

Feminist Pedagogy in a Time of Coronavirus Pandemic

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FemTechNet, a network of scholars, artists, and students working on, with, and at the borders of technology, science, and feminism, has a great deal of experience thinking about pedagogy and technology. We have produced real intimacy, vibrant classes, and insurgent pedagogy since 2012. The principles of our signature Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs) are crucial (see below). In this time of crisis, we believe we need to think again, drawing the most power possible from the radical knowledges, tactics, and commitments of feminist pedagogies of past experience.

We write while schools, colleges, and universities have closed in a cascade of fear and also care in the hope of minimizing coronavirus infections. Mandated social distancing is critical, but difficult emotionally to sustain. At the same time, almost all campus authorities are requiring that classes be moved to an “online environment” to maintain physical distance. Most institutions are offering complicated, highly corporate, and narrow advice about how to teach online. While rapid conversion to standardized and detached Silicon Valley-type approaches is the prominent option, we have learned how quality instruction takes time, connection, careful planning, collaborative approaches, and local know-how.

Many are expressing dismay over “migrating” our courses with such a brief time for preparation. Many feel at a loss, not just technically, but also pedagogically. Many are also precariously employed and have little access to institutional support. This statement is not about HOW to teach classes online, but how to do this WELL, that is thoughtfully and with principles, and with the support that is at hand. We recognize that it’s not “the same” as face-to-face teaching, and we don’t know how it’s different (yet). However, FemTechNet can offer some ways we have learned to make digital learning work well. Here are some insight from 8 years of working together as teachers, scholars, students, artists, technologists, and feminists.

What We Have Learned as an International Network Over 8 years

- What we have is the possibility for **distributed** learning, and in real time (or in asynchronous time, see below). Worthwhile exchanges can take place across surprising distances and differences.
- We encourage “**minimum viable courses**”: by this we do not mean Less; it’s an opportunity to rethink what a class is and could be. For now, simpler is better.
- They call it “distance learning,” but it can be **intimate**, horizontal, distributed, online, in real life learning.

- Migrating a class into **domestic space** changes all interactions.
- Everyone is in a digital space. Admit that it's a **new experience** for you all.
- Foster skepticism about **techno-solutionism** and the visibility of corporations who are promising a new normal.
- **Everyone** has something important to add to a class. Digital learning can help us discover or allow this.
- (Options for) **asynchronous** learning can be helpful for anyone who has responsibilities outside of work or school. Being **co-present** should be extended in the spirit of hospitality, not enforced as a demand.
- Consider **labor practices** as you work as student, staff, or teacher: you should be doing less at work (or at school), for now, so you have the time and energy to care for yourself and your community.
- Audio works just fine while **opening accessibility** to those without access to broadband and allowing for some privacy and distance. Help people to figure out how they choose to safely display their digital presence and how they negotiate online performance. Accessibility is a core principle.
<http://femtechnet.org/publications/accessibility-report/>
- Digital learning allows for exciting ways to **connect**, including pen pal classes, offering and accepting guest lectures by writers or scholars of what you are reading or learning about. Try reading aloud during class. Classes can connect with other classes all over the world. See FemTechNet's "Key Learning Projects":
<https://femtechnet.org/get-involved/self-directed-learners/key-learning-project>.

Things to Consider as You Move Your Teaching Online

Uneven resources always exist, but the move online makes this structural inequality more obvious.

A variety of needs for privacy should always be accommodated in learning communities. An online class is not the same thing as a class with physical persons gathered to learn together in a brick and mortar classroom in real time and physical space.

You don't have a "flipped classroom." You no longer have a classroom at all!

Reject calls to highlight prestige, peer institutions, and imitation of star systems on other campuses and instead explore what is needed and best about where you work and then also foster connections across difference.

Embrace DIY peer-to-peer improvised faculty and student connections, as did the first FemTechNet connected classes: <https://femtechnet.org/docc/>

Reject the push and rush to "learn" the technology; do this in your own way; admit that you are learning as you go.

The supposedly "born digital" generation needs just as much help as others. Your online course is not simply about imparting information in one direction.

Consider what co-presence means in any learning situation and how we relate to each other newly through screens and with various technologies.

Consider how international students can be supported in a time of widespread anti-Asian racism.

Consider how to recognize and thank everyone who is participating in the class.

Online experiences can be unsafe. Please see our resources at the **Center for Solutions to Online Violence** at <http://femtechnet.org/csov/>.

Differences around race, class, nationality, gender, sexuality, and ability don't disappear in online environments. Online experience is as racist and sexist and homophobic as anywhere else.

Feminists have been thinking about digital learning since its inception. Please see our white paper on **Transforming Higher Education with Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs): Feminist Pedagogies and Networked Learning** <http://femtechnet.org/about/white-paper/>

Feminist Collectivity is fierce, diverse, and creative.

See our **manifesto** <http://femtechnet.org/publications/manifesto/>.

Here's how it begins:

FemTechNet is committed to making the accessible, open, accountable, transformative and transforming educational institutions of our dreams. We are feminist academic hacktivism.

FemTechNet understands that technologies are complex systems with divergent values and cultural assumptions. We work to expand critical literacies about the social and political implications of these systems.

FemTechNet is cyberfeminist praxis: we recognize digital and other technologies can both subvert and re-inscribe oppressive relations of power and we work to make these complex relations of power transparent.

Accountability is a feminist technology.

Collaboration is a feminist technology.

Collectivity is a feminist technology.

Care is a feminist technology.