



# Diminishing the Distance in Distance Learning: Developing a Relationship-Based, Online Course

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## Background

Infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) is a dynamic field at the crossroads of medicine, education, mental health, and other fields. Faculty from **Family and Child Nursing** collaborated with the **Early Childhood and Family Studies** program to develop an undergraduate distance learning course in IECMH.

As **Teaching Technology Fellows**, we aimed to connect our content with diverse audiences of learners -- those just entering fields (traditional undergraduates) and those already engaged in frontline practice (e.g., child care providers). We taught a purely online as well as hybrid version of the course back-to-back.

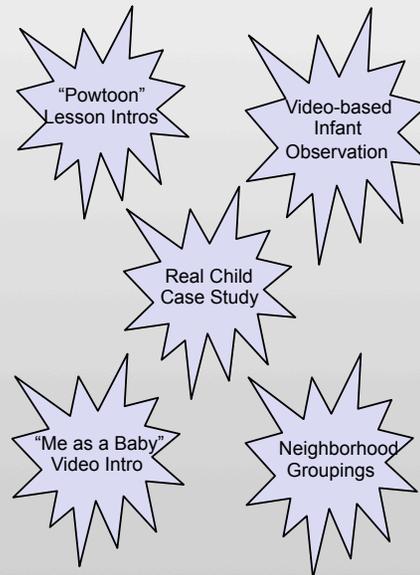
## Questions

Key questions for us included:

- What are best practices to maintain a **relationship-based approach** to teaching this content online?
- What are best strategies to **utilize video** and effective learning activities?
- What are best online (and in class) practices to **increase students' reflective capacity** (ability to consider experience of the other as well as their own experience in the moment)?



## Online Teaching Methods



## Evaluation Methods

To assess impact on student learning, we reviewed:

- Canvas **course analytics** (e.g., page views and participation);
- Qualitative changes in **discussion posts** over time; and
- **Reflective feedback** from students

In the spirit of reflective practice, we developed a short survey that we posted on the course website. 17 students completed it.

For purposes of continuous evaluation of learning, **qualitative change in student posts** was most illuminating. Maintaining a consistent weekly schedule and format made the learning readily visible.

## Reflective Feedback Survey

### Reflective Feedback Survey for NSG 432 A

Directions: We value your reflections. In the spirit of reflective practice, please help us reflect about this course, your own learning, and our teaching this quarter.

- *Tell us about your experience in neighborhood forums. How well did this structure and peer experience support your learning?*
- *Tell us about your experience with instructor grading feedback and online discussion. How well did this structure and interaction with instructors support your learning?*
- *Tell us about course content you liked most and/or found most useful to your learning. Why?*
- *Tell us about course content you least liked and/or did not find useful to your learning? Why?*
- *What advice would you give students who take this course in the future?*
- *Other comments about your experience taking this course:*



## Results

**Canvas Course Analytics.** Examining student page views and participation was nominally helpful when concerned about an individual's performance. Analytics showed lower levels of views and online participation for student performing poorly.

**Reflective feedback survey.** Several themes emerged across feedback survey responses:

- **Neighborhoods** were uniformly viewed as assets to learning
- Surprise and satisfaction at seeing their **weekly improvement in posts**
- Appreciated **specificity of rubrics and feedback**
- **Infant observations** and a quarter-long **case study** uniformly supported understanding and application of key IECMH concepts
- Appreciation for **self-reflective focus** of the course

## Discussion

Something seemed to "click" in the work of many students at about Lesson 6 (of 10). We speculate improvement in observations and other posts was linked to consistency of practice, as well as attentive early feedback. Students' words (from surveys) best answer our guiding questions:

**What are best practices to maintain a relationship based approach to teaching this content online?**

### Creating Neighborhoods

*I really liked the smaller groups of peers. I think we connect better when we have smaller group because you get to know people better.*

*I appreciated the neighborhood forums and especially those when we were invited to comment and challenge one another. I often benefited from the feedback as well as gained new insight...*

### Relational feedback

*The grading feedback was invaluable. I could see my growth throughout the quarter. I felt respected and valued, which ultimately supported my learning...*

*I realize now that instructor feedback helped guide my own awareness of myself...*

**What are best strategies to utilize video and effective learning activities?**

*I found doing the infant observations to be eye opening. It was helpful to realize how many feelings go into making a simple observation.*

*Use of Powtoons to introduce the course and each lesson, as well as the "Me as a Baby" introductory video exercise.*

**What are best online practices to increase students' reflective capacity?**

*Though I resisted at first, I did enjoy reflecting on my reaction to children and their families. Understanding my own feelings will help me as I continue to work with children and families.*

*You learn so many different perspectives in this this quarter, be prepared to see things differently and reflect on your own self.*

*Be prepared for a lot of reading and a lot of emotions, but it is so very rewarding when can begin to piece it all together and implement it into your daily practices.*