Developing Norms for Distance Learning

Vision

Building strong relationships and establishing student created norms sets the stage for high expectations and an equitable culture. With unpredictable transitions between in-person and distance learning, educators will need to build a strong foundation of norms and revisit often to maximize student engagement and performance. This guidance attempts to rethink and plan for effective class norms and their implementation.

Specific Considerations

"Creating norms in a face-to-face classroom setting often begins with asking the students to describe and agree on actions… This practice can be useful in a remote environment but must also attend to the features and constraints of the technology used (or not used). When distance learning is new or necessitated by circumstance, contextualizing familiar norms may help students and teachers feel more at ease. In your efforts to establish norms for distance learning, remember that learning can be messy under the best circumstances. Be flexible and remember that perfection is not the goal" (Staying Grounded when Teaching Remote, 2020).

Best Practices

Strategies to support the co-construction of norms in varied environments

Distance Learning Norms Development

The following norms are from Staying Grounded when Teaching Remote at https://www.openscied.org/remote-teaching/.

Synchronous virtual learning	Asynchronous virtual learning
• Use a virtual whiteboard with stickies (e.g., Pinup, Padlet, Flipgrid) and get consensus on some shared norms, grouping ideas together. • Re-establish or adjust classroom norms for a virtual setting • Revisit norms often and draw attention to a specific norm for the learning session. • Take time to check-in and connect with students. • Allow students to express a "digital identity" using a background or profile picture.	• Use a digital board (e.g., Google Docs, Padlet, JamBoard) to collect ideas allowing all students to return at a later time to analyze and add comments. • Post ideas and suggestions for norms (perhaps by category) for the teacher to compile. • Allow students to react to, vote for, and add ideas to a suggested list of norms. This could also include describing what a particular norm could look like in a distance learning setting. • Utilize online journals that students can share and "talk to" each other about.

Norms that represent best practices for teachers and students in distance learning environments

Respectful

Synchronous virtual learning	Asynchronous virtual learning
• Use digital talk moves to provide positive feedback. • Use established signals/digital responses to facilitate taking turns to avoid simultaneous talking (e.g., raising hands, thumbs up, muting when others are speaking). • Adhere to agreements about when to use cameras and when to mute/unmute audio.	• Agree that digital platforms (e.g., Pinup, Padlet, Google Docs) are safe places for questions and discussions. • Address the inherent anonymity of using digital tools and define respectful interactions. • Know that others will read and respond to your comments. • Develop respectful comment/ feedback starters (e.g., How about…). • Recognize that thought partners might be working on a different timeline and be patient when waiting for responses.

Equitable

Synchronous virtual learning	Asynchronous virtual learning
• Take time to learn and practice using the digital platform and post tutorial videos for reference. • Recognize that students may access digital platforms with different devices that may have differing capabilities. • Use and rotate breakout groups to increase participation and sharing of ideas. • Use strategies to manage speaking such as each person nominating another to speak, until all have spoken • Check in on students who aren't here. • Provide recordings of lessons for students who miss synchronous interactions.	• Provide opportunities for students to share in different ways, such as videos or written responses or images. • Accept responses that reflect varied student resources such as registers of language. • Monitor contributions and participation. Reach out via phone or text to address gaps.

Committed to Community

Synchronous virtual learning	Asynchronous virtual learning
• Maintain a format for recording and tracking progress on student questions. • Encourage patience, support, and kindness among the group, paying particular attention to those who might be new to technology or selected platforms.	• Find a way to honor all contributions. • Provide support for parents (e.g., tutorials, online meetings, overviews of assignments, links to helpful websites).

<u>Moving Thinking Forward</u>

Synchronous virtual learning	Asynchronous virtual learning
• Establish structures for quick teacher-student and peer-peer feedback. • Utilize breakout groups for small group discussions and processing before whole group sharing.	• Engage in asynchronous discussion boards. • Set expectations for contributing and responding to asynchronous discussions. • Establish a buddy system and encourage students to agree on times to meet online to collaborate on activities.

Considerations to make in order to support to different populations of students when providing distance learning

Student Population	Considerations
Underrepresented students	• Provide ideas for adaptations of materials to the students' home culture and interests. • Opening up instruction so that it no longer involves a school building can be freeing for students who aren't connected to school. • Foster thinking about how this "new normal" can benefit students who were marginalized by school. • Provide opportunities for students to practice skills and ideas that matter to them.
Multilingual learners	• Engage support staff and community members in creating translations of materials. • Support student-student discourse using technology if possible. • Allow students to dictate or video record responses for activities. • Use a platform like YouTube that has captioning options.
Differently-abled	• Allow for and provide multiple modes of expression to students for sharing ideas, listening/reading/communicating. • Involve the parent/caregiver as much as possible. • Provide scaffolding such as frameworks or sentence starters. • Give them a virtual partner to share ideas and models with. • Record lessons and let them view as many times as needed.
Students experiencing homelessness	• Work with area shelters and food banks to coordinate learning resource and meal pickup and drop-off, and space for students to do school work and conduct school check-ins. • Engage other staff in supporting students, ensure consistency. • Secure technology and WiFi for students.

How can we acknowledge the realities of distance working and learning?

Working and learning remotely often means sharing space with others, competing for limited technological resources, and dividing attention between learning activities or materials and distractions of the remote environment. Even under the best of circumstances, distractions and unexpected interruptions are inevitable. Teachers and learners in remote settings should operate from a standpoint of compassion and assume the best intentions of each other. As educators we ourselves have varying demands at home and therefore need to find a level of remote engagement with our students that is sustainable for our own self-care and family care.

Some tips include:

For Teachers: See full article: https://www.openscied.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Resources-for-Remote-Teaching-Norms.pdf	For Students: See the full article at http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct15/vol73/num02/Creating-a-Safe-Digital-Space.aspx
• Accept that each individual will be managing different circumstances in their remote environment. • Assume technological glitches will happen. • Be flexible and patient. • Check in frequently with learning community members and ask how they are managing. • Invite and offer gratitude. • Offer reassurance by highlighting the good. • Maintain your regular routines as closely as possible. • Encourage positive media habits and be a role model for healthy habits.	• *Use names*. Using a person's name when you respond to his or her postings creates a friendly online tone. • *Read questions and conversational postings carefully* to avoid unnecessary confusion. • *Compliment your peers* when they post strong responses or contribute original ideas to the conversation. • *Ask questions*. If anything is unclear or you want further information or insight on a topic, just ask. • *Be considerate*. Remember that your peers cannot see your body language or hear your tone of voice, so you need to keep your language direct and respectful. • *Respond instead of reacting*. Do not write a response if you are angry or upset. Instead, wait until you have had time to calm down and collect your thoughts. • *Critique the content*, not the person. • *Don't use all caps* when writing. It is interpreted as yelling.

References

- Ascd. (n.d.). The Techy Teacher / Creating a Safe Digital Space. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct15/vol73/num02/Creating-a-Safe-Digital-Space.aspx
- Staying Grounded when Teaching Remote. (2020, June 23). Retrieved from https://www.openscied.org/remote-teachings