ‘Grammar is not important’. The result of the voting is displayed on the whiteboard as a graph.

2. Tell the students they are going to discuss controversial issues, and see which of the arguments provided can change people’s opinions. Reveal the first topic you wish to discuss on the whiteboard, and ask students to vote. Tell students the voting is 'blind'. Make a note of the results.

3. Divide the students into small groups in order to prepare arguments for and against the statement.

4. Ask two people from each group to present their arguments.

5. At the end of each talk, ask the students to vote again and make a note of the results, before moving on to the next statement for discussion.

6. After the discussion, debrief the activity. Tell students whether the initial voting was different from the final vote. Look back over the lesson and decide which arguments they thought were best, specifically which ones convinced anyone to change their minds.

**Variation:**
Instead of statements, you could use questions around controversial topics as the basis for discussion, for example:

*Should young children have mobile phones?*
*Are e-readers better than printed books?*
*Are people getting more intelligent?*
*Is it OK to tell a small lie to protect someone’s feelings?*
Here is a new, practical activity in the area of phonology.

**Activity name:** Marking intonation  
**Level:** pre-intermediate and above (depending on the dialogue used)  
**Interaction:** individual / pairs / whole class  
**Aim:** To identify the intonation patterns of the sentences in a short dialogue  
**Language focus:** intonation  
**Technology:** Smart Notebook IWB software: cloning tool

**Before the class:**  
Create a page with the following dialogue – feel free to change the names. Leave some space between each line.

*Robert:* Good morning, Jenny.  
*Jenny:* Morning Robert. How are you?  
*Robert:* Very well, thanks. And you?  
*Jenny:* I’m fine, thanks. You went to the cinema yesterday, didn’t you?  
*Jenny:* Was it good?  
*Robert:* Yes. It was fantastic! You should go and see it.  
*Jenny:* OK. I will.

Also create two arrows. One to indicate rising intonation (↑) and one for falling intonation (↓). Set both of these to infinite clone.

Hide the page with the screen shade.

**Procedure:**
1. Reveal the first line of the dialogue and ask students to predict what they think the next line will be. Continue until the whole dialogue has been revealed.

2. Show the arrows and explain that they indicate rising and falling intonation. Put the students into pairs. Say the first line of the dialogue. Repeat as necessary. Ask the pairs to discuss the intonation then ask for a volunteer to come to the board and drag the arrows to mark the intonation. Invite the other pairs to give their opinions.

3. Ask the pairs to practise the dialogue and decide on the intonation patterns for the remaining lines. Invite pairs to the board to drag the arrows to mark that intonation. Again, allow discussion and invite students to move the arrows if they have a different idea. Although there is no single definitive answer to this activity, try to reach a group agreement for the whole dialogue.

4. Ask the pairs to practise the dialogue again but reproducing the agreed intonation patterns.

**Variation:**
Tell the students that Jenny is not very happy this morning or change the dialogue so that Robert thought the film was terrible and advises Jenny not to go and see it. Ask the students to think about how these alternative scenarios would affect the intonation used.
Review of 400 Ideas by Wayne Trotman in the EL Gazette

We were delighted to read Wayne Trotman's perceptive review in the September edition of the EL Gazette.

*In his foreword to this title, series editor Adrian Underhill claims that Interactive Whiteboards (IWB), more than all previous technological developments, seem to have the potential to change the ELT classroom. History will perhaps judge such a bold statement, but who better to introduce the IWB to us than authors well versed in such matters: Sharma and Barrett have published widely on information technology (IT) and ELT, while Jones was one of the first to use the IWB both in the UK and abroad.*

To read the rest of Wayne's review, please visit: [http://www.waynetrotman.com/wp/?p=643](http://www.waynetrotman.com/wp/?p=643)

Further reading on IWBs


**Articles**

Interactive whiteboards that divide (Learning English: Guardian Weekly 17 / 07 / 09)
The rise and rise of the interactive whiteboard (ETP Issue 66 January 2010)
Ten things to do with an interactive whiteboard (MET Vol 19 Number 1 January 2010)

**Website**

iTILT (Interactive Technologies in Language Teaching): [http://itilt.eu/](http://itilt.eu/)
A European project which aims to promote best practice in communicative language teaching using IWBs.

Dates for your diary

**Webinar**

Wednesday 7th December 2011
Interactive Whiteboards

**Training**

Saturday, 11th February 2012
English UK
Getting the most out of your IWB: approaches and pedagogies: