

MEDIA WORKSTATION

THE BOARD

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This may be easily the most redundant article to date in this series on media use. ALL teachers use the board and are probably quite adept in its use and abuse ... and I do not mean just the old caricature of the screeching chalk that sets pupils' teeth on edge and wakes up the dozing stragglers.

Nonetheless, a collation of board skills should be of some use, especially now that chalkboards (traditionally referred to as *blackboards*, though grey through overuse, or green could be the colour) are being progressively replaced by the more health promoting marker boards (*whiteboards* to the colour sticklers among you).

For the teacher the board is a way of:

- thinking aloud,
- underscoring points,
- visually reinforcing elements of a lesson for memorisation,
- spontaneously fluctuating between the verbal and the visual,
- progressively disclosing workings,
- illustrating,
- displaying.



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Board mishaps

First off let's look at the negative side of board use. A lot of teachers use boards almost for companionship. They talk to boards and ignore the class in the process, with the resultant discipline problems. They write massive amounts of just about everything, never rub anything out, fitting tidbits in odd corners, and expect their students to sift through the visual jungle and make sense of the communications. The size of the text is usually quite apt, but only for themselves and the front row of the classroom. "A chalkboard is such a common classroom item that instructors often neglect to give it the attention and respect it deserves as an instructional device. Using a chalkboard effectively requires conscious effort." (Heinich, et al, 1996, p.125).

Then there are the non-voluntary mishaps. In the case of chalkboards, many people (teachers and students) are allergic to chalk or find it disturbingly messy. There are environments that cannot tolerate chalk dust, like computer labs and environmentally controlled spaces. Whiteboards solve the above but can have their own problems. If the wrong markers are used (permanent or non-specifically whiteboard markers) a ghosting problem may occur and persist (Ellington, et al, 1995). Faded markers can be frustrating to both writer and viewer ... and pressing DOES NOT help, in spite of wishes to the opposite.

Usage pros

Taking as read that the board is a non-projected medium will avoid certain pitfalls that many are liable to, like using the board as a tool with very large groups. The board is only good for relatively small, enclosed environments. Also, most circumstances can apply to both the chalkboard and the markerboard, again, providing the basic differences are considered: primarily that the chalkboard gives a "negative" reading with white on colour and the marker board's reading is "positive" with black or colour on white. A limitation of both is that no effective toning process is possible since chalk and markers can only offer line. Once these points are accepted and not exceeded, then a lot can be done with the board in the classroom.

Here's a look at positive board use, based (though not exclusively) on Newby, et al's (1996) compendium.

- Check the visibility of the board from several positions around the room to be sure that their isn't any glare on the surface. If yes, move the board or curtain/blind the source - normally a window or a lamp.

- Don't write too much. Use the OHP for pre-prepared material, or if this is unavailable, prepare the whole thing on a chart then stick it on the board, with tape if c.board or magnets if m.board. The point of the board is spontaneity not eloquence.

- Organise in advance what you plan to write on the board and where you plan to write it. If you're to put drawings or diagrams, there's nothing wrong with sketching them out before the beginning of the class and then "building" them up in front of your students. And don't shy away from using specially large board protractors, set-squares, etc. For frequently used shapes, prepare your own stiff cardboard or wood cut-outs. Stick a used thread-spool on them to have a place to grip.

- Whenever possible, don't use script, but print. For a ten meter classroom letters should be around 7 to 8 cms. high and the lines forming the letters should be around 5 mm. thick.

- Avoid scratching or squeaking by holding chalk and markers at an angle.

- Without overusing colour, make sure you use it for emphasis and differentiation - not aesthetic, but utilitarian.

- Face the class as much as possible. Don't talk to the board. Don't block the class's view of the board once you've written something on it.

- Don't leave marker writing on the board for too long. The longer it's there, the more difficult it is to erase. Use a felt eraser for this. A general cleaning with a damp cloth is effective for both c.board and m.board. More profound cleaning of the m.board can be done with special whiteboard sprays bought at dealers.

- Cap your boardmarkers every time you're not using them or they'll dry on you. Store them horizontally. If you leave the cap off and the tip dries, stick the cap on and leave the marker tip down for a few minutes. This may help.

One final comment needs be made. Never use the board as a crutch for your lesson, but as a partner that can provide a cheap, available visual dimension that is usually indispensable.

References:

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