

TCARE

SPECIAL EDITION

Teachers Connecting to Advance Retention and Empowerment *Teaching, Learning and Working in a Remote Environment*

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Loss.

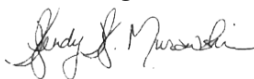
It feels like that's what 2020 has been about. Loss of loved ones, loss of freedoms, loss of naïveté, loss of sanity. The pandemic has made us physically move away from one another, in many cases taking a toll on our mental health in order to protect our physical health. The recent loss of George Floyd brought many together again in solidarity - emotionally and at times even physically.

This is the first special issue of TCARE and was conceptualized when many of us were asked to quarantine. Thus, we wrote a call for papers around the theme "Teaching, Learning, and Working in a Remote Environment." Many wrote in and, based on the responses, we created a new section for this issue only: *Reflections in the Time of COVID-19*. Here we include the voices of teachers, professors, specialists, and – for the first time – the students themselves. We continue to offer our What Really Works columns to provide concrete strategies for those who are teaching, learning, and working in a remote environment now and in the future. We would also like to refer readers to our newly established YouTube channel where we have also housed some short videos related to working in a remote environment: <https://bit.ly/2MHP2xP>

Based on the conversations happening currently across our nation, as well as those that are not occurring but need to be, we have already decided that our next issue of TCARE will be another "special issue." Please look ahead to an issue focused on *Equity, Access and Social Justice*. Many of you have varying perspectives on this issue and may have strategies for talking about social justice or providing equity and access in schools. We encourage you to go to our website at csun.edu/center-teaching-learning/publications to get the guidelines for submitting an article for the next special issue. We will also be including a "Reflections" section for that issue as well so if you have personal experiences or thoughts you would like to share, we encourage you to write them down and submit them. The deadline for that special issue is **July 31, 2020**.

I started this editorial with the word "loss." I end it with "gain." I hope this issue provides you with thoughts about how our current situation can help you gain: gain techniques for engaging students in a virtual classroom, gain strategies with collaborating with colleagues, gain plans for conducting performance assessments, gain ideas for how to engage in self-care, and gain a sense that educators everywhere are working hard to make this work. You may even gain a sense of validation as you read how students prefer to be in the room with you daily, despite the 'freedom' offered by being at home. I hope we all gain a sense of perspective: *even apart, we are in this together.*

Stay safe.



Wendy W. Murawski, Ph.D.
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WHAT REALLY WORKS

GRRR: HOW TO BATTLE THE COVID-19 READING LOSS MONSTER

Ms. Smith and her second graders have worked all year to improve oral reading fluency (ORF). From read alouds, to partner reading, to repeated readings, Ms. Smith has implemented many strategies for improving ORF. Her students are now reading with accuracy, automaticity, and meaningful expression and can focus more on meaning and less on word-by-word reading.

All of the sudden, her students were quarantined at home for a pandemic. If nothing is done, by the time Ms. Smith's students return, they may have forgotten how to read! While that may be overstating it, students can lose up to two years of reading development because of summer reading loss and those who aren't reading at home during the quarantine are in a similar danger. This regression is in addition to any deficits they already face in reading (Blanton, 2015). What an educational monster! Scary? Yes. Impossible? No. Ms. Smith can scare away the COVID-19 reading loss monster with a loud GRRR.

Guide Parents. Parents need to know they are invaluable when it comes to their child's education. Just asking about their child's day at school (in this case, virtual/remote/ or online school) and "showing genuine interest in [their] learning can have the same impact as hours of private tutoring" (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011, p. 136). Parents frequently want to know how they can help their child with reading at home; now they are in the position to help daily. Students who struggle with reading will benefit the most from additional support during times away from the classroom (Blanton, 2015). Ms. Smith can host a parent event on Zoom or another platform to teach parents a few simple strategies that can be integrated into their home literacy routine.

Routine Matters. Encourage parents and students to read every day. Beyond bedtime stories, remind them to take advantage of the many hours stuck at home. Encourage them to vary where they read. Reading on the couch, in the backyard, or even standing up can be a fun way to pass the time. Repeated readings are an effective strategy for improving students' ORF (Blanton, 2015; Rasinski, 2000). Let students and parents know about the positive impact re-reading can have on ORF. Even if they do not re-read the same book immediately, encourage them to re-read it sometime that day. They can even read aloud to their brother, sister, cousin, or dog!

Reach Out. Face-to-face communication is the most powerful form of communication (Blanton, 2015). Throughout the quarantine, parents and students may need help choosing interesting books or troubleshooting barriers to their reading routines. Talk to the principal and school librarian/media coordinator about hosting regular opportunities online for parents and students to get book recommendations. This interaction may help build positive relationships between the parents, students, and school. Anticipation of a virtual school visit may also offer an extra layer of accountability and incentive for consistency in the students' at-home reading routines.

Resist Myths. Just giving books to students is not an effective strategy for reading loss (Blanton, 2015; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Equip parents and students with more than just books during this time. Help them scare away the COVID-19 reading loss monster with reading strategies, consistent routines, and positive relationships!

Don't let this new situation be a monster. Prepare to scare quarantine reading loss away with a loud GRRR! **Guide** parents with simple strategies and let them know they are valuable to their child's education. Encourage them to have a regular reading **routine** that includes re-reading their favorite books. Take the opportunity to **reach out** and interact with students and parents throughout the quarantine by opening the school's library virtually or finding online libraries and resources to recommend. Finally, **resist** just giving them books. Equip them with strategies, routines, and relationships that will help them scare away the COVID-19 reading loss monster that is visiting us this year.

References

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WHAT REALLY WORKS

THE SECRET SAUCE: HOW TO MAKE LEARNING FUN IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

In times of COVID-19 physical distancing, many schools have moved their classes totally online to reduce the spread of the virus. During these times of uncertainty, it has become even more important to create “a sense of community within online courses” (Epp Demmans, et al., 2017).

Recently, I taught a yearlong literacy graduate course for practicing teachers or teachers about to enter the profession. This challenging course started out as an in-person class and later was taught mostly in a virtual environment. These individuals were already overwhelmed coming into the course, busy with their own families, their own classes, and learning new content. If practicing teachers or teachers about to enter the profession can have fun while learning online, then anyone teaching students behind the screen can foster a real sense of community, particularly in these isolating times.

Google docs came to the rescue! I was able to provide online websites, samples of previously approved projects, and videoclips on academic writing. It was helpful to be very explicit about what my expectations were for student work. The “secret sauce” for the course though was using these resources in such a way as to make learning more fun in a virtual environment.

First, think about what makes your in-person class engaging and translate that to a fun virtual environment. For instance, strategically create student groups online using break-out rooms and have students work together on a project. Let students work “off-line” for a certain amount of time or on a different platform if they prefer. Make it more fun by having them name their own groups, by setting up friendly competitions among the groups, and by having the groups produce joint projects for public display. Encourage them to find unique projects, WebQuests, websites, apps, and other online media that you are not yet even aware of. A little social pressure goes a long way!

Another strategy is providing students with select choices on how to complete their schoolwork. Think about different learning preferences and how that can be incorporated into an online assignment either in writing, pictorially, or through the spoken word. Create tic-tac-toe or choice boards that give students more ownership and choice regarding how they demonstrate their competencies.

Finally, make online learning fun by making it more personal. Try providing a schedule of individualized help session options for students. Create “office hours” for yourself. The accountability of a conference call can keep students on track, especially if they are having difficulty with the week’s assignments.

If you are new to teaching totally online or even a veteran online teacher, be honest with your students about what works and what does not work in the virtual environment. For example, I found wordy explanations of academic writing were not helpful to the class. A quick video clip on academic writing cleared up the confusion immediately. When an approach falls flat, just admit it. Moving to totally online learning can be stressful for students and teachers in these chaotic times. Students may even suggest more engaging ways to learn online that would be fun for them. Try them out! In the end, the “secret sauce” of making learning fun electronically may even improve your own teaching skills in the long run.



Use this QR code to view a captioned webinar on this topic!

Epp Demmans, C., Phirangee, K., & Hewitt, J. (2017). Student actions and community in online courses: The roles played by course length and facilitation method. *Online Learning Journal [OLJ]*, 21(4), p. 53+.



Dr. Kathleen Magiera is a retired Professor of Special Education at the State University of New York at Fredonia. She has been in the field of education for 40 years.

WHAT REALLY WORKS

SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH HOME LEARNING SCHEDULES

During this time of virtual learning, parents are often juggling multiple children's schoolwork while also managing their own jobs. Learning schedules can be a valuable resource when personalized by teachers and shared with parents. With clear expectations, students and parents may find an easier rhythm to their days, yielding more productivity and predictability.

Although students may be finished with this school year, they may still be struggling to stay organized and motivated. Teachers may also find that parents want summer enrichment, given the uncertainties of common summer activities like camp. Learning schedules can be tailored to any number of educational and familial needs. The following questions will guide educators with providing learning schedules to parents.

1. What are the most important objectives for students to learn or practice? Given the challenges of virtual instruction, all content cannot be covered or mastered. Teachers must be deliberate and selective. Start with identifying key objectives that should be included on students' learning schedules. Skills like reading, writing, and math would be included for elementary school students, but secondary teachers may need to drill down into their content to identify objectives that are key for content mastery. All teachers may want students to work on foundational skills that would be necessary to advance to the next grade level or enroll in a subsequent course. When considering learning objectives, focus on what is most important.

Lincoln's Daily To Do List

| | Block 1 Morning Work | Block 2 Journal writing OR write a friend a letter | After blocks 1 and 2 are done ----- Outside play 30 min. | Block 3 Reading comp. | Block 4 Math | After blocks 3 and 4 are done ----- Outside play 30 min. | Block 5 Read for 20 min. | Block 6 Chores and clean up | After blocks 5 and 6 are done ----- Outside play 30 min. | Block 7 Creative play (legos, art, listen to music) | Block 8 Genius Time OR STEM OR Reading Time | After blocks 7 and 8 are done ----- Outside play!!!! |
|--------|----------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| Mon. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tues. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Wed. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thurs. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fri. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

2. What are the specific needs of students? While most students will likely be able to use a grade level or content specific schedule, some students may require reinforcement or additional or replacement learning tasks. Consider whether students with disabilities or English-language learners have specific goals that should be included. These goals or objectives may include social skills, occupational therapy exercises, or remediation and foundational skill practice. Reinforcement may need to be built into schedules for children who find engagement or motivation difficult. Teachers should encourage parents to identify reinforcers that are motivating to students and intersperse those throughout the schedule. This may include free time, the use of gaming systems, or preferable food choices. While some students may need reinforcers midday or at the end of the day, others may need several shorter bursts of reinforcement throughout the day.

WHAT REALLY WORKS

SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH HOME LEARNING SCHEDULES

3. What should the schedule look like? Schedules can vary depending on the grade level and needs of students. An easy, streamlined schedule format includes using a simple table that lists the tasks along the top row and the days of the week in the far left column. This format allows for one schedule all week. As students complete tasks, they can place check marks in corresponding boxes and parents can follow up with initials or stickers. If students need reinforcement to stay engaged or motivated, those opportunities can be listed alongside the tasks. The schedule can be designed so the reinforcement is contingent upon completing the proceeding tasks. For older students, it may make more sense to focus on one content area a day and block off other tasks. For example, if math is completed on Mondays, then science, English, and government are taken off of that day. Another simple option is a daily schedule with specific start times. This may help students who feel overwhelmed with a weekly overview. The daily schedule can still include boxes to check off once completed.

While teachers will identify academic objectives for schedules, they should stress to parents the importance of remaining flexible. Some students may need exact times for work completion, and others may need time ranges. Still others may prefer a daily list or picture schedule. Parents should also know they can add columns to include chores, family activities, art integration, or any number of skills. Offering learning schedules to parents may seem simplistic, but they are important organizational tools that provide consistency and predictability while supporting students' learning. Remember, most parents aren't trained as teachers; these scheduling supports can make schooling at home more manageable for everyone.



**Want a screen?
Did you...**

9:00 Finish your math? ☒

10:00 Do your chores? ☐

10:30 Write in your journal? ☐

11:00 Read for at least 20 minutes? ☐

11:30 Clean your room? ☐

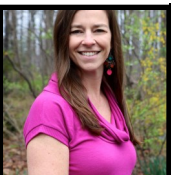
12:00 Ask Mom or Dad if you have any other chores? ☐

✓ Did you answer yes to everything? Check in with Mom or Dad.

✗ Did you answer no to anything? Go do it and then check your list again.

Tatum's Daily To Do List

| | Math | Science | Language Arts | Geography | Ag. Science | Read for 30 min. | Chores and clean up (check in with mom or dad) | Writing Prompt & Math Review | Complete PE activity log | Devotional |
|-----------|------|---------|---------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Monday | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | | | | | | | |
| Friday | | | | | | | | | | |



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WHAT REALLY WORKS

LEARNING FROM MASTER CO-TEACHERS

Co-teaching has become a common service delivery model for addressing the needs of diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. How can we make sure co-teachers learn best practices and avoid common mistakes? We learn from the best! Several teams from Arizona and California were identified as the cream of the crop by scoring in the “master” range of core co-teaching competencies (Murawski & Lochner, 2017). Here is what makes them so successful.

Before co-teaching together

Ask for professional development. Several teams said they received training in co-teaching and/or researched co-teaching before ever setting foot into the classroom together. One said, “co-teaching without training is like jumping into the deep end of a pool without knowing how to swim.”

Prepare to share. These teams learned to share openly with each other, whether it was teaching ideas, personal feedback, or space. One teacher said, “You need to let them into your classroom, because it is their classroom as well...Even if you only share one or two classes.”

Relationship building

Get to know each other. Each team said they focused on building their relationship. One explained, “You’re just really going to have to take the time to get to know your co-teacher... Go get coffee together, go get lunch” to talk about more than just school.

Co-planning

Go above and beyond in co-planning. The teams said they put in a lot of time, at least initially, and that it paid off for them, especially in better outcomes for students. One said, “We were lesson planning on an ongoing basis...I think that’s how we were able to get really good really quickly.”

Make the most of co-planning time. The teams recommend asking for common planning time and making the most use of the time together. Even though special educators are often called upon to do other tasks, one teacher said, “I’ve set aside specific periods to be pulled” that do not interfere with co-planning with her partner.

Co-instructing

Use regrouping strategies often. The teams all mentioned using regrouping models such as station teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching. They think often about what the two of them can do better together than what each could do alone.

Don’t take anything personally. The teams recommend putting ego aside and developing a thick skin. One said, “Don’t take anything personally. We are all just trying to do our best and help each other, so it is important not to take any kind of comment as a slight against someone’s teaching ability.”

Co-assessing

Share the responsibility for grading. A common issue in co-teaching is that only one is “in charge” of the grade book and considered the “teacher of record.” The teams said each of them takes ownership of every student in the classroom; for example, both have access to the grade book.

Co-reflecting

Survey your students. The teams ask students how they feel about the co-taught class and then reflect on what they could do better. One teacher said, “We’ve surveyed our students for years. We ask them ‘Do you feel like you were helped more with a co-taught class versus not?’”

Embrace baby steps. Finally, these teams did not become master co-teachers overnight. Masterful co-teaching practices take time, but using baby steps, teams can continue to improve until your team is also a Master co-teaching team!

**Want to co-teach in a virtual environment?
Check out this webinar:**



Murawski, W. W., & Lochner, W. W. (2017). *Co-teaching core competency framework*.
www.coteachsolutions.com

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WHAT REALLY WORKS

HOW TO CO-TEACH FROM YOUR COUCH

Working and learning from home can create a time of anxiety for many administrators, teachers, related service providers, students, and families. Being able to create lessons that are engaging and effective in a remote learning environment is in itself a challenge for most teachers, much less finding ways as co-teachers to collaboratively ensure that those lessons are accessible and appropriate for students with special needs. Students are now learning on a kitchen table or living room couch, alongside brothers or sisters in a different grade as the cat walks across the keyboard! New realities warrant plausible solutions to stay on target to achieve goals.

Now more than ever, co-teachers should be reaching out to collaborate with colleagues. Co-teaching, wherein two professional educators co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess, can be daunting, even when face-to-face. To be successful, co-teaching requires far more than putting two adults in a classroom with students – whether that classroom is brick and mortar or virtual. We encourage teachers to value co-teaching as a viable collaborative instructional model that assists students as they learn side by side with grade-level peers. Side-by-side may be temporarily redefined, but evidence-based practices and successful outcomes are never deleted or diluted.

Strategies for Virtual Co-Teaching

- **Co-planning is still key.** Regardless of the teaching platform, co-planning remains critical to co-teaching success. Plan face-to-face via Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, and so on. Plan by staying before or after a virtual class session, or use the Chat feature during a lesson to communicate to the whole class, individual students, and each other. Define what “observation” looks like during a virtual lesson and how as co-teachers you will tweak supports. Along with district requirements, there are numerous sites online (e.g., www.khanacademy.org/coach/resources) where co-teachers can access and differentiate lessons and resources across the curriculum and grade levels, whether they are teaching sight words or how to apply differential equations and derivatives. Co-teachers can post information for each other and their students on platforms such as Padlet (www.padlet.com) or Edmodo (www.edmodo.com).

They can also share PDFs, videos, PowerPoints, step-by-step visuals, and tutorials with one another via emails or in chat rooms, or use the co-teaching app Protégé (www.2teachllc.com/protege) to connect with other co-teachers and co-teaching mentors and access co-teaching resources for planning.

- **Use break-out rooms for co-instruction.** One of the logistical concerns present when teaching in a school becomes moot when teaching remotely. Finding a space to take a small group and figuring out how long it will take students to transition now occurs with the click of a button. Online break-out rooms are easily utilized for co-teachers to use Parallel, Station, and Alternative Teaching approaches. Co-teachers can set and adjust scheduled timers to help with movement, and can offer “virtual proximity” by popping into break-out rooms.
- **Co-assess frequently, strategically, and differently.** As one co-teacher leads direct instruction, the other can be monitoring, observing, collecting data. The co-teacher in the support role can monitor attendance and time on task, ask individual questions to students with the chat feature, document answers as students type responses to questions, and even move a student to a breakout room for a quick chat regarding concerns, grades, responses, or any anxiety or personal issues that may be present.
- **Be kind to yourself, your partner, and your students.** Realize that your co-instruction may simultaneously require structure and fluidity to accommodate home, family, and learner realities. Those may include limited access to a computer, losing connectivity, distractibility, or a student requiring a sensory diet. As co-teachers, divide and conquer while also encouraging, assessing, and reinforcing the healthy habits of exercise, sleep, and resiliency – for your students and yourselves!

First published at <https://inservice.ascd.org/strategies-for-co-teaching-from-your-couch/>
(April 22, 2020)



Dr. Wendy Murawski and Toby Karten are excited to promote their new book *Co-Teaching Do's, Don'ts, and Do Betters* which will be published with ASCD in Summer 2020. Dr. Murawski is the Executive Director of the CSUN CTL, author of 14 books, and a frequent keynote speaker. Mrs. Karten is an author, educational consultant, adjunct professor and inclusion specialist.



WHAT REALLY WORKS

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Why Performance Assessments (PA)

When you examine Performance Assessment, there are number of important dynamics that stand out. First, performance assessments are student directed and provide students with choice and ownership in how they design their projects and demonstrate understanding. Second, performance assessments require a clear process for completion and the development of a product. This product could be a project, an oral presentation, the facilitation of discussion, or even a poetry slam or musical demonstration. Third, performance assessments are designed to facilitate critical and creative thinking, skills we want to develop and foster in our classrooms. Fourth, we want students using formative feedback to improve performance throughout the process. Lastly, it is essential that students are required to apply what they have learned into new contexts. This important work, often referred to as transfer, is central to meaningful performance assessment.

Characteristics of Strong PA

- The first characteristic has to do with developing authentic tasks for your students - Think “real world” scenarios.
- PA requires students to develop some type of product and/or performance that demonstrates their understanding of the topics being studied. These can vary in design.
- PA should challenge students to address questions and problems that do not have one right answer. These questions and problems should serve as a guide for student development and research.
- Feedback on PA is key. This feedback should come during the process and not just at the end after students have submitted their work. This feedback, which can come from the teacher, peers, and even professionals in the field, should, ultimately, enhance the development of student ideas.
- As projects unfold, students should be provided space to reflect on their progress and what they have designed. As students embark on their projects, consider having students set goals, timelines, and a list of tasks.

The Importance of a Rubric

Performance assessments should include rubrics that students use to develop projects as well as reflect on the process. Share rubrics with students at the start of the process. We want them to use these as they develop and hone their ideas. Students can even be involved in the development of the rubrics.

There are 3 really important parts of a rubric that need to be thoughtfully developed.

- Performance Criteria: Major attributes of the performance task that will be evaluated. We can’t grade everything in a project. What is important?
- Performance Indicators: What are the different levels that define one’s performance? These can be used as you provide students with feedback during the process.
- Performance Criteria Descriptions: We have to describe the characteristics and quality that must be present at a given performance level.

Strategies for adapting PA to a Virtual Environment

- Create a repository for important performance task resources. If your district does not provide a learning management system for this, there are some free options available. Make sure whatever you use is approved to make sure student and teacher privacy is protected.
- Have a consistent way for students to communicate with you and each other. While email can initially work, video conferencing and chat options will be handy for group work, providing each other feedback, conferencing, and making presentations.
- Encourage students to reach out to professionals in the field to help develop ideas.
- Identify virtual platforms for creating and developing projects. There are a number of online tools that can be utilized. Please also check to see if your districts have free access to some of these tools.
- How will students share their work? This can be done in large or small groups or even one on one with the teacher or with a panel of experts who have volunteered to help. Presentations can be pre-recorded by students and uploaded to a share site so classmates can peruse them and provide feedback and ask questions – think “virtual gallery walk.”

Just because students are no longer sitting in a room and staring at one another doesn’t mean that work and assessments need to be boring. Use PAs to continue engaging your students regardless of where and how they learning!



https://youtu.be/FnX9PV4d_3k



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WHAT REALLY WORKS

TECHNOLOGY IS THE TOOL: ENGAGEMENT IS THE GOAL

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will be felt for a long time. This is especially true in education. The wide scale closure of schools for such an extended period is unprecedented in modern history and schools worldwide are searching for ways to ensure that education does not come to a standstill.

The virtual classroom, either through a learning management system (LMS) (e.g. Schoology and Google Classroom) or online video conferencing (e.g. Zoom), quickly became the default solution to this dilemma. One of the great hurdles in the implementation of distance learning is the lack of devices. Despite this shortage, we are in a far better state than even 5 years ago. The adoption of online state testing acted as the catalyst for districts across the country to begin investing in technology. Until now, most of these investments were for classroom devices which did little to narrow the digital divide in the homes of our socio-economically disadvantaged students. As a result of this pandemic, school districts are quickly realizing that educational equity cannot occur without closing this divide. Once the devices are in the hands of students, how they are utilized will ultimately determine the level of success of distance learning.

An LMS allows teachers to assign work and keep track of student progress. This can be a very useful tool for distance learning. However, the work teachers assign through their LMS must be engaging so that students will be motivated to work on them independently, without a teacher looking over their shoulder. Online video conferencing is another popular tool for distance learning but if the entire session is nothing more than a direct instruction lesson, it quickly becomes something that may be better taught through a YouTube video. Thus, beyond the technical tools and challenges, the greatest determiner for student success in distance learning is no different than in a physical classroom – engagement!

When students are engaged, learning happens regardless of how the instruction is delivered. A critical component of student engagement is learner agency, where students are empowered to make decisions that

affect their learning. The challenge to the teacher is letting go of some of the control they are accustomed to. The teacher still determines the learning objectives and standards the task will cover but how that happens will be determined greatly by students.

The second critical component of raising student engagement is engaging tasks. When students are engaged, they naturally demonstrate and develop the four Cs of 21st century skills. They think *critically* and *creatively* to solve problems. They *collaborate* and *communicate* as they work in teams to accomplish the task. Engaging tasks can begin with students looking for open-ended real-world problems they choose to attempt to solve. In the process, students research the problem and teachers assign tasks that are designed to cover the designated learning objectives and standards. These may include things like models, budgets, and presentations that move instruction away from isolated subjects to a transdisciplinary approach that better mimics what they will encounter in their future careers.

This is where the same digital tools discussed early, such as an LMS, can be used as a means for students to record their progress on creatively solving their problems, highlighting their critical thinking in the process. Video conferencing tools can then be used to support students' collaboration and communication with each other.

When students are engaged, teachers will observe many interesting side effects such as the reduction in discipline issues, students completing their assignments on time, and discussions become much richer. The teacher, taking on the role of facilitator, is now able to focus on ensuring the success of all students by providing the differentiated support each student needs. Ultimately, technology becomes the tool it was meant to be, one that magnifies the teacher's craft and makes instruction more effective and efficient.



Mr. Jerry Song is a STEAM specialist who has worked with Los Angeles Unified School District for 24 years and is currently supporting schools with integrating technology into the classroom to make instruction more effective and efficient.

WHAT REALLY WORKS

MAINTAINING AND PROMOTING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF KINDNESS

Kindness towards yourself and kindness towards others may be one of the best “psychological medicines” to take and give during these unprecedented times of worry, uncertainty and loss.

So How Does Kindness Work to Improve and Maintain Your Mental Wellness?

When you are in the middle of acts of expressing kindness, your body relaxes and smiles. You often feel generous and have a spirit of gratitude. When you express kindness, your view is turned outward. You are seeing what is around you and you notice the humanity in others. Kindness is both an expression of empathy and appreciation. In that expression, your internal narrative says, “I have enough right now, I am not consumed with only what I need and I have the spirit and energy to offer of myself.” What a gift this narrative has on your mental state of mind and wellness! Research suggests a positive correlation between the number of kind acts and increases in one’s happiness. As a bonus, observing acts of kindness has been found to have equally positive effects on happiness. When your body is relaxed, smiling, and you are feeling happy, this is a protective factor against anxiety, feeling sorry for yourself, and depression.

Acts of Kindness Promotes Mental Wellness in Others: “You Made My Day”

Whether it be from a stranger or someone you know, receiving unexpected (and even expected) acts of kindness has a way of positively jolting the receiver’s current state of mind. The feeling of being seen and noticed by the other, usually brings a smile and feeling of warmth, both physically and emotionally. The internal narratives the person receiving the act of kindness experiences may include: “I am not alone, people can be so generous, I feel so fortunate, and You made my day.” Most of us remember even the smallest acts of receiving kindness. These words and actions are powerful and have most likely stuck with you consciously and unconsciously.

Kindness is Contagious...Pass it On.

Aesop, the ancient Greek storyteller said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” After receiving an act of kindness, there is the likelihood that one will pass it on to others. What a great antibody to all the stress and worry we are experiencing during this pandemic!

What Does Passing on Kindness Look Like During these Trying Times?

- Asking “Can I pick you something at the store?” to an elderly neighbor.
- Saying “I appreciate you” to someone (repeat frequently).
- Sending a surprise gift to someone you care about for no reason.
- Giving a smile and thank you wave (with physical distance) to a cashier, mailperson, garbage collector, gardener.
- Sending a thank you email to those working behind the scenes: an administrator, state or city politician, or teacher.
- Texting a health care worker you know to let them know you are thinking of them.
- Giving a smile to a stranger as you pass them on a walk.
- Donating resources or money to worthy causes.
- Reaching out to folks who may be most impacted.
- Giving yourself a gift of kindness with a forgiving attitude. Recognizing that sometimes: sleeping in is ok, eating more of what you like is ok, taking an extra nap is ok, feeling unmotivated is understandable, and having a difficult time concentrating will happen.
- Managing your expectations when you offer kindness to other and not expecting anything in return.

Remember, we become kinder with practice.

Dr. Mark Stevens is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling-Marriage and Family Therapy Program at California State University, Northridge. He has worked in education for over 37 years.



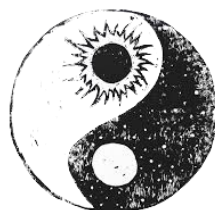
REFLECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

YIN AND YANG OF SHELTER-IN-PLACE

I'm a *people person*. I prefer to express myself face-to-face. In my teaching practice I search for signals of understanding and engagement through clues from body language, gestures, eye contact and thoughtful replies to inquiry. Currently, I feel like I'm locked in a sensory deprivation tank. With only my computer to reach out to my students and colleagues, these online responses, quite frankly, leave me flat. I pine for the social aspect of teaching. Can you imagine Aristotle sitting under a tree with his laptop attempting to engage his disciples in thoughtful discourse? I miss visiting school sites and exchanging pleasantries with the office staff and administration. I long for those insightful discussions with mentor teachers as we share constructive feedback ideas to guide and improve the student teacher's instructional techniques. I yearn to observe the school children with which my teacher candidates work. There is nothing like watching that light bulb of understanding ignite during an "aha" moment when a new concept becomes clear. I even miss meetings – *please don't use this against me later*.

On the positive side, I have had more time with my family, especially with my six year-old daughter. Home schooling and toiling with first grade homework assignments have amplified our bond. She is developing her virtual abilities even though it often appears as if she were hard-wired with this skill. I've also taken advantage of my present flexible schedule to leap back into a consistent exercise routine. I'm certain you too have witnessed numerous conscientious citizens out there walking the dog, strolling with infants, bike riding and basically making healthy choices as they flee the couch to escape their claustrophobic living rooms. Personally, I have an established goal of 5,000 steps per day. Furthermore, I have unearthed time to fix myself oatmeal in the morning (with a little extra brown sugar I must confess). After spending 20 years in higher education, I'm challenging myself (out of necessity) to explore online platforms such as Zoom and Canvas. In this pursuit, I have discovered how these new instructional tools will assist me to improve my pedagogical reservoir when we return to "normal" conditions.

Yes, we will . . . however not as soon as all of us would prefer.



Steve Holle has been with the department of Elementary Education at CSUN for 20 years and is the Professional Development Coordinator for CTL.

REFLECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

WHAT'S WORKING FOR US (AND NOT!)

Do you prefer learning at school or online?

"In school, because you get to do actual projects with glue and stuff. We can walk around and look at each other's stuff, like we made a giant tree one time in the middle of the classroom. Another reason is, no offense to my mom, but she's not necessarily qualified to be a teacher." (Quinn's mom, Amy, interjects laughing: "I learned a lot during this time too. I realized I'm not the teacher I thought I could be. I just don't have the patience.") Quinn continues, "The third reason I don't like school at home is no recess and you can't see your friends."

What have your teachers done to engage you?

"I've liked some stuff but nothing is better than being in school. I liked that, on Monday, the teachers had a Zoom thing with every kid in class but it went a little too long. On Tuesday, we got to do a Zoom with just the teacher; I liked that because we got to interact with someone. Like anyone. Nowadays, if you see anyone you don't know, you're like: "hey! I want to talk to you" but the people you see every day, you're like: "meh." I did like the time when our teachers had us create a Rube Goldberg machine and make videos of it and show it to others."

What recommendations would you give your teachers if remote teaching needs to continue?

"I'd say don't interact just in the mornings; help us be able to have conversations with different people. Maybe help kids zoom with other kids and the teacher can set it up. Don't keep zoom meetings too long; I got off after 45 minutes because it was so long. I would like more engaging projects."

Any recommendations for other students?

"It's probably best to get work done early in the week so you can have the rest of the week to have free time but I don't really do that or have that much motivation so I just spread it out but I don't think I did it the better way."



Quinn Casey is nine years old and a third grade student at Greenwood Elementary School in Denver, Colorado.

Do you prefer learning at school or online?

"This is hard because I like the freedom of doing school at home and I like independence but I'm enough of a people person that I miss being in a classroom with people and learning from a teacher right in front of me."

What have your teachers done to engage you?

"Our teachers are trying to make doing school at home more fun so there have been lots of spirit days & challenges and I like doing those. My math teacher found math art challenges and we send them to each other, which I like. There are a lot of puns and jokes on Google classroom which teachers and others will post. A few of my teachers did Google meets and Zoom calls that are not related to academics so we can just talk to them like we would do during extra time in class or at lunch. My band director does "Breakfast with Boswell" because it's hard to do Google meet with all instruments playing due to lag time."

What recommendations would you give your teachers if remote teaching needs to continue?

"I'd like more time to be with our teachers for core classes. It's hard to fit 45 minutes of instruction into 20 minutes; maybe extend it to 30 minutes and have more time to talk things through. Teachers do office hours and we can go in at certain times to ask questions, but I'd like time to have more instruction, not just go in to ask questions."



Addy Owiny is thirteen years old and in the seventh grade at Viking Middle School in Gurnee, Illinois.

REFLECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

WHAT'S WORKING FOR US (AND NOT!) *CONTINUED...*

Do you prefer learning at school or online?

"I think there are many things about having school online that I enjoy but I prefer having school at school. The extra time and not having to wake up early is good, but the actual school itself I prefer. Being in the classroom and being able to talk to your teacher, there are great benefits to that."

What's one thing you really like about school at home?

"I like having conferences because downstairs my dad is doing the exact same thing for his work and not just because of quarantine; he works from home. So that's a good insight into seeing how that feels. My chemistry teacher does conferences and I enjoy that. In my English class, we have been doing shared docs with specific groups. It's a clever way to do it because you can work together but you don't have to have a specific time to collaborate. It's a real world situation."

What's one thing you really do not like about school at home?

I don't like the delay. I don't like to write emails to ask a question; some questions don't need an email. I get a lot of grades, but not a lot of feedback. I'd like to have more feedback; that'd be really helpful. I wish teachers could find a way to do that without me having to email them. For example, one time, for a 100 point project in History, the directions were unclear. I tried my best and turned it in. I got 10 points out of 100. I freaked out for a while and finally emailed my teacher to find out what I had gotten so wrong. When my teacher finally saw my email, she realized she had just forgot a 0! It was an emotional roller-coaster for me for a full day. In class, that would have been a 2 second conversation. It was night and day from an in-school experience. The good news though is that I got 100 on that project."



Tim Webb is a fifteen year old tenth grader at El Camino Real Charter HS in West Hills California.

Do you prefer learning at school or online?

"I prefer going to classes in real life. Before the quarantine started, I thought I'd prefer working at home but now that it's only online, I don't like it. I'm unmotivated."

What don't you like about online schooling?

"When I'm studying, I tend to do it after class. I feel like my professors aren't as accessible when I need them to be, right in the moment. Now that I don't have to get up before class starts, I wake up right when classes start. I need time to really wake up so I'm not really paying as much attention as I need to be. I have started to plan out my days so I'm forced to time manage or I'll be sitting around watching TV shows all day and not working on school work."

What have your teachers done to engage you?

"In my Chemistry class, my professor has been more lenient, providing us more extra credit options and more time with exams. He understands that we are learning on our own. I have some friends whose professors are making it more difficult to learn online; I appreciate mine are not doing that."

What recommendations would you have for teaching online?

"Try to not make the online lecturing so on point so we don't get off-track. In class, it's different. Professors engage with students and it's ok to get side-tracked sometimes and give more real life examples. Right now, they are worried about time so they get to the point of the subject and after a while it's too much to handle. There's no tiny side-tracking. In class, they give examples of what we are learning and now, just sticking to the basic information is too overwhelming. We need them to engage with us!"

Suzy Matinyan is twenty years old in her junior year at California State University, Northridge majoring in Chemistry.



REFLECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

COVID COLLABORATION:

REFLECTIONS FROM THE FRONT BY A TEACHER CANDIDATE AND HER TWO MENTORS

What a crazy ride this has been, right? All schools in our area of Los Angeles, California ended up closing on Friday the 13th. How weirdly coincidental.

The three of us teach at Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in a 4th grade co-teaching classroom setting with 40 students. When the school initially closed, most of our students didn't have access to technology at home. A way that we have differentiated for the variety of student learning needs is by creating lessons that students can access either online or through homework packets and complete at their own pace. We all plan, instruct and assess together using digital tools such as Google Classroom and SKIES. The three of us agree and feel fortunate that our students had already learned how to use Google Classroom and SKIES prior to the shutdown.

As user friendly as they are, we have all experienced a steep learning curve in implementing SKIES, Zoom, Google Classroom, and Class Dojo. Admittedly, we were all shocked to discover how many hours it took to design a lesson and put it on a platform. However, we are confident that with practice comes efficiency.

In addressing the social-emotional needs of our young learners we have been having weekly group check-ins with the students. The three of us firmly believe that these check-ins provide the children with a sense of safety and familiarity. We talk with our students about the books they are currently reading, what they are doing to keep themselves occupied at home, and we always include a few minutes of exercise. Watching ten-year olds do jumping jacks through Zoom is hilarious. One student even did them on her bed!

Additionally another way that we are staying in touch with our students and their families is by making frequent phone calls. Parents have told us how grateful they feel to be kept in the loop, while being able to express their concerns about their child's academic progress, any technology questions, and expectations for the remainder of the school year. We all trust that this has helped us build an even deeper connection with all our students and families.

It would be easy to dwell on the negative aspects of the current uncertainties nevertheless; we prefer to focus on the positive. It has become abundantly clear that they have been able to build on our co-teaching expertise through constant communication and collaboration. The three of us agree that the most productive way forward is together.

"If you want to go quickly, go alone.

If you want to go far, go together."

African Proverb



Alison West (left) just finished the credential program and will begin her career in the fall as a 6th grade teacher at Sal Castro Middle School. **Eunice Kwon** (middle) is a 4th grade teacher at Vaughn Next Century Learning Center. **Allison Razo** (right) is a 4th grade teacher and her favorite subject to teach is Social Studies.

SELF CARE SPOTLIGHT

SELF-CARE DURING A PANDEMIC

During these surreal times in the world of COVID-19, anxiety levels have drastically spiked. The stress of adjusting to a new normal, the struggle of balancing home life and teaching students on a virtual platform, along with the fear surrounding the virus can be overwhelming. Don't allow yourself to be consumed by anxiety! Here are some practical ways you can decrease your anxiety and find solace.

- Focus on things you have control of, and not on things you don't.
- Make a list of things that are causing stress or anxiety. Cross out those you don't have control of, and make a plan to tackle the things on the list you do have control of. Feel the anxiety and stress strip away as you cross off items on your list.
- Take care of your body. Mental health and physical health go hand-in-hand. Make sure you're getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and maintaining healthy eating habits.
- Develop and stick to a feasible routine. Time management is necessary to complete tasks and decrease stress. Pull out a notebook, or invest in a planner to structure your time and daily routines. Don't forget to schedule in something you enjoy. This may include taking a walk, watching a movie, taking a bath or playing a board game with your family.
- Limit media coverage. Catastrophized information pouring out from social media and the news heightens our fears and skyrockets our anxiety. It's productive to tune into sources you feel are trustworthy to make informed choices. Just remember, too much can inundate your thoughts and induce anxiety and fears.
- Faith over fear. Put trust in your personal beliefs. Meditate on things that give you comfort and peace. Spend time in nature or engage in mindfulness. Find whatever is peaceful for you.
- Stay connected. Stay in contact with family, friends and fellow teachers. Social distancing doesn't mean you have to socially isolate yourself. Contact with friends and family helps maintain our mental health. Stay connected with your fellow teachers; they can offer a variety of types of support.
- Help others with your time, talents and treasures. Helping others not only makes the world better, it also elevates your happiness, health and sense of purpose. Send an encouraging text, donate money to a local food bank, donate blood, do a grocery store run for an elderly neighbor. There are numerous ways you can help others during this pandemic.
- Remember this is temporary! It may seem like an eternity, but we live in a continuously, ever-changing world. This too, shall pass.

Sheila Ramos, MFT is the SIMPACT Coordinator with the Center for Teaching and Learning at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). She graduated CSUN in 2008 with her master's in Marriage and Family Therapy.



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