Remote Learning What Worked

Idea In Short

Remote learning succeeds when you flip the classroom, overcommunicate logistics, and triple engagement channels. Record lectures in advance, use live time for discussion, and gather feedback every session. Energy and clarity matter 30 percent more online than in person.

As with all things strategy, remote learning involves trade-offs and using your strengths to an advantage. What makes remote learning more flexible, accessible, interactive, and better? Do that. Copycatting the competition, in this metaphor the local classroom, is a path to mediocrity. 1

Twelve Practices That Worked

Several activities proved effective across four classes. Clarify logistics because it is easy to get lost in hyperlinks, surveys, and assignments. Record lecture content and send it out early. Send out PDF printouts of the recorded content. Use live time for discussion and interaction. Show the discussion questions upfront. Create comfort through consistency of routines, norms, and process.

Bling out the online experience with polls, chats, and breakouts. Bring energy and clarity, as Satya Nadella recommends for new hires. Triple the number of ways for students to engage with the content. Get feedback daily, because if something is not working you need to correct course immediately. Debrief the class by email or learning management system and post the video recording. Have fun.

Remote Learning Worked

This might surprise some, but remote learning worked fine. It has a lot of potential, and in many ways, educators have been itching for change. Students attended the online sessions,

did the work, learned a lot, and wrote great exams. They learned how to learn and had some cathartic intellectual struggle. For the final exam, which was open-book, the quality of answers was genuinely surprising. Student evaluations came back above the three-year average. 2

Of course, there is a lot to improve. The syllabus was designed for in-person, so a mid-semester switch to fully online was not pretty. Students had the option to take the class pass or no pass, creating grading uncertainty. All team projects converted to easier individual ones, requiring logistics and explaining. Student evaluation is difficult to do remotely versus a proctored classroom. Class participation is doable but needs clear expectations and student comfort.

Online Is Not In-Pfort Plus a Screen

Taking traditional in-person content, no matter how well organized and curated, and playing it for the audience on video underwhelms. Watching a concert is different from going to a concert. Since the experience has been stripped out of the recording, it needs to be augmented in other ways. Making it experiential remotely is the challenge.

There are so many differences between local classroom and remote learning that it only makes sense to rethink, redo, and recharge the content. With so many constraints gone, what are the possibilities? Freedom of time is perhaps the most liberating aspect. Students can watch recorded content now, later, or in pieces. Teachers can reuse content here, there, and everywhere. Freedom of frequency, medium, and place means students can watch or listen again on their laptop or phone. We do not have to coordinate 70 calendars to make 75 minutes of magic happen. 3

Flipping the Classroom

For anyone who is a fan of Khan Academy, flipping the classroom is a familiar concept. Students read through material with guiding questions, expecting mental struggle and bringing questions to class. Printed handouts serve as worksheets with well-placed blanks for filling in as the class progresses, creating massive synthesis. Application comes through papers, exams, surveys, and online discussions. For remote learning, students receive the PDF prints and recorded lectures in advance before the group meets. They get the highlight reel, so the live time is friendly, less edgy, and generally a feel-good discussion with

questions and answers.

Clarify Logistics and Record Early

Super boring, super important. Create a central place, like a Google doc, with a running list of the schedule, instructions, hyperlinks, and announcements. Put it in one place and create a short link so all participants know where to go. The Google doc approach is powerful because the instructor adds to it almost daily with links to PDFs and videos that students read or watch before the live session.

Record the video at home with bright lights, then post it several days before the corresponding live class. Record and share. For PDF printouts, students receive them at the same time as the recording. The handouts are consulting-quality and essentially spoon-feed the buckets needed to understand the topic, like spark notes. Students can follow along and take notes. An advise for students:

> hack the process by watching the video first, then skimming the source material second. This is how executives do it

Live Time for Discussion

Expect students to speak 50 percent or more of the time in the local classroom. For live video calls, target 70 percent. No one wants to stare at a screen and watch other people talk unless it is a comedy special. Cold calls are still in season. In a 45-minute session, target 15 to 20 students speaking up, with another 10 or more giving comments by chat. This is precious time to create humanity and serendipity.

Create comfort through consistency of routines, norms, and process. Join the call early, play music, and chat with early joiners. Start with announcements, logistics, and direct attention to the central document. Show the discussion questions and ask students to message if they want to volunteer. End on time and stick around for 30 minutes to answer questions. Send out a debrief announcement and a survey for feedback after every class.

Bling out the remote learning experience to keep people engaged. Use polls to ask whether

people agree with. For all discussion questions, tell shy folks to type answers into the chat, which moves at nearly the speed of a verbal comment. Use breakouts to randomly split the group into various sizes, ensuring teams are clear on their task and which questions they should discuss.

No way around this one. For remote learning to work, teachers, facilitators, and communicators need to be 30 percent more energetic and 30 percent more clear. Low energy and clouded messaging is not what we want. Get bright lights, record yourself, and test audio and video quality. Ask students to turn on cameras. Stand up and use the video space, moving closer or farther from the camera. Gesticulate a bit more than usual. Pause and use silence to dramatically snap attention.

Triple Engagement and Daily Feedback

Remote learning is a continuous process, not a discrete task. It is a flow of recordings, readings, group sessions, discussions, chats, and presentations. Invite guest speakers because people are available. Ask students to record video. Continue discussions with online chat boards. Create three-page presentations challenging students to summarize what they learned. Use office hours aggressively, because the remote format saves teacher time for one-on-one sessions.

After every class, have students fill out a two-question survey. The first asks for the key takeaway from the day's content. The second varies: what can we do to improve, are you taking this pass or no pass, and what did you think of the guest speaker. Feedback is a gift. It provides a release valve for unmet needs, frustrations, and comments. Remotely, we need to create safe ways to collect critical feedback. Culture trumps strategy.

Debrief and Have Fun

Just like in the corporate world, send out meeting minutes after class. What were the key takeaways, action items, and announcements? Adults need to reflect on their learning, and these debriefs help to remind, nudge, and crystallize understanding. The video recording is mentioned in these debriefs and in the trusted central document.

As a bonus, have fun. Continually tell students to do the hard things and follow their curiosity. It is time for the teacher to eat their own cooking. Thankfully, a lot about teaching

is the same: demonstrating expertise, making it easy to learn, setting high expectations, and being fair. Learning how to learn and thinking about thinking remain the goals. Have fun, friends.

- 1The Effectiveness Of Flipped Classrooms In Distance Education, STEP Academic
- 2Overcoming Zoom Doom, University Of Dayton
- 3Microsoft's CEO On Rediscovering The Company's Soul, Harvard Business Review

Summary

Remote learning is not in-person plus a screen. It requires rethinking content, rhythm, and engagement from scratch. The tools are available, the methods are proven, and the willingness to experiment makes the difference between mediocrity and mastery.