

Why Is The Screen In Front Of The White Board?

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Another classroom building opens and the classrooms look the same. A white board on the front wall, a professor table with portable podium and rows of student tables beginning directly in front of the professor. When projection is desired in these technological enhanced rooms the screen covers the white board. Overhead projectors and their carts seem to have no place and would have to be a few rows of students deep to project a large enough image on the screen for some of the larger rooms.

Classrooms should be designed to enhance instruction, not inhibit it. A choice of using the white board or the overhead or a projected display, but no combination of the three is forced by poor design. With some advanced thought and input by a variety of instructors the tools of teaching could be better positioned so as to allow the use of multiple media, e.g., an overhead and the white board, or the computer projection and the overhead. For example, screens and white boards could be mounted side-by-side or screens corner mounted with the teacher station off to the side. But if instructors do not have input on the design of the classrooms and have to teach in them what can they do?

There is a way to get around the design imperfections of these typical classrooms. When classrooms are technologically enhanced with suspended video projection from the ceiling, solutions emerge. A SMART board or other graphic device can be used to write electronically and have the written image projected for all to see. Additionally, the written lecture notes can be captured, saved, printed, archived, and placed on the web or in a course management system for review later. An elmo (www.elmoussa.com) or video-overhead document camera allows for the typical transparency to be projected, as well as projecting any object laid under the video lens, such as a 3 dimensional object or a tablet upon which the instructor writes. In combination a SMART board and an elmo make a powerful solution to the poor design of the typical classroom and is integral in better-designed classrooms as well.

A killer advance in classroom technology comes from SMART technologies (www.SMARTtech.com). The SMART Sympodium is a LCD screen which previews the image of a computer or other graphics or video device, accepts touch controls and allows writing and drawing on its surface which is projected for all to see. In this manner and in conjunction with SMART notebook or other software that allows the use of writing and drawing, an instructor's every line drawn on the tablet is projected on the large screen for the students to see. This product is a must have for the classrooms of today.

For a less pricey solution, a graphics table, such as the Aiptek digital tablet (Hyperpen 8000U, www.aiptek.com), will allow a stylus mouse to be used to write in or on top of various software including the white board in Microsoft NetMeeting and other products. In the case of the Aiptek, you do not write on a video image directly, but rather must master the feel of writing on the tablet while watching the marks appear on your laptop or computer monitor. If you are used to showing mostly PowerPoint slides, the write on feature of PowerPoint will allow you to circle your important points, draw reference lines and make brief notes on the slides as you are showing them. The use of NetMeeting or other included software will allow you to write and save your notes. Another advantage of an electronic writing surface is that not only can the written word and equation or drawn graph be projected in the classroom and saved for recall and review, but the signals may also extend through the internet to students at a distance. In the face to face meetings the professor does not have to turn their back while writing at the board and lose valuable eye contact with the students.

The price and maintenance of a Symposium and elmo make the decision to purchase at the departmental or institutional level mandatory, while the Aiptek is clearly affordable by the individual faculty. What is needed is an intermediate product that has the power of the Symposium with the portability of the Aiptek.