

Using Virtual Spaces to Promote Equity, Inclusivity, and Learning

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Core Aspects of Learning

Learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978)

- Interactions and language use as a shared experience
- Students as active agents
- Peer interactions
- Multicultural learning environments

Virtual Spaces

Digital collaboration and community-building platforms

- Discord, Zoom, Teams
- Discord provides the environment most similar to a physical classroom (Drange & Kargaard, 2017)
 - Permanent text conversations
 - Video chatting for more than two individuals simultaneously
 - Multiple text channels and permanent voice channels
 - Screen sharing
 - Reduced response time

Common issues in the classroom environment

Students are too self-conscious and are unwilling to participate

- Generation Z students tend to feel more at ease in online communities and prefer text-based communication more than earlier generations (Chunta et al., 2021)

The students are mostly passive and seem to lack motivation to learn

- Increased levels of student activity, interaction, and motivation in the classroom (Arifianto and Izzudin, 2021; Kruglyk et al., 2020; Lacher & Biehl, 2019; Wulanjani, 2018)

The students feel alienated in the classroom when they do not have any friends and

- Community building through off-topic channels (Wiles & Simmons, 2022)

Students do not seek help even though it is explicitly encouraged

- Increased help-seeking behavior (Wiles & Simmons, 2022)

How do virtual spaces promote equity and inclusivity?

Accessibility

- No barriers to entry – completely free
- Compatible with a lot of portable devices without high system requirements

Low participation barriers

- Introvert, anxious, neurodivergent, non-native

Multiple ways to engage

- Mix of text, audio, visuals, polls, reactions, etc.
- Respects learning preferences and abilities

Student voice and belonging

- Students as active agents in co-creating their own channels and discussion topics
- Dedicated spaces for affinity groups or interest-based discussions

Thank you!