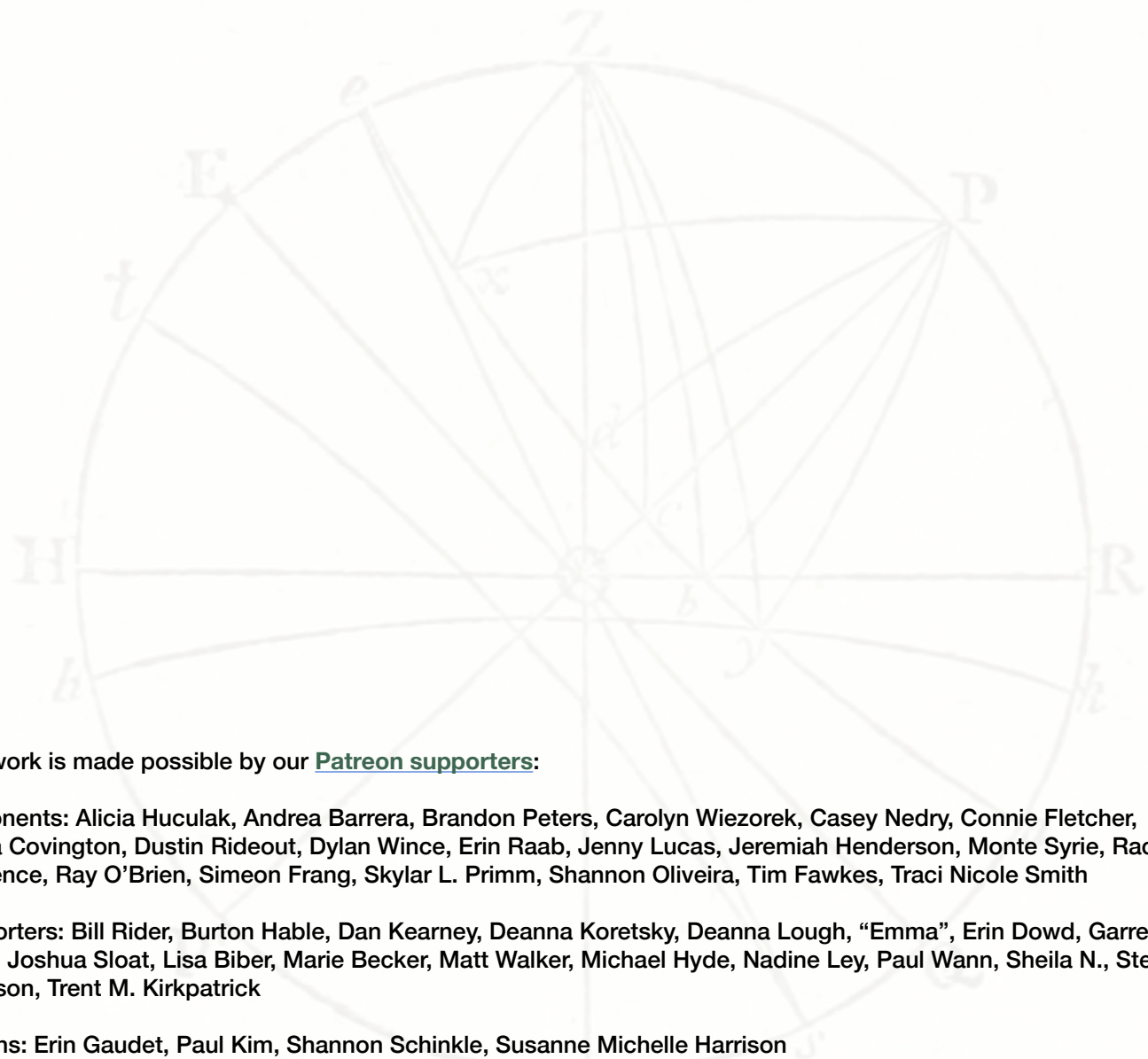




VIRTUAL LEARNING HANDBOOK



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OVERVIEW

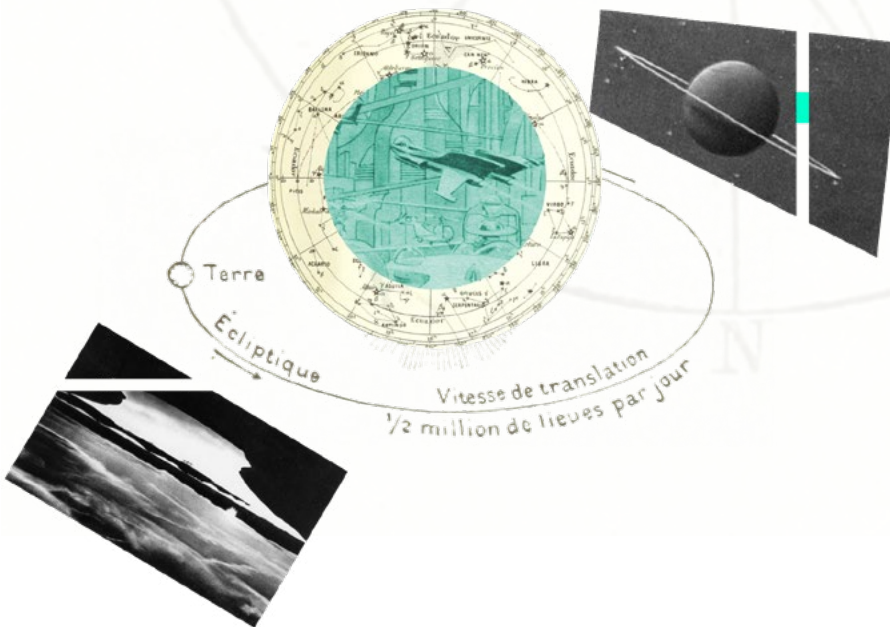
2020 is full of uncertainty. As educators move back into their classrooms socially distanced, in hybrid environments, or entirely virtual, our methodology must change. It's crucial, though, that progressive, human-centered pedagogy is not lost. Districts have extended harmful practices into digital space intent on controlling and surveilling learning and behavior, even if that digital space terminates in a student's bedroom. As humane educators, we must resist this systemic inertia and build an empathetic and tolerant space to work alongside students rather than against them.

In this handbook, you will find twenty elements of progressive pedagogy outlined with specific methods of carrying them out. This handbook is meant, in part, to resolve the "how" of human-centered pedagogy, offering tools and websites to structure engaged learning for our students.

In the same vein, we must push back against carceral practices invading our schools: student tracking software, forcing webcams to be on and surveilling student screens, centering anti-cheating rationales, suspending students, or enforcing dress codes. Now, more than ever, educators must demand that students are treated with respect and demand respect for our profession, as market forces attempt to capitalize on a pandemic to dismantle public education.

To join us and educators around the world in our effort to restore humanity to education, please visit [our website](#).

In solidarity,
Chris & Nick



VALUES

In order for transformative change to occur in our classrooms, we must approach our practice through *systems*. For each of the following progressive pedagogical systems, we've provided at least one change to implement in virtual learning to help learners thrive. Of course, there is no telling if students in your classroom feel the same way. We encourage you to co-plan, co-assess, and co-implement each of these concepts with your students.

Human Restoration Project (HRP) is a non-profit organization aimed at transforming school systems and restoring students as human beings, rather than a vessel for standards.

We are dedicated to radically student-centered school systems.

I Learning is rooted in purpose-finding and community relevance.

- map a path to purpose
- create cross-disciplinary classrooms
- learn experientially
- connect to the community
- promote literacy

II Social justice is the cornerstone to educational success.

- support a reflective space
- authenticate student voice
- demand inclusive spaces
- adopt critical pedagogy
- utilize restorative justice

III Dehumanizing practices do not belong in schools.

- radically reduce homework
- build strong relationships
- reform food systems
- eliminate grading
- redefine assessment and end testing

IV Learners are respectful toward each other's innate human worth.

- self-direct learning
- support and elevate teachers
- cooperate, don't force competition
- stay buzzword free
- support multi-age classrooms

Learn more at humanrestorationproject.org

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MAP A PATH TO PURPOSE

purpose coursework

A lack of purpose is endemic to our fractured modern societies and, as a result, rates of teen anxiety, depression, and suicide have hit record highs. **An influential 2006 study** found that only about 20% of young people could be considered “grounded in purposeful activities, with a clear sense of what they are doing in the world and why”. The other 80% were classified as “disengaged”, “dreamers”, and “dabblers”. Purpose-finding, on the other hand, is associated with positive well-being, a sense of belonging and of self, and leads young people to find long-term meaning and success, however defined, in their lives.

To these ends, connecting young people with adult and peer mentors, promoting extracurricular activities, having purposeful work, and even simply discussing purpose increases the likelihood of finding meaning and purpose in life, work, and school. Human Restoration Project has a comprehensive handbook and a shared Google Drive folder that summarize why and how we should help our students build their Path to Purpose.

Path to Purpose Handbook: 20 page interactive handbook full of research and resources to get started.

Purpose Finding Activities Shared Drive: Contains 25 activities you can use with individuals and teams of students and adults to drive purpose-driven work.

LEARN EXPERIENTIALLY

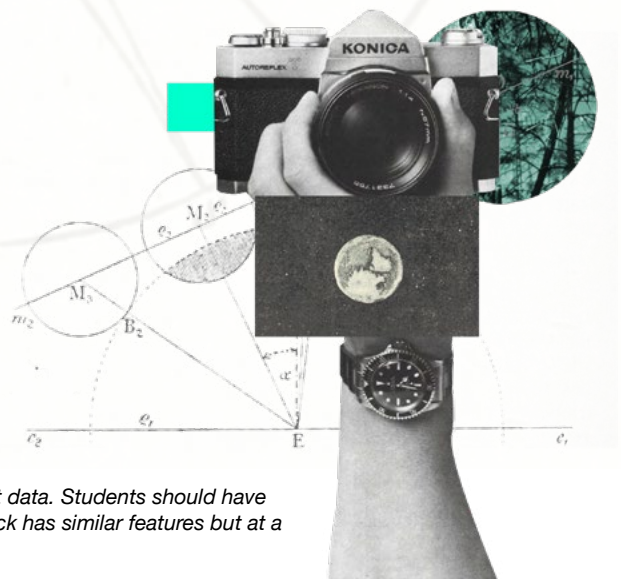
student journalism

Virtual learning offers us unique ways of engaging with the world around us. Instead of being restricted to particular time zones and synchronous learning environments, we can connect with others in new ways. Let students take advantage of this opportunity!

Consider tools like Flipgrid*. By reaching out to members of your community, locally or globally, students can ask questions asynchronously to an individual or organization, which can be answered in-turn. Further, students can work remotely with anyone in the world, regardless of the time difference. By working with multimedia, such as podcasts, video, and photography, students can learn to integrate digital tools within a virtual context.

Summit, Inspire Citizens and Out of the Blocks: In this professional development session, we speak with Inspire Citizens and NPR program, Out of the Blocks, to talk about how educators can engage in virtual spaces to connect with their community.

**Flipgrid (Microsoft) sells student data. Students should have the option of opting out. Peardeck has similar features but at a premium cost.*



CONNECT TO THE COMMUNITY

discord

As we shift ourselves physically away from the classroom environment, the “classroom culture” is both literally and figuratively isolated. Whether we’re speaking through masks or attempting to connect via online classrooms, we miss out on the daily conversations that fill a room. We can find alternative solutions to bolster connections between students and educators.

One system could be creating a class Discord. Discord is a free text (optional voice and video) tool available via browser or application. Many students will be familiar with this software, as it’s actively used in the gaming community. By creating a new account and making a few “text channels”, students can communicate with each other. Try structuring a few channels for random, off-topic interaction, class questions and answers (encouraging cooperative learning), and sharing student work.

Discord: A free application for structuring online communities.

How to Use Discord for Your Classroom: An in-depth guide to utilizing Discord.

PROMOTE LITERACY

libby, overdrive,
and eBooks

The Internet is one of the best ways to connect to books! By using free applications like Libby/Overdrive, students can gain access to a plethora of options with just a library card (which, most of the time, can be obtained online.)

It’s true that most of these books don’t have unlimited copies, so our strategy must shift to choice over the one class novel, something that is supported by research as a more conducive system for learning. Instead of assigning students the same novel to read together, equip them with tools to express what they’re reading to share with others.

Libby/Overdrive: A free application to check-out eBooks. Note that this application requires a library card.

Research to Support Literacy Choice: Dr. Stephen Krashen has documented research studies supporting choice in literacy, including “junk reads” (e.g. comic books, manga) for decades.



CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CLASSROOMS

SDG-themed projects

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global targets for social, economic, political, and environmental justice that every member nation has agreed to reach by 2030. Their nature as “global goals” can transform isolated, classroom content-based projects into real-world, locally and internationally collaborative efforts that necessarily draw from authentic interdisciplinary work and value a range of student backgrounds and experiences. However, the real power of the SDGs for educators comes largely from the community of educator “ambassadors” around the world opening their classrooms and sharing their work. Use #TeachSDGs to connect to this community on social media!

Instead of “doing projects” that work across content areas only as enrichment or a culminating unit activity - and whose impact is not felt outside classroom walls - curate a true long-term project-based learning experience aligned to the SDG framework. Help them find community connections in areas that intersect with the goals - say, hunger or quality education - and partner with local organizations and agencies to address the impact in your community. Reach out to share the results with parents, your local community, and the online #TeachSDG community to showcase your students’ work and inspire others to action.

The World’s Largest Lesson: This should be your first stop if you’re new to the UN Sustainable Development Goals!

Podcast: Implementing SDGs to the Classroom with Dr. Jennifer Williams, Julia Fliss, and Nick Covington & Summit: Experiential Learning and the SDGs w/ Dr. Jennifer Williams: Listen to teacher testimonials about how the #TeachSDGs community has transformed school and classroom practice.



SUPPORT A REFLECTIVE SPACE

informed SEL

Today's market societies have responded to the crises of mental health and alienation with consumption: by individualizing systemic problems and marketing the "solution". Given the symbiotic relationship between teacher and student wellness, the key to a humanized approach to mental health in schools begins with recognizing and resisting this market narrative and reflecting on the structural changes that will create happier, healthier schools for children and adults alike. And if we can't change systems so much larger than ourselves, we can at least create pockets of reflection and conscientiousness as shelter from the barrage of interests competing for student energy and attention.



Dena Simmons - Why We Can't Afford Whitewashed Social-Emotional Learning: Too often vital sociopolitical context for SEL is lost and marketed instead as shallow "self-help". This article helps us put SEL in the correct context in its role to build, as Dena Simmons' states, "a more peaceful world."

Monte Syrie - How I Build Community With Smiles & Frowns: Monte's Smiles and Frowns is a simple exercise for community building that can be used to support SEL in any level and any context.

Headspace: If you need to make room for "mindfulness" in your classroom, Headspace provides free premium accounts for educators and can be used individually or even with large and small groups of students. These exercises, some as short as 60 seconds, can be the means, rather than the ends, of starting conversations about individual mindfulness and its impact on those around us.

DEMAND INCLUSIVE SPACES

building
connections

Of course, reflective spaces are inclusive, and inclusion doesn't happen without action. Educators from backgrounds and positions of privilege have a responsibility to leverage that privilege for colleagues, students, and community members from historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups. As such, there are no shortcuts and strategies that can replace interpersonal relationships, community connections, and leveraging power and privilege; however, there are digital tools and resources that educators can use to develop student consciousness and drive a generation to action.

Teaching Tolerance: The premiere resource for classroom resources for teaching students to action on vital topics from racism and police violence to gender expression and rejecting ableism.

Belouga: An online teaching platform that connects classrooms to a global learning network of students and teachers. Through these connections and facilitated interactions, students have the opportunity to build relationships, cultural competency, empathy, and a global perspective.

Web Conferences: One fortunate effect of social distancing has been the availability and accessibility of professional development opportunities through online conferences, and many are available for free or for reduced rates online.

AUTHENTICATE STUDENT VOICE

surveying

Now more than ever, we need to be listening to students. It's difficult to stay in contact, there's a ton of uncertainty, and we aren't sure what's working. Luckily, there are intuitive, simple tools to ensure we're listening to our students. In order for us to have any chance of success, we need to be as transparent and open to feedback as possible, making sure we do not lie about our initiatives or blame students for our difficulties.

By enacting simple feedback forms on Google, we can cater our classes to our students. What activities do they enjoy? What do they want to learn about? What structures work best virtually and for this particular class? Although everything mentioned in this handbook can be valuable practice...until you ask your students and see if they agree, it's not worth implementing!

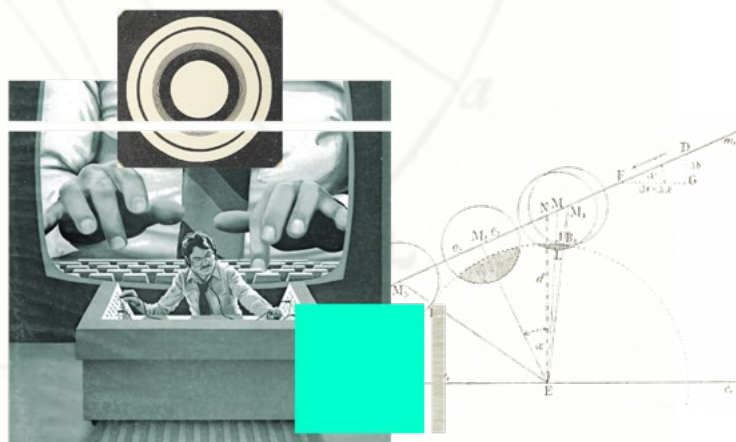
Typeform: Although Google Forms is recommended because it's free, Typeform is a conversation-based form software that's more engaging than a traditional survey. If your institution could supply it, it's a worthwhile investment.

ADOPT CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

student data & monitoring

When we learn online, our students are utilizing a plethora of tools in the classroom. However, we don't always see them actually using these tools. For some, this can be unnerving: how can I know, for sure, that this student is learning and doing their own assignments? Trust is vitally important to any learning environment and there's additional stress online in allowing for it.

We must be incredibly careful of monitoring our students to the point of panopticon. Requiring webcams to be on (which has harmful ramifications for equitable practice, teacher/student judgment, and "Zoom fatigue") and/or placing algorithmic trackers on student work (which is often inaccurate, misleading, and anti-student) can be dangerous. In addition, many of these softwares sell and/or misuse student data, something we may ignore outright. Reading the Terms and Conditions of websites, even as a class activity, and being transparent about them is important classroom practice. Do students have a way to opt out of activities and assignments that utilize their data?



Jitsi: An open-source, free alternative to Google Meet or Zoom that does not misuse and/or sell data.

Hybrid Pedagogy: A range of discussions about the use of digital critical pedagogy and trusting students.

UTILIZE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

trauma-informed, anti-surveillance, caring classrooms

Education reporting outlet Chalkbeat wrote in their August 2020 article, **“Virtual Suspensions. Mask Rules. More Trauma.”**, warning that a “student discipline crisis is on the horizon”. Students of color especially face the **“dual pandemic”** of disproportionate impact of the coronavirus specifically and structural and systemic racism broadly. News reports and social media posts since August have corroborated concerns that, as student homes become virtual classrooms, schools are responding to the trauma of pandemic schooling by doubling down on discipline. The list of student offenses include having family members and pets in the background of Zoom calls (or simply keeping webcams off during synchronous class time), non-compliance with school dress code during virtual learning, or sitting in darkened rooms during assessments.

Schools have deputized teachers with a suite of surveillance tech tools from lockdown browsers to TurnItIn.com to regulate and monitor student behavior, particularly during proctored exams. **One university student on Twitter** shared that her class was threatened with being written up for “online cheating” when the McGraw-Hill Proctorio software, which proclaims to “eliminate human error, bias and expense” when it records users and generates an “automated suspicion report” for instructors to review, reported “a lot of head and eye movements” and resizing browser windows, behavior apparently consistent with cheating during an online assessment.

This is all to say that we are at a crossroads in education. We can allow a list of self-imposed policies and procedures enforced by “error and bias free” surveillance technology to simulate virtual command-and-control classrooms which communicate an adversarial relationship with students and families or we can partner in solidarity to overcome the inequitable adversity the “dual pandemic” imposes on the communities we serve. There is no tech tool that will restore humanity, we can only inoculate ourselves against this mindset and resist where it presents itself in our schools.

Against Cop Shit: In which Jeffrey Moro argues for the abolition of “cop shit” in classrooms, defined as “any pedagogical technique or technology that presumes an adversarial relationship between students and teachers”.

Tolerance.org, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus: We’ve always needed to put relationships ahead of compliant behavior, but it’s especially true and urgent now.

“Robot Teachers, Racist Algorithms, and Disaster Pedagogy”: To quote Audrey Watters from the piece, “Surveillance is always caught up in the inequalities students already experience in our educational institutions”



RADICALLY REDUCE HOMEWORK

tools for further
study

In all aspects of learning, less is more...and this is even more true in a virtual classroom. Considering that a student spends most of their time on a screen, assigning even more labor after school is too taxing. This runs counter to ample research suggesting that homework has no academic value, and actually hurts a student's social-emotional well-being.

Instead, we can offer a range of activities that are possible online or offline. Rather than assigning specific tasks, there are a host of things to do, download, and/or purchase that can be done at home. Now that students are becoming more familiar with connecting online, an educator can showcase resources to further learning. Note that none of these would be required. Instead, these are great places to further one's passions.

OpenCulture: A huge list of new things to learn about.

HarvardX: Harvard University's free coursework over a range of academic concepts.

BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

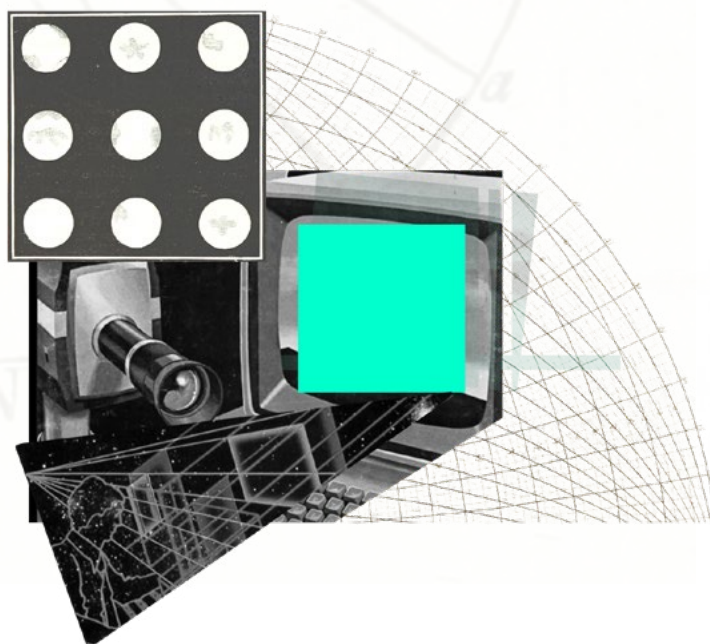
games & activities

When students are stuck at home, there's less opportunity for interaction that builds meaningful relationships in a school environment. It's important that educators allow time for social, emotional well-being by facilitating activities that are purely for fun. There are many valuable places to participate in interactive games and social activities online. From Spymaster to Kahoot to Jackbox Games, all age levels can enjoy social interaction through gaming.

Also, Google Jamboard is a valuable tool for structuring relationship-building activities. Allow students to not only get to know you through surveys and conversations, but also to know each other through collaborative activities.

Building a Student-Centered Third Space: An overview of games and activities to brighten one's classroom.

Google Jamboard, Teacher Center: How to use a collective whiteboard for student-centered activities.



ELIMINATE GRADING

evidence journal

As many districts realized in the spring of 2020, there was not an equitable nor accurate way to grade student progress and performance when schools shut down for a pandemic and scrambled to provide emergency instruction and services for the communities they serve. If it made little sense to maintain traditional grading systems then, what sense does it make to return to them now? Rather, we should use this as an opportunity to reshape grading practices that better serve our students and our circumstances.

“Going gradeless” can look different in every context, but what all attempts at gradeless learning have in common is diminishing the salience of points and grades to improve student learning, even if systemically you are unable to avoid assigning a semester or a final grade. We can absolutely do this in a way that is more humane, equitable, and accessible than running students through a grading algorithm. Supporting students in gathering and reflecting on evidence of their learning, like in an Evidence Journal or other portfolio, helps students demonstrate their understanding rather than have their story be reduced to a single number or letter.



Evidence Journal Screencast Tutorial & Google Doc: Screencast tutorial for how to use the Evidence Journal and a Google Doc template that you can use for any content area.

REDEFINE ASSESSMENT

portfolio & low- stakes assessment

The research is clear about the use of feedback over grades and the efficacy of frequent low-stakes formative assessment to improve learning outcomes. As we work in asynchronous spaces that increasingly require students to be self-directed learners, even toward existing curricular objectives, providing students meaningful feedback and opportunities for reflection doesn't have to be time consuming or teacher-led.

Quizizz is one tool for students to get real-time feedback and help guide teacher/student decision-making in virtual environments. Teachers have the option of running an assessment live - “gamified” or not - which can be completed individually or in teams, or posting an assessment code for students to take on their own. Use this second option to create self-directed learning progressions with Quizizz checkpoints, build in opportunities for additional practice, and help students reflect on what they know and where they can grow.

Nick Covington Microeconomics Quizizz Collection: An example of scaffolded low-stakes formative assessment and certification quizzes used to complete the Evidence Journal.

REFORM FOOD SYSTEMS

identifying food insecurity

It's paramount that we recognize, identify, and connect students and their families to healthy foods, especially during trying economic times. Although many schools are offering substantial food pick-up services, these opportunities may be limited, serve questionable meals, or may be not taken advantage of by every family. Although educators are just one piece in this puzzle, there is a need to be explicit in identifying at-risk youth. This can be a basic proposition: simply addressing it outright by asking if any students are food insecure via email. Then, using our network, helping students take advantage of local resources in any way possible.

Further, there are opportunities to connect students to food through research, activities, and projects. After we recognize our classes' basic needs are met, we can brainstorm and take actionable steps to make food-secure communities.

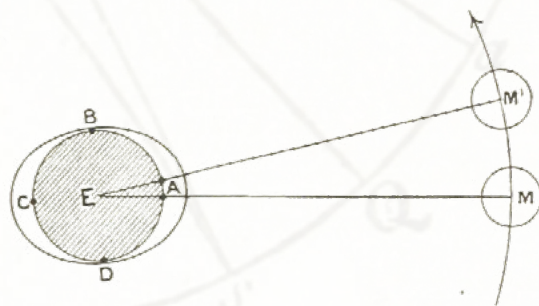
Chef Ann Foundation COVID-19 Resources: A host of resources for schools, families, educators, and students to identify food sources, prepare healthy meals, obtain grant/seed money, and/or learn about food.



zoom fatigue and
tech tools

In addition to virtual office hours and **SDG-aligned projects**, teachers can use a number of digital tools to reduce “Zoom fatigue” and turn passive synchronous time into an active, self-directed asynchronous learning experience. Also, by allowing students to process at their own pace, pause, rewind, adjust the speed, or add captions and provide other supports, student-paced presentations and pre-recorded video content is just more accessible than synchronous lectures!

Peardeck: Peardeck works with Google Slides to present student- or teacher-paced slideshows embedded with interactive whiteboards, questions, and draggable objects to collect and provide feedback on student progress in real or asynchronous time.



SUPPORT AND ELEVATE TEACHERS

flipped classrooms
and unionization

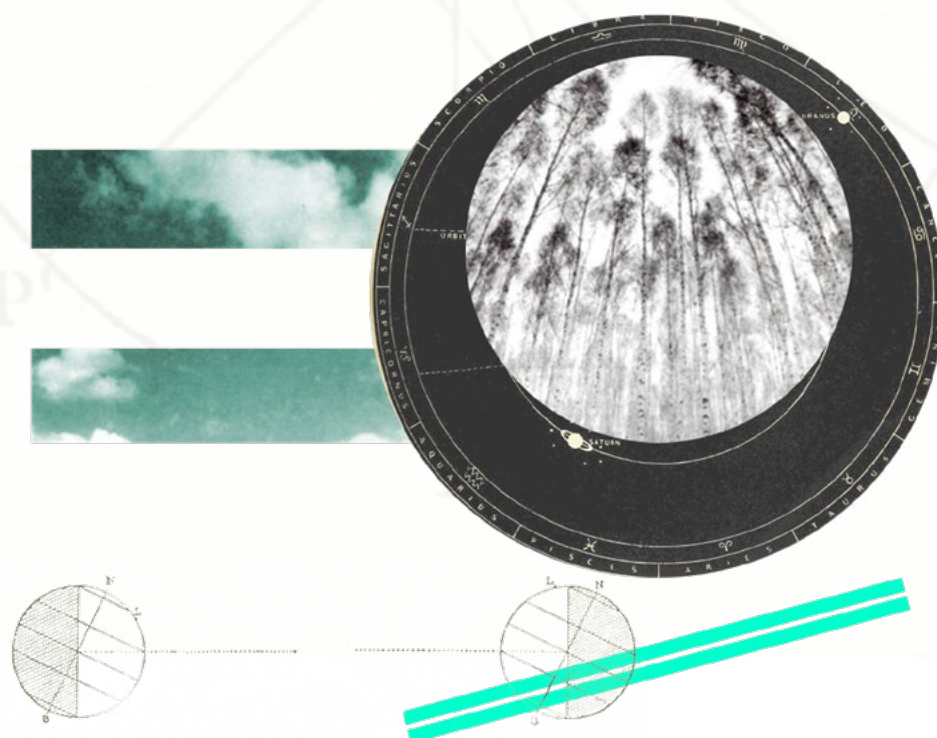
Office Hours are not just for colleges anymore! Some districts have strict requirements for what synchronous time with students looks like, often filling up student days with hours of teacher talk and digital direct instruction. As a humane alternative, systems should embrace a largely asynchronous learning environment reinforced by virtual “office hours” where teachers host an open or semi-open forum to provide support, feedback, and in-time instruction for students who need it most. It’s also possible to build choice into breakout rooms where students can elect to work collaboratively, individually, or in the main room with the teacher. To better prepare, you can collect questions or data from students ahead of time via Google Form, then record the session and post the video to your LMS for students who were not able to make it to the live meeting.

Northern Illinois University - Options for Virtual Teaching: This document has good tips for how to structure virtual office hours.

Laura Gibbs (@OnlineCrsLady): Laura has been teaching online for nearly two decades. Her Twitter feed is a must-read for teachers wanting better and more humane online teaching, and she is a proponent for virtual office hours!

The reality is that most teachers do not have professional autonomy and are on the receiving end of the same inhumane and arbitrary policies as their students. Over the course of the pandemic in the United States, national, state, and local teacher associations have been the strongest advocates for a safe return to learn for staff and students alike. Amplifying our collective power and codifying our voice through unionization remains the surest path to having a seat at the table when decisions are being made about our working conditions.

American Federation of Teachers & National Education Association: Find your state and local affiliates and ask them how to get your district organized.



STAY BUZZWORD FREE

identifying core
applications

It's true that technology allows us opportunities in the classroom to engage students. The "chat window" of virtual classrooms brings new voices into the fold and collaborative documents allow for stellar group learning. But, we must be careful of overloading our students with many "edtech tools" all at once. It's recommended that we stick to a "core suite" of websites and softwares, identifying one to three major platforms that we consistently utilize.

Digital Natives: From the Myth to the Reality

by Ferran Adell, CCCBLab: An extensive overview of the myth of the digital native.



COOPERATE, DON'T FORCE COMPETITION

effective breakout
rooms

Virtual learning is awkward. We're no longer able to easily read what our students are feeling each day, especially when many opt not to turn on their webcams. Rather than forcing video, we can change systems in our classroom that bring students into the fold. By providing space for students to work together, we can encourage communication in myriad ways.

One way to structure group work is through iPads, Chromebooks, or laptops provided by your district. Chances are, many will have access to spare devices not in use at the school. Create breakout rooms by scheduling Google Meet sessions on Google Calendar, and provide those links to select students. Then, login to Google Meet on each one of these devices and space them throughout the room. This will allow you to have students in a "physical" space where you can see how they're doing, let students feel more inclined to speak with their friends, and work collaboratively.

Virtual Breakout Rooms Overview from Engage Their Minds:

This article highlights ways in which one can utilize breakout rooms in virtual contexts.

SUPPORT MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS

multi-age mentoring

Though multi-age environments can present their own challenges - the image of an awkward gaggle of neighborhood kids lost in their own small world can bring both worry and comfort - why do classrooms in school look so different from the way siblings interact and how neighborhood kids play and grow together? There is very little research conducted today about the costs and benefits of formal multi-age learning environments, but what research exists points to kids in multi-age environments demonstrating more pro-social behavior, positive self-image, higher self-esteem, and better attitudes toward school than students in single-grade classes.

Without the need to juggle schedules and transportation, online tools facilitate multi-age learning in a way that may not have been possible before:

- Older students can record themselves reading books for younger audiences and can even be live-streamed into younger classrooms. Likewise, older students can be the audience for younger readers and can also be a source of constructive feedback for other types of performance and presentation.
- Older students can be peer mentors, pen pals, and “ambassadors” for younger students and respond to questions about growing up, working, participating in activities, and navigating new learning environments.
- **Flipgrid** can facilitate asynchronous Q&A between age groups with a teacher moderator.



