DIGITAL BEST PRACTICES

It might comfort you to know teaching online is not necessarily more ineffective than teaching in person. However, many educators must learn how to bring their teaching to life in a digital space. New platforms, protocols, ways to establish relationships with students when you are primarily or even exclusively interacting with them online, is an extraordinary challenge. But here's the thing: if educators make clear to their students that they are in this together, that they value their students' expertise and experience with online learning, young people will work with us to create a virtual teaching space where everyone engages and feels welcome.

To support these goals, the following guidelines can help:

➔ **Create group expectations together and be aware of equity challenges as you create them.**
Create guidelines together of how everyone (including the teacher) should "show up" for class; including participants' dress, hygiene, location, etc. You are creating guidelines for how participants will show up for your class **with** your participants. That said, it's your responsibility as the facilitator to be mindful of your participants' different home environments.

For example, in one way, it makes sense to have a group guideline that participants (and you) should not attend the class while in bed because it's important to separate where a person rests from where they study. On the other hand, a participant may have no other choice but to attend your class from their bed due to lack of privacy in common spaces or limited space overall. This doesn't even address the challenge of those participants who have limited access to technology. So be mindful of creating guidelines that affirm each participant's dignity in the online learning space you co-create with your participants. And consider having your students use the blurry background feature.

Establish a system for students to let you know if there is something specific going on that prevents them from meeting a specific class guideline. How should they approach or reach out to you? Make that very clear for the group and part of the group guidelines.

➔ **Use platform features to control the learning space.**
Ask participants to mute their mics unless speaking, use group muting functions if necessary, and make sure all participants have equal access to content by sharing within the video conferencing connection, using subtitles when recording or sharing videos, and saving recordings so participants can return to them later.

➔ **Ask for feedback**.
All participants may not get the chance to, or feel comfortable, sharing with a large group. Through email, google form, or your video conferencing platform find a way to ask your participants if they felt seen, heard, and supported. Be prepared to follow up with those who say no.

➔ **Encourage participants to use backgrounds on video.**
Remember that we are being invited into our young people's homes when they turn on their video. Be mindful of how vulnerable this feels. Even if they are silly, backgrounds offer privacy and emotional safety. Privilege of all kinds is easily on display in video calls. Backgrounds can help participants feel comfortable, make the learning space more equitable, and eliminate stereotype threat participants may bring with them into the space.

➔ **Making participants have their camera on does not always mean they are engaged**. Be aware of your students developmental age. Not only can they be self conscious of their learning space but also of their physical appearance. Often the reason adolescents don't want to turn on their cameras is because they worry about their appearance and fear others are judging them. Students can be engaged with their cameras off, just as they can be disengaged with their camera on. You can use the multiple features within your content delivery platform to check in for engagement, such as the chat feature, polls, thumbs up etc.

➔ **Ignore the small stuff.**
This is new territory for many and you cannot exert the same amount of control over a digital space as you can in a classroom or meeting. If someone is in their bedroom, or wearing pajamas, using a funny background, or have people walk in the background try your best to let it go. What matters is that they are there. If this goes against the guidelines set up for the classroom, reach out separately to check in with the participant. There may be more going on than meets the eye.

➔ **It's ok if they laugh with you...not at you.**
It will be inevitable that the technology you are using to teach will have problems. Or...maybe you'll do something online that is not ideal. That's ok and it's a great moment to laugh together with your students about this situation we are all muddling our way through. What's not ok is for students to embarrass or humiliate you (or anyone in the virtual classroom space). **Bottom line is laugh with, not at.**

➔ **Model how to mess up.** If your technology fails, your lesson is a bomb, or your toddler screams in the middle of your class, model for your participants how to accept "failure" and show self-compassion. Model how to bounce back, reengage and finish class or follow up afterwards to correct any mistake. This is a lesson for everyone as we figure out how to live in the virtual world, there will always be things that are out of our control.

BEST PRACTICES TO RUN A GROUP

The principles offered below are selected from Cultures of Dignity's overall principles that we use as guidelines to run productive groups, provide norms for feedback, and can be used to redirect challenging behavior while honoring dignity.

- → **Be Soft on People and Hard on Ideas**
  Push on ideas without personally attacking others. Use conversation stems like:
    - ◆ *That's not my experience (instead of you're wrong about…)*
    - ◆ *Help me understand…*
    - ◆ *This is clearly really important to you...*

- → **Engage Curiosity:** When we find someone's ideas immediately objectionable, take a breath and get curious before responding.

- → **Have Patience:** It takes a while to understand these topics let alone apply them in our lives. Give people room to make mistakes without discounting that they are trying.

- → **People are the Subject Matter Experts of their Lives:** Acknowledge people's paths. We have no way of knowing where everyone is coming from or how their prior experiences are shaping their participation in the current moment. Try to lead with benefit of the doubt.

- → **Validate, Don't Relate.** Avoid telling others we know what they're going through. While you may have had similar experiences, you don't know how others' experience events.

- → **Seek Meaningful Connection**: Come to discussion looking to expand your knowledge and understanding of others.

- → **Remember Intention versus Impact**. We cannot control how our words, actions, and behaviors land on others. Be open to the idea that you may have caused harm without meaning to. Getting defensive only makes both sides dig in and shuts down connection. Self-Regulate and accept feedback.

- → **Create Space for Participation and Contribution**: Be mindful of airtime, encourage others to share, ask curious questions, avoid judgement.

- → **Remember Who Isn't Here**: Be mindful of who is not in the room and represent their interests.

- → **Acknowledge that Conflict is Inevitable:** Conflict is not a competition, it means we are passionate about ideas. However, our passion is not permission to treat others poorly or close ourselves off to the ideas of others. Someone disagreeing with you does not have to be viewed as a personal attack.