

Conversation with Devin Carberry

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For educators

- Agility is very important for a team, at all times, but especially when navigating events such as a pandemic: agility should be woven into the DNA of the team – problem finding, problem solving, moving quickly.
- Be intentional about making things work – it requires high level collaboration & resiliency.
- Relationships should be core of everything – establishing effective feedback loops with all players - kids, families & LGs (Learning Guides - teachers) is vital.
- Feedback is important – along with the confidence to trust that feedback.
- Prioritise mental health & wellness of learners: create a community worker role who checks in daily.
- Embed a regular check-in time – for kids & also parents; if any learner still remains distant, try all avenues (friends) to gain engagement. Silence may be a window into someone's emotional state.
- Don't try to translate everything being done in the classroom or learning community online. Working at home is very different. A remote learning programme should optimise fresh opportunities.
- Supporting learners & developing good routines is very important.
- Find ways to *make do* with the resources that might already be at home – e.g. run a *Masterchef* type course using ordinary kitchen ingredients.
- Bring social elements into all aspects of remote learning – it is what the learners want & need.
- The structure of the day & week is very important. At Learnlife, mornings are reserved for academic skill building, knowledge building activities & the afternoon is kept for more high interest, passion-based workshops, mostly undertaken in an asynchronous mode.
- Embed regular discussion times for the LG team. Tackle the topics that will lead to improvements & programme iteration e.g. how to make things more social; how to improve check ins; consider what different pedagogies work best in the online world - discussion-based learning; project-based learning.
- Too much screen time is lethal. Kids & adults both get burnt out. Knowing when to dip in & out is important. Check in regularly, but allow kids to work offline.
- Include 'wild cards' throughout the week for fun. e.g. learner led exercise classes; spontaneous creative activities – helps to keep the community engaged.
- Feedback loop for the LGs important – helping people manage their own stress & anxieties, as well as the kids. Provide a safe space for them to just share.
- Keep a log of which activities are energy-giving & which are energy-draining. Assess all activities through these lens & assess whether the energy expended is worth it.
- Take this rare & unique opportunity to do new things, push the normal timetable aside & adjust whatever goals you had.
- Think divergently about the possibilities that now exist that can create energy.
- The core things: focus on learning, wellness & learner engagement!

What has been important in the shift to online for Learnlife?

- We were lucky because a lot of pre-work did exist before this pandemic. Pre-work was invisible, but very important to the success of moving online. The team were not specifically trained in online learning, because the programme was not offered that way before, but as far as skill sets around tools & technology, there was pre-existing competency across all Learning Guides.
- All of our programmes existed – the documentation, the content curation - using Monday.com. This was already in use, along with the Google suite: all content & schedules were already there.
- Feedback from the parents was really helpful – they were concerned that kids were expected to be in front of their screens for too long. The programme iterated with this feedback. We can't just translate what was done before online. We needed to blend analog with digital.
- Someone from the team became a community manager with the role of checking in with learners & families on a daily basis.
- Provide advice to parents on how to set up an optimal learning at home.
- The parent community has started to host their own virtual get-togethers for themselves as well. It is important for them to have an outlet.
- The learners enjoy talking about their work & sharing photos or videos. This social element is very important.
- There have been plenty of challenges – just getting some kids to turn up in the check ins & out of bed. It does give a window into their emotional state. Each learner has someone who checks in daily with either them or their parents. If that didn't work, we went via their friends. Persistent effort meant that we re-engaged most.
- Afternoon activities have plenty of choice: e.g. the book club; science in your home; watching a Netflix show & discussing it. We get the feedback that learning new skills in a fun way & a social way has been exciting for them. However, they still want the consistency of knowing they are engaging in deeper learning in other ways as well.
- Group chats work well – the kids ask for them & it demonstrates their desire to share & keep engaged. This process was already embedded in what was called 'real talk' in a face to face context. In this situation now where everyone is working from home, the same touch point has been important. A lot of one-on-one calls to help those struggling. We should not view children as just brains who need input. We need to have a broader model where we view the whole child & their needs.