Blackboard K-12 Connections

Spring 2003

Spotlight On Success: Blackboard at the Middle School Level

An increasing number of K-12 Blackboard users are using Blackboard Learning System™ to enhance teaching and learning in K-8 classrooms. This profile focuses on some of the many ways in which two innovative middle school teachers are using Blackboard to enhance face-to-face instruction in their classrooms.

McPherson Magnet School, part of Orange Unified School District in California, is a math, science and technology magnet serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade. McPherson's rigor-ous curriculum focuses on "hands-on" discovery and a project-based, inquiry approach to learning. Jay Turner, an 8th grade History teacher, and Lynne Palucki, an 8th grade English teacher, collaborate together on a teaching team and have been using Blackboard extensively with their students. Initial student and parent introductions to Blackboard are important, and many OUSD teachers have helped students and parents to become familiar with the resources and tools available on "Orange Black-

board" using simple reminders like the business card below.

In Jay and Lynne's classrooms, Blackboard has been used effectively for engaging parents in classroom activities. Jay and Lynne use the Announcements tool to recognize students who have achieved top grades and they have been surprised at the very positive impact of this practice, which takes so little time on Blackboard.

For some activities, Blackboard has facilitated

Orange Blackboard Directions

1. Go to www.orangeusd.k12.ca.us
2. Click on "Resource Tools"
3. Click on "Orange Blackboard" and then click on "log in"
4. Enter User Name: _____
5. Enter Password: _____

Instructions posted on login page.

OUSD "business cards" for students and parents with Blackboard login directions.

> *"Blackboard keeps kids accountable…parents and students know what's going on in class…. This is especially important in middle school, when kids are becoming independent."*
> *Lynne Palucki,*
> *8th Grade Teacher, Orange Unified School District*

Blackboard K-12 Team—Your Human Resources at Blackboard

We are very pleased to announce that the K-12 team at Blackboard has grown significantly in order to better serve the needs of our dynamic community of K-12 Blackboard users. In the last year, our team of account managers, who work most closely with Blackboard clients nationwide, has grown from one person in charge of all clients in the United States and

Canada to a staff of five specialists who are working together to connect Blackboard clients and advocate for the needs of K-12 users. The entire K-12 team at Blackboard, including regional representatives, K-12 trainers and technical consultants, services, marketing, and business development staff numbers over 25 and is rapidly

growing.

Our main goal in growing our account management staff has been to hire professionals with expertise in technology and K-12 education who will work closely with you and your users to help ensure the success of your Blackboard implementation. Profiles of all K-12 Account Managers are on Page 3.

Spotlight on Success: Blackboard in the Middle School Classroom

greater viewing and comment on student work. For example, one project that resulted in students creating slide show presentations, the work was posted in Blackboard for student and parent viewing. The built-in audience for student assignments serves to motive students to produce high quality work and allows students to learn from each other's research. Perhaps most importantly, the videos and images Jay and Lynne are able to post in Blackboard make it possible to share experiences in ways that would be very difficult without technology. For example, parent night, mock trials, field trips, and pictures of art work have been filmed and posted on Blackboard for parents or students to view at their convenience.

Each class in Orange Unified School District is designed to meet California learning standards. Blackboard provides an easy way for students, teachers, and parents to refer to the standards that apply to each assignment. The teachers have created Learning Units that store all assignments related to a unit or particular standard of learning. These can be made available or unavailable to students within particular date and time ranges. This content repository is particularly helpful when students are absent as well as for general organization of class materials. For students who have fallen behind or are at risk of retention, required content and assignments are available on Blackboard.

Jay and Lynne make extensive use of question pools and offer many practice tests and assessments online. They use randomization to challenge each student with a varied order or different selection of questions. These questions can then be re-used the following year or shared with other teachers. Parents and students appreciate the instant feedback and teachers save time by not having to grade as many objective assessments manually. Jay Turner has often emailed parents immediately after a student completes a test, providing students and parents with immediate feedback as to areas that need work or in which a student has shown positive growth. When remediation is necessary, students can continue practicing and taking tests at home.

The Discussion Board has also been an important tool for deepening student engagement in the curriculum. In both Jay and Lynne's classes, exchanges in the discussion board are lively and thoughtful. Lynne has created rubrics for evaluating online discussion participation which encourage students to make thoughtful, substantive contributions.

Lynne and Jay believe the benefits of e-Learning include keeping instruction fresh and more enjoyable for students. Their own professional development and creativity are also impacted. "It keeps us thinking," Lynne stated, when describing how new ideas often develop when creating the online activities.

"Blackboard allows me to be a better teacher by helping me be more organized… I'm able to spend more quality time teaching" - Jay Turner

Lynne and Jay expressed that Blackboard has increased communication with parents and students and allowed them to focus more on the students and their learning and less on time-consuming paperwork. Blackboard has made it possible for the teachers to post and email weekly E-newsletters about classroom activities without the hassle of photocopying. While they acknowledge that changing from a paper way of creating and thinking to a more digital approach takes time initially, it saves teachers a lot of time in the long run. These time savings translate into more time available to do what they love – teaching.

We thank Jay and Lynne for sharing their time and expertise for this edition of K-12 Connections. Thanks also go to Gwen Davis, Administrative Director of Information Services and Educational Technology at Orange Unified School District, for her support of Blackboard and for facilitating the interview with these outstanding teachers.

We welcome you to share your stories of success with Blackboard in your classroom, school, or district. Please contact CRMK12@blackboard.com if you would like us to feature your use of Blackboard in an upcoming issue of K-12 Connections.

Join "Team Blackboard"

Team Blackboard, a national K-12 Blackboard listerv hosted by Peoria Unified School District, includes subscribers from independent schools, school districts, and education service centers.

Since the list's inception last year, members have discussed issues such as sharing K-12 content in Blackboard format, best practices for student account management, and ideas for using the whiteboard in the Virtual Classroom.

All K-12 Blackboard users are welcome to join at:

http://listserv.peoriaud.k12.az.us/teamblackboard.htm.
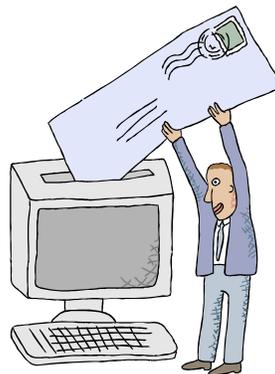
Behind the Blackboard

Our newly re-designed client support Web site, Behind the Blackboard, is an ever-growing resource to support the success of your Blackboard implementation. In addition to specialized access to tools, downloads, and documentation for two designated Blackboard System Administrators at your institution, all Blackboard users—including teachers, curriculum specialists, course developers, students, and parents —may create accounts Behind the Blackboard for access to free information including resources such as:
• User manuals
• Self-paced and animated tutorials
• Product documentation

http://behind.blackboard.com

Blackboard Account Manager Profiles

Our K-12 account managers collaborate as a team on projects such as this newsletter and we welcome you to contact us at CRMK12@blackboard.com. In addition, we each have responsibility for specific clients in a particular region. In general, responsibilities are as follows:

Northeast U.S. and Eastern Canada
NH, ME, VT, MA, RI, CT, NJ, NY, PA, DE, Eastern Canada
Matt Abel (mabel@blackboard.com) joins the K-12 Blackboard team with four years of experience teaching High School Math (he loves trigonometry), two years of public accounting experience, and most recently, four years of experience of keeping US Airways flying smoothly. He set up his first Blackboard class in the fall of 1999 and has been intrigued by e-learning ever since. He is delighted to be working in the education field again. Originally from Pittsburgh, a devout Steelers and Pirates fan, Matt was very happy to see Pitt go to the Sweet Sixteen this year, as well as his alma mater, Notre Dame. Go Irish!

Southeast United States
DC, MD, VA, NC, SC, GA, LA, FL
Jennifer Matthews
(jmatthews@blackboard.com) has been an Account Manager for clients in the central U.S. since June of 2002 and will now be taking responsibility for clients in the Southeast United States. Jen has eight year s of experience as an elementary school teacher for public schools in Chesterfield, Henrico, and Fairfax Counties in Virginia as well as experience as a school-based technology specialist. Jen enjoys living in Washington, DC and welcomes opportunities to travel and experience new cultures and places.

Central United States
ND, SD, MN, WI, IA, MO, IL, MI, OH, IN, KY, WV, TN, AL, MS, AR
Elizabeth Isler (eisler@blackboard.com) joined Blackboard in February 2003. Prior to her work on the K-12 team, Elizabeth taught high school Spanish in City of Falls Church, Virginia and ESL in Charlottesville, Virginia. Elizabeth enjoys traveling, running with her dog, spending time with family, and drinking coffee.

Back: Matt Abel, Maura Keaney, Elizabeth Isler. Front: Jennifer Matthews, Tracey Powell

Western U.S. and Western Canada
AK, HI, WA, OR, CA, MT, ID, NV, WY, CO, NM, AZ, TX, OK, KS, NE
Tracey Powell
(tpowell@blackboard.com) has been serving as an Account Manager for K-12 clients in the Western U.S. since August 2002. Before joining Blackboard in July of 2002, Tracey was a teacher and later a research analyst for SRI International where she contributed to national studies of education technology policy, professional development, and accountability. She co-wrote a literature review on professional development in educational technology and the subsequent study report on the status of educational technology practice in U.S. schools. She helped develop and pilot the NSF-funded middle school mathematics software application, MathInsight. Tracey enjoys training her two new puppies, Siesta and Poncho, to do side-by-side tricks.

National Accounts
Maura Keaney
(mkeaney@blackboard.com) has been with Blackboard since summer of 2000. She first worked as an instructional designer and consultant with Blackboard Learning Solutions, traveling around the world to train Blackboard users. Since March of 2002, Maura has been working with K-12 clients, initially as a representative for all K-12 clients in the U.S. and Canada. As Senior Manager of K-12 Client Development, Maura now works intensively with a small number of clients across all regions of the United States and Canada to develop showcase Blackboard implementations and create implementation resources for all K-12 Blackboard clients. Maura's classroom teaching experience includes six years as an English teacher for Arlington County Public Schools in Virginia. She enjoys commuting from Virginia to DC on her motorcycle during good weather.

Our entire account management team strives to work together to serve the needs of all K-12 clients. We welcome information on how you are using Blackboard to impact student achievement and suggestions on how we can better serve you!

Teacher Corner: Guiding Chatter in Chat Rooms

Situation:

An un-moderated online chat room is like a classroom where all students are talking at once. Separate conversations emerge, ideas are difficult to follow, and students who need more time to process information have difficulty keeping up. Public online chat rooms can be interesting to visit, but very few people try to conduct substantive discussions in that setting. In an un-moderated online virtual classroom, the situation can be even worse because when all students are reading and typing at once, those that are slower typists or slow readers get left behind. Some teachers shy away from using Blackboard's virtual classroom for synchronous instruction because they assume that interaction will be totally chaotic. Learning about the features of the Virtual Classroom in Blackboard can help teachers use this powerful tool most effectively.

Solution: Raise Your Hand!

Blackboard provides features that can allow a teacher to more closely guide the "traffic" in an online chat to keep synchronous class discussions on track. In face-to-face classrooms, most teachers ask students to raise their hand before talking or otherwise guide the flow of conversation and interchange in the classroom. In Blackboard, you can ask students to raise their hands, too—virtually! A brief explanation below shows how to do this in Blackboard 5 and in Release 6 of Blackboard Learning System (including Basic Edition).

Blackboard 5.x

The Tutornet Virtual Classroom in Blackboard 5 allows teachers to guide student interaction through the Tutornet Control Panel. For each of the four main tools in the Virtual Classroom (Draw, Navigate, Chat, and Question), the teacher can block student participation entirely or can limit student participation using the Floor setting. Students can request the floor by clicking an icon that looks like a hand—in effect, raising their hands virtually. In the Tutornet Control Panel tab, the teacher sees a list of all students who have raised their hands and can assign the floor to one or all of those students.

Release 6 of Blackboard Learning System

The Virtual Classroom technology in Release 6, built entirely by Blackboard, allows a teacher to customize these settings more easily by providing a "participant panel" on the same page as all other tools in the Virtual Classroom. Each tool can be turned off entirely or can be made available to only Active Users or all Active and Passive Users. For example, in an online math course, the teacher may allow all Active and Passive users to type in the chat panel, but only an Active user may solve an equation on the whiteboard. To volunteer to solve the equation, students click an icon that looks like a hand. The teacher can see a list of students with raised hands in the participant panel and can select one of those students to become Active.

Teaching Tips

Innovative K-12 teachers use Blackboard to go on virtual field trips and discuss the content of Web sites as in the art history example below. Many teachers conduct online study sessions on the night before tests. Teachers can also allow students to use the Virtual Classroom for group projects, leaving the Archive of the session on so that student activity can be monitored and/or graded after the session has ended. Many teachers also use the Virtual Classroom for virtual parent conferences or to communicate with a class from home when absent.

We welcome ideas for future Teacher Corner columns.
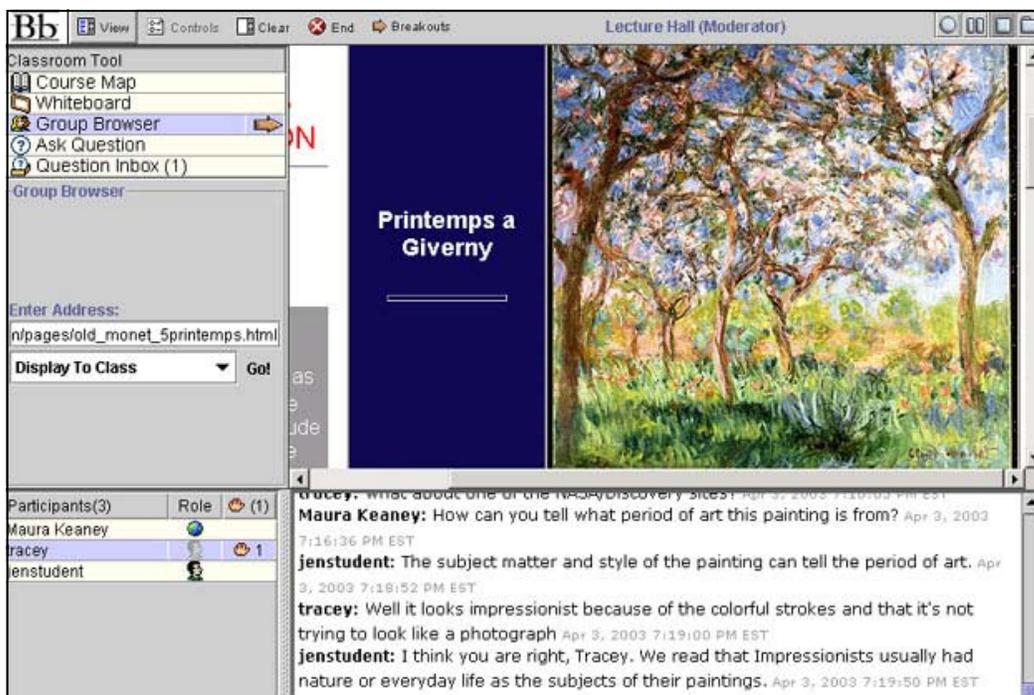
In this Release 6 Virtual Classroom session, the Participant Panel in the bottom left hand corner shows one student with a raised hand.