The Transition to Online Physical Education

We are certainly in unique times. Suddenly, thousands of teachers and millions of students have been thrust into the world of online education. As the Health and Physical Education Content Specialist at Cobb Virtual Academy in Marietta, GA for three years, I oversaw the instructors and over 1000 HPE students annually in online courses. One thing I learned quickly is that teaching online is vastly different than teaching face-to-face. In fact, many fantastic face-to-face teachers struggle in the online world and vice versa. With the extraordinary circumstances putting many teachers in an uncomfortable position, I will share some tips I gathered along my journey.

Have a central hub for learning – Students will not be showing up to your gym each day. Without a classroom, you will need to create your virtual classroom! Whether it is your school's platform, your district's learning management system, or creating your own website, make sure you have a "place" for your students to go. There are many simple and free website builders to choose. In this situation, don't stress about the "glitz". Make sure it is functional and easy for students and parents to navigate.

Communication is critical – Communication will be key because students won't be able to hear the tone of your voice or read your body language when you communicate. Create a method for students and parents to reach you. Options would include email, phone, Remind, or other learning tool. Be concise and to the point with your communications. If you direct students or parents to a resource, provide "click by click" instructions rather than saying "look on the website". A communication with students/parents should come from you at least every other day.

Have a face – Create a way to communicate with students at least once a week via video. It could be live or a brief recorded message. This puts a "face" to the teacher in a strictly online course, but for our students who know us it gives them a sense of comfort and normalcy. Consider utilizing a platform like Flipgrid that allows students to submit recorded messages to interact with you and classmates. There are safeguards so teachers can preview messages before they are posted. Tools like Anchor allow teachers to create audio messages that are accessible by clicking a link. FreeConferenceCall.com and Google Hangouts allow for live video conferencing with recording, too.

Keep "office hours" – Your students now have flexibility and won't come to you at 9:05 AM every day. Be ready to answer questions all the time and check your communication tool often. They may work on your class at 8:00 PM at night and have a question. Setting office hours, such as 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM each day gives them a time that they know you will be available. It also provides some normalcy to your day! Additionally, set hours that you are NOT available. For example, you may not be available between 9:00 PM and 8:00 AM. This gives you the opportunity for "down" time.

Learn some tech support – Some students/parents will gravitate to the online environment easily and others will struggle. Just like we can't give up on them in our physical classrooms, we must support them in this new setting. Familiarize yourself with any online tools that you utilize so you can provide solutions. "Googling" the issue is a wonderful way to troubleshoot problems. However, telling a student/parent to "figure it out" is not an option. Some of the tools listed in "Have a face" above have options for screen sharing which can be very valuable in solving tech issues. Flexibility will be paramount since our students did not sign up for an online class. Be prepared to figure out solutions to tech issues that students may have. Also, remember not all students have reliable internet or device access.

These are just a few of the adjustments that teachers will need to make over the coming weeks to transition to online learning. In the scramble to provide lessons to our students, many teachers have posted content online to share. Remember to vet this content thoroughly to make sure it is grade level appropriate, based on standards and learning outcomes, and best teaching practices. Finally, feel free to contact me with any questions I may be able to answer for you moving into the online teaching environment!