

Chalking up the success of Blackboard's 'kids-helping-kids' cycle

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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In 1976, students took to the streets and helped shape the South Africa we're living in today. In 2019, students are going to need a different tool to shape our future. Nkanyezi Masango, founder of Blackboard, has been drawing parallels between these two cohorts of students, with the only difference that in 2019, the most powerful tool for change is creativity. Here, Masango shares how the Blackboard initiative aims to empower and better diversify SA's creative field.



Masango's Blackboard in action.

[Nkanyezi Masango](#), creative director at King James Group, is a true champion for excellence in creativity among youth. He was the only SA juror on the One Club's international [Young Guns board](#) two years back, and he pays forward his own experience through the Blackboard initiative now in its third year.



Gunning for creative diversity on Nkanyezi Masango's Blackboard

Leigh Andrews 3 Jul 2017



With Blackboard built on the belief that true transformation of the advertising industry starts in under-privileged high schools, Blackboard's grade 10 students have been working on exciting projects leading up to Youth Day.



A scene from Blackboard's design class, led by King James Group ECD, Jenny Ehlers.

Here, Masango explains how high school students can use their creativity to shape a new future of SA and how Blackboard is guiding them along the way...

2019 marks your third year in running Blackboard. How has the initiative grown since we last chatted?

Blackboard has become a well-oiled machine. Thanks to the support from Nina and Lourens van Rensburg of 7Films, we now have a dedicated team of people who ensure the operation runs smoothly, freeing me up to focus on the overall vision of the initiative.

The workshops are also more frequent, which has helped strengthen our ties with the students.

■ ***Share a few important milestones you've reached thus far, in your goal to expose advertising as a career to high school students and this hopefully diversifying the talent pool of the future.***

In the last two years, we've exposed over 60 under-privileged high school students to a variety of career opportunities in the advertising and film production industries. These are kids who had never heard of advertising before, but now understand disciplines such as art direction, post-production, copywriting and others. It's an important step as the youth continue their fight for equality.



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The next step will be to handpick the most passionate bunch and guide them into the industry once they complete high school.

It's a long game, but I believe this is what real transformation means. It's not just tweaking the optics in a boardroom or quickly trying to hire people of colour when you're going to pitch for business.



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Real transformation is putting plans in place to make sure we're not talking about the same issue in 10 years.

■ ***Hear, hear! Why is it so important to draw parallels between the students of 1976 and 2019?***

The progress of this country has always depended on the youth. In 1976, students took to the streets and helped shape the South Africa we're living in today. In 2019, we're still leaning on students to move us forward. Except this time, they are going to need a different tool to shape our future. And that tool is creativity.

■ ***Explain creativity as the most powerful tool for change in 2019 and beyond.***

Creativity is a powerful business weapon, which helps create opportunities where they didn't exist. So from an economic point of view, it's one of our greatest assets. It's also the most effective way to tackle social issues such as health, education and safety.

As Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited”.

■ ***Let's end with an overview of some of the NPO projects the grade 10 students are working on leading up to Youth Day, in terms of using creativity to shape a new future of SA.***

This year, we're taking our momentum further. Starting from 1 June, the month that represents the youth and their fight for equality, the students have the opportunity to create real work for a non-profit client, with the help of our friends in the industry.

This way, the students can get practical experience and discover the joy of solving problems through creativity. And that tool is creativity.

We're currently working on both Operation Smile and the Chaeli Campaign.



Michaela Mycroft

3 Nov 2015



Both of these organisations are focused on changing the lives of children. The beauty of it is that you have high school children using their creativity to help other children.

In return, the Blackboard students learn how to solve problems through creativity in the process. It's a kids-helping-kids cycle.

That's truly creativity that matters. [Click here](#) to follow Masango on Twitter, [here](#) for his Instagram profile and [here](#) to follow Blackboard's Instagram updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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