

Using Blackboard to Motivate Students to Look for Mathematics

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When students perceive mathematics as little more than a collection of procedures to perform mathematical operations, misconceptions about the nature and utility of mathematics follow. The struggle to get students to make mathematical connections and see through “mathematics-coloured lenses” is shared by many educators. Despite professors best efforts to expound upon the value of mathematics, if our students are to have the opportunity for a broader vision of the beauty and breadth of mathematics, it’s imperative that students themselves be required to identify and articulate mathematics in the world around them.

To dissuade the perpetuation of students’ algorithm-driven perception of mathematics, I require students to look for mathematics in their daily lives. Students hone their communication skills by articulating observations and connections that they’ve discovered in a discussion forum on Blackboard, promoting active learning across the curriculum. Requiring students use of Blackboard as a vehicle to communicate their “real-life” mathematical discoveries began as an experiment in an elementary pre-service course, rich in real-life content, but this activity could be constructive in any mathematics course, rife with practical application. In this talk, student use of on-line discussion boards on Blackboard to communicate mathematics observed found in the “real-world” will be discussed.