

Death by... PowerPoint

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Projectors and whiteboards were meant to bring interactive excitement to lessons and glimpses of the world on the other side of the world.

But instead some teachers are making lessons resemble a corporate board-meeting, complete with endless bullet-pointed slides.

The problem – dubbed “Death by PowerPoint” – arises where the popular Microsoft program is used to teach dull, didactic lessons. Where once trainees were told to avoid “chalk and talk”, the new hazard is “click and talk”.

Roger Higon, ICT co-ordinator of Lord Williams’s school in Thame, Oxfordshire, is among those who fear misuse of the technology.

“Students can go from lesson to lesson and be faced with a series of one-way didactic presentations,” Dr Higon said.

“The teacher may feel very pleased and think they are up-to-date and modern – but the student will glaze over within the first 30 seconds. Students find this passive absorption of knowledge no more educationally creative than copy-

ing out of a textbook.” Such concerns are shared by teacher members of NAACE, the association for ICT in education.

Terry Freedman, the association’s vice-chairman, said the program could be useful for presenting information in short doses, but teachers needed to be careful about over-reliance on it and be aware that more interactive software was available.

“We came across one head-teacher who installed interactive whiteboards in every classroom at his school, then told his teachers he expected to see them switched on all the time,” he said. “It’s just as daft as if a head-teacher in the 1950s decided that televisions should be in every class and constantly left on.”

Mr Freedman said that teacher training often featured even worse examples of “Death by PowerPoint” than the classroom. “Quite often at conferences you have to sit through an hour of PowerPoint, only to be told your lessons must be more interactive,” he said.

In the US, academics are concerned that PowerPoint may have worse effects than simply boring

pupils. Edward Tufte, a professor emeritus of political design at Yale university, wrote in *Wired* magazine that the software’s emphasis on bullet points meant that “rather than learning to write a report using sentences, children are being taught how to formulate client pitches and infomercials”.

Stephen Uden, Microsoft’s education relations manager, stressed that PowerPoint was simply a tool and that it was up to teachers to create a lesson’s content.

“We know many teachers who are using it for all sorts of creative lessons,” he said. “But there’s no magic dust about it – if the material would have been bland or boring on a blackboard, then it will probably be the same on PowerPoint.”

Microsoft has also created an online global community called the Innovative Teachers Network to share inventive teaching ideas.

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See free examples of imaginative lessons in PowerPoint at: <http://uk.innovative teachers.com/>

Stop the slide to PowerPoint

Be careful what you wish for" is good advice, even in this technological age. Once upon a time, people dreamed of presentations without blackboards, flipcharts, or those overhead projectors which amplified hairy forearms to King Kong proportions - and so PowerPoint was born.

But PowerPoint can make anything look respectable, no matter how badly prepared or dull, which is one reason many teachers are dreading next week's crop of Inset days. Ironically, the worst offenders seem to be presentations on enlivening lessons.

And now, after a decade of campaigns for more technology in class, it emerges that many pupils are experiencing "death by PowerPoint", a fate so well-known to adults that Google has eight million references to it. Still, look on the bright side: school is supposed to be about preparation for adult life.

*September 1st
2006*

TES

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