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PLUS

Getting Girls Into IT Page 56

Corel's New X3 Graphics Suite Page 95

Wacom's New Intuos Page 97

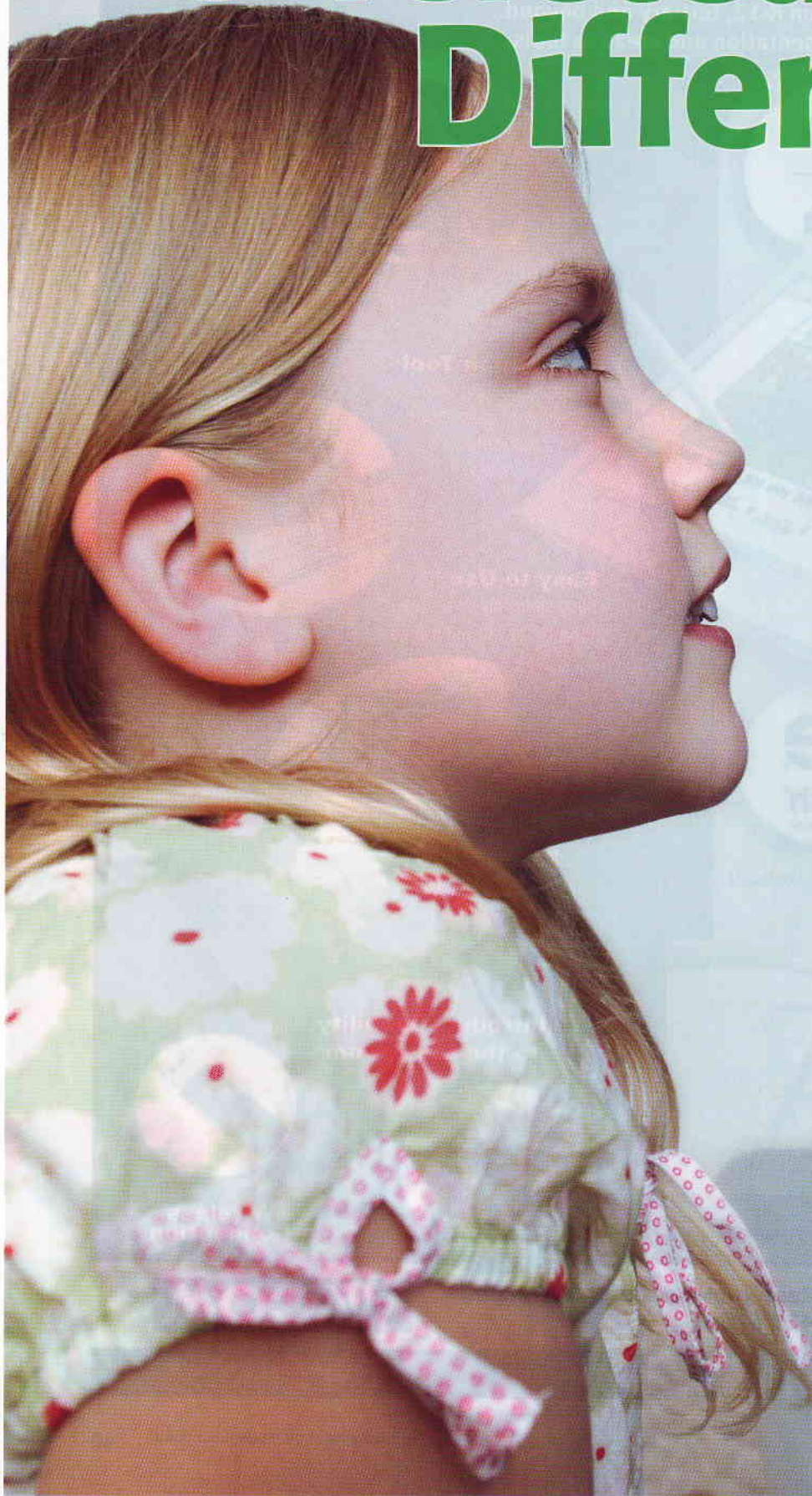
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Is Teleteaching Different?



By Carol Daunt

Many teachers are being thrust into the role of 'teleteacher'. This sometimes occurs because an organisation has investigated new and creative ways of delivering education to dispersed groups of learners. However, it often occurs because organisations must do more with less and teleteaching is seen as one way of achieving this. No matter what the motivating factor, teleteaching presents exciting new opportunities for teachers and students.

It also raises many questions for those who have never been involved in teleteaching before. What are the issues to be considered and what are the differences and similarities between teleteaching and face-to-face teaching?

What Is Teleteaching?

Teleteaching is a term that has been used for some time now. It first appeared and was originally used to describe teaching that was delivered via 'tele'vision. However, the term is now used to encompass teaching that employs a variety of technologies. Those that are currently popular are web or video conferencing and interactive satellite TV.

The most common factor for teleteaching is that it involves the use of communications technology to interact with students in 'real' time. As technology changes, so will our concept of teleteaching. However, 'real-time' interaction is an important component of teleteaching and this defines the types of teaching strategies that can be used.

Face-To-Face V Teleteaching

So how does teleteaching compare to face-to-face teaching? What adjustments, if any, do teachers have to make for teleteaching? I encounter many decision makers who think that because videoconferencing allows teachers and students to see each other then it is just the same as teaching face-to-face. This is an understandable conceptual leap because videoconferencing is as close as you can get to face-to-face, without being there. However, there are differences and it is essential to consider these when planning to venture down the path of teleteaching.

What's different?

One of the major differences is that you are moving into a distance education/open learning/flexible delivery/blended learning mode and this brings with it a new way of planning and structuring the course.

It is unlikely that you will be teleteaching for the same number of hours as the course takes in a face-to-face situation. You will need to develop support materials (most likely self-directed learning guides) which students work through between

their telelearning sessions. For some teachers this involves learning a new set of skills.

Probably the biggest difference is your working space. In a face-to-face situation you are free to wander around the room, look at students' work, participate in numerous small group discussions, distribute materials, have students gather around you, work on a one-to-one basis and change the direction of your lesson depending upon students' interest and motivation (or lack thereof). All this is undertaken in a defined space where you can see and hear all students at all times. In teleteaching some, or all, of your students will not be physically located with you. If you wander around the room the students at other sites will not be able to see you, and private conversations are difficult depending upon your microphone situation.

Your students are likely to have less of an emotional connection and commitment to you when you have not met face-to-face. The challenge is for the teleteacher to 'break through the glass' and add the human touch to what is a remote experience.

Below is a brief summary of some of the differences.

On top of all this, it may be that teleteaching is being used to reach a student population that you

have never taught before. Issues to be considered here are background, experience and expectations of students and especially cultural issues if you are extending beyond the boundaries of your own country.

What's similar?

Despite the long list of differences above, there are many similarities between teleteaching and face-to-face teaching. The most important of these is that good teaching is just that! Most of the conditions for desirable teaching and learning situations can be achieved through teleteaching - it just takes a little creative thinking. This is the challenge!

Making the Transition

For most teachers the transition is not overly difficult. It usually enables them to revisit their content and teaching strategies and repackage their delivery with enthusiasm and vigour. Support is what teachers need most of all. Support in the form of time, resources and training. It takes time to redesign a course for delivery via teleteaching and time to become familiar with the new environment and equipment. Resources in the form of teaching relief, expert advice and access to the teleteaching room are necessary.

Table 1: Some differences between face-to-face and teleteaching

FACE-TO-FACE	TELETEACHING
Equipment Whiteboard, OHP, VCR/DVD, computer.	Camera/s, monitor/s, microphone/s, document camera, control panel, VCR/DVD, computer.
Student location In the room with you.	Some students may be with you, others will be at one or more sites which may be hundreds of kilometres away.
What teacher sees All students at all times.	Depending on the operating system, probably only one site at any given time ie a number of students are unseen.
What students see The teacher AND any visuals shown.	The teacher OR any visuals shown OR students at other sites. (This can vary depending on the system.)
Ability to speak and hear Teacher and students can hear and speak to each other at any time.	Microphones must be used. If these are 'press to talk' models, students will not be heard if they do not press the button to activate the microphone.
Interaction The dynamics and energy of the room encourage participation and interest.	Participants view a monitor and can easily become passive viewers. You must design strategies for maintaining student participation and interest.
Operational support Usually not required.	Somewhere in the background will be a raft of specialists who manage and maintain the equipment you will be using.
Preparation You are responsible for preparing your own teaching program and materials. This is usually done alone, but you may include some colleagues in the process.	A well designed course will need course developers and some input from experienced teleteachers. You may also need to redesign graphic material. It may involve instructional designers and graphic artists.
Teaching session length This is usually in a 2-3 hour block.	It is not appropriate to have students 'screen watching' for more than an hour. The time 'on-screen' should be broken into smaller segments.

And finally, and by far the most important, teachers need training. Not just training on how to operate equipment, but on how to adapt their course for delivery and, specifically, what strategies are most effective for teleteaching.

With or without the support of the organisation, there are strategies that a teleteacher can adopt to make their role more effective and fulfilling for both themselves and their students.

Feeling at ease

It is essential for teleteachers to feel at ease with their equipment and environment. The technology needs to become transparent. (Note I do not say 'invisible' as I think it impossible to make any technology invisible.) This can only be achieved by familiarity with the teleteaching room and practice. Practice alone, practice with other teachers and practice with 'stand-in' students. Do you know how to switch between the visuals you want to show? Do you know exactly what your students are seeing at any point in time? Do you feel in charge of your teaching environment? Are you enthusiastic about teleteaching?

Once you are comfortable with your new surroundings, it is time to concentrate on the educational issues. First and foremost, you are a teacher and this is what you do best. Don't try to change your style because you are 'on television'. You are not 'on television' - you are teaching - it just happens to be through a screen. Basically you teach in much the same way as you normally do (assuming that you do that in an interesting and interactive way).

Class size

The size of your class will greatly affect the way in which you design your sessions. If you are working with less than 25 students you can interact more easily and more often than you can with a large group.

Interaction

Most teleteachers agree that interaction is an

important element in their teaching - after all it is the only thing that distinguishes teleteaching from a video tape! Interactivity takes many forms; it is not just limited to audio and video, or just teacher-student interactions. It represents the connectivity the students feel with the teacher, the local tutors and their peers. Successful teleteaching involves interactivity between teacher and students; between students and the learning environment; and among students themselves, as well as active learning in the classroom. This does not just happen when you make the technical connection. Interaction must be planned and encouraged.

Feedback

One of the most difficult aspects of teleteaching for those new to it is the difficulty in recognising the usual non-verbal cues from students. Without the non-verbal cues, you need to communicate with students to check their attention and progress. Interacting with direct questions about their understanding as well as encouraging dialogue from all sites will help overcome the lack of non-verbals.

Teaching strategies

Teleteaching involves using a medium that is primarily a visual one, so it is essential to capitalise on this. The challenge is to visualise your lesson. Try to think in pictures rather than words. Space is too short here to list the numerous teaching strategies that can be effectively employed as this is the subject of training sessions.

Student expectations

From years of watching commercial television, students come with expectations of how information should be presented. Because the teleteacher is coming to them via a monitor, they expect to be 'entertained' with all of the advanced theatricals available to the television producer. I don't recommend that teleteachers try to emulate this (just the opposite), but always consider the visual aspect and work with good visual aids.

Don't ignore the fact that students will come with preconceptions and educate them as what to expect from teleteaching.

Students will also have to make adaptations to their behaviour, e.g. use microphones and be seen on screen. They need instruction and practice with the technology to feel at ease. Even after this, they may not be psychologically adjusted to using the technology and you need to plan ways to continually put students at ease - throughout the entire course.

Is teleteaching different? Yes and no! On the one hand, organising a telecourse is very different from organising a traditional course since you are using a different medium which presents different kinds of teaching opportunities as well as places constraints on what you can do.

On the other hand, the basics are the same but we need to make some adaptations.

- Good teaching practice is essential.
- Planning and organisation are essential.
- Interaction with learners is vital and must be built into the session.
- Use of well-designed graphic material is vital.
- Be familiar with your equipment so both you and your students feel at ease.

A careful look at this list will show that all of these items are also essential for good face-to-face teaching. I rest my case!

Carol Daunt is Founder & Managing Director of LearnTel Pty Ltd. She has been involved in the design, application and effective use of learning technologies since 1986 and is recognised internationally as a leader in the field. Carol holds a Dip T; Grad Dip Dist Ed; B Ed & M Ed (Research) - her thesis investigated the nature of interaction in videoconferencing. She has been published in numerous journals and is a frequent speaker at international conferences. Copies of some of these papers and articles can be downloaded at <http://www.learnintel.com.au>



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