## Humility and Humor: A Holistic Approach to the New Online Reality

When the world went into lock down this spring, everything changed for educators and learners alike. The initial panic took instructors into overdrive to ensure course content could be wrapped into a digestible virtual format ready for immediate consumption. But after a few weeks, we started sensing that a quick fix may not outlast the long-term implications of the pandemic. What we needed was a more realistic, inclusive, and palpable way of connecting with our students, one that would communicate empathy while leading students on a scholastic journey for which they had willingly signed up. This meant donning the hats of a listener, observer, and note-taker more than ever before in order to make this experience more supportive and meaningful for all stakeholders, including students, support services, instructional designers, and subject matter experts.

### Netiquette

Having taught the essentials of online communication in an Introduction to Computers course for several years, it became apparent to me that students were failing to use effective communication skills at a time when they mattered most. For many, the stressful situation exposed a vulnerable and inarticulate side. I witnessed many frantic and erroneous emails, incessant follow-ups, a lack of online composure or engagement, and an overall distracted disposition. To help students adjust and ease their worry, my colleagues and I collaborated to create an online conduct information sheet that outlined instructor and student expectations and responsibilities. This one-page guide outlined clear and concise expectations from the start and provided resources to help students and instructors prepare for online learning (e.g., links to plagiarism resources, academic integrity expectations, time management tips, and more).

We still worried that students may not read the information sheet. Wasn't there already too much scrolling and content? We felt that, as an institution, translating policies and procedures in a more digestible format was necessary and timely. Moreover, we all needed a reminder that the onus of acceptable online behavior is always a shared one.

### Multiple Intelligences

Gardner's theory holds good in any time and space. For visual-spatial learners like myself, endless text passages and lectures that drone on seem onerous, while for others, interaction with peers is a preferred learning experience. As instructors, remaining guided by the notion of offering your learner flexibility is key. Inclusion can be founded on personal strengths. By offering students an experience tailored to their learning style, instructors allow suitable accommodation and respect for individual learning differences in a classroom that is increasingly complex and multicultural.

Catering curriculum design, delivery, and discussion to a variety of learners is no easy task. Taking it online is another challenge. The switch to online learning has compelled us to consider the one thing that hasn't changed: The human mind and its adaptive capacity. When GPS systems can offer drive options like a scenic route or the fastest path to selected destinations, why can't we provide human learners with options for how they may prefer to navigate their educational journey?

### What's In It For Me?

A college education is a gateway for many, from the mature second-career student, to the vocational or technical career aspirant, to the undecided or "only because my parents pushed me into this," to the industry-focused go-getter. Each has an impetus to be in class. But no student signed up for the adventure we're currently embarking on, one that entails endless hours of back-to-back Zoom classrooms amid juggling other life commitments and deadlines, all while hoping one's health and well being remain intact.

Asking your learners how they wish to learn, what would enrich their experience in your class, and how you can support them are pertinent conversations. Acknowledging their sense of purpose and vocalizing empathy are invaluable lessons. One of my students recently communicated she was more worried about affording groceries for the week than an upcoming assignment. Reaching out to students, listening, and establishing support networks for those at risk has become the new normal for many of us.

### Keep It Light

There have been numerous virtual classroom pranks and failures that have been replayed and gone viral. It's plain to see that students and instructors miss the spontaneity, creativity, personal interaction, deviation, constructive disruption, and countless moments of truth in an in-person classroom that is nearly impossible to replicate virtually. As

a firm believer that the show must go on, I remind myself that facilitating is really about the magic of storytelling. And with a touch of humor, you can't go wrong. Plus, it does wonders to alleviate stress levels across the board.

A recent exchange with a harassed student about an upcoming test and her subsequent rant during the virtual class meeting led me to lightheartedly declare we could consider canceling all tests this term if that made her feel better. There was some nervous laughter in the room. I quickly backed it up with a dose of reality, explaining how evaluations of some sort must be put in place to determine if students met course learning outcomes, and this test was only one of many tools being used. The light two-way conversation and suggestions that followed helped break the ice, relieve the tension, and establish a rapport that showed students I was accessible, approachable, and amenable to ideas, change, and collaboration.

I also use humor in class in the form of personal anecdotes, videos, illustrations, and comic strips. Keeping interactions light and playful allows instructors to take the overall pulse of the class and pull in students who may have disengaged. What better time than now to experiment with humor, when we could all do with a daily dose!

The ongoing struggle to package learning material for the online classroom will continue. How we create and facilitate our classrooms will determine the nature of this new age of online education. The idea of treating others the way you'd like to be treated has never felt more meaningful or profound. How would we have survived this shift and what coping mechanisms would we have had in place if we were students during the pandemic? Answer this question and then create the kind of teaching moments needed to address the change.

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