

KIDS

Jazz up the learning space

Keep kids motivated, organized, moving

BY KAILA PAVELKA-DICKEY

YOU WERE TOLD your child will stay remote for a while.

Despite extenuating circumstances, kids get to be kids. We don't want this generation looking back on 2020 with hesitation. Kids don't need to carry our stressors.

So, how do we embrace remote learning?

Remote learning has much to offer: families are spending more time

together, kids are playing outside and teachers aren't dealing with discipline. Well, that is the idea anyway.

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At this point though, for many, it hasn't been the reality. What can we do as parents and/or as teachers to turn this paradigm on its head?

I want to offer up some components of online learning that have helped me shift my internal dialogue from an "Uhh. Hmm?" attitude to an "I was born for online learning" frame of mind.

Create a vibe for learning.

To bring learning to life we have to redefine a learning space. Learning can happen anywhere, at any time. Its

boundaries have spilled outside the classroom walls. The learning space is the part of the house where the child puts on their focus face, learning hat and ready-to-rock-this attitude!

The goal of this activity is to create a piece of art students will be proud to hang in their learning space. A piece that can motivate them when they aren't feeling particularly zesty.

Ask students how they want or need to feel in order to learn and be productive.

Have them describe that feeling using the colors, ideas, phrases or words that come to mind when they picture that feeling.

Next, students turn those descriptors into art that represents that feeling. It could be a sculpture, pencil drawing, watercolor, etc.

My students' creations ranged from flow charts to sculptures and more colorful paintings. The binding agent was that they all connected to their art piece in some way and were proud to hang it in their learning spaces as a motivation to feel X, Y or Z.

Help students schedule their time.

We are expecting middle and high school students to balance seven subjects with seven teachers (which translates to seven unique expectations), when in reality we don't even do

that in college. We need to be mindful of the expectations we are placing on kids and help them to schedule tasks so they are successful. Dig deep into a few core ideas – don't skim the surface on every standard.

Release a weekly calendar for students that breaks down assignments into manageable chunks. Each day they tackle a piece of the puzzle. Who can do a 1,000 piece puzzle in one setting? Not I.

Schedule time into your virtual meets for students to write down the days tasks.

Your exit ticket can simply ask students to tell you what the day's expectations are.

Film a short overview video informing students of the week's assignments.

The New Mexico Public Education Department has released an instructional scope that can help to prioritize curricular standards.

Teach the whole child

We need to incorporate emotional intelligence into our lessons daily. Our conversations and lessons should incorporate movement and students' feelings in addition to asking for their understanding. Never has the whole child been a more important part of learning.

Our connection to students, as teachers, is the most powerful teaching tool we have. We have to help students feel connected to one another and to themselves so they don't feel isolated in the remote learning setting.

Incorporate movement in your virtual meets.

Use art to anchor or introduce a new concept. Ask students to make sense of the piece by analyzing the artist's message then transition to how the piece makes them feel.

Empower kids to learn intrinsically. Self-reflections and goal setting should become an important part of each unit. Create student goal-setting sheets by asking students to score themselves on the units learning objectives before and after. As the teacher, give a pre- and postquiz to assess student growth

toward the learning objectives. You can compare the teacher data to the student-crafted data and use it to start meaningful conversations with your students about their progress.

Project-based learning for the win

Screen time can hinder cognitive and emotional development. Children develop from the back of their brain to the front of their brain – from gross motor coordination to more fine motor skills. This development progresses as kids are able to comprehend less concrete and more abstract concepts.

The screen limits this development and keeps kids mostly living in the back of their brain. They aren't forced to create, imagine or use their bodies on a screen. Movement, creation, exploration are critical actions for the developing brain.

After a lesson or unit ask students to apply their learning by assigning a project.

Provide students with choice in the format of the project, but require all students to include the same core concepts.

I am often asked by my colleagues: Where did you find that? My response is always Google (thanks to all those teachers turned bloggers!) Nevertheless, it can be a time investment to scour the internet for curricular jewels so here is a list of some of my favorite project-based go-tos.

BioSTEAM: Students can research, design and create solutions to problems and learn from experts in the Taos community.

UNESCO has a digital library that is rich with resources.

Cornell Institute for Biology Teachers offers hands-on labs and lessons.

Studentdiscover.org has project-based teaching modules.

Teachers Pay Teachers: Many hands-on activities for all ages and all subjects.

Newsela: Find readings already scaffolded by Lexile ranges.

Kaila Pavelka-Dickey is a middle school math and science teacher at Anansi Charter School.



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