


DISTANCE LEARNING DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

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



From the editor: DL PD from an unlikely source- a baby...

The first time I babysat nine-month old Shannon she vomited onto the nape of my neck. It wasn't quite exorcist-style, but it definitely had some distance. Being the friend without kids, you're the designated babysitter until you have your own. The rest of the night was spent playing on painters-plastic to protect my new wall-to-wall carpet.

Two years have passed and Shannon is now a quick-witted, sharp, cannonball of a little girl. Watching Shannon two months ago was an eye opening experience, not because it highlighted my potential as a father (no vomit=success), but because it led to an epiphany for my ITV instruction.

We arrived home from a walk in an apple orchard and ate pizza while watching *Blue's Clues*. Immediately, Shannon was transfixed to the screen. She was fully engaged: laughing, clapping, pointing, and singing along with the bouncing blue dog.

"Jeez" I thought to myself, "*Blue's Clues transforms kids*" as Shannon proceeded to watch the **same** episode three more times.



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Lights, Camera, Diction: How To Keep Your Teacher Voice Through A TV

Help others in the DL community by responding to their questions. Do you have a question that needs addressing? Ask it here!

Tech Tips: Common Errors and Deficiencies

Capital Region Distance Learning:
146 courses
58 schools
14 counties

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



The camera zooms in on Steve while he is instructing (left) and zooms out when the audience is participating (right). This is effective because Steve's facial body language is easier to perceive when zoomed in and the participant feels more included when zoomed out. Give it a try!

It got my DL wheels spinning. *How does Blue's Clues do it? How do they get a three year old 100% engaged through a T.V. screen?*

Interactive Television (ITV) teachers need to do the same thing. Getting and keeping the attention of a viewer through the screen is our priority. **If I understand the secret behind *Blue's Clues*, I could potentially unlock the secret to ITV instruction.**

I dove into the Blue's Clues pool headfirst and resurfaced with some helpful information. This is what I found through *hours* of watching the program and an extensive literature review. The underlined phrases highlight lessons for ITV instructors.

-*Blue's Clues* prioritizes immediate audience participation. Within seconds, Steve has the kids singing, clapping, or answering a question.

-Steve's shoulders and head are the only things in the frame while he is instructing. This allows the viewer to see his over-exaggerated facial expressions depicting his emotion.

-They zoom out to show more of the scene when the participant is actively doing something such as answering one of his questions or singing a song.

-Steve's thought process is vocalized as he is solving a problem. As he talks through the steps, he repeats items already covered and frequently reviews the goal.

-*Blue's Clues* has exciting transitions. Steve will sing and dance between mini-segments.

-The program includes visuals. It is not just Steve talking.

-Repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition, and more repetition.

I feel uncomfortable saying this, but I truly feel that my time investigating *Blue's Clues* led to more actionable changes than my time spent crawling through academic literature discussing ITV best practices.

Watch an episode or try one of the above suggestions and let the DLDN know what you think!

Thanks for reading!

Chris



Putting the DL Fruit at Eye Level: 6 Ways to Increase Enrollment in Your DL Class

In this issue we discuss a problem that many DL teachers inevitably face: student enrollment. Social psychology can help us answer an important question: once enrolled, how do we keep students in our DL class?

Luckily, tons of literature describes how decisions are made and how people in the position of authority can help others make the right decision. Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler co-authored a book called Nudge that describes the concepts regarding choice architecture (how to design a situation that encourages favorable choices). Let's attack our student enrollment issue using the six "nudges" described in the book.

Our discussion begins with a couple of assumptions that are true for a number (but not all) DL classes:

Assumption #1: Many of the DL classes we teach are electives

Assumption #2: Electives need to be chosen

Assumption #3: There are two choices to make, the first to enroll and the second *to stay enrolled*.

If we are honest with ourselves, a certain level of our success is dependent on an appropriate number of students. To use a phrase from Sunstein and Thaler, let's learn how we can **nudge** our students to stay in our class.

1. Understand mappings

A decision map is a mental representation of a choice that includes, at the time it is considered, all of the trade-offs, variables, and factors involved. Most importantly, the mind seems to attempt to predict the future and an accurate map is correctly "*predicting the choice experience with the outcome*" (pg. 94). Essentially, the brain asks itself "how will the current choice change what I do." Often it is over-confident, biased, or simply wrong. The brain creates the decision map involuntarily and seems to spend most of its time thinking about the benefits of the choice being faced. Understand this and *use it to your advantage*. Simple reminders can help your students forecast the benefits:

"This class will help you as you enter college because..."

"Remember that as a consequence of taking this course, you will have acquired _____ set of skills."

"This course will prove to colleges that you are serious about pursuing your interest."

Gentle reminders that act as "*nudges*" and act to keep the benefits front and center in their mind.

2. Incentives are central to decision making

People make choices and act on those decisions based on **incentives**; your students are no different. The incentive for taking your class, at the most basic level, is obvious: they will get something from it.

However, there is an underlying, and very important second incentive: they are in your class because if they were not, they would lose something as a result of not participating. **The fear of LOSING OUT seems to be stronger than the feeling of receiving something.**

Give them the 1-2 incentive punch:

First: *Remind them what they REALLY care about*- what was their initial and original motive for joining your class? *"You enrolled in this course because you are excited about pursuing your interests. You are taking the next step and bettering yourself by learning about something YOU care about."*

Second: Follow up by reminding them what the students who are not taking the course are *missing out on*. *"Think about those not enrolled in this course, they are missing out on X, Y, and Z."*

This will keep their initial motive clear in their minds as well as highlight the second, more influential incentive they might not be aware of.

3. Consider the default settings of their educational process

Default behaviors are natural, safe, normal, and "predetermined." We are going to twist the concept of a default as an attempt to place ourselves in the shoes of our learners. There are two settings that we need to be aware of:

-*"What would my students be doing if they were not enrolled in my course?" (study hall, early release)*

-*"What type of class are my students normally enrolled in?" (traditional in-person)*

These are important considerations when thinking of their decision to remain in your course. We realize that study halls and early releases are easier and that traditional in-person courses are more comfortable for our students.

4. Provide feedback- they are a fire and praise will make them burn bright!

Assess their performance in the class and positively frame feedback. A DL class is hard work; let them know that they are doing a great job and people are noticing. *Try This: Tell them that the DLDN heard about their fantastic DL course and requested a picture. Take a picture during your time together and submit it. Bring it to their attention so they can receive some recognition!*

People respond to "new." We appreciate material items as new (car, clothes, movies, etc.). More powerful is new information and new methods of acquiring information. Remind your students that DL courses are NEW and they are part of something very unique and special. They are part of an exclusive DL group that has experienced learning in a novel environment.

5. Expect Error (with a healthy serving of insecurity)

Students experience (and instructors do as well) varying levels of comfort in a fully equipped DL classroom. Being continuously uncomfortable in the DL classroom might push the student in the wrong direction on the enrollment fence. Their comfort level is often related to the instructor's *perceived* comfort. If the students perceive their instructor as comfortable, they will feel more at ease. A stressed, nervous, and unsure instructor will have the opposite effect. Project 100% confidence using the technology and challenge them: *"I can and will teach this DL course. Will you learn?"*

Further, DL guidelines and procedures are new. For example, emailing the teacher to submit an assignment is uncommon. Plan for mistakes, accept them, be lenient, and address mistakes individually. An ambiguous discussion regarding the difference between leniency and being naive is unnecessary. Accepting mistakes does not translate into the instructor being a "push-over" if the instructor keeps the student's best interest in mind.

6. Structure Complex Choices

Their choice to remain in your course is an on-going decision. By being a “choice architect,” you are creating a framework conducive to a decision you feel is favorable to them. Build the framework slowly and help them organize their thoughts. Eliminate other options by being clear with your intentions. Once in your class, it is easier to stay in it if the benefits are regularly realized. Make the process of *staying* in your class easier than being removed by eliminating logistical issues. Finally, remove frustrating logistical issues and make the class user friendly:

- prepare and organize the course in advance: make the course calendar available to them
- avoid changing course procedures or policies during the course
- work to be transparent and create a cooperative relationship

Final Thoughts

Whether we like it or not, students must *choose* our class and then *choose* to remain enrolled. Encourage healthy decisions by selectively employing these ideas and watch your DL enrollment grow!





In the last issue, other DL teachers asked:

"I get nervous/excited feeling before teaching on T.V. Any ideas on how to get over this? I guess it is like stage fright☺"

"How does everyone handle time during a block when your lesson is faster than you planned? How do others deal with unexpected "free" time? It is much more difficult to take advantage of this time because necessary materials need to be distributed to remote sites."

You Responded:

"I get nervous too! But I remind myself that just as in a normal classroom, things happen and I'm trained to deal with it. I also have the NERIC help numbers posted at my DL desk- they are FANTASTIC."

"I practice my lesson in its entirety prior to actually teaching it. It normally takes about an hour but it gives me confidence the following day when I teach the lesson. It also allows me to work out the small issues that may derail me."

"I was nervous for a while, but now I've settled in. Watching my taped classes helped; I realized that I wasn't as bad on TV as I thought ☺"

"For unplanned downtime, I have at my remote and host site a folder of relevant articles. I never let my students know that a lesson has finished early, I simply move on to one of the articles and help them work through it."

"For unplanned free time, I turn to TED talks. There is always a purpose behind watching them, and they are instructive and very watchable."

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

"Does anyone have any good resources- books, videos, etc. that have helped them become a better TV teacher?"

"I find that student body language that communicates to me that students are still 'with me' is lost in transmission. What ways do other DL teachers assess how their remote students are proceeding through a lesson?"



Tell us how you...

Tell us how your DL methodology has changed since last year:

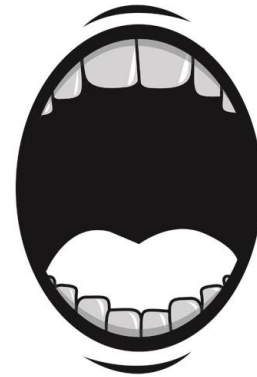
“When I began teaching DL, my lesson was largely lecture based. I was unsure of how and what I could do at the remote site. As I have become more comfortable, I now try several different things each block of DL time. My students will work in pairs, read through an article, or even complete a small lab. Basically, I have learned to trust my students more since last year. I feel that the trust has led to a more enjoyable experience by both the teacher and students.”

“My facilitator and I have a great relationship and I am very lucky to have her at my remote site. Last year, the facilitator took a passive role in the course (which was fine!). I now use the facilitator as a student teacher. She is active and helps with small activities. At times, and when necessary, she’ll answer content related questions if I am unavailable. Incorporating my facilitator has made the class run more smoothly.”

“My methodology has not changed since last year, but my confidence has. Teaching on the DL network for the first time last year was tough and I bumped along. I tried all sorts of things. Some worked, some didn’t. This year, I’m improving on the activities that were successful and I’m more confident that they’ll work.”

For The Next Issue: Tell the DLDN your Distance Learning New Year’s Resolution!

How to Keep Your Teacher Voice Through A TV



Bethany Glazebrook, M.A., CCC-SLP, TSSLD is a Speech Therapist at PS 126. She is also a speech evaluator for the Department of Education. The DLDN sat down with her to better understand how we maintain our teacher voice through the TV.

The viral video of the tongue-tied Miss Teen USA pageant participant is unforgettable. One may never hear “such as” that many times ever again! Those of us that teach on TV, rather than laugh at her, sympathize with her. The lights, cameras, and spectators (students) can be unnerving. Once that panic snowball starts, it is difficult to end. Talking on TV is hard.

Sitting on several interview committees this summer, I had the pleasure of asking a question that is fairly ubiquitous: “what is your strongest teacher attribute?” We received the usual responses: ability to multitask, ability to form strong personal relationships with colleagues, and all of the other generic responses we’ve heard before. One applicant’s response, however, caught me as powerful. She said, “*My teacher voice, I have a strong and confident teacher voice.*” She got the job.

Transactional distance creates an unbridgeable gap between the instructor and remote students in a DL “classroom.” Many things are lost, including the resonance of a teacher voice. Further, what was once a strong, confident, commanding voice in a traditional classroom becomes a squeak when staring at a camera.

What can a DL teacher do to retain their powerful teacher voice while teaching on TV? The DLDN sat down with a speech pathologist to ask this very question.

DLDN: I represent a group of teachers who instruct on TV. As you can imagine, our teacher voice seems to get lost and our students on the TV don’t receive our powerful expression. This often impacts instruction. Rather than just ask you how to improve our voice, I’d like to ask a couple specifics. A lot of us warm up, but we really don’t know how. For instance, I sing, terribly, but it helps me get my mouth going. To people you council who give speeches, how do you advise them to warm up?

Ms. Glazebrook: First, you are right to warm up. Second, singing isn’t a terrible way to do that. A strong voice is like a muscle, it needs to be primed before it can function. This is what I suggest: To prepare your voice for a big speech: drink lots of water, try to limit your talking beforehand, and *DON’T WHISPER* to try to save your voice. Also, check out Julian Treasure’s TED talk. He has pragmatic advice on how to get started.

(From Treasures' TED talk)

"Any time you're going to talk to anybody important, do these. First, arms up, deep breath in, and sigh out, ahhhhh, like that. One more time. Ahhhh, very good. Now we're going to warm up our lips, and we're going to go Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba. Very good. And now, brrrrrrrrrr, just like when you were a kid. Brrrr. Now your lips should be coming alive. We're going to do the tongue next with exaggerated la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la. Beautiful. You're getting really good at this. And then, roll an R. Rrrrrr. That's like champagne for the tongue. Finally, and if I can only do one, the pros call this the siren. It's really good. It starts with "we" and goes to "aw." The "we" is high, the "aw" is low. So you go, weeeaaawww, weeeaaawww."

DLDN: *What about confidence? How do we speak with authority? We need a voice that carries to our remote schools.*

Ms. Glazebrook: **A strong voice is all about breathing. As you talk, breathe from your belly rather than your shoulders. A belly breath naturally deepens your voice. Also, practice when you breathe. Weak speeches are laced with frequent, shallow breaths at random intervals.**

DLDN: *The next question addresses an issue that I specifically struggle with. I stutter. I was never diagnosed with a stutter, but when I get going and my mind starts racing, I have trouble getting words out. Any suggestions on how to get through a stutter? Or even prevent them?*

Ms. Glazebrook: **You are not alone. Stuttering while speaking on TV or in front of others is common and something I help clients with routinely. If you start to stutter, stop, take a breather and restart the word; begin to breathe out before saying the word. This makes for a gentle start to the word.** One quick question for you and your colleagues. How, on Earth, do you teach a class on TV?

DLDN: *Well, that's a long story. Basically, we love the content we teach and want as many students to receive our instruction as possible. 😊*

Worth Your Time

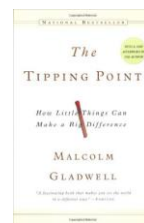
Do you want to improve as a DL Teacher?

Check out these useful resources!



Tech Tips!

Book:



Gladwell discusses *Sesame Street* and *Blues Clues*, two educational television programs. Don't you teach an educational television program too? ☺

Academic Article:

Kop, Rita, & Adrian Hill. "Connectivism: Learning theory of the future or vestige of the past?." *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* [Online], 9.3 (2008): n. pag. Web. 18 Dec. 2015

Many theories surround DL education and connectivism is beginning to enter the discussion.

Video Resource:

"How to speak so people want to listen": a TED Talk by Julian Treasure

Julian discusses the power of effective communication. At its core, DL is getting ideas from one place, through a screen, to another. Try a couple of his helpful tips!

Website:

<http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/>

Though not specifically a DL resource, this website is a thoughtful collection of progressive educators. This resource is not only helpful, but inspirational.

When asked if they see common errors or deficiencies from DL teachers, they responded:

-Not enough interaction with remote site students. At times, I feel that the remote sites are left out of the conversation leading them to do other things that are not class related.

-Sending/Receiving content (tests, quizzes, etc.) is always an issue. I prefer to have instructors place everything in Blackboard (handouts, powerpoints, etc) so students have access to learning materials 24/7. Ideally, giving tests in Blackboard would be helpful since everything is electronic and the facilitators and instructors do not have to coordinate getting materials to and from each place. Snail mail and faxes seem to cause more of a headache for everyone due to the fact that mail is misplaced, or facilitators haven't checked their mailbox, or trying to send 50 pages over a fax machine just won't work due to buffering.

Contribute to the Distance Learning Development Newsletter and Be Recognized

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

THE DLDN 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 DLDN:

Some features of the DLDN 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.

share

Share your views, thoughts, or experiences regarding each issue's 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?



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

Facilitator

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!

Special

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

Opportunities that require research and DLDN correspondence:

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



Special

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

