

OLTD 510
Reflection on Evidence 2

Program Learning Outcomes:

- Understand, design and commit to student success in online learning environments
 - Design inclusive learning environments
 - Share engagement strategies and tips
 - Engage in mentoring and coaching with educational partners
- Integrate current cognitive learning and brain-based learning theory
 - Examine current research around best practices and emerging practice

Evidence: Humanizing Your Online Classroom - Conference Presentation Site

Reflection:

This site was started in OLTD 502, then revised and completed during weeks four to six of OLTD 510. This iteration of the site was developed based upon the findings of my annotated bibliography research addressing the critical challenge question “*How can we humanize the online classroom to support student engagement and enhance learning for intermediate to high-school age students?*” and is intended to be used as a conference presentation on this topic for other educators in the K-12 school environment, in particular the intermediate grades and higher.

I believe this site represents a culmination of many areas of my learning in this OLTD program. This concept of humanizing online learning connects all the way back to the first course, OLTD 501, when I learned about Michael Moore’s theory of transactional distance and the idea that it’s not necessarily the physical/geographical distance that can negatively impact outcomes in online learning, but rather the transactional distance, the lack of, or inconsistent, relationship between teachers and learners that can occur as a result of the separation in time and space. But, this doesn’t have to be the given state - the structure of the program, the quality of the dialogue and the autonomy afforded to the learners can all be addressed to reduce this sense of distance (Moore, 2013). I believe humanizing the online learning environment and using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework to support this work attends to these elements, reducing the transactional distance and enhancing learning engagement and success.

This is now my sixth year teaching in online and blended programs and each year I've struggled with the content heavy focus and a sense of disconnect - I really missed that day to day interaction and community building that I experienced teaching in bricks and mortar classrooms that I knew positively impacted the learning of my students. In this new pandemic context, where suddenly all teachers and students were thrown into a distance learning reality, that relationship and connections piece is what people began widely discussing as the missing element. This made me realize that while the Col framework that I had now grown to really appreciate as a guiding model for course design and facilitation would indeed be valuable to others as well, what people are really looking for now is the human element - that sense of connection, relationship, flexibility and personalization that builds the rich sense of community within individual classrooms and schools. This realization is the rationale behind my shift in the primary focus of this resource site to humanizing the online classroom, with the Col framework used to help organize and guide this work. Col becomes the scaffolding to support and build up the big idea of humanizing online teaching and learning. The specific strategies presented in this site are based on research and my own experiences in the distance and blended learning field of education and meant to provide concrete and actionable starting points for other educators looking for a guiding framework to support their own work in supporting students online.

Student success is the ultimate goal of teaching and in order to learn students need to be engaged in the process. Understanding how to design learning environments that encourage and support this engagement, then help to maintain this throughout the facilitation, or teaching, of the class supports students success. As teachers we are learning too and continuing to develop and refine our practice so that we can better develop engaging and effective learning environments. Through this process we benefit from collaboration with one another and sharing the strategies and tips that we discover through research and our own practice, growing as a collective educational system to support each new learner the best we can. I look forward to sharing this site with my colleagues and in turn learning from the conversations that I hope will take place in connection to this.

References

- Moore, M. G. (2013). The theory of transactional distance. In M. G. Moore (Ed.) *Handbook of distance education* (3rd ed., pp. 66-85). New York, NY: Routledge.