

#24 Make Virtual Learning Fun (again?)



MAKING VIRTUAL LEARNING FUN (AGAIN?)

Best practices for teaching remotely



With Dr. Malathi Srinivasan



[Curbsiders Podcast theme]

Molly: Welcome back to The Curbsiders Teach Season 3, our miniseries on medical education. I'm Dr. Molly Heublein, joined by my cohost, Dr. Era Kryzhanovskaya. On today's episode, we'll discuss best practices for teaching in the virtual learning environment with Dr. Malathi Srinivasan. Before we get to that, Era, will you remind the audience what we do on this show?

Era: Sure, Molly. We are *the* Internal Medicine podcast for all things medical education. We use expert interviews to bring you teaching pearls and practice-changing knowledge, to inspire the next generation of medical educators. And we have a fantastic conversation with our guest, Dr. Malathi Srinivasan tonight. We cover tips and tricks for teaching on Zoom, really on any learning platform, regardless of virtual or in person, just really how to keep your learners engaged and also how to prepare as an educator.

Dr. Malathi Srinivasan is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at Stanford University, Associate Director at the Stanford Center for Asian Health Research and Education, and the Director for Stanford Care Scholars research program. She's also the Director of the Stanford Implementation Sciences Fellowship. Dr. Srinivasan is the Co-director of the One Health Teaching Scholars Faculty Development Program, an international program focusing on faculty development for health professionals' education around the world. She was also RWJ Foundation General's Physician Faculty Scholar, and US Health and Human Service Public Policy Fellow.

Molly: A reminder that this and most episodes are available for free CME credit through VCU Health CE for all healthcare professionals at the curbsiders.vcuhealth.org. All you have to do is create an account.

Era and Molly: So without further ado, let's get to it. [crosstalk]

Molly: Hi, Dr. Srinivasan. Thank you so much for joining us on the episode today. Are you okay if we use your first name for this recording?

Malathi: Oh, absolutely, Molly. Thank you for having me today.

Molly: Yeah, we like to just let the audience get to know you a little bit. Could you start out with a one-liner to describe yourself, and maybe include something from outside of medicine?

Malathi: Yeah. I'm a passionate medical educator, disparities researcher, and super internal medicine nerd with a huge extended family. I love the humanities, cooking, and travel, and basically every superhero movie except for *Green Lantern* for very obvious reasons, which is really quite sad because I do like Ryan Reynolds.

Era: I hear you. Do you have a favorite superhero or superperson movie?

Malathi: [laughs] This is going to sound so cliché but I really did like the *Wonder Woman* movies and *Wakanda Forever* will have a great space in my heart.

Era: [laughs] I love it. Well, separate from those, Malathi, do you have a book, movie, show, or album that you enjoyed, recently, kind of accessing or perusing recently?

Malathi: Yeah, recently as part of one of my book clubs, I read *The Lincoln Highway*, by Amor Towles. I don't know if you know it. It's a historical fiction of ten days set in 1954 of three teenagers who were recently released from a juvenile detention center and traversed the Lincoln Highway, which is the first transcontinental highway. It feels like a very reflective modern Steinbeck with each chapter for a day, but with subchapters told from the viewpoints of each of the different major characters. What's really interesting is all the villains prevent themselves from having cognitive dissonance by recasting all of their narcissistic moments. There's a real beautiful clarity and innocence and thoughtfulness for the protagonists. So, highly recommended. If you have a chance, go read it.

Molly: I will add that to my list. That sounds very interesting.

Malathi: Really good.

Molly: Do you have some favorite advice that you've received or that you like to give to your trainees about your career in medicine or about succeeding in medicine?

Malathi: Yeah, so career advice. I've received so many great pieces of advice from so many people. Probably the two that stick out most was one on failure, which was from David Leach. I had failed at something, and he was, at the time, the executive director of the ACGME. This is way back in my medical student and resident days, and I had a mentoring session with him, and he told me, he said, "Malathi, just stand up one more time than you fall down. We all fall down." That was the first thing.

The second one, I think, was from my mother, who is just a remarkable woman. She's a nuclear physicist and an MBA, but really spends all of her time cooking and taking care of her whole community. She told me that, "You can have anything you want, but you can't have it all at once."

Molly: Those are both very good pieces of advice.

Malathi: [laughs] I feel very lucky.

Era: Well, Molly, should we do picks of the week? Do we have time for that? [crosstalk]

Molly: [crosstalk] Yeah.

Era: I know you always have good ones, so let's hear it.

Molly: [crosstalk] Okay.

Era: Yes. And, Malathi, if you have one, please jump in. Mine is actually a quote. I was recently at a Golden State Warriors game, and we got shirts for being there that had the quote, "Be water, my friend," by Bruce Lee, and it was an honor. It was the 50th anniversary, I think, around

the time of his movie, *Enter the Dragon*, that kind of put him into, basically international stardom. I had to remind myself about the power of that quote, which I think goes to your book recommendation, Malathi, and the advice that you just got, which is the embrace what comes at you, kind of adapt, be fearless in the face of this kind of challenges and be like water that takes the shape kind of whatever it enters. So, it was just a moment for me to really lean into bravery and adaptation and also being at peace with what comes at you.

Malathi: It's really nice. So, who won the game?

Era: The Warriors, of course. Though Steph Curry was injured and I was so sad because it was the first game I had seen and I was like, "Oh, I'm going to see Steph play." And then, it's the TFL, that ligament that gets us every time. But Clay showed up and had an incredible game and he was just on fire. So, it was beautiful to watch, even in the nosebleed seats. Yeah, Molly, do you have anything, and Malathi?

Molly: Yeah, I have a podcast recommendation. It's non-medical. It's called This Land. It's hosted by Rebecca Nagle and it's a research podcast around Native American issues. Season 2, I thought was especially powerful. It's about legality around children's rights and Native children being taken out of Native homes and the foster care system and just a really interesting look at how our history of racism in America has influenced current policies today and how that really is impacting children from Native families. So, I would definitely recommend listening to This Land.

Malathi: Sounds wonderful. I'll definitely check it out.

Molly: Well, Era, do you want to start us off with a case from Kashlak Memorial to help us jump into our topic for the day?

Era: You got it, Molly. We are going to talk about Jada. Jada is a first-year faculty member in the pharmacy school and teaching cardiovascular pharmacology in the Airways, Breathing, and Circulation, or ABC block. She has perfected a 50-minute lecture. She's given it in person as a pharmacy resident, actually in front of a large auditorium for medical, dental, and pharmacy students that they all share this auditorium. She's really kind of made it her most engaging lecture with pair-share exercises, poles, demonstrations, even using inhalers that patients will be using, in her lectures so that learners know what they're talking about. And this has been super well received.

The ABC course director told Jada that with the recent changes in the structure of the ABC block, her lecture is actually now going to be virtual. And while she has been a learner herself in virtual lectures, she has never taught in this format and she's worried that this is going to create serious roadblocks to not only her content being fully delivered but also engaging her learners and not making it a snooze fest.

So, Malathi, we can imagine that most educators have been in Jada's position in the last three years with #COVID. I have felt this concern and worry about their prized educational product changing. Just wondering, if you were in Jada's shoes, or maybe if you were Jada's mentor or

even the course director, how would you help address what she's feeling and kind of help guide her in the adaptation of her lecture to the virtual learning format?

Malathi: Yeah. Era, I think the first thing I would really recognize is how much effort Jada has put into her in-person lecture. I mean, she's thought about how to engage her audience. She has gotten feedback from people because she's done this a couple of times. She's put a lot of love and caring into it and she shaped it into something that's very useful and practical, it sounds like, for the learners. The fact that she's made it practical is just a lovely thing.

But what I would ask is for Jada to go back to why she created that course in the first place. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "A man's mind, stretched by new ideas, may never return to its original dimensions." What that reminds us of is how we can use our passion and our cases and our experience to be able to inspire people, to be able to learn new things in a way that they didn't think they could before. If you lose a scaffolding model of medical education, you can see how you can take someone from point A to point B, which she's done with her in-person lectures. I would challenge her to do that in the virtual world.

I have to say, online teaching can be really engaging and really fun, just like your podcasts, as long as you can get the learner to engage using more active teaching methodologies and the right set of expectations. You have to be very attuned to what the format is so that you can match your methods to how people are receiving the information. Because it's not about what you're teaching, it's about what someone's learning.

Molly: What are some of those specific elements that are different about teaching online as opposed to teaching in the classroom?

Malathi: For any situation, you have to do three things. You've got to prepare, you've got to connect, and you've got to engage. In the online environment, there's a bunch of very specific things we need to pay attention to. First, learning by video, if someone is sitting in front of a video screen for hours is so fatiguing, and we've all been there. While people are sitting in one place without a break, staring at a screen with lots of distractions, none of these are really visible to the educator. And the educators who are used to building off and feeding off the energy of the classroom, they need to create that energy for their learners. So, learners can't give it to them until they give it first. It's also a very higher cognitive load on the learners.

Now, we forget about that because normally when we're together, we're paying attention to body language and micro cues and the facial expressions, and some of those, depending on someone's screen resolution and their lighting, is not that visible, and you can't figure out where the educator is going. And the educator simultaneously, if people's videos are off, they can't figure out where their learners are.

So, what I would ask Jada to do is put herself into the standpoint of a learner and say, "If I was receiving this information, if I was on the other end of that screen, what would it be like for me? Would I be happy? Would I be engaged? Am I drawn into it? Am I passionate about it? Is there something there that makes me care?" There's three things that we ask people to do, again it's prepare, connect, and engage. For this particular thing, in terms of strategies, you want to use the prepare and connect portions of the paradigm. And there's preparation in two senses. One

is preparing your environment, and the second is preparing yourself. I've got two mnemonics for our at-home audience today. The first one is PLACE, and the second one is the 4Rs, and it's not reading, writing, and arithmetic. So, the first is Place it's privacy, lighting, audio, arranging yourself in your background, connection, and equipment.

If you've got a bunch of kids at home and you're lecturing or you're doing a seminar, you've got to negotiate for that privacy. I'm going to turn my light off for a second so you can see what it's like when my lights off. You don't see me that well. And I look kind of funny. If I turn my light which right now is too blue, I look really terrible. You got to figure out the lighting that's good for your skin. If I unplug my audio, which I can do, you'll see it's terrible. You have to clean your screen. You need to always have Windex next to you and I wish I could get an endorsement for this, but I don't. Along with-- for audio, you have to make sure that you are absolutely, absolutely dampening any audio that's not relevant, which means if you have hardwood floors, which all these beautiful homes in San Francisco and around the country do because that's like the new thing, nobody uses carpet anymore, get blankets. Put them all over anything that can reflect, and make sure that you are dampening sound if you don't have a sound closet.

And then, arrange yourself in your background, make sure there's nothing distracting. Make sure that it's simple, have converging lines. You may need a point of lighting in the back to be able to give a background light to differentiate yourself from the background. Right now, I have a no-no, which is don't have your hair blend into your clothing. I'm wearing all black, which is not the best thing.

You want to actually have people be able to see you. In medicine, no one's expecting you to be a glamazon, but what they do want to do is they want to see your face clearly and they want to hear you clearly. So, as long as you're clear and they can see your face and they can see your eyes and your expression, you're going to be in good shape. Make sure your connection is okay and that you've checked your equipment ahead of time. And including your internet to make sure that your bandwidth is reasonable.

The second thing is you've got to really prepare yourself, and this is the 4Rs. It's really being relatable, being willing to share something about yourself. Looking at the green dot, which is usually on a lot of these computers, so maybe it's a white dot or a green dot. Use your body language. Don't just be like this the entire time. Move your arms. You've got this entire box to play with. So, be expressive when you can, make sure that you're doing all these things. To be rested as part of the 4Rs, so this is your NEST, nutrition, exercise, sleep, and time management, and get stuff done ahead of time.

For readiness, ready is really about resources. If you have to do breakout rooms or you're going to do complicated things with your session, make sure you have a teaching assistant or someone else who can help you, especially if you're doing dual in-person and online course teaching. You have prior reading materials, scheduling, Zoom links, waiting rooms, everything set up ahead of time. One of the toughest things when you're teaching remotely is to multitask, because part of the thing that you have to do is to be ready to monitor your chat, video, make eye contact with a green dot while at the same time monitoring everybody who is in your educational session.

Typically, I have about two screens, which I have two screens up right now, and I have about six windows open. It may have some notes, it'll have all of the people, my slides, and then the chat opens along with other functionalities that I might need. The most important thing is to just be relaxed and be yourself. When you're in the session, the preparation part of the prepare, connect, engage portion is preparing your environment and preparing yourself. That's what I would tell Jada to do.

Era: Malathi, that was amazing. I feel like the amount of mnemonics, I'm like committing them to memory. I just want to review. In terms of the three things you mentioned up front was prepare, connect, and engage. The PLACE mnemonic lets how to maybe optimize your place, which was the privacy, lighting, audio, connection, and equipment. And then, the 4Rs, please correct me if I'm wrong, but I heard relatable, rested, readiness or making sure you have the right resources on hand, and then being relaxed or being yourself. Does that sound accurate?

Malathi: That's completely accurate.

Molly: Okay, wonderful. I just want to say you are our first guest about props. So, I'm absolutely feeling the energy that you're bringing to this. I think this is a great example for our listeners of how to bring that in real-time. We will be posting this to YouTube as well. So, for those of our listeners who are just listening to the podcast, if you want to actually watch this, it will be available.

Era: I know. I was going to say you're putting into practice all of your recommendations. Just as Molly was saying, it's amazing to watch that. It's like very meta, very inception style where kind of you're talking about and you're doing what you're recommending. But I think if we go back to Jada real quick, given that she is adapting her content, something she already had prepared to the virtual environment, do you have any approaches or frameworks to make that specific adaptation successful? This could be pulling on the prepare, connect, engage piece, but maybe something where someone already has content prepared, they need to make virtually accessible.

Malathi: I mentioned this before, but this is very important. Format dictates both content and style. You can't give the same lecture in person that you're going to do virtually. When we talk about engagement, there's two ideas I want to have. The first one is Francis Peabody always said, if you guys remember the famous quote, "The secret of the care of the patient is caring for the patient." If you adapt that to the educational environment, the secret of care and education of the learner is in caring for the learner, which is using in sort of Dan Pratt, Five Perspectives methodology, the nurturing perspective.

When you are doing something online, you still have to make the same effort that you would in person to connect with people and engage them. The connection portion is that you got to build community, even if it's just in a very short period of time, using your chat or using personal anecdotes and asking people to share their own experiences. And you've got to set expectations. It is very important for Jada to speak to the program director ahead of time and find out what the expectations of the class are. Are they a video on, or video off? And can she negotiate that they need to have their video on so she actually knows that they're there and not

doing what a lot of people do? We just do their laundry or buy something for their dogs or take a jog while they're doing it and it makes it something very passive.

Once you set those expectations and communicate those ahead of time, what can you do with that group? How can you show them that you care? You can certainly ask them about their experiences and then because you're cutting down the total amount of content that you have, when you're doing that, what you can do is you can use their experiences to ground the points that you want to make. And you got to be able to take your points and your lectures to be able to adapt that and then use their points to illustrate your points. And then, you have to build in stretch breaks.

Right now, I know that we're about some time into this, I'm going to have all of you stretch. So, everyone in this, you have to demonstrate this on your own. You got to be willing to do this on your own. So, stretch. We always want to do-- American Heart Association always says to stand up and then do some bending. I'm going to bend forward and then just really stretch it out a little bit, shoulders backward, do a head roll.

You have to build in, into your lectures if you're having someone sit for some period of time, things where you're giving them a physical break. Because if you expect them to sit there the entire time, if they're in a class with you, they can get up and do things, and they're going to have of a water break between lectures. And it's a little bit less fatigue and you have to be able to do this, and you got to make sure that you're connecting with them, and you're honoring where they are, especially if you're asking them to have a video on.

When we think about engagement, you have to make them curious. Dorothy Parker always said that the cure for boredom is curiosity and there is no cure for curiosity. So, can you get your learners to be curious? Can you get them to care about what you're doing? Can you share why you're passionate about this particular topic that you've been asked to talk about? Can you give them a puzzle or a case? Can you show them something that's interesting? Can you make this fascinating and applicable and relevant? When I'm talking about engagement, I'm talking about instructional design and content.

So, can you streamline your session? Can you go higher up on Bloom's taxonomy? Rather than you doing a mini-lecture, can you do like a five-minute thing and then give them an exercise? Can you start with a case? Can you have them-- because she's doing something on cardiovascular medicine and pulmonary disease, can you have them interpret PFTs? Can you talk about drug interactions? She normally had demonstrated how to do an inhaler. Maybe she can show a video clip of an inhaler how to do it correctly, and then she can do it badly and ask them to correct her and put them in small groups so that they can then fix her and figure out how to talk to her about that in a way that doesn't demean her as a patient. And honor where the patient is, and then bring in whatever cultural perspectives or other things and examples so that the person understands how to do it.

So, how can you lecture less? How can you get them to share on chat? How can you streamline your content? Usually, you have in an online lecture maybe five to seven major things that you can do are cases. That sort of moves us into instructional design, which is what are the

educational tricks and the trade that you can use with the technology available to you? What's unique about this platform that you can't do in a lecture?

And part of it is great use of video. You can put people into breakout sessions, but when you do the breakout sessions, you need to give them a minute to get in, a minute to get out. So, that takes up time. You can send ahead curated slides ahead of time, and then you can do things where everybody is searching for different things independently, the same way you might do in class, but you can put them in groups and have them do very different assignments. People can't see or hear what other groups are doing. So, you can give three different groups or five different groups five different assignments, and they won't know necessarily until they all come back because it can be quite the surprise because they're not in the same class together. So, there's some unique things about this environment where you can be very creative and you can give them surprises in the middle of it.

One of our faculty, Blair Bingham, who does a thing on health communications in the simulated newsroom, he will have a great case that he'll give where people have to pitch an editorial team a news idea and then he'll throw in little things in the middle of it. So, they have to adapt in the middle of their exercise after he's given the basic principles. These are great ways of being able to mix things up and get people very excited about the topic.

The other thing I would recommend is don't always have your slides on. You are not supposed to give someone so much content that they're overloaded. You're supposed to engage them about hopefully content they've brought a little bit before and where you can interact with them and you can ask them questions and you can see what they're thinking and how they're doing. So, alternate between slides on and slides off.

When you do a breakout session, because I know she's been doing breakout sessions. Save a couple of minutes on either end. Make the minimum time at least five minutes. It has to be longer if they don't know each other. So, this is a new group. If you've got a functional class that's been together for the entire year that they know each other, they have each other figured out. When you put them in small group, you need to save a little time for socializing. You may have an icebreaker exercise. But after that, they know each other and they're going to work together pretty well.

But if they're a new group, you've got to save a longer time for them to get to know each other for introductions and then have specific team roles where each person has something different to do on the team and then save time for the report-out. An exercise without a report-out has no accountability, and the learnings that you can get from that team are lost. You can do it in different ways to save time, but that's one of the core things. You end up doing a little bit less online. But if you're going to do a breakout session, you can have people learn the two or three main things that you really want them to know. Was that specific enough?

Molly: That was fantastic. I feel like just so many great pearls about teaching in general, just really bringing that passion and really preparing and being very deliberate about how you're using those activities. You gave us some great examples about using the breakout rooms and talked a little bit about using chat. Are there any other technology functionalities that you like to use or that you recommend teachers be aware of, things like polls?

Malathi: What I would ask Jada to consider is this. When you're trying to engage someone, the point is not to use tricks or techniques to be able to get them to care. But you have to ask, what is the added value of any specific technological tool that you have? If there's no added value, don't use it just because it's there. If you think it's going to drive home a teaching point, or if it's going to help you help someone understand something, then do it. If you want to get the temperature of a class, what they know and don't know, then use the polls, use other things. If you're going to use it as a step-off point for discussion, that's great.

But the main thing is to do what you normally do, which is connect with everybody. Hear about them, connect with them, figure out who they are, get them to contribute and chat so that you can read it and that's why you've got to multitask. You've got to have several screens up and you've got to be reading everything at the same time because you can't read their body language as much, but you can read what they're saying.

I mean, there's lots of things you can do. You can do pasteboards, you can do annotations, you can put people in breakout rooms, you can do polls. There's a million things that you can do with technology. You can have people do different searches. Don't do them unless you think it's going to help you make your point and if it's going to help you get people to think. If your goal is engagement and it engages people meaningfully, then do it. If it doesn't, then don't do it.

Era: And, Malathi, I definitely want to hear how you stay present too, when you have these multiple screens, multiple tabs, kind of you're keeping track of people's facial expressions and how they're engaged.

But before we get to that, I wonder, do you have a way of thinking about kind of when we do lectures, let's say in person, sometimes we'll stop the lecture and do a think-pair-share to give people kind of [unintelligible 00:27:55] time to really maybe solidify some of the information. Do you have a kind of virtual learning environment equivalent of that? Like, is that the breakout room, or are there breakout rooms within the breakout room? How do you think about that solidifying, but someone on a smaller scale piece?

Malathi: Let's go back to the purpose of the think-pair-share. The purpose of the think-pair-share is to have someone reflect on an idea, to talk about it with someone else, and then either to share it within the group or to share it with a larger group. You can do that again with the two easy functionalities that every single one of these online educational programs has, is one is the breakout room and the second one is chat. You can give someone an assignment and when I give someone an assignment, let's just say, for instance, using the inhaler demonstration that Jada is doing, she's just had everyone watch a really great video of how to do it properly, it's beautifully done. She didn't have to do it. She borrowed it from YouTube and then gave it good attribution.

Now, she's demonstrated how to do it badly. Her question to the group is, what would you tell the patient and how would you instruct them how to do it in a way that's very patient-centered. And the person sits down. They're going to think about for one or two minutes and make it really limited. Give them one minute, let them think about the idea, it's limited. They can either share it and chat, or you can then have them go into a breakout room and then use that as either that's

what they talk about in terms of communication strategies, or you can use that as the basis for leaping off to building a curriculum around communication with patients.

You can use the first activity that you have as a building block for a second activity. It doesn't need to be just one thing. That way, you can get multiple things within Bloom's taxonomy of trying to get people towards synthesis, application, and creativity. And at the same time, you can have them work on the content. I think the idea is to be flexible, creative, and adaptive you shouldn't be limited and you should always be asking yourself, how can I get the people to engage with this content and care about it?

Era: I love that, Malathi, because it feels like you're sharing the priming and almost like the scaffolding that were talking about earlier, where people have that moment to kind of reflect and then put into practice or that synthesis, show your work or showcase how you synthesize things. I guess I just wonder how you maintain being present in the moment while you have these screens going and multiple people's faces that you're keeping tabs on. How do you do it efficiently? Because I feel like that's very difficult for my smaller brain to focus on so many things at once.

Malathi: It's like anything else that you do. It's just a matter of practice. The difficulty with any new format, especially when you're being asked to do many things, is to master the technology and the format of it. When you know-- So, first of all, we do this all the time in medicine. You are both attendings and you have your nurses, your patients all talking to you at the same time, you are managing all of the pages that come in, plus your family that's calling you about the pipe that's burst and the dog that needs to be taken to the vet. At the same time, you've got like five different meetings that are happening next.

So, you are constantly managing multiple streams of information and you are usually most of us, I think, are quiet in the moment. What we're asking people to do is to take that same idea of being able to synthesize and integrate multiple streams of information and apply it to one teaching situation in which you're getting different information simultaneously about your learners in a particular way. And it's not tough to do, it just takes practice. It sounds like, "Oh, you're having lots of things to do." But in fact, you're doing all the things that you would normally do if you were in person with them. You're just using different technologies to do it. So, it's a different set of sensory inputs, but the reasoning behind it is all the same.

Molly: Thank you for outlining that. We've talked about some of the challenges to virtual teaching, people having their cameras off, people being multitasking, it's harder to cover as much content and we need to kind of narrow things down. Are there other challenges that you have identified throughout your work in this and how might we address those?

Malathi: I think one of the big things is if you're doing both in person and online teaching simultaneously in a session, it's almost impossible to do. I mean, it's really, really, tough because none of the classrooms are set up for it. Because when you are doing that, you need to both be able to see the people who are at home or wherever they are virtually as well as a class. I don't know about you guys, but when I'm doing in-person teaching, I'm always moving. I'm never in one place. I'm not like the person at the podium who stands in one place and points at the screen. I'm walking around, I'm asking questions, I'm pointing at people. For someone--

so if you have a mobile teacher, the at-home person feels disadvantaged because they don't have that same level of interaction.

The person who's teaching needs to be able to see everybody, both who are virtual as well as in person, and needs to be able to call on everybody. So, the educator needs to be mindful of everybody who's within their learning session and find different ways of engaging them. If you are having a dual component class, you should try to have a TA who can specifically work in breakout sessions when you do breakout activities with those individuals. We need to make sure that those videos are on and everybody can see each other, which is not the way most of these classrooms are set up right now. They're set up to record for future viewing. They were not set up and developed for livestream dual interaction. It's a real problem.

Molly: That definitely rings true. I only do small group teaching, but it's either two people are enormous on this full wall screen and everyone else is in the room, which is awkward, or they're like on a cell phone and can only hear and we can barely see them. So, the technology definitely needs to catch up or hopefully, we can get everyone in the same place.

Malathi: Yeah. And it's a thing. I mean, you have to get people to take it seriously because if you are involved in an educational session and as an educator, you put some time into it because you've been asked to do something that you think is important enough to spend some time preparing for it. You guys know it takes hours to prepare for a good session. And the learners are showing up because they think that what you're hopefully going to share is important for them.

Everyone needs to be able to incorporate that degree of professionalism. Aristotle always said that, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." And so, we have to tap into people's sense of professionalism and not get them to be on their phones in the middle of Costco, when they are in the middle of a cooking session. I know we've all seen it, I know we've all probably done it also. But we should honor, especially for the small group stuff, if you're going to a thing that's really transmission based, you may not need to do that because you're receiving passively information. But if the expectation is that you're going to engage with that content, put yourself in a respectful position so that you can properly learn as a learner and let the educator engage you so that you can be inspired.

Era: Malathi, I feel so inspired. Also, your use of quotes is like magical to me. [Malathi laughs] I wish I remembered quotes like that. So, that's a growth edge for me. I'm just going to name that right now. Speaking of growth edges, I wonder, as you kind of continue to improve in the virtual learning environment, are there people or institutions or organizations maybe that are leading the way or that you look to when you think about kind of, "These are the paragons of virtual teaching and health professions, education at large"?

Malathi: I hate to name names because everybody is doing such a good job. I mean, anyone who puts any kind of effort into this is going to be great at it, because it's not magic. There's no secret sauce here. It's about engagement and trying to get people to care about the content. We have educators all over the countries that are doing it. AAMC, [unintelligible 00:36:44] all of these major national groups always have great conferences. I'd like to think at Stanford, we do a very good job, but I wouldn't say that UCSF that you don't do a good job. I think that it's a

disservice to groups to be able to call out anyone who is that much better. The majority of times, we don't know what people are doing. I have great respect for all of the educators who are trying to make a difference in this format. And I just watch the green dot. If you can get that, people will always think you're looking at them, even if you're not.

Molly: Do you mean the green dot on your camera?

Malathi: I mean the green dot on my MacBook Air, which is like eight years old and probably should be replaced.

Era: It's like when you're taking a photo with the iPhone, if you look for the green dot, that's like where your camera is. Yeah, so that's a recent secret I--

Malathi: I'm sure I've offended every single Android and PC person out there.

[laughter]

Era: No, it's okay. I'm really ashamed to admit that's a recent addition to my technology where somebody was like, "Oh, just look at the green dot." And I was like, "Am I hallucinating? What green dot?"

[laughter]

Era: And then, I realized there is in fact a green dot. But separate from the green dot, Malathi, are there other-- I know we are saying that there's no secret ingredients, no secret sauce, but are there recent maybe Zoom features or Teams features or something that you've kind of started incorporating into your virtual teaching that are really, either surprisingly engaging that you found or some recent-- [crosstalk]

Malathi: No. So, what makes a difference is not the technology. What makes a difference is the setup of the educational exercise. The technology can be a nice add. I mean, I have people search during meetings or during seminars and report back. People do cases and watch videos and do all this other stuff. But the learning doesn't occur through features. Features are an addition to help drive home teaching points. You are still the educator. All of these things are just tools, and there's nothing magic about any of them. What you have to do is think about, with the constraints of your particular environment, what can you do and how can you get people to care about this. Nothing is going to be a substitute for a good story and a very simple set of ideas that you can convey in a short period of time.

I like online learning because of all the tools that are available, and I use all of them. Breakout rooms and I have TAs help set them up ahead of time because I'm terrible at it. And I have people monitoring chat if I have a large group. And we do pre-recordings. There's many, many things that we do that are techniques, but the techniques are in service to the engagement and the driving home of the narrowed-down version of the learning points that I'm trying to make. And I would do it differently if I was in person. Because if I was in person, I'd like run around the auditorium and I would ask people things and I would point them and if I thought that they were surfing the web, I would ask them to share something.

So, you can call people out differently when you are on Zoom versus when you are in person. But I think the secret sauce is caring and then putting the time in to practice and get feedback. And to know your content well enough that you're not doing a monotonous lecture, you're actually talking to people and it's having that conversation with the individual that makes a difference. And you have to imagine that you're talking to each and every single person who is in your audience.

Era: I love that. If I wasn't scared about my microphone, I would do a mic drop, but I am scared to-- [crosstalk]

[laughter]

Molly: Well, I think that brings us to a great point about feedback. You had mentioned sort of having a near-peer view your recordings and give you feedback, which sounds like a very vulnerable position. So, I am impressed that you are willing to take that, but I think that could be so valuable. Are there other ways that you try to get feedback, specifically from the learners?

Malathi: It's hard with the learners, because they really either typically like you or they're super critical. And some of the things that they're critical of are things that you don't have control over if you have trusted learners. One of the things is if you have a group of people and you know them really well, you can ask them for feedback and most of them will be honest with you, especially if you set up a good learning environment. It's really easy to have a peer who you care for, who is a near-peer--

We have at Stanford, an IPOP program, which is an instructional peer observation program. We pair people up and people observe each other. I've had people who are [unintelligible 00:41:45] directors observe me and I've been so grateful for it. If you are going to have someone observe you, please pay them the courtesy and observe them and then ask them beforehand what they would like to work on and where they think their strengths and weaknesses are so you know how to tailor your feedback to them in a constructive way. And then, highlight both the things, where they have had some strengths and things where they need to improve or change.

A lot of us, if you talk about the Johari window, where there's things that are known to you and things that are unknown to you, and things that are known to your audience and unknown to your audience, we all have blind spots. And there's things that are blind to you and that are also blind to your observer. Hopefully, through feedback and through participation and being open to it and not being defensive about the feedback that you receive, you'll be able to grow and improve. The main thing is just to know that the majority of people that you meet will have a frame of reference very different than you do. You need to be very humble and understand that your self-perception is probably very different than other people's perception of you. You have to be able to adapt what you're doing to the current teaching environment. So, practice makes permanent. This is a really good idea. Practice makes permanent, feedback makes perfect.

Era: I am stunned in silence even though I'm talking. You just can't tell but I am deeply impressed and also, I feel like, Malathi, you reminded me of just how much intentionality also goes into virtual kind of teaching or generally teaching overall. That practice, that preparation

piece. Is there anything that you wanted to mention that we haven't talked about yet in terms of virtual learning or the virtual learning environments that you wanted to highlight?

Malathi: Yeah, I think the main thing is that anybody can do this. There's not anything secret here. You just have to feel confident in yourself. Trust in the fact that you care for the people that you're teaching and that you care about the content that you're teaching. That if you prepare, connect, and engage, and if you get some feedback, if you practice, you're going to be great. It's really fun when you are online, if you are a program director, spend more time doing community building, especially if your learners are spread across different time zones, than you would if you were in person, because that water cooler conversation, all the physical micro cues, those things are lost. You have to spend more time building your community if you want people to come together and actually feel like they are accountable and professional and they are loving what they do. So, anybody can do this. It just requires some planning. And I'm very excited for Jada. I think she's going to do great.

Molly: Amazing. Well, those almost were take-home points, but do you feel like there are other take-home points that you want our listeners to carry forward?

Malathi: Just be happy and be joyful. Education is super fun, and most of us really just continue doing this because there's so much energy that we get from our learners, and you can get that in any, any sphere.

Molly: Fantastic. Well, thank you so much. This has just been really wonderful, and I think just such great learning for us. [crosstalk]

Malathi: I want to plug one thing. [crosstalk]

[laughter]

Molly: Sorry.

Malathi: I get a plug, correct?

Era: Yes. You definitely get a plug. Plug away.

[laughter]

Malathi: Yeah, I do. Okay. So, Stanford is having its 6th Annual Medical and Bioscience Education Day Conference, so it'll be SIMEC VIII on May 13, 2023, and we're accepting conference abstracts opening soon. So, please, if you guys can come, people who are local or people who are national, submit your abstracts and please come join us to celebrate all the wonderful things that come out of medical education. We want to [unintelligible 00:45:51] our learners and our patients, so please come join us and teach us everything that you're doing.

Molly: Fantastic. Well, thank you so much, and we really appreciate your time and expertise.

[laughter]

Malathi: It's great to be here. Thank you, guys. It's been super fun.

Molly: That was such an amazing episode. I feel like Dr. Srinivasan really modeled just such great energy and such enthusiasm for teaching and really reminded us that as educators, we have the skills to do this, and it is certainly an adjustment to make it virtual, and we need to think about how we're carefully changing our techniques to engage our learners. But at the core of it, our passion and enthusiasm for medicine and for clinical topics is really what's going to carry our teaching forward.

Era: Molly, I'm with you. I think just going back to her first mnemonic, I think I was really-- I love all mnemonics, obviously, but the prepare, connect, engage, and just kind of from the very beginning, how we as the educators, really have just a huge role to play in making things engaging, but we've really sharing our passion, like why we find this exciting, why this topic matters, and kind of being creative and really infusing curiosity into the learning environment. So, I feel like-- not to kind of put it back all on the individual, but I did feel a sense of really reinvigoration, of like, "Yeah, this is why we teach, and this is how we can-- these are all the tools we can use to make it even more engaging."

Molly: This has been another episode of our Curbsiders miniseries, the Curbsiders Teach. Get your show notes at thecurbsiders.com/teach. A special thanks to Dr. Matt Watto and Dr. Paul Williams for their support in this project. And thanks to Dr. Stuart Brigham composed our theme music. Thanks to our social media team, Andrew DeLaat on Instagram and John Ong on Twitter, and the team on Pod Paste for helping with our editing. Until next time, I've been Dr. Molly Heublein.

Era: And we're committed to providing you with high-value, practice-changing knowledge, and to do that, we really need your feedback. So, please subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple Podcasts or contact us at thecurbsidersteach@gmail.com. A reminder that this and most episodes are available for free CME credit for all health professionals at curbsiders.vcuhealth.org. All you have to do is create an account.

I'm Dr. Era Kryzhanovskaya. Thank you for joining us today and letting us bring you a little nugget of medical edutainment.

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