

Asynchronous Connections

Laura Torres, MfA Master Teacher

High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology

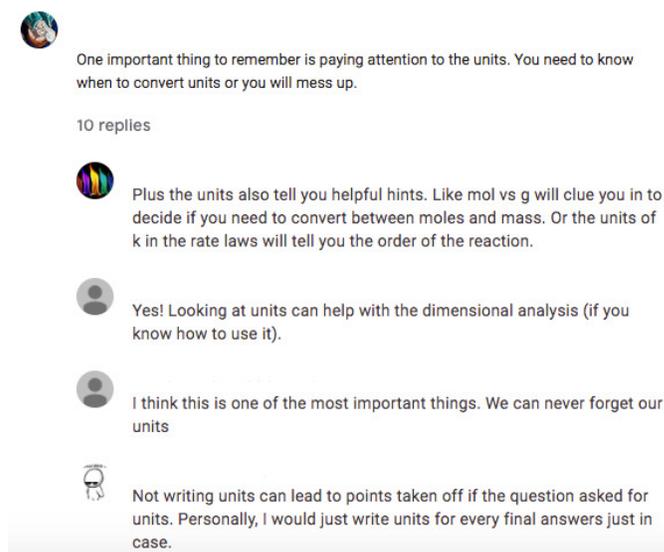
Laura knew the value of the feedback that students hear from each other in the classroom and how those moments work to build a community of learners. When she transitioned to remote teaching, Laura was limited to one voice at a time in Zoom and Google Meets, but she wanted to make sure there was a place where students got to hear from each other and build on one another's thinking. This led Laura to think about asynchronous communication using Google Classroom.

"Technically or timewise, something didn't work. Whenever I tried a different platform, my students would get confused and it would all add up to the stress of it. I think they liked that everything lived in Google Classroom and that was good."

► How did Laura use asynchronous communication to build community?

Laura added an assignment each week in Google Classroom where students would write a takeaway from the week's lessons using the 'question' item under the 'create' tab. Once they had submitted their own, students would see everyone else's post and be given the opportunity to add on and comment on their classmate's takeaways. This gave Laura's students the opportunity to react and build upon each other's thinking. At first, the replies students gave to each other were fairly stiff, but as students became more familiar with the format, Laura found that the replies became more genuine, and that students were able to connect with each other in a way that they weren't beforehand.

"I would start with the idea of trying to build community from the beginning [of the year] with very low stakes stuff. ... A few of them [low stakes questions] to get to know each other a little bit more, that space is there."



The screenshot shows a discussion thread in Google Classroom. The main post is from a user with a blue profile picture, stating: "One important thing to remember is paying attention to the units. You need to know when to convert units or you will mess up." Below this post are four replies from other users, each with a different profile picture. The replies discuss the importance of units in chemistry, specifically mentioning dimensional analysis and rate laws. The thread is titled "10 replies".

Discussions like this one helped Laura build community in her classroom.

► To start making asynchronous connections a part of your remote classroom try following these two pieces of advice:

1. It's useful to model the type of discourse that you want students to have, and to check in a few times over the first few weeks to post comments until it becomes a norm. Laura found that replying and adding to the conversation as the week went by helped keep the conversation going and allowed students to see she had taken the time to read what they had to say.
2. Laura suggests attaching a grade or expectation to the boards - she had a participation grade based on posting an initial remark and commenting on two other people's posts. This communicated to students that they were expected to not only voice what they were learning, but to listen to each other as well.

"That space was open - if they reached it Tuesday at midnight, that was fine because ... I didn't need to be there. The rest of the class doesn't need to be there. But then when the next person saw it on Thursday, they could respond. So it was interesting that it was an open board for them to say things that was kept open and I could comment too, and it felt a lot more intimate. It opened their ability to at least see what other students were thinking that week."