

Course Description: Well, THIS school year didn't end up going quite the way any of us had planned, did it? Hopefully there were some unexpected positives mixed in with the frustration and limitations of sudden, universal "e-learning." We can't predict if or when we'll ever be in a similar position, but it seems likely most districts will plan and practice for it far more often this coming year.

That means we have an opportunity, now that we've weathered the initial chaos, to step back and reflect – to figure out what we wish we'd known or done sooner, or understood earlier. How can we take some of the technology many of us were "forced" to use and incorporate it more strategically to support the knowledge and skills and mindsets which are important to us no matter what format the lessons take? What about stuff we still haven't used that could be good for our kids whether we're in the same room or not? And does this mean rethinking everything we do, or just that doing it suddenly requires reliable Wi-fi?

As you may have guessed by now, our time together this summer will be "virtual." Smarter people than I are already ensuring that the requisite technology will be easy to use and that there will be plenty of real-time support along the way. We don't want the mechanics of the institute to become its primary feature. On the other hand, it's automatically the elephant in the room. More accurately, it IS the room. For better or worse, doing things long-distance changes, well... *everything*, doesn't it?

Not *quite*. Our basic goals will be the same. We'll discuss and model asking good questions, analyzing primary sources and visuals, and effective reading in social studies. Because of the realities of the "virtual classroom," we'll practice some new dynamics and learn how to effectively utilize "small groups" and one-on-one time in new ways. Our priority will still be sharing and developing practical, classroom-ready ideas – to build content, to practice skills, and to gradually shift the responsibility for learning back onto our students. Whether you're at the cutting edge of incorporating technology in the classroom or you were just getting used to those interactive white board thingies when they were suddenly replaced, we'll do our best to keep things inclusive and productive for everyone throughout each session.

You do NOT have to worry that you won't be able to figure something out. We'll figure it out for you, then help you decide whether or not you want to keep it going forward into the school year. We're even going to model a cross-curricular lesson with the science and math people. This is partly because as teachers of a superior subject, we have a certain *noblesse oblige* to look after them (they're such jumpy departments), but also because we suspect many districts are going to be pushing more virtual interaction this fall. We can wait for district PD, or figure some of it out with one another now, when it's low-stakes and possibly even fun. Then, when we go back to school, we're the cool, cutting edge teachers who've been there and done that. Oh, and it's also probably good for kids, so we can always throw that in.

Is it going to be weird? Probably. I could eliminate that possibility if I agreed to simply talk to the camera for five hours a day while you tried to pretend you were fascinated, but I'd rather take our chances with the possibilities thrust upon us. It's been a weird year and it will be a weird summer. Let's make some pedagogical lemonade together.