



## **In My Class, It's Less Me and More You** ***Centering Student Learning With InSpace***

Educators who care deeply about effective online learning -- about reaching across distance to connect with, guide, and support students along their learning journey -- know in our bones that sometimes, you just have to do whatever it takes to make it work. We teach within the constraints of what exists in order to make learning happen as successfully as it possibly can in an imperfect world. We do this because we believe in the power of learning, and because we know that it can transform lives.

Certainly, educators lived this experience over the past year when Covid-19 forced many of us out of the familiar and pushed us into new, often uncomfortable online terrain. We learned to use new digital tools. We transformed synchronous experiences into asynchronous ones. We redesigned in-person learning moments to happen on screens. We rethought entrenched grading policies, out of consideration for the very real life-and-death experiences our students often faced that prevented them from submitting classwork on time. The digital teaching tools we had at our disposal weren't perfect -- in fact, let's face it: some of them were downright terrible. Somehow, though, we just stepped up and got it done. We made it work because we had to, and because we cared.

It's what teachers do.

After a year and a half of teaching and learning this way, of making do and of getting it done, some of us have paused to ask how all of this could be better -- because as educators who constantly strive and push ourselves to grow, we know it could always be better. What if the tools educators used to design and implement online learning could do more? What if they better-supported our humanity, and the humanity of learners? What if their design specifically centered learning? What if they were actually intuitive and easy to use?

InSpace offers all of us a glimpse of just that, of something better. A tool designed by educators for educators, InSpace centers student learning first and foremost -- because that's what educators want. The platform enables interactions which more authentically mirror human learning experiences, by cultivating virtual learning spaces that specifically and intentionally grow student agency while giving teachers the capacity to truly put student learning first. InSpace places student-centered learning at the very heart of its design.

How does InSpace do all of this? Let's listen to the voices of students who have experienced it themselves. They explain all of this better than we ever could.

# Movement

*"I feel like InSpace mimics the feel of being in the classroom by enabling me to move and interact with other students much easier than Zoom."*

Unlike many other video conferencing platforms, InSpace gives each person who uses the tool the capacity to move themselves around the screen without constraints. There is no grid controlling the position of people on the screen. Rather, there is utter freedom to move, stop, and move again. Each person who enters the InSpace learning environment finds themselves inhabiting a small circular bubble which they can click and drag around the entire screen at any given moment -- just as you might move around in your physical environment.

*"I like that we can move our icons around when needing to split into groups or when we do class exercises; it makes it much easier than individual break-out rooms."*

Teachers can put these free movement abilities to their best pedagogical advantage. They can design activities in which students move themselves to specific parts of the screen to complete specific tasks, just as they might have students move around a physical classroom in an in-person learning experience. Students can pair up, complete exercises, and move around the screen to rejoin the group just as they would move around in an in-person space.

## Interaction

*“We also found out that you can have multiple concurrent conversations in one space at the same time. You can hear and be heard only by those closest to you, and audio will naturally fade as you move away, almost like in real life.”*

InSpace mimics a physical audio environment by offering a unique proximity audio feature. What does that mean? When people are close to one another on the screen, they can hear each other at normal volume. When they move away from each other, the audio gradually fades away to match the distance between participants. This enables teachers and students to use the screen as they would use a physical room, by dividing up and moving to different parts of the screen to have separate conversations at the same time while remaining visually connected to the entire space.

*"InSpace also makes getting help easier due to the fact that we are able to just hop from room to room when we need help instead of waiting for a teacher to join the breakouts."*

What makes InSpace's breakout rooms unique is that they are all visible on the screen, and people can move themselves from room to room as needed. Furthermore, when you enter a breakout room, the audio you hear is sealed within that room so that people in other breakout rooms are not distracted. At any time, teachers and students can leave one breakout room and enter another. If someone needs help from the teacher, they can easily move themselves over to the teacher and ask a question. This gives students and teachers an easy way to seek out and provide help to one another -- just as they would in a physical classroom.

## Engagement

*"InSpace grabs everyone's attention and helps me focus and engage in the class."*

What does it mean to be engaged in class? When students are engaged, it means they are connected to their own learning as active participants. It means they are empowered to make choices that work best for their own learning. It means they play a proactive role by moving, acting, and taking responsibility for their own learning. They don't have to passively receive the experience, but rather play an active role in creating it.

InSpace supports student engagement by creating learning experiences in which students get to take charge of their own learning. They can move around their learning environment, asking questions or seeking support where needed. They can make choices to be in breakout rooms set up by teachers for specific purposes. They can take charge of where they are, what they are doing, and how they are learning. Students are empowered to actively participate in and connect deeply to their learning experiences.

*"I started to have more interaction with my classmates and also the teacher after using InSpace. I talked more in InSpace because it makes me feel comfortable to express my opinion."*

The freedom to move around the screen, to be near or far from people as you would in a physical classroom, provides a measure of human comfort to learners by enabling them to mimic the laws of physical proximity many of us have grown accustomed to in physical spaces. Rather than having to overcome the many hurdles created by unnatural or inhibited online interactions, students can more easily relax into interactions that are familiar because they are more human.

## Something Better

Educators who use InSpace for online teaching agree that it helps engage students more fully. In reflecting on his experience using InSpace for teaching, Professor David Uedoi of Kapi'olani Community College in Honolulu remarked that the capacity for movement and mobility greatly increased his students' engagement and participation:

*I truly think this has positively impacted their learning environment, their learning behaviors, and their sense of accountability. And, of course, it's really fun for all of us. I've also been able to maximize my own pedagogical strengths which were limited by [technologies I was using previously]."*

Educators already know how to make the best of challenging situations, to cultivate learning in the most difficult of times using whatever digital tools we have at our disposal. But those tools can do so much more to support our efforts and to be worthy of what teachers do every day. You heard it from the students themselves: InSpace makes online teaching and learning a little better. It does this by keeping students engaged, by bringing humanity and joy to learning spaces, and by putting learning at the center rather than the periphery of the environment.



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