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Compendium of Augmented Blended Teaching & Learning for Open Pedagogic Tools

Blended Learning Tool Evaluation – Digital Whiteboard

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Blended Learning Tool

Evaluation – Digital Whiteboard

Table of Contents

Report Overview

This document describes Microsoft Teams as a tool to support blended learning. Following testing and evaluation, it discusses the functionalities and how the tool supports educators in their professional activities, namely:

- Professional Engagement
- Digital Resources
- Teaching & Learning
- Assessment
- Empowerment of Learners
- Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence

1. Introduction

Microsoft Whiteboard is a digital application that functions like a traditional whiteboard, but is hosted virtually. Digital whiteboards can integrate with other video conferencing and screen sharing platforms to allow for collaboration even when you are not physically in the same room. A virtual whiteboard has multiple colours, shapes and templates to choose from and allows whiteboards to be saved in shareable files for easy access in the future.

Microsoft whiteboard can enhance a virtual or in person meeting by encouraging collaboration. A whiteboard can help people visualize a process. Whiteboards increase collaboration by allowing participants to easily add ideas to the whiteboard with sticky notes or coloured markers.

Microsoft whiteboard can help increase productivity as it allows users to easily draw processes with different shapes and colours. A virtual whiteboard further increases productivity as a user can easily copy or remove parts of the whiteboard and even save the file for future use.

Due to the pandemic situation, higher education institutions got started with Microsoft Whiteboard for remote learning in Office 365 Education. Educators benefitted from Microsoft Whiteboard in order to optimize learning in a digital classroom hub.

2. Testing and evaluation of the tool

UNIVPM universities widely used Microsoft Whiteboard during the pandemic. It has been tested and used as a tool for:

- online lessons;
- exercise and tutoring activities;
- exams (through audio and video functionalities);
- internal meetings between educators and/or students;
- external meetings between project partners.

The testing activity was particularly useful in assessing the user-friendly nature of the tool, allowing it to be used even without consulting a guide. The use of Microsoft Whiteboard during the pandemic allowed for multiple features to be experimented with and tested: easing the transition from the classical whiteboard to a digital means of instruction, performing digital lessons to exercises execution. After the testing activity, a list of the main features and advantages of Microsoft Whiteboard is provided:

- Visually brainstorm together, even when people are apart. Sometimes a video call or screenshare is just not enough: having an infinite canvas to express ideas and brainstorm virtually is worthwhile;
- Full integration with Microsoft Teams meetings. At any time during a Microsoft Teams meeting, attendees can click the Share button and launch a Whiteboard. From there, anyone on the call will be able to contribute and get scribbling. The resulting board will be saved in the main Whiteboard app for viewing later;
- Share a digital canvas on almost any device. Whiteboard can be used with touch-enabled tablets or laptops (like the Microsoft Surface), any modern iOS device, or any Windows 10 device without touch using mouse and keyboard to add notes. It also comes pre-installed on the Surface Hub line of smart whiteboard products.
- Stop and resume sessions anytime, anywhere. Once a team is done working on a whiteboard canvas, it'll be saved to the cloud automatically until you return to it, so there's no more fear of the dreaded whiteboard eraser (or having to take photos of the board at the end of the meeting).

3. Functionalities supporting blended learning

The nature of Microsoft Whiteboard encourages the development of educators' professional activities and qualities such as integrity, respect, collaboration, and communication. It also promotes the sharing of best practices, knowledge improvement, and digital skills detection.

Teams' functionalities to support educators' activities are described and organized under the following sub-headings:

- Professional Engagement
- Digital Resources
- Teaching & Learning
- Assessment
- Empowerment of Learners
- Learners' Digital Competence

3.1.   Supporting Professional Engagement

Microsoft Whiteboard supports Engagement of the professionals involved in the activities of educators and students. Microsoft Whiteboard provides a solution in order to integrate visual learning and visual activities. Educators and learners can apply their existing knowledge and talents and share them. Microsoft whiteboard encourages educators and learners to apply their existing knowledge, ideas, and expertise and share it through this visual aid.

During the pandemic, one of the most glaring deficiencies in the workplace, study or research has been the lack of tools also available in standard conditions, for example the use of a common blackboard or whiteboard. Microsoft Whiteboard makes it possible to fill this gap and thus maintain engagement online and in non-standard conditions.
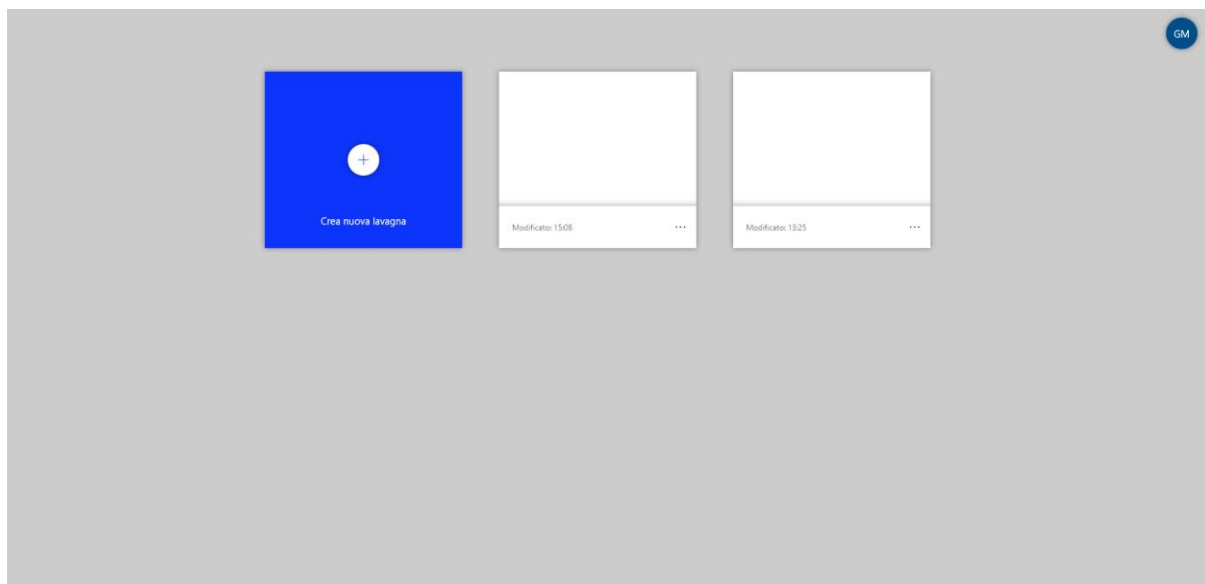
Figure 1: Initial Screen – Many Whiteboards can be opened

3.2. Supporting Digital Resources

Microsoft Whiteboard can integrate digital resources to support education and learning, digital skills, and professional development.

Microsoft Whiteboard currently supports the following features:

- Create and join boards
- Add and edit sticky notes
- Add and edit text objects
- Add and erase ink
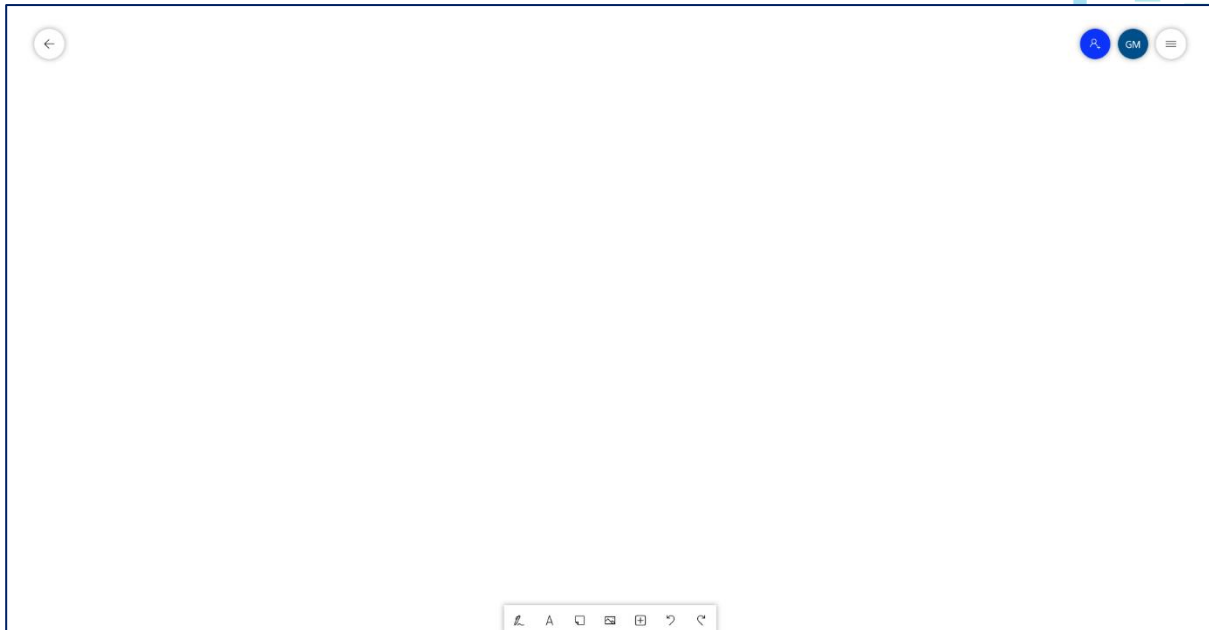- Select and move objects
- View images added from native clients

Figure 2: Whiteboard initial screen - in the bottom, the options to begin to interact on the whiteboard

3.3. Supporting Teaching & Learning

Microsoft Whiteboard functionality consists of a free-form digital tool to enable multi-handed work. Educators and students can edit material, brainstorm, collaborate in real-time, and share ideas using pens, text boxes, and note-taking together. Whiteboards can be saved as files so students can easily reference their work.

One of the hardest things for an educator to do, is to keep a student's attention throughout the class. Microsoft Whiteboard gives you tools to create beautifully engaging content for your class. Through Microsoft Whiteboard, a teacher is able to pull in images, content from other documents, shapes, and stickers to add fun and life to lessons. Time can be saved by creating the boards ahead of class and then simply opening the previously created whiteboard during class to get going.

When it comes to group projects and interactive lessons, Microsoft Whiteboard can give a little more structure. Microsoft Whiteboard makes simpler to upload digital worksheets already on the board or create new ones using structured organizers that come with the app. The content can be added to the board, opened in a Teams meeting: students can also be invited to the board to see their creativity blossom. With everyone on the same Whiteboard, live cursor identities will allow to see where students are, who is actively engaged with the work, and which students might need additional help or clarification on the tasks.

3.4. Supporting Assessment

Microsoft Whiteboard can be very useful to simulate a classic whiteboard that could be used during a classical exam. Especially in scientific topics, in which many exercise are to be solved with the aid of a simple piece of paper or a whiteboard

3.5. Supporting the Empowerment of Learners

Student empowerment is when students acquire the skills to make decisions prioritizing meaningfulness, competence, and goals. Social-Emotional Learning and virtual engagement are essential to helping students reach their full potential. For this reason, Microsoft Whiteboard offers opportunities for students to express themselves and build connections while interacting on the same board.

Integrating the use of Microsoft Whiteboard with other apps, like Microsoft Teams, it would allow direct discussion among individual students to encourage the theme of shared learning within digital classes.

3.6. Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence

Leveraging the Microsoft Whiteboard capability helped students address several challenges developing transferable skills to use in their careers, such as digital skills for content creation, interactive lessons, and multimedia presentation. Microsoft Whiteboard usage accelerated classroom digitization, leading students to perform tasks and assignments using tools they once might have used directly in the workplace.

4. Tutorial Video and PowerPoint slides

The ACADIGIA resources for Digital Whiteboard are available on the website here.