



Replace the Loss of Transitions With Better Teaching and Learning Practices



INSEAD Initiative for Learning Innovation and Teaching Excellence

We have lost one of everyday life's most vital moments: transitions. They are moments in time when we adjust between changes in our state (from squinting past disheveled hair and pyjamas to smiling with a professional demeanour in work clothes), our feelings (relaxed and playful to tense and concentrated) and our thinking (from freely wandering thoughts to hyper-channeling of facts and stories). These boundary crossing activities are often a result of **micro-role transitions** say between mother and partner to professor. As a professor, here is what your mornings look like without them.

8:00am. You help settle your kids in the common living area to play or homeschool under your partner's supervision. 8:09am. You shuffle over to your home office a few metres in the other direction. 8:10am. You throw on that respectable "Zoom shirt" and gulp down the rest of your coffee. 8:13am. You open the Zoom link to your double or morning session and greet the few early connectors. 8:30am. 50 more students or participants abruptly pop into your room. 11:45am. Almost all at once, 50 people leave your home without any parting words. 11:47am. You change back into something comfortable. 11:50am. Your kids are clamoring for extra homework help (and lunch)!

For learning to happen, the mind needs time to process, map out, rearrange, revisit, and interpret our experiences retroactively. It does this in order to make

the best inferences about those experiences and predictions about what will happen next. These can be deliberate reflections and/or an automatic activity the mind is continually engaging in to make sense of the world. I have observed that these micro-role transitions are when we allow our minds to wander a little. Research suggests that "mind wandering" helps with **creativity** and **personal future goal setting**, both crucial for good teaching and deeper learning.

Transitions for teachers are often moments in time that help them think through successes and challenges, enjoy or mull over warm or distant relationships built in class, feel energised or flattened by what they taught and how students reacted to it. These reflections help to make adjustments later. Transitions for learners, students and participants, are often moments where they construct the narrative of their learning journey. It is a chance to process the how and why of what they learned, and how it's (ir) relevant to them - thoughts that may lead to future questions in following sessions and nuanced decision-making in future roles. Without these transitions, teaching and learning can feel somewhat disorienting.

Right now, during a time of shelter-in-place measures, designers of students' or participants' whole days and professors' teaching must build in transitions for learning to really take place. Instead of simply transposing in-person to online, course designers

need to recognise what technology offers that's new, perhaps better, and integrate what learners and teachers need around it and through it.

Give longer breaks between online courses in a Degree Program or Executive Program's design.

Back-to-back classes online are much more painful and tiring than in person. Learners have no one to sit next to and moan about their fatigue. No new people to meet and greet to momentarily let off steam. No place to get up from, stretch, have a coffee, change their state in thinking and feeling from one class to the next. Without this respite sessions and professors can more easily merge into one.

Give a 10-minute break every hour if you teach more than 90 minutes.

For the same reasons as above, learners need it to allow a change in physical state (at a minimum from sitting to stretching). They need it for a change in mental state (from intensely focusing on knowledge intake and generation inside a small box to relaxing their focus and gazing further out into their homes or out the window).

Use Zoom's BORs - a lot. For group work within the first half an hour of a session, for pair work during a case discussion, for group work again to consolidate learning. These BORs are the ultimate, intimate space for students to be without you, to talk and reflect. Students want to learn from you and they need each other to process their learning, now more than ever.

Don't lecture for 90 minutes straight. Even if you have a technical class. You are bombarding students with discrete pieces of knowledge with little time for processing its meaning. Put some of it online ahead of time (flip class), then use class time to solve basic problems as a whole group, and BOR time to solve harder problems in smaller groups.

Don't disable the chat box for fear of students having side conversations. They're having them anyway in their Telegram or WhatsApp groups. A chat box is a privilege you never had before – imported "texts" about your class have always been used by class students to talk about your session. Now, they can also make meaning out of your materials and connect it to their experience in a structured space that is visible to you. After they click out, it's on to the next moment, so you just have to change your design to allow yourself to check in regularly and tell them so.

Linger before and after a meeting. Online or offline, those informal conversations help students fill in gaps in knowledge, satisfy unanswered questions, and process the course before moving onto the next one.

Flip your class, but not too much. Learners want to be in it together. Ask them to watch no more than 15 minutes of core lecture material that will free up time to deepen dialogue between them and as a group during the whole class time. Now is not the time to reduce your interactions with them or shorten your synchronous sessions. Those synchronous interactions can support deeper analyses and reflections of the lecture.

Ask for submissions of reflections, even in place of assignments. Allow students to be creative in their format. They do not need to write more than two paragraphs or produce the equivalent in images or a video clip. Only require that students comment on one another's work. The reflections can be about anything students learned in your session that connects to something they read, a business problem, a new product, a recent consumer experience. It gives students structured time to digest your session. To have fun. And to bring much needed levity into learning.

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