



Artisan teacher NOTES

Artisan Teacher Tips for Online Learning

Part 3: Complementary Elements

We know through multiple studies across many years that skillful teaching is the prime mover of student success. This is true for traditional classroom learning and also for other approaches and platforms such as online learning.

Since how we teach is so important for student success, and since the Coronavirus outbreak has closed many schools, and thrust many students and teachers into online learning platforms, I thought it might be helpful to take a look at which of the 23 *Artisan Teacher Themes* have particularly positive applications for online learning. We'll take these Artisan Teacher inspired online learning tips one at a time. Let's continue with Theme 20: *Complementary Elements*.

Theme 20: **Complementary Elements**. The ability of the teacher to sequence instructional experiences that build on the preceding and set the stage for the subsequent.

Some definitions of **Complementary**:

Combining two or more things in such a sway as to enhance or emphasize each thing's qualities (Dictionary.com)

Serving to fill out or complete (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition)

Mutually supplying each other's lack (Webster's 10th)

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Sometimes 1 + 1 can equal 3. Peanut butter is good. Jelly is good. PB&J is great. A stylish scarf complements a solid color sweater. At the movies, an interesting set of previews gets us warmed up for the feature presentation. Sadly, the acclaimed country singer Kenny Rogers passed away recently. Rogers had many solo hits. *The Gambler* may be his most recognizable song. To my ear, though, something exceptional happened when Rogers teamed up with Dolly Parton to record the duet *Islands in the Stream*. Parton's clear, melodic voice was the perfect complement to Rogers' raspy, rambling vocals. Both artists were excellent, but together they were extraordinary.

Applying Complementary Elements to Online Learning

Almost by definition, online teaching platforms restrict the variety of ways that teachers and students can engage and interact. These technical/structural limits on variety can reduce students' attention, engagement, comprehension, and transfer.

A simplified effectiveness principle for online learning is to **mix it up**. As much as the technology allows, engage students in a variety of ways, rather than in the one way that any particular online platform seems to favor. While we're mixing it up, let's go one step further and mix it up strategically. Here's where Complementary Elements can be helpful. When using online platforms, seek to position instructional experiences adjacent to other instructional experiences that are not only different, but complementary.

Here are three types of complements that can help us design variety into online lessons. (There are five patterns mentioned in *The Artisan Teacher* and on the *Artisan Teacher Memory Jogger Card*. These three are an especially good fit for online lessons)

1. Contrast. This is secret behind "sweet n sour" chicken. Things that exist on opposite ends of a continuum often complement one another. If A and B are adjacent lesson elements, let B come from the opposite end of the continuum than A. Place difficult tasks next to easy ones. Engage in generative work, then reflective work. Use brainstorming, then prioritizing. Teach to the cognitive domain, then to the physical-spatial domain. Introduce new content, then engage in an elaborative review. Ask students to work collaboratively, then individually.

2. Role Swap. Sometimes be the player. Sometimes be the coach. Ask students to solve a math problem, then design a problem for solution. Have them write an opening sentence for a persuasive paragraph- then offer feedback on others' opening sentences. Conduct a science experiment to demonstrate a concept, then name a science concept and design an experiment that would show the concept in action. Teach a mini lesson online, then ask students to give feedback on your lesson. Think of how to swap the roles of teacher-learner, designer-builder, performer-critic, reader-writer, doctor-patient, captain-sailor, adult-child, new-comer-old-timer... you get the idea.

3. Yin Yang. Yin Yang refers to a concept from ancient Chinese philosophy where opposite forces are seen as interconnected and counterbalancing (Dictionary.com). Yin Yang literally means "dark light." A Yin Yang complement occurs when two things are not merely different from one another, or simply "better together," but when the two things actively define each other. Light is not understandable until one considers darkness. Femininity is difficult to explain absent masculinity. The concepts of good and evil co-define each other. A set of Yin Yang instructional complements is more subtle than other complement types. Students are unlikely to even notice how their teachers are using Yin Yang complements. It simply feels right to them, and easier to understand, when a teacher links verb to adverb, dissonant sounds with harmonies, irony with logic, twist of plot with plot sequence, positive integers with negative integers, capitalism with socialism, or greater than with less than.

As teachers, I think we do well so see ourselves not merely as educational technicians, but as choreographers, designers, stylists, and composers. We are at our best when we are chefs, not cooks. Our students benefit most when we go beyond technical competence and add a layer of pedagogical craft to our lessons. Such lessons, whether provided in school with others or at home with devices, have a special effect on learners. We know that effect comes from our command of the science and art of teaching- our artisanship. To them it feels a bit like magic.

For more information on Complementary Elements and the other 22 Artisan Teacher Themes, see *The Artisan Teacher: A Field Guide to Skillful Teaching* ©2013 by Mike Rutherford, ISBN: 978-0-9914724-0-6. Available at www.rutherfordlg.com.