

# Quadrivium Networking Topic: What are the ethical considerations that have come to the fore in this time of increased distance learning (online, blended, virtual environments)?

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## **Introduction**

Over the past year, due to the Covid Pandemic, schools from around the world have had to adapt to remote teaching and learning models. This quadrivium discussion is focused on the ethical considerations that schools and teachers have had to work through during this difficult time.

## **Overview of the Main Topic Ideas**

This Quadrivium had 3 overarching threads that developed through our discussion. The themes involved

- Ethical considerations within the teacher to student realm using remote tools such as Zoom, Zoom fatigue etc.
- Assessment ethical consideration as to how valid and reliable grading can be in these circumstances, and
- Equity issues with regards to students with lack of access to internet resources.

## ***Teacher/Student Privacy***

The first consideration that was discussed involved the issues surrounding teacher and student comfort and privacy. Many teachers and students were working from home which caused challenges of distractions but also feelings of uncomfortableness, especially with web cameras. While many teachers like seeing students on the other end to make sure they are present and engaged, it can cause discomfort with regards to backgrounds and distractions. Also, some teachers felt like they were “spying” on students since, if they saw something inappropriate at home, it would be their duty to report it to proper authorities.

Suggestions for alleviating these issues involve rules to make cameras use optional; attendance and engagement can be measured through text chat and voice. Other suggestions were using tools like Padlet and Mentimeter to engage students live time.

Another solution is to show and expect students to have

a background image to mask their real life surroundings: there were some suggested resources like Canva for creating these backgrounds. Another privacy option was to use a program called Animaze Us which creates an avatar over the top of a person on video.

Also, communication with parents is key to make sure home set up can be as stress free and positive as possible; one of the suggestions was to discuss proactively with students and families to find a common agreement about camera use. This will help to build a trusting relationship with home as well.

## ***Assessment Obstacles***

The next topic that was addressed involved assessment issues around remote learning. With all of the challenges of remote learning is it fair and accurate to assess students in any meaningful way? Some time was spent discussing student use of outside help to write papers. Students’ use of someone else’s work is a difficult challenge and one that is nearly impossible to completely overcome, but some suggestions and strategies were discussed. Many of the participants suggested that Summative Assessment, Grades, scores etc. should be avoided and Formative Assessment (non-graded, feedback oriented) assessment should be practiced since it is nearly impossible to get reliable formative data. The notion of student attention and engagement due to remote learning challenges also was brought up. Can we expect learning progress when students have “Zoom Fatigue” or reduced bandwidth that affects learning?

## ***Digital Equity***

This is probably one of the ethical questions that has been discussed within many educational communities. While the problem is easy to define, the solutions have complexity of public and private sector involvement. While time didn’t permit for a deep dive into this

discussion as far as what could be done across governmental and various country initiatives, we talked mostly about teacher solutions. Many involved using asynchronous options for lessons and instruction. Zoom lessons need to be live time but videos lessons recorded earlier and shared to students as they can get access is one possibility to alleviate differences in bandwidth between students. This, of course, has some limitations in a completely remote session because teachers may not be able to interact live. However if there are other communication options like cell phones, this may still be possible.

### Conclusions

The Covid Pandemic has forced schools and educators to use a variety of remote learning tools. With these tools have come ethical challenges as well as some silver linings. The ethical considerations we discussed focused on challenges with privacy issues and personal comfort of students, teachers, and even parents. Teachers expressed numerous potential pitfalls, especially of having cameras on. Many of these challenges can be managed by being flexible about use of cameras for students. Another consideration that generated significant discussion was the notion of assessment over remote learning. The difficulties for preventing cheating fell under this umbrella. Many of the suggestions for best practice were to reconsider the importance of scoring and traditional assessment means. Many felt it was possible to assess students without traditional methods of multiple choice tests etc. and using more creative measures like writing, scripting, and digital creations. The third ethical consideration involved the topic of equity. Since many students were remote, some students didn't have the same internet, hardware, or computers which would affect learning and communication from teacher to student. There were general conversations about government and private enterprise developing internet and technology access for all. Some potential solutions for this were to lessen the need for bandwidth by providing asynchronous options. The conversation had a lot of thoughtful comments and suggestions on the challenges of remote learning but also the successful strategies.

### Resources Discussed:

- Make Backgrounds using Canva's Free background creator

- <https://www.canva.com/>
- Zoom backgrounds from famous BBC shows. [https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/empty\\_sets\\_collection/zfvy382](https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/empty_sets_collection/zfvy382)
- Becky Howard, "patchwork writing"
- [Huberman Lab Video series on Neuroscience](#)
- "Huberman Lab." <https://www.hubermanlab.com/>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021.
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- "Zoom: Video Conferencing, Web ...." <https://zoom.us/>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021.
- "Padlet." <https://padlet.com/>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021.
- "Mentimeter." <https://www.mentimeter.com/>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021.
- "Canva." <https://www.canva.com/>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021.
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