

An Aesthetic Analysis Of An Educational, Videoconferencing Experience

David M. Dees, (Email: dees@salem.kent.edu), Kent State University
 Jeff Heinfeldt, (Email: j-heinfeldt@onu.edu), Ohio Northern University

ABSTRACT

This study utilizes the “aesthetic mode of knowing” as a framework to analyze an educational, videoconferencing experience. Aesthetic themes are identified and evaluated from both student and instructor perspectives.

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance education is a dramatic idea. It may change, even restructure, education, but only if it is possible to make the experience of the distant learner as complete, satisfying, and acceptable as the experience of the local learner (Simonson, 1997, p. 3).

College students are bombarded with technological images in every facet of their education. From simple Powerpoint presentations to live interactive distance learning environments, the world in which we are teaching is changing on a daily basis. Colleges and universities have turned to distance learning as one way to provide flexibility and opportunity for various constituencies to have access to higher education. As Ball and Crook (1997) note, “Teleconferencing technology makes it possible for ideas to travel when people cannot...” (p. 19). Research on the effectiveness and quality of distance learning has been varied and extensive (Boaz, Elliot, Foshee, Hardy, Jarmon, & Olcott, Jr., 1999; Carrell & Menzel, 2001; Guerro & Miller, 1998; Knipe & Lee, 2002; McHenry & Bozik, 1995; McKenzie, Witte, Guarino, & Witte, 2002; Moore & Anderson, 2003; Selim, 2005; Simonson, 1997; Smyth, 2005). These research efforts have examined everything from student and teacher perceptions of distance learning to the effectiveness of content delivery. However, as Middleton (1997) warns, “How effective distance education [sic] seems to depend upon which criteria are used to evaluate it and who is doing the evaluation” (p. 133). This study, by examining the aesthetic (emotional, affective, holistic) dimensions of the teaching/learning experience, moves beyond the traditional components that have been studied in teaching through distance learning (subject matter, mode of delivery, student assessment) and evaluates the impact of a more aesthetic response to students’ and teachers’ conception of the event.

The aesthetic mode of knowing in teaching (Abbs, 1994; Bundy, 2003; Dees, 2000; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2006, 2002, 1994, 1985; Fenner, 2003; Greene, 1984; Henderson & Dees, 1997; Latta, 2000; Vallance, 1991) serves as a means to examine teaching in a more holistic manner. In the aesthetic mode of knowing, the individual moves beyond the idea of simple recognition of independent elements and explores the personal implications associated with the entirety of the teaching event. Like an encounter with a work of art, this mode of knowing attempts to move beyond merely representing the event through a simplified understanding of the interaction of independent elements; the aesthetic mode takes in the “whole” of the event and addresses the affective, emotional, and artistic qualities associated with the experience. The aesthetic mode encourages a recognition of the to-and-fro movement of human perception, as individual components of the event and the persons involved construct an integrated experience. Additionally, the aesthetic mode encourages the recognition of the confluence of both affective and cognitive domains of an experience. Thus, examining the aesthetic dimensions of the teaching/learning experience in a distance learning environment requires a recognition of the traditional components that have been studied in teaching (subject matter, mode of delivery, student assessment), and then moves beyond these to examine the aesthetic response and the impact of this response on the students’ and teachers’ conception of the event. By utilizing this mode, educators may glean insights into teaching that are currently left unexplored through our standard measures of effectiveness.

This study is a representation of the findings when the aesthetic mode of knowing was utilized by the teachers and students involved in a videoconferencing environment. During the semester, some of the class sessions were taught via videoconferencing technology (“semi-live”) and others were done in person (“live”). Throughout the course, most of the students and each of the teachers involved in the study created reflective aesthetic journals. Participants were encouraged in their aesthetic journals to view teaching as a work of art. This meant that participants were asked to view teaching from a holistic qualitative perspective by monitoring how the technical elements of the experience impacted them emotionally and affectively. Thus, by paying attention to the interplay of the traditionally studied elements of teaching (subject matter, mode of delivery, student assessment) the students were encouraged to recognize how these elements impacted their aesthetic (emotional, affective, sense of beauty) experience in the class. The students involved with the study monitored their personal feelings, the overall aesthetic of the experience, and other relevant insights that occurred when the professor was “live” versus “semi-live” through videoconferencing. Thus, like a lens on a camera, the students were encouraged to move between an overall picture of the event to focusing on individual teaching elements, then back again to the whole picture. The teachers in the study also created aesthetic journals that reflected their own personal responses to teaching “live” versus “semi-live” through videoconferencing. This paper focuses on the responses outlined in the aesthetic journals and the implications of these findings for the study of teaching.

STUDY DESIGN

This study originally developed from an assignment in a senior level educational foundations course that was administered through videoconferencing. The students in the course attended separate regional campuses within a large, mid-western university. The campuses were separated by approximately thirty miles. The professor for the course would teach “live” at each location one day a week. The goal of this aesthetic assignment was to challenge the professor and students to view the classroom from an artistic perspective. Rather than examining the practical applications of videoconferencing, the individuals in the study attempted to view the teaching event from an artistic/aesthetic point of view in an effort to uncover the aesthetic qualities associated with the teaching/learning transaction. Thus, questions that addressed the “feel” of the environment, the body in space, and the “spirit” of the teaching event dominated these aesthetic journals. When possible, the professor and the students attempted to capture the aesthetic of the moment in the narrative journals. Another professor from a different field of study (business) also maintained an aesthetic journal of his own videoconferencing experience in an effort to identify the shared realities that he associated with this teaching experience.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The journal entries submitted by the eight students in the course and two instructors were analyzed by using the qualitative thematic approach outlined by van Manen (1990). For van Manen there are three means through which a researcher can identify representative thematic phrases: the wholistic or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the detailed or line-by-line approach. Van Manen describes this process in the following manner:

1. In the wholistic reading approach we attend to the text as a whole and ask, *What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning main significance of the text as a whole?* We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.
2. In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, *What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?* These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight.
3. In the detailed reading approach we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?* (p. 93).

By utilizing van Manen's selective reading approach, thematic phrases were identified that served "...to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon" (van Manen, 1990, p. 92) of being a student and teacher in a videoconferencing environment. By utilizing the students' and teachers' own words, this project identified the

dominant themes associated with this experience. Member checking was also utilized to verify the categories. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note:

The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognizable to audience members as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to react to them (p. 314).

Each of the students was shown a draft of the paper that identified the dominant categories. After reading the draft, all of the students agreed with the themes that had been identified.

STUDENT RESULTS

The T.V. Mode Of Being

Without question, television is an important part of our lives. Whether it's remaining up to date with current issues or just simple entertainment, our students watch television and are familiar with the "T.V. mode of being." This mode of being is a common occurrence in a videoconferencing setting.

Two-way videoconferencing is unlike one-way television, but many people have a difficult time changing ingrained habits and preconceptions produced by years of experience watching television. Not only do we tend to "tune out" what's on a television screen; we also expect to be entertained by it. We expect broadcast quality video, slick graphics, and a quick pace to keep us engaged. And if we're not fascinated, we quickly change channels to something more interesting. The behaviors we associate with television -- channel surfing, "spacing out," "vegging" -- are not optimal learner behaviors (SBC Knowledge Network Explorer, 2004, p. 3).

This "reality" was observed in several of the student journals. One student wrote:

Today I got to watch T.V. in school. The program was not very exciting. It wasn't action-packed, and it seemed more like watching an old, dry documentary than my favorite soap or drama. What made matters worse is that there were not commercials...you know...time for me to get up and grab some chips and a pop...or use the necessary room. I thought I was going to die! Then, of all things...the m.c. of the show began asking me questions! I had to work...to think! This was just too much. I attempted to pick up the changer to find something more interesting only to find there was just one channel! This was modern technology?

This student's attempt to recapture her feelings highlights some interesting issues. First, she notes how each of us slips into a familiar mode of action. When we watch television, we expect a certain rhythm to develop. This rhythm includes commercials, quickly changing images, and other distractions that allow us to "tune out" from the everyday world. We have a mode of being that we live by when we are in front of the television and this mode of being can creep in, regardless of the setting. As she noted, she had slipped into this mode and was disappointed when it did not concur with her expectations.

A second element in her entry that is very interesting is the notion of the "teacher as master of ceremonies." This metaphoric representation of the teacher is quite interesting. As she suggests, in a video driven environment the teacher is viewed as an entertainer. Lessinger and Gillis (1976), Dawe (1984), Barrell (1991), Morgan-Flemming (1999) and Sarason (1999) have all discussed the entertainment factor associated with the act of teaching. In the videoconferencing environment, due to the T.V. mode of being, this "teacher as entertainer" expectation is pushed to another level. It appears that the videoconferencing environment may encourage students to develop a "feed me the material until the next commercial break" attitude, which heightens the entertainment expectation of the teaching event. This sentiment is further explored in another entry. The student writes:

I want to be entertained, darn it! I want fast-paced action...steamy sex...and tons of gore and violence! I want all the answers at my fingertips and I want choices! I want instant gratification at the touch of a button! God forbid there be any silence...I can't stand not having some kind of noise. Silence only leaves me with my thoughts.

This powerful exclamation demonstrates the intriguing nature of our students' realities. Fearful of our own thoughts, we have become a society that searches for an anesthetic to take the pain of our own consciousness away. Television has become this numbing medication. Thus, as Greene (1978) noted, the world of the aesthetic, a perspective that allows our consciousness to be open to new ways of being and thinking, becomes even more important in our television society. The television mode of being denies this wide-awake awareness that Greene contends is so important to the educative process. Another student continued:

Modern technology is often associated with entertainment. This V-Tel environment allowed me to slip into my "entertain me" mode. If the classroom instruction does not entertain sufficiently, the student may tune out. Dr. ----- does not seem real to me...it is the T.V. I feel that at any moment he will be interrupted by a commercial. The book felt more real to me. It was right there and I could touch it.

Again, questions of reality and the television mode of being are interrupting the educative process of this student. To her, the book has become the reality of the classroom. Without question, this is the professor's greatest fear. It is the dreaded "If I can get it from the book, why do I need the class?" mentality. Thus, the videoconferencing reality, because of the anesthetic frame of reference it encourages, may serve to make our efforts as educators insignificant to our students' learning.

Another student in the class highlights a slightly different aspect regarding the T.V. mode of being. During one class a very intense debate arose between several students at each site. The debate was over which educational approach is the most appropriate for children from diverse backgrounds. A student, that was typically rather shy and quiet, completely changed her persona during this debate. This relatively passive student was shouting and arguing with the students at the other site. She recounted this story in her aesthetic journal. She writes:

Today we had a very heated debate on how classrooms should be run. The older lady at the other site has very strong opinions on what is "right" and "wrong"... To me it just seems a very old school way of teaching. I feel that this debate, because it had taken place over V-Tel, became more intense. I had a feeling of distance between me and her and I was more open to confront her. Because I was not looking at her face to face I was able to go after her more. It was like watching the Jerry Springer show...I could yell at the T.V. and it didn't matter. It was a very interesting experience because I personally felt more argumentative because there was a screen between us. That's not me.

In this mode of being, argumentation became her personal style. From a professor's standpoint, there is nothing worse than having your class compared to the *Jerry Springer Show*. However, her metaphoric comparison was quite accurate. This professor had never seen this side of the student before. The television, in some ways, had freed her to express ideas in a different manner. As she noted, part of that bothered her. However, part of her also enjoyed the freedom to challenge another. The professor's reaction to this day was quite different:

Wow! What an interesting debate...I have never seen J----- react like that. I didn't know she could get that mad. She's never done that in class before. Again, though, I have some troubles. Normally after a class like this I have time to debrief...time to make sure everyone is o.k. and settle down. It's usually little things like watching mannerisms or smiling at them...just to "check in" with each of them. I couldn't do that today because we were cut off from the connection. I had never seen J---- that mad and then at the end of class I couldn't make sure she was alright. This is a troubling feeling for me. I never realized how much I rely on the small stuff to communicate with my students.

The television mode of being had created both freedom and dissonance in the class. Granted, students were speaking freely, a quality that professors strive for in their teaching. However, at a very important moment in a student's life, the professor was not there to make sure she had emotionally recovered from what had transpired. As a

teacher, this professor had become more aware of the importance that little connections play in the personal transactions that occur with our students.

The Personal Disconnect

The next theme that was identified in the students' journals was the feeling of personal disconnect. Many of these students, because of the separation from the teacher and other students in the class, felt that this videoconferencing environment was not conducive to a positive educational experience. Many educators contend that videoconferencing serves to connect students with each other. When viewed through the aesthetic lens, this class questioned the quality of this personal connection. One student wrote:

I want to write about how it feels being the only student in a class. I don't feel a true part of the class. The screen puts a distance between us. I feel I'm just in a big lecture class listening to the talking head. It is uncomfortable to talk because I feel I am interrupting more and I hear my own voice echo. It just feels different and disconnected. Also, when you're in a class with other students there is more time before and after class to compare notes and ideas. It's also awkward to be in the room by yourself.

Another student echoed this student's feeling of separation. She writes:

*J---- is not part of my class. I've realized that after a few classes into the semester, I kind of become acquainted and accustomed to the characteristics and habits of my peers. I can sense their moods...I "know" their families...I know their clothing preferences and food likes and dislikes. I don't know these things about J----. While I have come to recognize her personality and teaching ideas, she's seems a stranger to me. She is a figure behind a desk (once again that T.V. image) that I can see from the chest up. I wonder what she talks about before class and if she got her reading done for that day. (Y---- and I always know that about each other.) Trivial things such as these are part of what makes up a classroom. Not to mention, when there's a technical problem...*poof*...J---- is gone, while my other classmates are still here...I don't think I would say she was "in" my class.*

These students highlight an important issue regarding our classroom transactions. Often, in the study of teaching, the focus is on lesson planning, teacher dialogue, classroom structures, modes of presentation and student learning. These are important elements in the teaching/learning process. However, these students demonstrate that something extra occurs before and after class sessions. There is an important camaraderie that is established between human beings that have a shared experience. These seemingly simple interactions are also an important part of the teaching/learning process. Although some contend that videoconferencing pulls students together, these students believe the opposite is true. They do not feel as though they are having the same shared experience. As Dewey (1938) noted, it is the "experience in education" that serves to construct our meaningful encounters with the world. Another student continues this discussion. She writes:

If given the choice, I would not choose this format again. I have come to realize how much I enjoy being around other students and the professor. It is the little things like hanging around before and after class and just talking. I don't think I would even recognize the other students in the class...and that's also part of the learning process. I prefer the regular classroom.

When viewed from the aesthetic perspective, this student learned that the exchange from peer to peer, even the minor pre- and post-class encounters, are an important part of the educational experience.

Another issue that leads to this feeling of disconnect is the lack of "real" human contact. As several researchers have noted (Dees, 2000; Halabi, 2005; Hanna, 1983; Kamerman & Martorella, 1983; Lessinger & Gillis, 1976; Wilhite, 2004;), the live interactions of human beings in a shared space has an impact on the event itself. Although the videoconferencing environment is a synchronous setting, the notion of a "live" performance is questioned by these students and teachers involved in this study. One student wrote, "I hate not having the eye contact with my teacher. I can see the body language but the eye contact is important." For this student, videoconferencing limits the eye contact that can occur between teacher and student. One teacher's entries on this

issue echoed the student's concerns. He wrote, "The eye contact is not the same. I can see some expressions but it doesn't feel the same. Is it possible that I can feel confusion? That's an interesting thought to me. The 'spirit' of the class is not the same." The student and teacher felt the difference in the room. The eye contact, the energy, the overall connection is not the same. Another student moved beyond eye contact and discussed more broad kinesthetic issues. She wrote:

The absence of body is very real for me in these classes. Dr. ---- is so easily approachable, and if I need to talk to him, the idea of going up to a screen and speaking to him is just inconceivable to me. Somehow he does not seem real when he is on T.V. He cannot look into my eyes. I think this can be very detrimental to students. They need the security of having a "real" presence present. They need to know that in a blink of an eye ...a hand may be placed on their shoulder in reassurance. It's difficult for me to explain, but I strongly believe that a lack of physical presence somehow strips the identity of the teacher/prof. The reality is just not there.

The notion of having a real human being close to them is an important part of the teaching/learning process to these students. Another student explored this issue even further:

I quickly find myself disinterested...detached...void of any feelings of bonding or connections with my professor. It is like being dead. One can picture the person in their mind...smell their scent and hear their voice...but it is off in the distance like a memory, where the ability to touch goes beyond our reach....the physical presence is vital to making the class come alive.

These entries provide an insight into the importance of "being there" with our students. The classroom is a sacred space to them in which many personal encounters and exchanges occur between the professor and student. It is important to note that these were senior level students. One wonders what impact this environment would have had on a newer student who was also adjusting to the other pressures and realities of college life. As one final student wrote, "I want an atmosphere of warmth and human presence...a safe place...where my students can come and confide in me." Having a sense of belonging is important to all of us. To this student, this was lacking in the videoconferencing environment when viewed from an aesthetic/transactional perspective.

The Reality Of A College Education

The last theme that was developed from the student journals concerns the reality of being a college student today. Research indicates that student/learner demographics may need to be taken into consideration when delivering content via video. For instance, older participants expressed greater satisfaction with equipment functionality/usefulness and intent to repeat the experience while indicating less anxiety and self-consciousness. In the area of gender, females indicated higher satisfaction levels and lower anxiety associated with the use of the technology (Wheeler, 2000). In the classes involved with this study, there were a number of non-traditional students that felt that the convenience of videoconferencing was more important than the inherent problems listed above. One student wrote, "It definitely feels less personal. However, at this point I just want to graduate, so getting the class in any way is important to me. I am willing to sacrifice for the convenience." Another student added, "I feel that junior and senior students are far enough along to be responsible enough for this type of course. I don't need that connection with the teacher as much." Thus, as noted in the research, many students at different points in their career become less concerned with connection and more focused on completing their degree.

Another common issue that developed from these entries was students' concerns over speaking in front of peers. As one student wrote, "Somehow I seemed to feel I was more 'open' for others to observe...almost as if I was naked and everyone was looking. I wished that I could hide myself from their views." Another student added, "The camera zooming in on me is quite intimidating. When you're answering a question in class you feel as if everyone is looking at you. In this environment that is magnified. Everyone is looking at you! And very closely...maybe I just won't talk." Due to the nature of the camera in this setting, many students felt more "on the spot." It is common for students in a "regular" classroom setting to discuss the uncomfortable feelings associated with speaking in front of their peers. In the videoconferencing environment, it appears that this emotional response was magnified for these

students. Again, it was another barrier that needed to be addressed as the class progressed. The aesthetic perspective allows for the uncovering of very subtle issues that impact the teaching/learning experience.

INSTRUCTOR RESULTS

Body In Space

The body in space was a distracting factor for both professors in this study. The combination of watching your movements on a camera while simultaneously trying to monitor the to-and-fro of the classroom transaction is a difficult task. In one of the entries, a professor wrote the following: “Oh my god! Was that a bald spot? Yes, it is a bald spot. Man, I am becoming my father. Look at my hands...do I always move this much?” On that day the professor began to reflect on the impact the camera has on the teaching/learning transaction:

Without question, my theatre background is paying off. Thinking about angles and space and positioning has never dominated so much of what I do in the classroom. I really have to be centered on my content. So much energy and focus goes to the camera, the angles, developing the interactions with students. This is an odd feeling.

The professor realized that body in space was an important part of the teaching/learning process. Where we position ourselves in front of the camera has an impact on what we communicate. At important moments, moving to or away from the camera could serve to highlight the educational significance of what is being shared with the students. At each moment, in many ways, the teacher can “control” the students’ perception of the event. Although the personal disconnect that can occur through videoconferencing is a limiting aspect of the technology, the ability to influence student perception, if done properly, may outweigh this limitation.

Educational Disconnect

One professor wrote the following at the conclusion of his journal:

My experience was done through a “cohort” based program. While this provided the students with a consistent, social and academic support system, it made me feel as if I was the “outsider.” This was particularly the case when I taught a course later in the sequence after the cohort had been together for a while and their interaction pattern had “cemented.” Also, since the cohort of students was in the same physical classroom and I was the one being “beamed in,” I did not have the advantage of the physical/tactile presence. I often rely on the eyes of the students and the “feeling in the air” to assist with sensing confusion, frustration, anxiety, tension, understanding, satisfaction and so on as related to course material. That was missing in my circumstance. While I could see their eyes on the screen, I could not see into them. The lack of physical/tactile presence created a sense, at least for me, of never really getting to meet the students. It was as if I had been introduced to them, but never got to know them. I have taught a 6-week course in person and felt as if I knew the students better than after a 10-week video course.

This instructor’s powerful reflection echoed many of the concerns of the students involved in this study. It is important to note that first and foremost, due to the nature of how most universities are utilizing this technology, professors can become more disconnected from the “personhood” of their students. One of the advantages of technology is the ability to “reach out” to different sites of students to provide access to a college education. However, this technology, when viewed from an aesthetic perspective, creates a personal disconnect that can limit the educational experience. As this professor noted, he felt like an outsider disconnected from their lived experience. Additionally, he also identified the importance of eye contact.

The students and the instructors in this study recognized that the classroom exchange between teacher and student creates a feeling or “spirit” to the event itself. In addition, both parties indicated that there is a connection that occurs through physical presence. With regard to the video experience, one professor noted that he could see his students, but he “could not see into them.” In contrast, he noted that he can sense “...confusion, frustration, anxiety, tension, understanding, satisfaction and so on...” when he is “live” with his students. Without that presence, this

awareness is lost. The aesthetic mode of inquiry highlights that physical presence in the classroom. That presence, which creates a “spirit of connection,” affects the teacher/student exchange and may also impact the learning process.

Fear

Both professors involved in the study highlighted the fact that at various times there was a heightened sense of fear that was created by the technology. In particular, it was the fear of the equipment/technology failing or malfunctioning. This emotion was a common theme for both professors throughout the experience. One professor writes:

Being a definite “Type A Personality,” I was filled with anxiety and tension everyday that I was to teach via video technology. I was always concerned that the equipment (or I) would malfunction and an entire class meeting would be lost. This, of course, would be absolutely terrible because now we would be irretrievably thrown off schedule!! As someone who worries so much about being prepared as it is, this medium only added to my duress....it was one more thing that could be beyond my control!!!

Technological failure occurred at both sites involved in this study. The videoconferencing environment requires the teacher to be ready for any event. This sense of the unknown creates fear within the instructors. Live teaching, without videoconferencing, may also be fearful for some because, like any live event, the unexpected is always a possibility. However, in videoconferencing, the technology adds another level of concern. It requires the professor to be over-prepared and ready for any occurrence to develop. From an instructional perspective, it is a more difficult environment in which to teach. The professor must be well grounded in the content so that the distractions of the camera will not affect the teaching process. Additionally, the professor must be prepared for possible technological failure. Whether it is extra handouts that can provide clarification and guidance in your “absence” or a phone at the ready, over-preparation is a critical component in this environment.

SUMMARY & DISCUSSION

Due to the small sample size of the participants in this study, generalizing these findings to all videoconferencing experiences would be inappropriate. However, by utilizing an aesthetic mode of inquiry, the students and teachers in this study were able to examine an educational event from a new perspective. Additionally, several issues involved in distance education were identified that may benefit from further analysis with the aesthetic domain of knowing. The first issue deals with the notion of the “TV mode of being.” As noted, this mode of being can desensitize students and create an anesthetic learning environment. However, professors that are aware of this perspective can become proactive and utilize the technology to create a learning experience that is unique to distance education. For example, one of the professors in this study realized that he could “play” to the camera at different moments in the teaching event to control the students’ visual interpretation. This idea could go even further. For example, integrating video, music beds, and other visual and/or auditory images at the proper moments could actually serve to frame the emotional climate of the classroom experience. Considering the aesthetic domain in videoconferencing creates new possibilities for the teaching event.

Another insight provided by the aesthetic perspective is recognizing the importance of shared human experience. Both the teachers and the students commented on the importance of physical presence. This “spirit of connection” reminds us that classroom ethos is an important and, at times, ignored part of the educational research. Videoconferencing may limit this personal connection. However, if educators are aware of this issue, certain steps can be taken to help in this domain. For example, professors should make sure to arrive early, just as in a “live” classroom, and engage, as appropriate, in the pre-class dialogue with all of the students at the various videoconferencing sites. This seemingly benign activity is an important part of the learning experience when one considers teaching from the aesthetic mode of knowing. Second, encourage and create classroom experiences between sites that can help to bridge the gap of interpersonal space. Third, create web-based, on-line group activities that can allow the students to get to know one another in a more meaningful manner. Professors must focus on building between-site relationships or students will become disconnected to the learning experience.

Finally, the aesthetic analysis of the videoconferencing experience did provide insight into the study of teaching as an expressive art form. In this environment teachers may become more aware of their body in space. The live camera allowed the participants to identify the educational impact of adjusting the visual perspectives of those involved. This medium is a very tangible means to address the “technical” art of teaching. For example, simple physical gestures could be examined in terms of the relative significance each motion plays in relation to the teacher/student exchange. Facial gestures as well as body and hand movements could all be practiced in this environment to identify the technical pieces of communication. This has definite benefits in teacher education and in the study of college teaching.

The transaction between teacher and student is a very personal event for those involved. Without question, the videoconferencing technology can interfere with this process. However, if professors utilize an aesthetic awareness in their teaching, this technology may actually be used to enhance the educational encounter. This study challenged our conceptions of what it means to “be” in a classroom, it provided insight on some of the aesthetic qualities of the teacher/student encounter, and it allowed us to examine some of the technical aspects associated with teaching artistry. Through the aesthetic domain of knowing, a new awareness of teaching was developed. Our consciousness was awakened allowing us to ask some new questions regarding technology, the teacher/student transaction, and the overall spiritual nature of the “live” exchange of ideas.

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