

Supporting Distanced Teaching and Learning Through Feedback that Feeds Forward A 4-part Series by Amy Tepper & Patrick Flynn

Part 1: Making the Shift

Schools around the world have made unprecedented shifts from traditional classrooms to online platforms and virtual instruction. For most, the dramatic shift has been overwhelming occurring within a very stressful time. Student equity, accessibility, safety, and wellness, and teachers' and leaders' own needs, home lives, and personal experiences have added to the challenges of implementing a complete transformation of teaching and learning. Districts have worked tirelessly to try to combat equity issues by distributing food, supplies, and devices. Ensuring survival and wellness have been an essential first step in the transition, and will need to remain top-of-mind throughout. Teachers also need immediate tools and resources through which they can design accessible learning experiences for their students.

The outpouring of resources has been nothing short of amazing, from teachers sharing on social media to large companies offering free subscriptions of tools like Zoom. As this occurred, our Corwin editor, Ariel Curry, likened the outpouring to that of a firehose. We know the importance, power, and need for such a tool to ensure immediate mitigation in a crisis. However, there comes a point when we must turn from using a firehose to using a garden hose and begin watering with the purpose of growth.

What is Possible

We know it is difficult (or near impossible) for those in the middle of a crisis to recognize opportunities that arise amid the chaos of launching a whole new delivery system. However, as we move toward tending to our gardens, we may see blooms we did not expect. In our own first few days in the new reality, we drafted these words [in our blog](#):

In the first few weeks of dramatic change it is difficult to have any optimism about our situation or to wake each morning with a positive mindset and an eye towards the future. One perspective we humbly offer, however, is that *“out of necessity grows innovation.”* Many of you have already stretched so far out of your comfort zones out of necessity to include suddenly becoming proficient online teachers, using new tech tools, teaching your own children...learning to live with your college students...You are growing and will emerge from this completely changed in positive ways, as will your students. You have already strengthened your ability and theirs to adapt, problem solve, collaborate, create solutions, and think about others.

Though there will be challenges in the implementation, equity issues to overcome, and personalization required to reach all learners, our new online environment can open a door to different and deeper learning for many of our students. This will require a longer range vision at a time when we are all, rightfully so, focused on the next day, hour, minute.

Since the school closures began, we have been examining research and existing national standards for online learning, and reflecting on our own experiences (Both having designed courses, Amy as a former online teacher and Patrick as an online learner's parent, along with the experiences of those teaching virtually right now. We aligned our work in observation, feedback, and effective teaching and learning,

leveraging strategies from our books, *Feedback to Feed Forward* and *Learner-Focused Feedback*, to address current instructional needs.

In Part 2 of this series, we offer a frame of thinking, or progression, that will allow you to more directly support your learners and teachers. Through this frame you can identify possible pathways for successful implementation of virtual teaching and learning and build a structure for an effective feedback model for growth. To make the shift in how we support teachers, we must understand the skills, dispositions and tools necessary to online teaching and learning.

Supporting Learners in a New Environment

“Learners’ dialogue and activity are often higher in online courses. Learners must do more thinking, writing, doing, sharing, reflecting, collaborating, and peer reviewing as part of a community of learners” (Boettcher and Conrad, 2016).

We already know that many members of our younger generation have existed in the virtual world for much of their childhood and are comfortable with using technology, communicating virtually/ electronically, being on camera, and capturing videos. Many have also engaged in daily classroom experiences and tasks that have strengthened essential skills in 6 global competencies—communication, collaboration, creativity, citizenship, critical thinking and character (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018). The toolbox students are carrying forward from these opportunities will become even more essential in their virtual learning experiences, and the strengthening of these skills will need to remain at the forefront.

To understand how to best support learners in an online environment, we can learn a great deal from our higher education partners who have engaged in and researched virtual learning for years. We can look to effective practices within organizations like Florida Virtual School, one of the original K-12 providers, and seek resources from agencies like the International Organization for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL now [Aurora Institute](#)), [Quality Matters](#), and the [Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance](#), who remain focused on standards for high quality virtual teaching and learning. As we engage in a deeper dive into the standards it becomes clear that successful online learning also requires a broader tool box that many students may not possess yet—namely the understanding, skills, dispositions, and tools for self-direction and ownership of their learning. They will be asked to learn and work offline, sometimes without any adult support and asynchronously, setting their own pace.

We revisited overarching goals for learners originally presented in our book *Learner-Focused Feedback* (2020) that address global competencies and learners’ needs in the future, reconsidering these goals in relationship to standards for online learning. Whether teaching and learning is occurring in face-to-face or virtual classrooms, these can still remain as our guiding principles:

Goal 1: Students need to learn how to think conceptually

Goal 2: Students need to learn now to think about their thinking (metacognition)

Goal 3: Students need to develop the ability to self-regulate and self-monitor

The goals define learners who own their own learning and know how to learn. They are leaders of their own learning (Berger, Rugen, & Woodfin, 2014) or assessment-capable visible learners (Frey, Hattie, Fisher, 2018). These students:

- know where they are going, understanding current performance and how it relates to learning goals and criteria

- have the tools for the journey and know they can select from a range of strategies
- monitor their own progress, seek feedback, and know that making mistakes is expected
- recognize when they are ready for what's next against the learning intention and criteria, and
- know what to do next, including what to do when they do not know what to do (Frey et al., 2018, p. 15).

We realized that learners who know how to learn and who clearly see where they are headed often have high levels of self-efficacy, as they see goals as attainable and experience bite-sized success each day. Just consider the social-emotional impact of this for a moment” (Tepper & Flynn, 2020, p. 46). Through feedback, explicit instruction and modeling, active learning tasks, and scaffolded support, teachers can support students in developing/using the

- **skills** (e.g., ability to set goals and reflect),
- **tools** (e.g., items that convey clear criteria, resources) and
- **dispositions** (e.g., willingness to persevere, reflect, or use resources)

that are critical to their success in a virtual environment and necessary to own their own learning.

Supporting Teachers in New Environments

“Being present digitally for your course is the most fundamental and most important of all the practices...,” followed closely by nurturing a learning community (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016, p. 90-91).

It is challenging to support learners in the development of necessary skills, dispositions, and tools to own their own learning in brick and mortar classrooms, so supporting these now in new environments can feel daunting. Consider three suggested core instructional strategies developed by Boettcher and Conrad (2016) based on Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000). They suggest that teachers can support students by maintaining a:

- Social presence (creating connections with students and families),
- Teaching presence (guiding learning experiences), and
- Cognitive presence (guiding and supporting students’ intellectual growth)

As teachers begin their journey, they may have already found that it is more critical to establish a social presence in the first few days/weeks before shifting their virtual presence and challenging students cognitively.

Additional online teaching strategies Boettcher and Conrad recommend include:

- Developing a set of explicit workload and communication expectations for your learners and yourself
- Using a variety of large group, small group, individual work experiences
- Using synchronous and asynchronous activities
- Asking for feedback [from your students/families]
- Preparing discussion posts that invite responses, questions, discussions, and reflections
- Combining core concept learning with customized and personalized learning [offering choice]
- Rigorously connecting content to core concepts and learning outcomes

You might notice these suggested strategies are ones teachers may already be utilizing or working to refine this year in their classrooms. Through feedback, coaching, peer support and professional learning,

many teachers have been building an understanding of student-centered learning and the necessary instructional

- **skills** (e.g., ability to design rigorous learning targets, support all learners toward that goal),
- **tools** (e.g., creating clear criteria, resources) and
- **dispositions** (e.g., willingness to allow students to engage in productive struggle, to build in time/tasks for reflection and goal setting)

that are now critical to their success as online teachers.

The bottom line is that we can build on existing practices and strengths. To illustrate this, in Figure 1.1 we highlight a few important practices and several aligned Visible Learning influences on student achievement (2020). As you look at each one, ask yourself, “Do these make sense for online teaching and learning?”

Figure 1.1 Crossover Strategies

Practices or Outcomes	Influence & Effect Size
Lessons should be designed around standards-based learning targets and aligned criteria for learning that are clear to students	Teacher Clarity (.75)
Students’ academic, development, emotional, and social needs should be met through resources, groupings, scaffolding, and differentiation/ personalization	Self-efficacy (.92) Concentration/Persistence/ Engagement (.56)
Students should engage in rigorous tasks that build their capacity within the 6 C’s	Transfer strategies (.86) Classroom discussion (.82) Deliberate practice (.79)
Students should be learning to own their own learning, self-assessing, setting-goals, and making adjustments	Self-regulation strategies (.62) Metacognitive Strategies (.60)
Formative assessments should be integrated at critical points in the learning to allow teachers to make adjustments or provide high quality feedback	Feedback (.70)

Teachers can adapt these in a virtual environment to maximize impact on learners and promote student growth. For example, challenges that require adaptation to current teaching practices include:

- uncertainty about students’ environments and wellbeing
- teacher’s learning curve with new tools and systems/time management
- students’ and parents’ learning curve with new tools and systems
- finding or creating tools, applications, and resources for instruction, support, or enrichment
- not seeing or hearing cues from learners as they work/students working offline asynchronously
- reimagining “assessment” and how to use questioning and deliver feedback
- building student independence

At the end of the day, *any* support a leader, coach, or peer can provide to a teacher in these challenging times will make a difference. As we address and meet basic needs for ourselves, students, staff, and families, we can begin to tend to our gardens—moving from our firehose approach to a more targeted watering of resources based on learner and teacher needs. As we develop a better understanding of what effective online teaching and learning can look like, we can begin to identify where each student and learner falls along a progression of use/implementation toward this vision (Part 2 of our series).

Suggested Reading:

Supporting Online Teaching and Learning Through Feedback that Feeds Forward
Part 2: Seeing the Shift as a Progression

Learner-Focused Feedback: 19 Strategies to Observe for Impact (2020), Amy Tepper & Patrick Flynn
Our Three Goals p. 37-46; Examples of Skills, Dispositions, and Tools Figure 2.5 p. 47

NSQ [The National Standards for Quality Online Learning](#)

Quality Matters [K-12 Online Education Rubrics and Certifications](#)

The Online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips.(2016), Judith Boettcher & Rita-Marie Conrad

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