



INCLUSION IN REMOTE TEACHING CONTEXTS

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Introduction

Remote learning can be difficult for everyone, but it can be especially difficult for vulnerable communities. These communities already experience many inequalities and switching to remote learning can create new issues. This guide describes the ways that access and engagement can be blocked in remote learning and suggests practical ideas to increase learning opportunities for all.

Understanding barriers to access and engagement

- **Language and literacy**

Minority-language speakers and people with low literacy levels are at risk of being excluded from remote delivery. This is because they may not have the language or literacy skills they need to access the information. Students in education systems where English is the medium of instruction (EMI), but not the home language, might be even further excluded from learning materials. If their parents don't speak English, they won't be able to support the students' learning.

- **Gender**

During emergencies and when schools are closed, some families may believe that education is not important or that it has less value than other work or carer responsibilities. Girls and young women are often under more pressure as caregivers, and might have less time for study or work. Girls and especially boys might be encouraged to work outside the house instead of continuing their education with remote learning. In some cases, male family members might be given more opportunities to use digital devices (e.g. a phone or laptop) than female family members.

- **Different educational needs**

'Assistive technology' is designed to improve access to information and learning. It can be an enabler for home learning, if disabled and non-disabled learners have access to the types of technology they need. Physically disabled students may need expensive hardware to take part in online or other remote learning. Students with other needs might require constant support and supervision from an adult to do their schoolwork – parents might not be able to provide this. Many teachers are unaware of how aspects of widely used technology can exclude learners who have different educational needs.

- **Socio-economic and geographic exclusion**

Students from schools and families with a lot of money and resources often have the hardware and internet connections to support remote learning. However, many families will not have access to the resources they need. This includes large families with children who each need an individual device to continue learning. People living in refugee settlements, rural areas or poor communities will be disadvantaged even more.

Ideas for inclusive remote teaching and learning

Below are some general tips which can help to make your remote teaching more inclusive. Even if the tips don't seem relevant to your current class, they are good habits to develop. When we consider accessibility for some, everyone benefits. Think of a ramp – people in wheelchairs benefit, but so do people with prams, cyclists, tired people with shopping, those with low vision, etc. Equally, the inclusive tips below will help a lot of different people in a lot of different ways.

Understanding your students

- Contact students and their parents or caregivers on a one-to-one basis to identify any barriers to learning or additional support needs. This is the most important starting place.

Increasing the accessibility of your materials and resources

- Add Alt-text to pictures on Microsoft Office documents like MS PowerPoint and MS Word. This is a description of the picture (or caption) that helps people understand what the picture is about.
- Capitalise hashtags. Write #ChangeMakers instead of #changemakers.
- Avoid text boxes in MS Word documents. Screen readers can't read these, and they can cause confusion for others.
- Avoid using images of text. These cannot be read by screen readers or Google Translate.
- Use a 70 per cent difference in contrast and consider the minimum font size as 12pt.
- Avoid using colour only to add emphasis to text as many people will not pick this up.
- Use clear, formatted headings and lists to help students navigate your document.
- When creating presentations, use the reading order: slide title, subtitle, body text/content, slide number and footer.
- Use audio messages and text messages in combination where possible.
- Learn how to create accessible documents in MS Office (see links below).

Teaching inclusively via videoconferencing

- Turn off the students' cameras if you need to save data.
- Send materials in advance of events to give participants preparation time.
- Ask participants if they have any access or engagement requirements.
- Use names in discussions to help others follow the conversation.
- Use breakout rooms to allow for group support.
- All participants should be encouraged to fully participate in a variety of ways, but individuals have the right to opt out of certain activities. How will you manage this sensitively?
- If you use videos, the videos should have subtitles or a transcript.
- Whenever possible, do a practice session with students and parents to demonstrate how to access the events/materials and how to participate fully (e.g. muting their microphone, using the chat function, raising their hand, going into breakout rooms).
- Verbally describe diagrams and images that appear on slides.
- Note that use of the chat box can be distracting for those using screen readers.

Useful links

- Accessibility in MS Word: <https://bit.ly/RTTMSWord>
- Accessibility in Zoom: <https://bit.ly/RTTZoomAccessibility>