Update One – Over the Shoulder Learning

The Challenges to Creating Over the Shoulder Learning in the Online Environment

by Joanne Tyrrell

The online or elearning environment has, in my opinion, five areas it needs to address in order to give the support and feedback with proper immediacy that the in-class over the shoulder learning would. First, learning there is environment stress for those not comfortable with computers and those who require a great deal of feedback. Second, is the building relationships and a sense of intimacy for the “class.” Third, is replicating or encouraging organic teachable moments. How do you create a friendly classroom culture in the elearning environment when you do not have all the interpersonal cues that being in-person provides? The fourth challenge is successfully recreating the “see one; do one; create or teach one” environment for learning. Fifth is the challenge is to build confidence in the elearning environment. Providing the feedback and reassurances in a timely manner can be critical for those students who lack self-confidence.

Computer learning environments can be very stressful for some. Even ,I who have used Blackboard and Canvas, struggled at first with the Coursera and Scholar platforms finding information and getting things to post. Many students are just not computer literate to the degree we assume. According the website *Statista*, only about 60% of the world’s population has access to the internet, let alone is proficient in using online platforms and search engines. Case in point: my school system several years ago gave ever student Microsoft 365 accounts. As a high school teacher, I was constantly helping students reset passwords, showing them how to access Microsoft Word, showing them how to access their email. This year during the pandemic I created a series of technology activities in my English class to assess students’ computer competence. I found that one of my seniors knew had to log on Microsoft 365, but had only used it for creating documents in Word and had no idea he could click on the “waffle” icon to get to the other Microsoft programs and his email. So when I assigned a lesson to write a former teacher or coach a thank you note and then attach it in an email to me, he could not do the assignment. He was so stressed about it he wanted to just take the zero. I had to work with him in office hours one on one with him sharing his screen over Zoom to help him through the steps.

Building relationships with students may not happen as much at the college/university level, especially with large online classes, but it is very important in K-12. As a special education teacher I not only teach English but also have a caseload of special needs students whose individual education plans are my responsibility. One year, I had a young man who was learning disable and was suffering from concussive syndrome from football. He was struggling with his earth science class. We discussed strategies for studying and tutoring, but the thing that had the most impact was me telling him I believed he could do it. In my English class, I read the children’s story *The Little Engine That Could*  and then every time he was negative about his science class I would say “I think you can; I thing you can; I know you can!” and having him say” I think I can; I think I can; I know I can.” In time his fellow classmates joined in encouraging him to be positive. We had built an intimate group who supported each other. He passed the course and the standards of learning test for the course. That type of relationship building is not possible online, so we need to do our best to find other ways to build relationships. Perhaps building good scaffolding for peer interactions within the online environment is the key.

As a high school teacher, I have had days in which my entire lesson has gone out the window because a student is having a bad day or asks a question off topic that gives rise to an organic discussion and an important teachable moment. This is hard to recreate in the elearning environment. First, we often do not see the faces of the students if we are not holding zoom sessions, and even in that environment it is difficult to encourage high school students to turn on their cameras and engage. We often sacrifice the engagement and jump right into the lesson. At the university or corporate levels this may not be as important, but in K-12 it is important. We public school teachers do counselling, current events, social skills education on top of our content area, and all of those things are important and heighten the learning that occurs in our classes.

The see one/do one/create or teach one teaching model encompasses the very best in teaching practices- model, practice, and performance task. Certainly in the medical professions you want this type of learning. Medical residents at hospitals do rounds with a doctor on staff to observe, see how the doctor in charge makes diagnoses, and then at some point gets to offer their own diagnoses and reasoning. Surely, we all hope our doctors have plenty of guided practice before they are practicing without supervision. As an English teacher, I have modelled good writing and practiced writing a paragraph with the whole class followed by the entire classes create a story by agreeing on a plot and characters. Each student was to write a line and passing the paper to the next student who continues the story. The students were engaged, gave feedback, were more interested in editing the product, and learned valuable lessons about constructive criticism. This exercise loses something in translation to the elearning environment even with a face to face Zoom class. The excitement in the process just did not seem to be there. So our challenge is to come up with activities that successfully use the see one, do one, and create one. Perhaps the integration of visuals and audio visuals could help.

The last challenge is building self-confidence. Certainly my story about the student and *The Little Engine That Could* touched on not only the intimate class culture that was created, but also the building of self- confidence. There will always be a wide range of students’ characteristics in any course and in any teaching environment. As teachers we need to provide the proper supports for the all the students no matter what the learning environment. Some students need more feedback, more often. Michael B. Twidale & Karen Ruhleder address this in their paper, *Over-the-Shoulder Learning in a Distance Education Environment.* In this paper the authors address several ways to provide support and feedback for a variety of online learning problems and situations including compute issues and timely feedback. I recommend reading it.

References

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