



What Hill Should We Die on For Remote Learning?

By Educator Barnes – August 21, 2020

Remote learning is not new. There have been virtual schools before the pandemic. What is new is that schools that have not offered remote learning have been forced into the virtual world and are trying to determine best practices to implement. Teachers and administrators have had different opinions on what is best. Here are some of the highly debated topics.

Should video cameras be on or off?

Many schools are demanding that students have their cameras on while on Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams. The argument for cameras being on is so teachers can check for understanding and see what students are doing. The argument against cameras being on is that students might be in a home environment they don't want classmates or their teacher to see. Different from when schools abruptly closed, students are being asked to be on camera for longer periods of time. Stephen Steven Hickman, Psy.D., executive director of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, wrote an article that addressed [Zoom fatigue](#) and how to manage, so the home environment is not the only issue.

Honestly, I enjoy seeing my middle school students' faces when I am observing their teachers on Zoom, but I also know there is more than one way to check for understanding outside of a visual. Students can respond in the chat. If a teacher does thumbs up or thumbs down, a student could type 'b' for thumbs up and 'p' for thumbs down. Yes, it is easier to see how students are doing, but if a student is refusing to turn on the camera, the best approach is to speak to the student one-on-one to learn why and then try to problem solve. That could look like the student putting up a photo so the teacher can at least learn the child's name with the face. It could be problem-solving where the student can sit so he or she feels comfortable turning on the camera. Last, it could be an option of having the camera on for certain parts of the class. Teachers should start with problem-solving first.

Should students follow a certain dress code?

The argument for the dress code centers around students maintaining the same dress code standards for in-person school while at home. The argument against a dress code is that educators are overreaching their boundaries in an effort to control what someone wears in his or her home. As long as students are covered and not wearing something that is distracting, I do not believe we should make students wear uniforms if their school has them or follow a dress code. By distracting, I mean offensive words on a shirt such as profanity or clothing that is see-through. Other than that, I am happy students are in class. I do not need to worry about what they are wearing. If teachers make this an issue, then teachers will have to figure out the consequences. With the limited time we have right now, making consequences for the dress code is not the best use of our time.

Should we assess students and assign homework?

The argument for assessing students and giving homework is so teachers know where students are so they can plan their lessons. Assigning homework gives students the opportunity to practice what they have learned. The argument against assigning homework has been that parents may be helping too much. I'm not entertaining any arguments against assessment because you really have to know where your students are to make lesson plans. The teacher should communicate with parents to not help their children. Instead, give parents tips such as have their children rewatch the lesson. Most schools are requiring teachers to record and post the lesson online afterward. Teachers could also suggest students review notes or reread the lesson on the learning management platform.

Should we shift the focus from academics to social-emotional learning?

The argument for making SEL the main focus is that we are all living through a pandemic. It has taken an emotional toll. The argument against making SEL the main focus is that students have lost leaning due to the pandemic. Both are needed. One is not more important than the other. We need compassion, and we need to address the whole child while making sure the child is learning.

Some hills we should not die on. There is the saying that rules are meant to be broken. For every rule we make, some students will test the boundaries and break them. Then there would need to be a consequence for students not following expectations. Unfortunately, not following rules during remote learning is leading to virtual suspensions in some places. Students are inviting teachers into their homes. Teachers and administrators need to be mindful and focus on what they can control. At the end of the day, some teachers could not control students when they were on campus, so how are they really going to crack down the hammer when students are at home? Knowing this, we should work with families and not make remote learning more challenging than it needs to be. Making sure students have access and are learning is the only hill we should die on for remote learning.