

LOOK UP FROM THE PHONE!: CREATIVELY USING THE OLD SCHOOL BLACKBOARD IN THE WORLD OF ONLINE BLACKBOARD.

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Full Paper
Experiential Track

Allison was disinterested sitting at the back of the classroom constantly buried in her phone. Despite decent exam scores and writing assignments she would not engage, nor smile, working alongside her classmates or the lectures. Quick to have an opinion, and often a negative one, classwork seemed for her to be a tedious and uninteresting enterprise. Until she got up from her phone. Her group was called up to the whiteboard to illustrate a map of their utopia town as part of their collaborative assignment. None of them admitted they could 'draw' until Allison stepped up. Before long she was laughing along with the group as she emerged as the chief illustrator including a "creative dog that also appeared to be a cat!". Public drawing in front of her peers had broken the addictive monotony of life on the phone and being buried in the siphon effect of social media.

Historically, the physical blackboard hung at the front of the classroom as a signifier of education and learning. Copying notes and illustrations from the teacher into notebooks was how learning was translated in a teacher to student relationship. The electronic Blackboard has emerged first in online education and now into the traditional classroom as a learning platform that engages the student with the course materials, assignment submission, and collaborative online discussions. Indeed, the teacher at the front of the classroom is coopted by a tablet.

In the current culture, students bury their heads in their phones checking their social media, texting, Instagramming, Snapchatting, gaming, or whatever might hold their attention. A difficulty in this tablet and keyboard generation is engaging them in classroom activities that get them off their phones and keyboards and engaging the learning space of the classroom. This paper will demonstrate creative techniques in using the traditional blackboard/whiteboard in the classroom as a collaborative and tactile learning tool. It gets students not only off of their phones but also out of their seats into game-like experiential learning.

The COVID era placed colleges into the online format and quick learning and application into Blackboard, Zoom, Canvas, or whatever online platform is used, forced all students into the online educational realm. As is well known, this has worked well for some students who are accustomed to individualized learning, but for others losing the face-to-face contact and organic elements of in-personal classes was detrimental to their learning. Without the physical engagement with others some students were unable to connect the online lessons to real-world experience. This paper addresses this disjuncture in reconnecting physical presence with the online format in a cohesive manner. This paper introducing using the traditional blackboard or whiteboard as a teaching tool. From storytelling illustrated tableaus, to topical polls, to collaborative wall writing, students participate in understanding one another through public demonstration of their opinions and aspirations.

Author keywords:: experiential learning, collaboration, visual learning, storytelling, emotional empathy, electronic education

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative learning is a concept rooted in human history where communal societies connected their individual competencies into making sure the tribe worked well in networks and shared tasks. Tribalism demonstrates this interlinkage between positive work relationships and networks. In the social sciences, tribalism refers to the strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates the members of one group from the members of another. Urban Tribes are a form of collectivity that has emerged in the past decade. Ethan Watters (2003) describes his own experience of finding friends that are like family in the lonely world of the city. Social capital is now found in a cohort of friends. Maffesoli (1988) concluded that while there is in the post-modern era a breakdown of individualism and a turning against mass culture, as people cluster into neo-tribes finding affinities in the midst of a sense of alienation.

There is a group trend in American business that is focusing on the flat-leadership model that highlights networked and collaborative groups (Medland, 2015). The heterarchy of cohort projects lead by team leaders is overshadowing – and coming to dominate – the hierarchy of top-down command and control operations (Stark, 2008). According to Satell (2015), 80 Percent of all employees in America work in groups and teams. Students need to know how to cooperate and how to compete in this networked environment where the relational nature of humans has come to the fore. Educators are focused on

producing students who can translate their learning into real world experiences that are applicable and practical in their daily lives and in future college and careers. A goal of leadership is to help students “in finding unlikely connections” in the heterarchy. This paper shows how this is accomplished with the new meets old pedagogical methods.

Becker (1982) in *Art Worlds and Collective Activity* argues, “all artistic work...involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people.” Every art form requires the collaborative efforts of a number of individuals from the painter, to the critic, to the marketer, to the audience, to the one whom makes the paintbrushes, to the purchaser who receives a tax break from the government. These represent a “bundle of tasks”. This concept of bundling of tasks in a networked relationship is typical in today’s business world that requires specialists from various fields to work together to complete a project. Similarly, this project translates this form of learning into the school classroom wherein the students and teacher blend visual art forms and writing to best educate one another.

Small Groups are a core of collective activity and effective group work. Putnam & Fieldstein (2003) maintain that in the smaller social environment people find stronger relationships and build social capital that allows them to trust one another on project completion. “Researchers have repeatedly found that social capital is higher in smaller settings – smaller schools, smaller towns, smaller countries, and so on. Listening and trusting are easier in smaller settings” (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 275-76). The effect of small groups in the classroom builds trust amongst students that they are working together to achieve a common grade that is based on collaboration. Beyond learning together, they are achieving together.

Commonalities in community are effective in building team solidarity and cohesion. Students relate to one another through a common set of ritual forms, assignments, or educational practices that hold them together based on certain values, beliefs, and ideologies it have about themselves. This black board meets Blackboard project forms this solidarity around a curriculum that teaches the core values of collaboration, creativity, literacy and fluency, transformation, knowledge, and cultural awareness.

Chrislip & Larson (1994) in considering the role of teamwork conclude that “if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies”. The project is embedded with partnerships between students and teacher. This networking element of student mentoring fits well with the trends of networked relationships in business and organizations. Huxham & Vangen (2000) in describing group dynamics found “that social issues necessarily sit within the interorganizational domain and cannot be tackled by any one organization acting alone” and “power remains shared in this way.” (pg. 1159). This concept of power sharing empowers students to take action, embrace responsibility, and learn in creative and fun ways.

With this in mind, I have undertaken to integrate collaborate learning, design thinking, and traditional tactile tools in the classroom.

STORYTELLING ILLUSTRATED TABLEAUS

Current students are highly visual having been raised in the era of video, camera, selfies, Instagram, and social media. A standard response in the classroom, then, is to supplement lecture and written content with compelling videos, photos, and multi-media. Most effective teachers do this. However, the familiarity with students in watching technology generated material every day becomes blasé. A stronger engagement is to have students take their own photographs, making their own videos, and create original graphic material on the plethora of software available. I have done this in varying ways from group selfie photos, to cinematic montage photo power point presentations, and in-class use of phones and tablets such as ‘phoning a friend’ during class in remaking Who Want’s to be a Millionaire quiz show method for the classroom. Even this, though, can become blasé as students create social media content almost every day.

In light of this, I have incorporated actual drawing on the Old School Blackboard (or whiteboard) as a teaching tool. This requires students to look up from the phone to observe and learn. The storytelling illustrated tableau are a collections of drawings on a theme or topic done by the professor if they are artistically proficient while using a metaphorical story or by students in illustrating an assignment. The Old Man on the Mountain tells a fictional realist story about discovering an ancient cultural and religious tradition on the top of an abandoned mountain. An anthropology student discovers an old tradition about an ancient elder who goes up a mountain to look for something sacred but never returns. He takes this on as his thesis project to retrace the steps of the elder and to find what the elder was looking for. A young female biology student joins the project and adds the biology and science discovery. A budding romance that never happens but a simple paper gets published in the college journal. Several years later on the other side of the world a “crazy rich Asian” graduate student discovers this paper and picks up the research with the funding and influence from a wealthy Asian family that enables him to hire a research team and use modern technology. It goes on to show various elements of the research process through the use of image. Mountain (research field), Hike (methodology) Stream (theoretical foundation), Cabin (archival data), Lakes and Ocean

(scientific data), Students (researchers), Camera/Test Tubes/Notebook (data collection), Other Mountain and Temple (comparative case), Drones and Satellites (research tools) Cruise Ship Conference (academic presentation). Students after watching and listening to the story respond on the Blackboard online discussion board with their interpretation of the elements of the illustrated story and proposed ending.

The Utopia Town project is an extended group project where learning teams collaborate to envision, plan, and illustrate the ideal city. They are required to incorporate various social issues and planning such as diversity, income, industry, leisure, schooling, health care, transportation, laws, and infrastructure. The culmination of the project is to illustrate and color a physical map at least 36" X 36" and/or to illustrate that map on the traditional blackboard/whiteboard in a sales presentation to the rest of the class. The interdisciplinary nature of the project brings together engineering, technology, human services, communication design, and illustration into a flat-leadership model of learning. Everyone leads and participates in some form or another. The project is introduced by showing movie clips of Hollywood renditions of utopia town from various eras: 1930s Lost Horizon and idyllic life away from the gritty industrial city, 1970s Bladerunner and technological age, 1990s Truman Show and suburban life, Wall-E and the Big Box consumer city.

OPINION POLLS

Continuum polls

The Likert Scale is a useful tool to gain opinion about certain questions. It uses a continuum between extremes with various opinion positions between the extremes. Continuums are useful to understand various positions between extremes. In this vein, Beauchamp (2013) defines a continuum of benevolence from "obligatory moral obligation" as the minimal philanthropic activity such as making a small donation or paying one's taxes, to "superogatory" benevolence where a citizen exceeds the social norm in volunteerism and giving money, to the "saintly" where true personal sacrifice is made such as going to war, martyrdom, or giving away of all riches. Hodge (2003) shows a continuum as a progression or series of archetypical behaviors in a range of "transactional-transitional-transformational" particularly in relationship to leadership behavior.

I have adapted this methodology into using topical opinion polls in class that uses a continuum to determine different viewpoints of various social issues. I draw a long arrow the full length of the blackboard/whiteboard with an arrowhead on each end facing opposing directions, a slash in the middle of the arrow indicating the centerpoint, and label the extremes, sometimes with a picture that accompanies the extreme positions to add humor and interest. Students come up to the board and place a slash where they 'land' with their opinion on the topic at hand. After all students have added their slash an open floor discussion ensues where students analyze the board results and share their views either in a small group setting, for the whole class, or online in the Blackboard discussion board. Some topics I have used are as follows:

Pictures are shown of women with lots of makeup and no makeup.

Poll question: How much makeup should a woman wear?

Cake (lots of makeup)  Plain (no makeup)

A video is shown of a fight in a McDonald's restaurant between teenagers.

Poll question: Would I get involved in breaking up a fight in the McDonald's?

Always  Never

Follow discussion: Bystander Apathy causes people to not get involved if it might cause personal threat.

A video clip from the movie Fast n' Furious depicting fast cars is shown.

Poll question: What speed should I drive?

Speed Limit  Plain (no makeup)

A video clip of a sports riot is shown of people both rioting and others taking pictures of the riot on their phones and Instagramming them.

Poll question: Would you get involved in a riot if the options are destroy something, take pictures as the midpoint, or go home.

Destroy something  Go home

Follow up discussion: Groupthink makes someone do things they would otherwise not do and overcomes rationality with emotion.

Students are asked to review any pictures they have posted about themselves and the image they are trying to portray.

Topical question: To what degree is your online image fake (nothing is really true) or real (I reveal everything about myself)

Fake (nothing is true)  Real (I reveal everything)

Follow up discussion: People have a self-image. George Herbert Mead shows how we create a social construction of self, based on what we want others to think about us. One could say some of us are social media introverts, and others social media extroverts and people falling in various places in between. In a follow up exercise students are asked to phone their closest friend and ask simply “am I fake or real?”.

In each of these cases, and others, it resulted in often humorous, gripping, and challenging discussions. Often I will pick a few ‘slashes’ from the continuum arrow and have that student explain why they placed their slash there. Outliers are given the opportunity to explain why they might have countered the majority opinion. We also discuss if this was not a public poll, and there wasn’t the pressure to conform to the group, if answers would change and be more honest.

Snap Judgement Poll

Diversity is a strong element in many college classrooms. However, most people associate with those most like them selves. In a pre-project discussion students are taught about socioeconomic status, racial categories, and social judgement. The blackboard/whiteboard is marked with a grid pattern as noted in the diagram. The horizontal axis on the left contains the socioeconomic classes from top to bottom: Top 2%, Upper, Upper Middle, Middle-middle, Lower Middle, Working, Welfare/Working Poor, Bottom 2%. Across the top are listed the racial categories according to the INS determinations: black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Arab, Native. There is no option given for mixed-race. Students are simultaneously to make their own version of the grid on a piece of paper. Once the grids are set, the questioning begin.

Students are asked to think about the following based on how they judge the person’s socioeconomic standing and race. No additional information or description is given except for the simple categorizations. Each response should only be 10 seconds or so ensuring they write down what they think first as snap judgements. They are to enter the symbol onto their personal grid.

- i. The person you last saw before entering the classroom. (checkmark)
- ii. The person you last texted with or talked on the phone. (square)
- iii. The first person that comes to mind when asked “think of any person you have interacted with this week”. (circle)
- iv. Your best friend. (heart)
- v. You. (star)

TABLE 1: CITY GRID

Once students have completed their personal grids they are separated into groups of five and their responses are tabulated for

	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Arab	Native
Top 2 %						
Upper Class						
Upper Middle Class						
Middle Middle Class						
Lower Middle Class						
Working Class						
Welfare/Working Poor Class						
Bottom 2%						

the group. The group tabulations are totaled for each of the categories. These tabulations are then posted onto the master grid. While the posting is taking place the students are to observe the poll emerge and think about what the data is stating and what is missing. In the groups the students discuss their judgements. Each group then has a spokesperson present to the rest of the class the responses from the group and their viewpoints about the snap judgements they made.

The professor concludes the exercise by highlighting the principle of the Homogeneous Unit Principle that people like to be with people like themselves and make judgements about others whether to engage them or avoid them. Many of these judgements are made based on simplistic understanding and lack of information as the exercise has shown. Further, it shows how people in positions of authority and power create protections and security keep ‘undesirable people’ away.

As homework on the electronic Blackboard, students upload a photograph of their personal city grid and then answer: Why did you make the snap judgements you did? How did you feel being forced to make snap judgements? What can we do to avoid making snap judgements to overcome the stereotypes that often drive our decision making?

COLLABORATIVE WALL WRITING

This method is an adaptation of street art techniques and graffiti wherein the wall (traditional blackboard/whiteboard) is filled with words on specific topics with everyone in the class coming up to the board to write simultaneously on different panels of the wall. I have consistently used three: Racism Stereotypes, Family Wall, Before I Die.

Racism Stereotypes Project

American public schools are resegregating, especially in the inner city, and inner suburbs, reconstructing the social, racial, and economic boundaries breached in the past several decades through diversity policy (Edelman, 2011; Lutz, 2011; Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012). Integration is not achieved as “everyday racism” still exists amongst high school students (Dovemark, 2013.) even with the establishment and continuation of diversity policies. The project was an experiential learning pedagogy which utilizes groups (Graeff, 1997; Easterling & Rudell, 1997; Ekrich & Voorhees, 2002; Laverie, Madhavaram, & McDonald, 2008) that aimed to introduce helping students engage in positive tribalism, and learn from one another to overcome social distance that comes from racial and ethnic diversity. (Gilchrist, 2009). This project is very useful in a Race and Ethnic Relations, sociology, ethics, or leadership course. An explanation to the project is given prior to beginning about racial stereotypes how they might be humorous to some they would be damaging to others. Historical context is given about American immigration policy that designated six narrow categorizations of race.

Desks are pulled to the back and sides of the classroom allowing for free movement. The blackboard/whiteboard is divided into six sections about 4 feet wide stretching across the breadth of the classroom with a line drawn between each section. At the top of each section in bold lettering are written racial types as ratified by the INS: Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Arab, Native. The class is separated into racial groups only allowing for the narrow stereotypes. Students who are mixed race are told they ‘must choose one’ because in 1965 that is what would take place at the border and even today. They squeeze in next to the blackboard/whiteboard within the boundaries of their racial stereotypes. Several pieces of chalk or pens are made available so several students can write at once while others shout out responses. On the word “GO!” they write down as many stereotypes about their racial category they can think of with no boundaries. After 3 minutes of writing a countdown “five, four, three, two, one....SWITCH!!! Students the switch to the category to their right. The group on the extreme right runs across the room to the extreme left board. The process of busily writing stereotypes continues with various students writing and others shouting names to write down. After another three minutes or so, there is a countdown and switch to the next stereotype. This process of writing-countdown-switching continues until students have written in all of the racial categories.

After the completion of the board exercise, students sit on the floor in groups around their respective racial stereotype lists and assess the degree to which the names might be true (pretty much always like that), truisms (true for some but also stereotype), false (not true at all) and their rationale for their judgements. After each racial group shares, a floor discussion ensues where everyone is open to give their responses to the exercises.

The moderator (the professor) closes by discussing how the project has shown how many stereotypes there are, how they are applied differently by different people and interpreted in various ways. It also illustrates how racial stereotype knowledge exist within each person having acquired that knowledge from somewhere such as family, cultural groups, friends, or even enemies.

An electronic discussion board is opened for the following week where students are to respond to at least three stereotypes from each category about the true, truism, false assessment and opinion. Many students have taken pictures of the completed board for their own posterity and review.

A sample video is available on the Tokke (2018) YouTube Channel.

Family Wall

The Family Wall collaborative wall focuses on cultural traits and positive views of one’s family. Across the top of the blackboard/whiteboard is written in large letters FAMILY spread across the breadth of the board. The session opens with a discussion about the importance of family as the most significant social unit in life. Each family has social and cultural traits that make them unique and distinct. Families, despite their foibles, are positive influences by and large into student’s lives. A selection of humorous videos about family life are shown. Students are then to come to the board and write down their response to the following queries: what is the home country for your family, what are some cultural practices unique to your family and its ethnicity/religion/culture, what are positive traits about your family, what are some things you regret, what are some things you want to change. The collaborative response imagery seen by everyone shows the complexities of everyone’s family.

An open floor discussion follows the exercise where students share their family experiences. For homework, an electronic Blackboard discussion board assignment asks students to respond to the following: what are some cultural traits and social rules in your family, what social rules would you want to change, what can you do to improve your family life. This can be predicated with a discussion in groups in class about the responses to the board rather than open floor as it may provoke more personal responses for those uncomfortable speaking to the full class.

Before I Die

Artist Candy Chang (2012) created a therapeutic public art project wherein passers by are asked to complete the statement “Before I Die I Want To...”. It has been completed in many parts of the world as a community therapy experience causing reflection on life, hopes, dreams, regrets, legacy, and ambition. A large blackboard is erected on a sidewalk and written in large white letters across the top is the incomplete phrase “before I die I want to...”. Chalk is provided. It has resulted in a plethora of responses.

I adapted her concept into the classroom, using it predominantly in the context of the sociology of religion, explaining that throughout history one of the key elements is understanding death and the afterlife. I open the class with showing Chang’s short Ted Talk profiling her work and the project around the world. I reveal the blackboard/whiteboard where written in bold large letters is the phrase “Before I Die I Want To...”. Then, putting on some reflective music - I prefer Sarah McLaughlin’s “I will remember you” (McLaughlin, 2006) - students are invited to come up to the board and complete the phrase. Responses have been funny, sad, motivating, troubling, and heartfelt. Some responses include: skydive, own my own house, please God, please my mother, travel the world, get married and have lots of kids, forgive, drive a Lamborghini, graduate college, get a new heart, start all over, be the best person I can be.

It is an excellent therapeutic and thoughtful exercise that cause students to take a moment out of their busy days to think about their lives in a broader context than exams, papers, or classes. It is best to give this project towards the end of the semester after trust between classmates and professor is established. A video sample can be found on the Tokke (2018) YouTube channel.

RESULTS

There are some important results that emerge from this pedagogy.

1. Students see how their individual opinions and responses fit within a larger group response. They are able to contrast and compare their own micro view within the context of the broader macro view.
2. Reflection responses brings emotional and feeling into a classroom
3. Tactile involvement in writing or illustrating on a traditional blackboard/whiteboard adds uniqueness in a world of videos and digital imagery.
4. The collaborative nature of the projects in a public format where everyone can see each other’s responses opens discussion in groups on a topic.
5. Students are engaged in various human emotions from happy, sad, reflective, motivated, and critical in providing their personal answers and then discussing them in groups.
6. Using an active learning traditional classroom method initially, and following up with online individual discussion board responses allows the introvert student who is not comfortable speaking in public
7. The phones and tablets are put away for the duration of the class creating an ‘electronic free’ moment for students to respond, think, analyze, and speak.

There are limitations to the teaching methodology.

1. Being that answers are public some students are not fully honest or vulnerable with their responses.
2. Peer pressure makes students respond according to the majority of students as some do not want to be outliers and be called upon to answer publicly about their outlier response.
3. Though it is an entertaining and fun exercise to some degree, some students overemphasize the fun at the expense of true learning.
4. Some students are not comfortable with public sharing of their opinions. The extrovert can dominate the follow-up classroom discussions.
5. There must be a large enough blackboard/whiteboard so everyone can put their opinion on the board and the visuals to be large enough.
6. It requires a professor/leader who can use the artistic and qualitative skills needed.

CONCLUSION

This paper shows how using the traditional blackboard or whiteboard in the classroom is a useful pedagogical method for involving students to divert them away from the attention-grabbing and distracting phone or tablet. Integrating collaborative learning where the whole class participates and analyzes the results together based on a theoretical foundation laid by the professor, makes for strong student engagement in both theory and practice. Using illustrated storytelling tableaux, opinion polls, and wall writing all bring unique methods that use the creative skills and views of the students to actively learn through participation.

Using these traditional tools is especially useful in developing countries or underfunded public schools where the latest technology is not available. It builds on current research in network-based learning wherein individuals input their views and opinions into a larger group response. It captures the attention of students through collaborative emotional empathy with humor, sadness, dreams, and struggles. Combined with effective blending with the electronic platform the slate and wood platform (or white board) combine to creatively innovate learning in old and new.

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