Foreword

What do Mexico and the UK have in common, at the time of writing, which is relevant to this book? The answer is that in both countries interactive whiteboards (IWBs) have become an integral part of classroom life. Although the situation is very different elsewhere, it seems likely that IWBs will become a familiar feature in schools across the world.

The large-scale implementation of IWBs in British schools began without a clear conception of what teachers would make of them and how their use could help good practice. In other words, the introduction of this expensive piece of equipment was “technology-led” (happening because the technology was available and politically attractive) rather than “education-led” (happening because it was known to meet the professional needs of teachers and the educational needs of students better than what was already available). Instead of evidence of their value, there was only political rhetoric about the wonders of new technology, with unsupported claims that IWBs would (and should) transform teaching. Research on the introduction of computers into schools tells us that a technology-led mode of introduction can create serious problems, especially regarding teachers’ enthusiasm for using the technology.

However, there is something special about IWBs, which may explain why they have had quite a positive reception from teachers. The IWB is the only mainstream digital technology that has been developed with a classroom situation in mind (as compared with the hand-me-down technologies which schools have been given in the past). Even on first observing an IWB being used by an experienced teacher, it quickly becomes apparent that it is potentially a very useful tool for classroom education. It allows images, texts and sounds to be selected, saved, displayed, moved and modified in ways that conventional classroom display technologies cannot – and yet you can write on it too. It can be networked with other ICT equipment, such as web-linked computers, scanners and laptops operated by children in the class. In fact, the IWB is not really one educational tool, but rather a hub for the use of many.

There might therefore appear to be no problems with the introduction into schools of the IWB, because of its apparently good fit with the demands of classroom life. But like any tool, or toolkit, the IWB can be used well or badly. It has no powers of alchemy; it cannot transform poor pedagogy into good. We need to know more about how it can be used in a wide range of real-life situations, to pursue different educational goals. This book offers what we need in that respect. The chapters within it describe systematic studies of the IWB in use, in the context of practical, educational concerns. From across the continents, the authors explore the relationship between the affordances of IWB technology and the aims of education. I would encourage everyone involved in the introduction and use of IWBs to read this book. Only a good understanding of the use of this educational tool can ensure that teachers and their students gain the most benefit from it.

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