Building Pedagogical Community from the Get Go

Arch Chee Keen Wong, *Ambrose University*

Blog Series: Online Teaching, Online Learning
December 10, 2018
Tags: student learning | assignments | pedagogical communities

A pedagogical community consists of at least three elements: the student, the professor, and the subject. The intersection of these three elements has the potential to create what Parker Palmer (1998) calls "a community of truth." In order to create this community of truth in an online course, the instructor has to consider in the design of the course where community happens, so that students can begin to "know one another."

One of the best, and perhaps most difficult, places to start is at the beginning of the course. For a number of years, the start of my online courses were, quite frankly, boring and not very engaging for students. This, in turn, caused a lot of angst in me, the instructor. As I shared my dilemma with a colleague, she suggested, "Why don't you make an assignment in the first week to produce a video about you and have each student in the course do likewise?" I started to do that at the beginning of each of my online courses and that advice from my colleague has helped me and my students begin to "know one another."

Below are the instructions that I put in the syllabus for this assignment. I have found that it is doable even for students who have technological challenges. There are many apps/software out there; I use an app/software called Animoto. It's easy to use, it provides choices of background and music, and it's free!

Purpose:
An introduction is often your best chance to establish yourself as a distinct individual with something unique to offer the world. Most people default to the standard, "Hi my name is . . . I live in . . . I work at . . ." For this assignment, you will move beyond such a standard introduction and create a 1 minute and 30 second (minimum) Animoto about you. You will also write a short paragraph to accompany the video. While a resume is a professional document, consider how an Animoto can be an innovative way of conveying the same information. What sort of audience would prefer this format?

Instructions:
Step 1: Start by establishing the essential information you think should be included when introducing yourself to others. Obviously, your full name is important, but you may also include your age, your field of study, ethnicity, home town, hobbies, some details of past experience, accomplishments, future goals, etc.

Step 2: For this assignment you must consider appropriate images and music that will highlight information about you while maintaining a professional look. Draft a few ideas, sort through your photographs, or Google images and arrange the "story."

Step 3: Write a text that highlights the images and/or helps put them in the proper context.

Step 4: Select the music that best reflects the image of yourself that you want to send out to the world. You may want to select the music first and let the rhythm and lyrics guide your story.

Submission guidelines:
Post your biographical Animoto and paragraph to the Introduction Forum. You must watch all the Animotos and respond to at least three other Animotos (not the instructor's). Your responses should be thoughtful, constructive, and more than one sentence. Comment on similarities, differences, enquiries, wonderings.

What makes this first assignment most interesting for me are the comments from the students to one another's Animoto and short paragraphs in the discussion forums. The curiosity that students have for one another is gold! The benefit: the course begins on an encouraging note that helps students be more transparent and authentic with one another in a way that helps build positive momentum for the course. I'm sure there are many good ways to start off a course right that builds pedagogical community—this is just one that has been tremendously helpful to me.

(You can click and watch my academic Animoto (https://animoto.com/play/Zh0oXpqBBZt61q0kvx7h6w) which shows where I went to school, where I teach, and a bit about my family.)

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2018/12/building-pedagogical-community-from-the-get-go/