

What I Have Learned Facilitating Learning Online, Part 2: Community Building + Navigating a Virtual Platform

By Gina Fugnitto | Categories: Classroom Community, Technology & Remote Learning

In a millisecond, you were asked to plan for and use a virtual platform to engage students in remote learning. Now you might be wondering: *How do I continue to create a connected and safe learning experience? How do I help my students feel connected? How do I help to establish our way of work as a classroom community while students are sitting in their own homes?*

In my previous blog, I shared some of the best practices I have developed over the past few years for facilitating learning via Zoom. I thought it would be important to continue what will be an ongoing conversation by focusing this blog on community building and navigating your virtual platform. Here are a few things that are important to me for creating and leading dynamic, intentional, and valuable online learning experiences.

Create Classroom Norms. It is important to establish the ways a class will work together via this new virtual platform.

What is important to you about a virtual classroom community? How might you involve your students in determining the ways you work together? How might you revisit these norms as you find out more about learning together virtually?

Talk to the students about the ways you will work together on your new virtual platform. Consider creating a “Ways We Work Together” chart. Possible questions might include:

- *What can we do to make sure we get to sessions on time?*
- *What can we do to assure we have all the materials needed?*
- *What can we do to show we are listening?*
- *What can we do to make sure everyone gets a chance to talk?*
- *What can we do to make sure several of us don't talk at the same time?*

Overtime, you might consider asking students to reflect on questions such as:

- *Which work habit was easy for you today?*
- *Which work habit was challenging for you today? Why?*
- *What do you like about working together virtually?*
- *What can be hard about working together virtually?*

Ask Families to Develop At-Home Norms/Expectations. Within the same space, parents are striving to work and students are striving to learn. Ask families to establish at-home norms or expectations for the school and work day.

Encourage families to discuss norms for working at home. Possible questions might include:

- *What kind of routine will we establish to make sure we can all get our work done?*

- *When will we take breaks to play and have fun?*
- *When is it okay to interrupt adults while they are working?*
- *How will children communicate that they need help?*

Teach students how to navigate your virtual platform. Students need the opportunity to learn the essentials of their virtual platform. Build in time daily—yes, daily—to teach students! Via Zoom, I teach participants how to turn their camera on, mute/unmute, open and use the chat box, click to join a breakout room, and share their screen (older students).

How will you incorporate learning to navigate the virtual platform into your online sessions? What are the aspects of your virtual platform that are essential for students to know how to do? How can you remind yourself to be patient about teaching this navigation?

As you consider the aspects of your virtual platform that are essential, think about:

- The age of the students
- The content
- The time available
- How you can make best use of platform features:
 - A chat box is an excellent way to have quick conversations, provide short responses, and share thinking.
 - A breakout room is an excellent way to have deeper conversation, partner talk, and group work.
 - Sharing a screen is an excellent way for older students to show their work (writing samples) or share information.

Involve parents/family in supporting your younger students. There is a lot for our younger students to learn in this transition to online learning. Consider how you might involve parents/families in effectively engaging in the platform.

Who will help the student sign on? Who will help the student get oriented to their screen as you teach them about the camera, the microphone, and the other features of the virtual platform?

In these unprecedented times, it is important to lean on each other as we strive to engage students in quality remote learning opportunities. Don't forget to give yourself grace. Don't forget to keep it simple. Don't forget you are doing the best job you can do given the circumstances. Don't forget that no matter what, your students want to connect with you and their peers.

Click [here](#) to read part 3 of this blog series, What I Have Learned Facilitating Learning Online, Part 3: Five Best Practices for Recorded Sessions.