

Moving from Discussion Boards to Jamboard

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Jamboard is a digital interactive whiteboard that allows learners to collaborate in real time. Jamboard was released by Google in 2017 and is one of the free products on Google's G-suite. Prior to discovering Jamboard, I relied upon discussion boards in each of my classes. In my role as instructor, discussion boards provided me with insight into who was completing the course readings and acted as a form of assessment, both formative and summative. In this brief vignette, I discuss how Jamboards offer many of the advantages of discussion boards and provide students with the opportunity to interact with their instructor and peers. This results in a more enjoyable online course.

Discussion Boards as a Staple of Online Learning

Discussion boards have been a staple of online learning for several reasons. They offer permanency so that students can look back on their discussions for future work (Garrison, 2006) and they engage students. Moore (1993) found student engagement in online courses is enhanced through learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content interactions. Discussion boards can offer all three of these forms of engagement through peer and instructor feedback, with peers replying to posts that support or challenge their thinking, and instructors extending the learning through questions, comments, and connections.

Concerns About Discussion Boards

One concern with discussion boards is that students tend to reply to existing posts without taking the time to digest previous responses (Hewitt, 2001). Key to designing interactive discussions is creating challenging questions that require students to think about the course materials, apply concepts they have learned, analyze problems, and synthesize divergent points of view (Smith & Winkling Diaz, 2004). Students often avoid time consuming tasks like summarizing and synthesizing previous posts and instead rush to post a comment that will fulfill their discussion posting obligations (Hewitt, 2001).

One of the goals of online learning is to move students beyond superficial engagement to critical thinking where they consider the reasons behind the post. In her analysis of online learning, Arend (2009) found that critical thinking was more likely to occur in the online environment when students were encouraged to think about the material in a new way through discussions and questioning. When students are able to relate course content to prior knowledge and experience, reflect on their classmates' postings, and apply this to their own learning, they are more likely to engage in critical thinking (Gilbert & Dabbagh, 2005). Similarly (Smith & Winkling Diaz, 2004) found that having students relate concepts to their own experiences increases ownership and engagement with the course materials. In their criteria for evaluating online discussions, Nandi, Hamilton, Chang, and Balbo (2012) suggested that quality posts include interpretation and

critical assessment, focus on important issues in the literature, contribute new ideas, share knowledge or expertise, and demonstrate good use of social cues.

The Advantages of Jamboard

Like discussion boards, Jamboard provides a permanent archive that students can refer back to (Jones, 2021). The advantages of Jamboard is that students do not need to spend a lot of time synthesizing or summarizing previous comments because they are right in front of them. In this way, students are more likely to expand upon one another's ideas and reflect on ideas in real time, leading to critical thinking. Collaborative discussions that rely on open-ended, informal spaces where students share multiple viewpoints, encourage critical thinking (Arend, 2009). In an examination of student perceptions on distance learning strategies during the pandemic, Chen et al. (2020) found that interactive synchronous sessions and small group discussions improved student engagement and decreased burnout.

Another advantage of Jamboard is that it can offer learner-learner, learner-instructor and learner-content interaction thereby increasing student engagement (Garrison, 2006). When a question is posted on a Jamboard, students have the opportunity to build upon one another's comments, relate comments to course content, and engage with the instructor and peers through online discussion. Like discussion boards, the instructor must design a challenging question that requires students to think about the course materials, apply concepts they have learned, analyze problems and synthesize divergent points of view (Smith & Winkling Diaz, 2004).

How I Use Jamboard

While I don't profess to be an expert on Jamboard, like many of you, I realized when the pandemic began, I would need to find new ways to engage students online. When I first discovered Jamboard, I thought it was a superficial way to engage students but over time, I realized it can be used to engage students in critical thinking about complex issues by applying what they have learned in the course and reflecting on other students' contributions (Gilbert and Dabbagh, 2005). Looking back at my Jamboards, I see that I have used it for setting classroom norms, discussing readings, having students compare and contrast toolkits designed for the same purpose, engaging students in analysis of complex issues such as globalization and poverty, analyzing case studies and applying models found in course-based literature. The figure below (*Figure 1*) is a screen shot of a Jamboard students created in response to the question, what are the norms for our class?

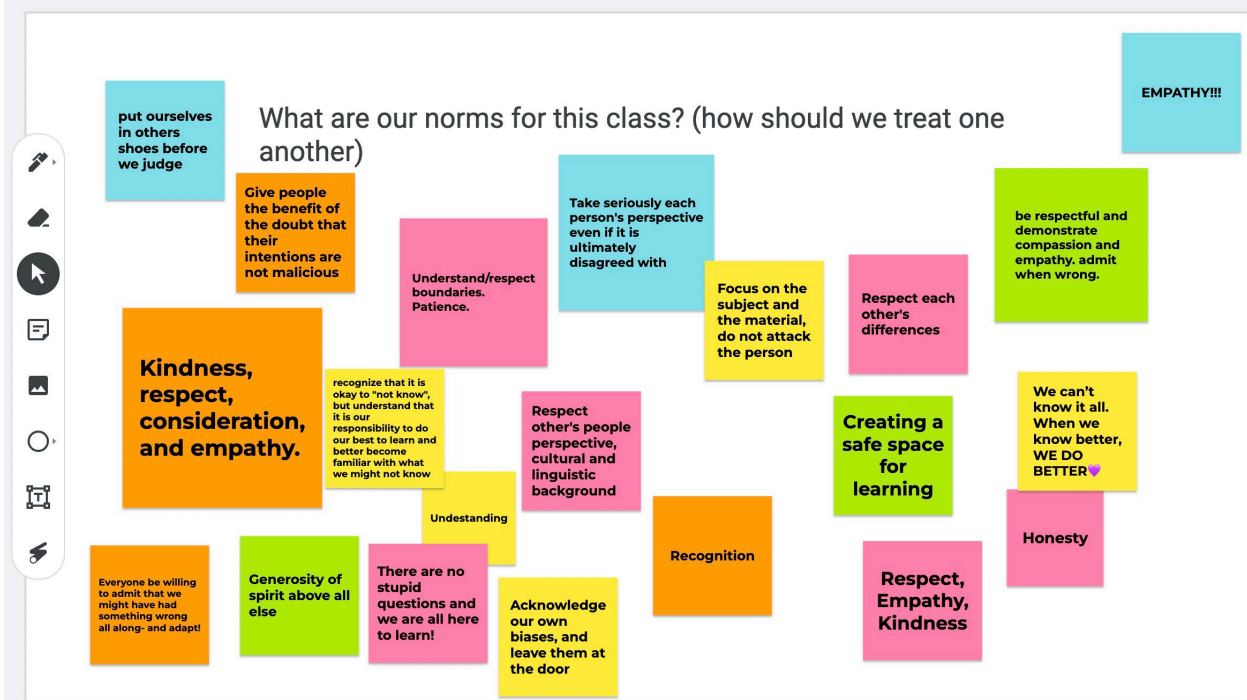


Figure 1: Jamboard Image

In attempting to analyze the way that I have used Jamboard, the following figure considers the type of interactions. The figure demonstrates how the Jamboard required students to engage with course materials, apply concepts they have learned, analyze problems and synthesize divergent points of view and apply this to their own learning.

Activity	Type of Interaction	Apply Course Literature/ Concepts	Analyze Problems	Synthesize Divergent Points of View/Reflect	Apply to Their Own Learning
Setting Norms	learner-learner/ learner-instructor				
Discuss Readings	learner-learner/ learner-instructor/ learner-content				
Compare/Contrast Toolkits	learner-learner/ learner-instructor/ learner-content				

Analyze Complex Issues	learner-learner/ learner-instructor/ learner-content				
Case Studies	learner-learner/ learner-instructor/ learner-content				
Analyzing Models	learner-learner/ learner-instructor/ learner-content				

Figure 2: Jamboard Analysis

In the above analysis, it is evident that all but setting classroom norms provided an opportunity for students to engage in all three levels of interaction as identified by Moore (1993). By providing opportunities to interact with other learners as well as their instructor, Jamboard is more likely to increase student enjoyment of the course. The *setting norms* Jamboard activity (Figure 1) acted as an icebreaker that offered students the opportunity to share their expectations of the course with their instructor and classmates. This activity provided students with the opportunity to engage with one another in a friendly, low-stakes environment at the beginning of the course. *Discussing readings* and *comparing and contrasting toolkits* required students to apply the course literature and reflect on other points of view while applying divergent comments to their own learning (Arend, 2009). The three final Jamboards, *analyzing complex issues*, *case studies* and *analyzing models* all required students to apply course readings and concepts, analyze problems and synthesize divergent points of view while reflecting on their own viewpoints and applying what they were hearing and seeing to their own learning (Arend, 2009).

The interactive nature of Jamboard also offers other benefits that discussion boards cannot. Jamboards connect both students and their instructor all at the same time. Students report that interactive synchronous sessions, small group activities and breakout rooms increase their engagement (Chen et al., 2020). Such activities allow students to get to know each other and their instructor on a more personal level. Jamboards also increase students' feelings of belonging by encouraging learner to learner interaction and, in doing so, can combat feeling of isolation through live discussions with real people who are sharing similar experiences (Tice et al., 2021). During the pandemic, we became aware of the mental health costs of isolation and for many students, engagement with their instructors and other learners took on increased importance.

Rules for Jamboard

In using Jamboard in my online teaching, I have certain expectations of students prior to class. Firstly, they must come to class having engaged with the content/readings assigned for the week. Secondly, they must be prepared to participate verbally in the discussion of the Jamboard and explain their post. I use the Jamboard activities as a formative assessment that allows me to observe who has completed the readings and who is struggling with course concepts. Following the activity, I can adapt my teaching and determine if students are ready to move on or whether I need to spend more time focusing on certain concepts. Finally, I would add a caution that while Jamboard offers many possibilities, students quickly tire of its overuse.

Conclusion

While Jamboard may initially appear to be a superficial way to engage students, it can offer all three types of interaction identified by Moore (1995). In designing Jamboard, facilitators should consider using challenging questions that require students to draw upon course materials, apply concepts, analyze problems, synthesize divergent points of view and apply this to their learning. Most importantly, Jamboard offers the opportunity to connect learners with one another and their instructor thereby decreasing feelings of isolation.

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