

Physical Workspaces

Many teachers have experience working remotely and have found that their physical workspace impacts online teaching. A physical teaching space allows you to deliver your online lessons in an environment that can look like an actual classroom to engage your students. Designing a purposeful space can help you increase your productivity, promote your focus, and make sure that there are not any added distractions on your end to affect your students.

1. What challenges have you had creating a physical workspace to teach online?
2. What similarities and differences exist between face-to-face and online physical workspace environments?
3. What elements of a physical workspace are essential for blended and online learning, for both me and my students?



to Consider

Having a deliberately designed physical workspace is foundational for successful online teaching and learning. Physical workspaces should support teachers and students in being productive and maintaining focus on the learning at hand. A functional physical workspace does not need to be spacious, but it needs to be safe and secure. A suitable physical workspace can be any place with all necessary equipment and all teaching and learning-related essentials within reach.

A teacher's physical workspace must support both a teacher's pedagogical and technological needs. Any physical environment that will be seen by students should be developmentally appropriate for students. Teachers can make their environment reflect the lesson instruction by utilizing pictures in the physical or virtual background, such as having an image of the water cycle in the background when teaching about this topic. Additionally, utilizing text in the background might enhance student engagement and understanding, but be sure to consider students' developmental level when determining text. Showing or using manipulatives or objects related to the lesson is another way to engage and connect with students during video conferencing.

It is important for teachers to communicate openly and honestly with students about their physical workspace. Teachers should help students understand the teacher is teaching in a non-school setting, and there may be things that teachers cannot control within the physical space, such as a dog that barks. Then, if something happens during an online session, students will not be surprised and can continue with the instruction without extended interruption. It is also important to consider requirements of online teaching, such as stable internet and adequate technology. While technology equipment choices are often decided by school leadership, teachers may choose to supplement provided equipment. Some teachers find it beneficial to utilize a secondary computer monitor to extend their display or a green screen background. In some cases, schools might have funds to purchase desired additional technology equipment, so reach out to school leadership before personally purchasing additional equipment. When using or choosing equipment, connect the equipment to its instructional focus. The instructional focus and delivery format should drive technology tool selections.

Teaching online is different from face-to-face teaching. Both teachers and students get tired of staring at their computer screens. Taking breaks during online teaching and learning is a must, and allows teachers and students to rest their eyes, stay energized, and refocus their teaching and learning. Teachers can plan two-minute stretch breaks during synchronous video conferencing sessions or include independent physical activities into their asynchronous instruction. Creating a safe and useful physical teaching and learning space is linked to positive outcomes, including productivity, focus, and engagement.

KEY Elements