Collaboratory: Utilizing Interactive Whiteboards to Collaborate

Joe'l P Lewis and Andrea Yohn
University of South Alabama
United States
lewis@usouthal.edu
aky601@jaguarmail.southalabama.edu

The College of Education at a southeastern university has developed a room for collaboration called a “Collaboratory” in which the faculty, staff, and students are engaged in learning with interactive whiteboard technology. The Collaboratory is a conference style room with six interactive Whiteboards and Wi-Fi. The room was designed to be open space and easily adaptable for different discussion formats and group consensus and reporting. We have conducted research on collaboration using technology located in the Collaboratory.

The content of the discussion was community conversations on the topic “Why We Need to Talk About Race”. The integration of collaboration and technology in the Collaboratory is based on principles that Fonseca and Chi (2011) propose as stated by Clark and Mayer (2011) who state the “effective collaborative learning activities must involve dialog during learning that includes substantive contribution from all parties with no participant ignored” (p.283). Another concept that we focused on throughout our research is the concept of collaboration which is defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as being the act of working jointly together with others in a capacity which could be labeled but not limited to as being an intellectual activity. Not only were the instructional conditions designed to promote dialog that was effective among group members but each group used technology to engage with other groups in discussion in a manner which encouraged sharing and exploring of new ideas.
This research consists of two different groups: one equals 18 in size and the other equaling 27 in size. One group consisted of a community wide leadership group and the other was a Pre-Service Teacher group affiliated with a Summer Enrichment Program. The sessions were conducted on different days with the two different groups. Looking at technology use in the Collaboratory with items such as effective use of technology for sharing information, aided in discussions, and value in using the whiteboards in the discussion allowed the researchers to gain better insight into participant reactions of use of the Collaboratory for group collaboration activities. The groups watched a video then participated in group sessions where each person was given opportunity to share personal experiences connected to the conversations being discussed. The engagement of technology in the Collaboratory was the main focus with these two group presentations for this research. Once all participants completed the discussion, we directed the groups to merge into a larger group as to further elaborate by use of technology on discussing posed questions as a collaborative effort for solving issues that could possibly be addressed in the community. The technology allowed each group to share information on all the boards to present ideas simultaneously. Upon completion, all participants were asked to complete a Likert scale technology questionnaire. This research includes qualitative and quantitative data collected in both sessions.

When comparing the outcome of the questionnaires, it showed that the answers were quite similar; however trends did set the groups apart. Initially, we grouped the two groups together, however when the groups were broken apart we saw differences in the use of technology among the Leadership group and the Pre-service Teacher Group that presented as being very interesting. We will report the findings from our technology questionnaire which was completed by the participants upon completion of the session. We were pleased with the outcome of results as it allowed for a guide in further development and implementation of collaborative efforts for our community of learners. We hope that
we will be given the opportunity to discuss this information and our findings in connection to this research project from beginning to end.

REFERENCES:
