

A Review of the *Boundless Classroom: Designing Pedagogical Instruction for Any Learning Environment*

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to the realm of education when school closures across the nation led educators to figure out the best ways to teach students from behind a computer screen. In their brilliant book, *The Boundless Classroom: Designing Pedagogical Instruction for Any Learning Environment*, authors Nathan Lang-Raad and James Witty (2022) explore various effective pedagogical approaches, keeping challenges of the online learning environment in mind. The authors conclude that effective academic feedback is one of the most supportive pedagogical tools all educators should find a way to implement in their courses; therefore, this review focuses on the authors' recommendations for how effective academic feedback should be constructed and how it should be most successfully implemented in in-person and online environments across the disciplines.

Keywords: effective pedagogy, online, hybrid, in-person, learning, challenges, feedback, academic

**A Review of *The Boundless Classroom: Designing Pedagogical Instruction for Any Learning Environment*
by Nathan Lang-Raad and James Witty**

The pandemic led many educators to ask themselves questions such as the following: What is my goal as a professor? What *should be* my goal as a professor? How have either of these realities changed since the pandemic? What am I doing as an educator to be a better resource for my students and create as many effective resources for them as possible? The pandemic inspired educators to find creative pedagogical approaches to ensure that, in an online

learning environment, students can foster a beneficial, effective sense of community among one another, which includes opportunities to reflect on and critique one another's work. Meaningful connections and reflections between students and their peers, and even between students and their instructors, can be extremely difficult to establish when face-to-face learning is impossible—and, as the pandemic made clear, even typical, traditional face-to-face learning methods often need improvement in this regard. Not only is the new “standard” of learning vastly different than it was prepandemic, but school closures across the nation revealed old approaches to teaching needed to be reevaluated. The pandemic was both a blessing and a curse within the realm of education, leaving teachers to develop and refine “continually for all settings, [which] is a critical teaching skill” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 270).

In their book, *The Boundless Classroom: Designing Pedagogical Instruction for Any Learning Environment*, educators Nathan Lang-Raad and James Witty (2022) explore answers to the questions at the start of this review, reshaping their responses in the wake of the pandemic. The authors proceed to research and implement effective teaching strategies for in-person, hybrid, and fully online courses, mainly by way of experimenting with the *blended model*, or a combination of in-person and distance learning, also known as the hybrid model. Admirably, these authors ensured “both in-person and online students receive[d] equitable instruction” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 24), and that even in an online environment, students did not feel disadvantaged due to their lack of face-to-face contact with their instructor. They still received a worthwhile college education—one that provides college students what they crave most—

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autonomy and agency” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 25).

To ensure students receive this sense of self-guidance and agency, educators must maximize academic feedback in order to best help students succeed (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 268). They must make sure to acknowledge each student’s personal needs for improvement and be aware that the road to success in any college course will look different for everyone. Maximizing academic feedback means not simply telling students how to improve their writing, but instead requiring them to answer a series of quality, personalized, and comprehensible inquiry-based questions, which leave them understanding what needs to be improved.

This series of personalized questions should be delivered in timely cycles, and set an example for students on giving constructive, productive feedback to one another during collaborative activities like peer review. For example, in a composition course, an instructor may assign multiple activities pertaining to a major essay. In my freshman composition courses, students write each paragraph of a major paper one at a time, and these paragraphs are due every other class period before the essay due date. Each paragraph is turned in twice prior to turning in the paper, so students prove they have read and implemented feedback by the second, revised draft of each section.

Scaffolded feedback like this charts out a route to success, promptly and specifically clarifying which parts of the writing do not meet the assignment’s criteria or could meet it better. Next, a series of questions is provided to students to catalyze the process of improving their writing. Successful academic feedback requires students to develop their idiosyncratic route to academic success themselves. Certainly, effective academic feedback ensures students fully understand the learning outcome of an assignment, but it also makes sure a student understands where he or she is in relationship to the learning outcome (i.e., what needs to be done for the student to succeed and better master the learning outcome at hand). To accomplish this, successful feedback permits students to answer these following key questions, all while making sure that the feedback clarifies any misunderstandings students have about an assignment in a timely manner:

- “What am I trying to achieve?”
- “How much progress have I made so far?”
- What should I do next?” (Lang-Raad & Witty,

2022, p. 271).

These questions help develop “safe, supportive, and collaborative classroom cultures [in person and at a distance] conducive to cyclical, ongoing feedback structures” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 272) and ultimately promote student success in any educational setting. Plainly put, instructors must confirm students know where they are in regard to the learning outcome of an assignment and where they still need to go to better accomplish this goal. Furthermore, educators must articulate these areas of improvement to students in an effective, timely, and respectful way.

Effective academic feedback avoids ambiguous, biased comments or simple praise, as these hollow approaches do not constitute effective, productive, or successful academic feedback. Additionally, instructors should provide students feedback which first addresses each student by name and goes on to ensure that students are required to “actively [use] feedback as opposed to passively receiving feedback and never taking action to improve their learning” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 273), all while tailoring feedback upon each student’s level of comprehension and mastery of the subject. Next, feedback should be “offered within a culture of trust, respect, and support” (Lang-Raad & Witty, 2022, p. 273), emphasizing that mistakes are just part of the educational process instead of instilling a sense of shame or fear of failure in students.

While it may have arguably been an even stronger text overall had the authors provided more examples to educators of how to implement effective academic feedback across the disciplines, there are enough basic details about the process to permit instructors to tailor these same questions to their own course needs and pedagogical approaches. Most importantly, in my opinion, is the reality that these authors so strongly and effectively chart out how to help students succeed in the everchanging world of the pandemic and postpandemic periods. Online, seated, and hybrid environments each come with their own sets of challenges, but effective academic feedback can easily and readily be provided to students in any learning environment if instructors and students alike are willing to do the work and put in the effort.

Overall, this is a wonderful textbook for its price, and it is one that I have marked up religiously and will be revisiting throughout the rest of my career as a professor. I have already charted out a plan

of how to successfully implement effective academic feedback in all of my courses for each major and minor assignment. I challenge you to do the same as you reevaluate how to best help students learn in any setting.

Reference

Lang-Raad, N., & Witty, J. (2022). *The boundless classroom: Designing pedagogical instruction for any learning environment*. International Society for Technology in Education.

Author's Note

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