

DISTANCE LEARNING MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

"technology does not teach students; effective teachers do"
Open source discussion to improve Distance Learning instruction

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From the Editor



The mind has an amazing capacity for feeling and emotion. Emotion has been found to be a human trait that is universal; people from across the globe in different cultures respond similarly to the same feelings. Being a community of our own, DL teachers share the same emotions as the rest of the world. However, DL teachers have two emotions that are far more developed: overconfidence and apprehension. Forgive me for assuming my subjective experiences are shared by everyone.

Bill Watterson (Calvin and Hobbes) is a master at depicting emotion. Young children who can not yet read are still captivated by Watterson's comics because the character's facial expressions tell the story in themselves.

Below, Calvin bursts into his classroom, ready to take on the world (or Miss. Wormwood). We do the same.



In This Issue:

From the Editor:
The DL Emotion Rollercoaster

Feature Article:
6 things you can do to increase dialog and decrease Transactional Distance

Quick Lit:
Theory of Transactional Distance as a theory of Education

Share:
From Last Issue: Tell us how you distribute course materials
For the next issue: Tell us how you collect assignments

Try it:
Humor to observe your remote students

Editors Poll:
How much time does it take you to prepare for a DL lesson?

Help others in the DL community by responding to their questions.

Do you have a question that needs addressing?
Ask it here!

Capital Region Distance Learning:
157 courses
52 schools
13 counties

Contribute to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter and receive recognition. See the last page of this issue for details.

Rested, relaxed, and ready, you burst into the DL lab like a superhero on a mission. *"Have no fear, the DL teacher is here!"* resonates in your head. Your students brace themselves for the awesome shock of an amazing lesson. You are sure that as you leave, your students will give you a standing ovation and request an encore lesson afterschool that day.

However, after a few seconds of unrivaled educational bliss, you see the lights and the microphone. Most noticeable are the cameras, my personal DL superhero kryptonite. Your cape quickly disappears and you wish it would turn into a cloaking device so you could easily sneak back out the door. Far from your initial superhero slogan and much like a stock exchange ticker, *"oh my gosh I have to teach on tv"* is the only phrase racing through your mind.



But you take a deep breath and do what all great educators do: teach. Some elements of your lesson were superhero great (and you should share them with the DLMN ☺), other aspects were not. Regardless, you taught a lesson to students using interactive television.

Smile because not only does our DL community share similar emotions, it shares a passion for helping students. You are part of an elite group of educators whose influence is so important that traditional classroom walls can't contain it.

I'm proud to say that I'm a TV teacher, and I hope you are too.

-Chris



Editors Poll: How much time does it take you to prepare for a DL lesson?

Please submit your response to dlnn.pd@gmail.com. Along with your response, include a 1-2 sentence summary of how you spend your time preparing your TV lesson.



6 things you can do to increase dialog and decrease Transactional Distance

Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) incorporates a cognitive aspect into DL. Physical separation creates a psychological distance; to an effective DL educator, you need to bridge this gap called Transactional Distance. An instructor can manipulate the variables (dialog, structure, learner autonomy) that determine Transactional Distance to decrease it.

(see the [last issue](#) for more information describing Transactional Distance Theory)

1. Refine the technology

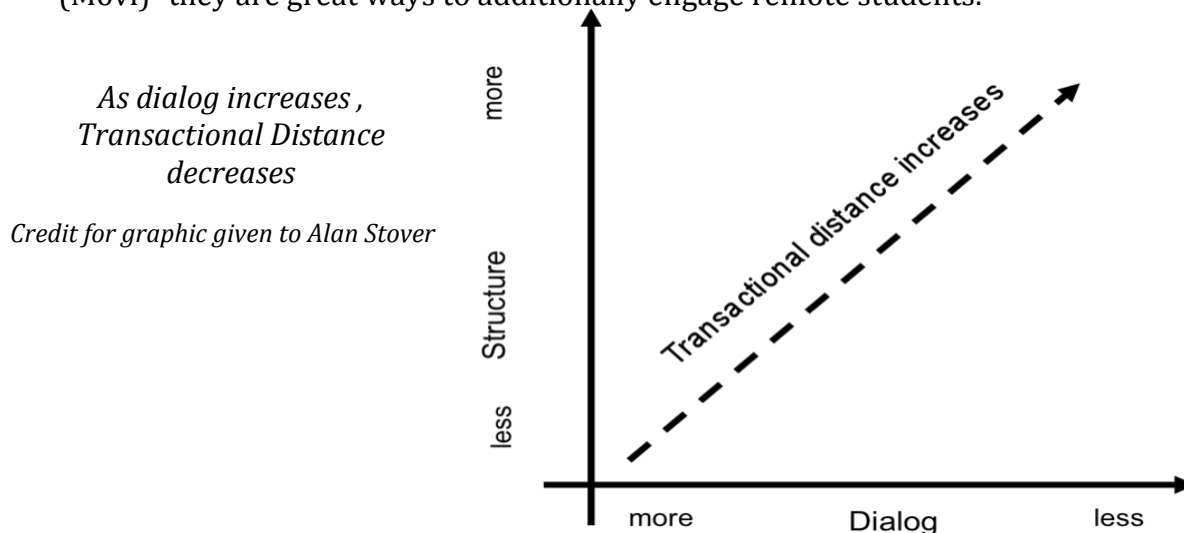
Interactive communication media maximizes technology to make interactions as synchronous as possible. Test connections, pre-set cameras, and adjust volumes. Remember, **as the quality of synchronous interaction increases, Transactional Distance decreases.**

2. Make them feel

This is a small change to your philosophy of teaching. Emotions engage the learner. Consider television; the most “attention grabbing” scenes are the ones that play to our feelings. When the learner (viewer) is emotional, they feel connected to the situation. **As emotion increases, connectedness increases. As connectedness increases, transactional distance decreases.** Tell a funny story as a hook. Show a sad picture that relates to content.

3. Take advantage of other modes of communication

It is well established that interactive communication media fosters a connected environment. However, **dialog can occur through a variety of different means.** Take advantage of your interactive website (such as blackboard.com); create a new post every couple days giving course updates. Utilize email to engage on a personal level. Be timely with your email responses to make the learner feel “cared” about. If you feel comfortable doing so, consider using personal connection technology tools such as Skype or Jabber (Movi)- they are great ways to additionally engage remote students.



4. Single out

Single out your remote site. After completing a portion of the lesson, rather than asking “does anyone have any questions”, **pick a specific site and directly address them:** “Maple Hill, do you have any questions”? This is a nice touch to remind your remote students that you care about them.

5. Change your personality

Research shows that videoconferencing presenters that appear “larger than life” are the most effective. **You are a movie star to your remote sites so act like one! Over emphasize your facial expressions.** Use body language to convey your emotion for the content. Adjust your teacher camera so the remote sites only see from your shoulders up (all of your face). Remember that your face appears on their projector screen, so a smile from you is a *really big smile!*

6. Visit the remote site

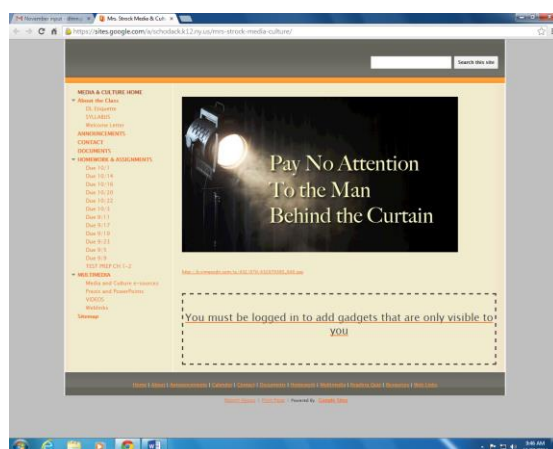
Transactional Distance involves the cognitive aspects of learning when parties are physically separated. **Visit your remote site and squash Transactional Distance.** Show your remote students that you are a real person and that you care about them. A quick visit can have lasting effects.

Next month we learn how to modify course structure to decrease Transactional Distance

(January) Tell us how you: distribute course materials

"NERIC provides our class with a Blackboard website. I use this shared interface to distribute all of my student materials to my students. They are responsible for bringing the material to each class. A very detailed calendar informs them what to bring and when to bring it. Not only does this make my preparation much more efficient, but it gives students access to the material in the event of an unscheduled class cancelation (they are still responsible for the material)."

"I have a Google website for my class. I post homework, documents, resource links and everything else I want them to access there. I even link the videos we watch whenever they are accessible online so students can revisit them."



"I have been teaching through Distance Learning since 2006. I started out just faxing materials to each site. I quickly learned that fax machines are finicky beasts and sometimes cause a lot of frustration. From poor connections, busy signals and error messages to low ink, no paper and stuck pages, the fax machine can eat up valuable class or planning time. I now use email as much as possible and send most of my handouts as an attachment to the remote site facilitators in a group email. The other important part of this is the use of scanning technology. The copy machines in my district have scanning as a built-in function and users may send the scanned document to their district email address. This allows me to return student tests or assignments to remote sites in a more reliable manner after I have graded them. I encourage remote site facilitators to use scanning technology to forward student assignments in a timely and complete manner. It frees me from the task of checking the fax machine intermittently throughout the day when I am waiting to grade something. Scanning technology is a tool that has made my role as a Distance Learning instructor go more smoothly and should be made available to every Distance Learning environment."

For March: Tell us how you: collect completed assignments from both your remote and host students

Send Responses to dlnm.pd@gmail.com



In January, other DL teachers asked:

“How do you keep your remote students from using their phones during class (I find it different from my host students using their phones)?”

“I feel that my administration sometimes lacks fundamental understanding of what a DL class is- without being abrasive, how do I communicate to them the true differences in the environment?”

You responded by suggesting:

“ I begin each class by asking ALL of my of my students to turn their phones off- I follow up that request by commenting that phones interfere with the audio and video transmission to the remote sites. I know this to be the case with mobile videoconferencing units-regardless it seems to work!”

“Though VERY supportive, my admin team has very little experience with DL. I encourage them to do two things; first, I encourage them to read (or at least skim) the DLMN. I also encourage them to stop by during a lesson and check things out!”

Readers sent these questions to be addressed by the DL community:

Send your response to dlnm.pd@gmail.com

“I can often hear myself as an echo at my remote site- how can I manipulate the technology to eliminate this?”

“At times during our connection, we often hear quick “rounded” beeps. What do we think causes this and how can we eliminate it?”

Directed to the DLMN: “Does the DLMN limit the number of submissions from an instructor?”

DLMN- “No! However, due to the number of submissions, not all submitted material will appear in an issue of the DLMN”



Give this a Try!

"I often use humor in my DL lectures as a way to informally assess the attentiveness of my remote students. At the host site, where the students are physically in front of me, I am able to observe their body language. Body language is more difficult to assess during the transmission to the remote site. I found it difficult to determine whether or not my remote students were still with me. Humor makes them laugh, when they laugh, they physically move and their movement is something I can observe on the screen. Try telling a quick, appropriate, content related joke to confirm the attentiveness of your remote students. Even if it is bad joke you can still see them roll their eyes and shake their head 😊 "





Quick Literature!

Read the literature the DLMN considers important to the Transactional Distance discussion. Develop your own opinion and dig deeper!

<p>Prioritize reading this</p>	<p>Moore, M. (1993) Theory of Transactional Distance: The evolution of theory distance education. In D. Keegan, (Ed.), <i>Theoretical principles of distance education</i> (pp. 22-38) London: Routledge.</p> <p>Moore first introduced the idea of a psychological gap between the teacher and learner in 1973. The development of his theory evolved as quickly as the DL technology did. The most comprehensive outline and description was published in 1993 and was part of a text book edited by Desmond Keegan (also a prominent thinker in the DL world).</p> <p>When beginning to understand an idea, it is often helpful to consult the original material addressing it. Whereas a lot of other TDT resources analyze specific components of the theory, this resource describes TDT at its core.</p> <p>Easy to read, comprehensive, and quickly digested, this article is a necessary starting point when investigating TDT.</p>
<p>You have spare time</p>	<p>Gorsky, Paul, and Avner Caspi. "A Critical Analysis of Transactional Distance Theory." <i>The Quarterly Review of Distance Education</i> 6.1 (2005): 1-11. Web</p> <p>Theories require empirical evidence to either support or refute their framework. By understanding the limitations of TDT, you come to understand the core framework better. This article is a review of literature that collects relevant resources describing empirical results assessing TDT.</p> <p>The review of literature reports that most of the research lacked basic validity and reliability. The authors concluded that those studies that did maintain reliability and validity did little to support TDT. The authors attribute the absence of reliability and validity to the fact that original TDT lacks operational definitions of dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy. They conclude by offering advice on how to create definitions if ever attempting to functionally test the theory.</p>
<p>You have even more spare time</p>	<p>Giossos, Yiannis, et al. "Reconsidering Moore's Transactional Distance Theory." <i>European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning</i> (2009).</p> <p>Kang, H. & Gyorke, A. (2008). Rethinking distance learning activities: A comparison of transactional distance theory and activity theory. Retrieved from http://krex.ksu.edu</p> <p>"Reconsidering" and "Rethinking" reflect the natural tendency to compare new ideas with existing ones. TDT is not the only set of views that describe the learning process.</p> <p>These articles are useful because they compare TDT with Realism and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Rather than break each other down, these theories seem to work in conjunction with TDT. Picking and choosing components from a variety of theories is the best way for DL instructors to develop THEIR OWN theory of Distance Education.</p>

Contribute to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter and Be Recognized

TEACHING DL IS DIFFICULT AND YOU DESERVE RECOGNITION. CONTRIBUTE TO THE DLMN AND BE RECOGNIZED.

THE DLMN IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY WHERE DL TEACHERS SHARE BEST PRACTICES.

SUBMISSIONS ARE NOT LIMITED TO LISTED TOPICS. FEEL FREE TO SUBMIT USEFUL LINKS, VIDEOS, OR A PICTURE OF YOUR DL CLASS!

Though everything submitted will be read and considered, the editor has final discretion.

Quick Opportunities to contribute to DLMN:

Some features of the DLMN are interactive and require reader participation while other features ask for quick thoughts and experiences. Many of the topics are time sensitive; please adhere to the submission deadline shown below.



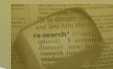
Facilitator

share

TRY IT

Opportunities that require research and DLMN correspondence:

Feature Articles are research based and serve as literature based best practices. Submitting an article of this nature requires time, research, and DLMN correspondence. Topics are variable and the DLMN is willing to include anything you feel is important. Start by proposing a Feature Article topic to DLMN!



Special

share

Share your views, thoughts, or experiences regarding each monthly topic!



Ask a question or respond to another reader's question!



Respond to the poll with a 1-2 sentence description! Poll results are published the next month.



Administrator

Do you have anything you wish that your administration knew or understood about DL?



Facilitator

Share something with the DL community that you are proud of! Encourage others to try something new!

The remote facilitator is one of the important pieces to the DL puzzle. Share your facilitator best practices!

There are a variety of unique topics that warrant discussion. Find one that you are passionate about, research your idea, and share it!

Anything and everything that does not fall into a specified category- any length discussing any content. Have fun and be creative!

Please send all material to
dlnn.pd@gmail.com

