Teaching, whether online or on site, requires a lot of day-to-day activities that make the course run smoothly, help learners solve short-term and longer-term educational problems, and facilitate learners’ achieving their educational objectives. Those tasks are important and immediate; they take up a great deal of your weekly teaching time. The success of implementing a class often depends on these daily tasks.

However, the “aesthetics” of teaching are equally important and can help determine how well the learners enrolled in your courses actually gain knowledge and develop skills. Ideally, you were involved with the course design process, but even if you were not, you still can create an online learning environment where learners feel safe to disclose information about themselves and their work, both to you and to other students. You also can gather information to help with future curriculum development by talking with learners about the course and their major areas of study.
A supportive, professional learning environment cannot be created through the course design alone. A nurturing environment is built when you work well with students and facilitate their educational experiences. This part of the curriculum-implementation process is more esoteric and may be forgotten by teachers who are overwhelmed with the daily tasks described in previous chapters. Nevertheless, you must find time to relate to learners and really think about how the course is coming across to others.

An online class by definition meets electronically, not in a physical classroom. Nevertheless, learners and teachers must feel there is a place that belongs to the class alone. Learning communities, of the class as a whole and of smaller groups of class members, are one way to create this educational space and time. Expecting honesty and ethical standards from learners, and upholding your and your institution’s standards for fairness and equality, are other ways to build an aesthetically pleasing, sound educational environment. The people who come together to take a course, even if their number is limited, should feel secure enough that they can disclose personal information, when appropriate, with others. They should believe that they belong to the online group and have responsibilities to it.

Although throughout the course you probably will deal with issues of academic integrity or class members’ interactions with each other, you should start the course by explaining your expectations for class members and showing by example how to work effectively with other members of the learning community. The aesthetics of teaching may be intangible and subtle, but they affect learners in profound ways. When learners feel secure in a classroom and share information in positive ways, they not only can learn more effectively, but they also build networks of friends and colleagues to further support their academic and professional development.

Creating a Positive Learning Environment within Different Times and Spaces

Online classes vary in the number of learners and the time frame for the course. Some programs continue year round. For example, in the design and structure for one online course, learners may work on their own and turn in assignments to a teacher who evaluates the materials. There are no
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