



New Chalk Talk

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Smart Classes in Smart Classrooms (1) *Effective Use of Data Displays*

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We aren't entertainers and shouldn't be expected to use laser light shows to maintain the interest of our students. However, research shows that students consistently report that a data display is able to maintain their interest more than a spoken lecture. Data displays allow instructors to display images from the instructor's computer monitor for the entire class. Class lessons using data displays appeal to multiple learning styles through the use of multimedia, but the effective use of data displays does not necessarily require video or audio elements.

As a composition teacher drilling the importance of outlining and planning, I often use the data display in my courses for organizational purposes alone. Each class period is outlined as a way to keep discussions focused on specific learning outcomes. Notes and activities are referenced and linked in this displayed online outline, providing a connection between the theory presented in lectures and the practice of group work and individual activities. Using WebCT to archive these notes, activities, and daily outlines allows students to follow the class lessons at home.

The use of data displays should go beyond the presentation of lecture material. The most common use of data displays is the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentation, which often replaces the archived handouts we use to accompany lectures. These presentations can be more than paperless handouts, and the development of interactive lecture presentations and self-study tutorials using PowerPoint is the subject of a future workshop and *New Chalk Talk* article.

More important than displaying lecture notes, the data display allows for student-centered learning. Multiple texts and graphics can be displayed at once for contrastive purposes, including the comparison of online sources, artwork, and even student work. Frequently class

discussions and projects focus on a very specific line of text, graphic, photograph, or other item. Rather than simply reading the material or forcing students to squeeze closer for a view, material can be easily displayed and manipulated.

Of course, outlining lectures and contrasting materials could just as easily be done with an overhead projector, but a data display does not require significant advance planning. A student's work can be displayed for class review on the day the work is due. New material found online can be presented for a class that same day. In fact, only through data displays can the wealth of material found online be made available in class. Web pages can be compared and live online content made available for class debate and discussion. A blackboard or whiteboard is also not ideal for lectures or discussions. The material on a blackboard is there and gone quickly as more space is needed. The spoken word is even more transient. Online space is unlimited, and the student is more likely to take accurate notes when these notes are archived by the instructor.

However, the problem arises that everything is a little too easy for the students when they are provided with so many "smart" tools. The physical act of taking notes reinforces learning. If lecture notes and class activities are provided for students each day, then why should they take notes at all? I've encountered this problem in my classes, but have found that asking students to summarize material in their own words or asking specific questions on the discussion board is one way of overcoming this fault. In other words, taking notes becomes an assignment rather than an automatic response that some but not all students may have during a lecture.

Using data displays in classrooms that also have a computer for each student presents its own unique benefits and problems, and so this form of smart classroom is the subject of the next article in this series.

Share with us your experiences by contributing to the New Chalk Talk series, or by simply sending comments/suggestions to aellozy@aucegypt.edu.