

Digital Empathy

Restoring Human Connection in
Online and Hybrid Classrooms



Ebrahim Tahassoni
CELTA, CertTESOL

The Human Gap in Digital Spaces

- Online teaching increased accessibility but reduced emotional connection.
- Learners often feel unseen, unheard, or disconnected.
- Key question: How can we bring back empathy and presence in virtual classrooms?

What is Digital Empathy?

- The ability to understand, communicate, and respond to learners' emotions online¹
- Requires intentional design, not just goodwill

CUE → CONNECT → CARE

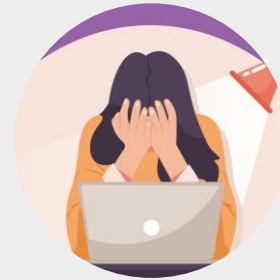
- CUE: notice emotional signals
- CONNECT: respond authentically
- CARE: follow up and build trust

Barriers to Digital Empathy



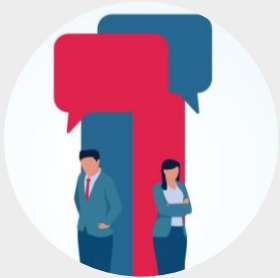
'Camera-off' culture

- loss of visual cues



Teacher overload

- Transactional lessons



Text-based misunderstandings

- Tone
- Intent
- ...



Cultural differences

- Gender
- Generational norms
- Religious beliefs
- Regional habits

Building Presence and Voice



Greet learners personally and use humor naturally



Use vocal tone and expression to convey warmth



Start sessions with emotional check-ins

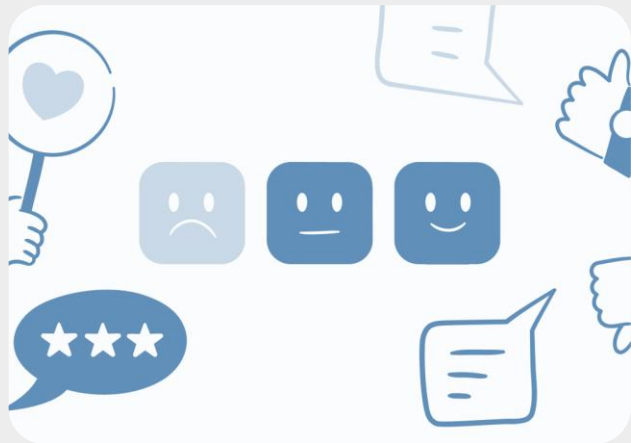


Show your human side: vulnerability builds connection

Design for Connection

- Use breakout rooms with defined roles
- 1-minute check-ins: 'What's something good that happened today?'
- Polls, emoji reactions and short reflections foster engagement 😊 🙋

Feedback with Feeling



Use short
audio/video
feedback: feels
more human



Start with
empathy: 'I can
see you tried
hard here...'



End feedback
with
encouragement
and next steps

Building Online Community

- Create small peer-support groups
- Let students co-create class norms
- Celebrate small wins publicly
- Maintain light, human interaction beyond content

Cross-Cultural Empathy Online



Interpret
silence
and
non-
participation
carefully



Ask rather
than
assume:
create
intercultural
dialogue



Respect
different
ways of
showing
engagement

Teacher Empathy and Self-Care

- Empathy is reciprocal: teachers must protect their energy
- Set digital boundaries (time, responses, notifications)
- Reflect and recharge: sustainable empathy requires balance.

Closing Thoughts

Technology connects devices;
empathy connects people

Small acts of presence make
big differences

“

Empathy lies in our ability to be present without opinion.

– **Marshall Rosenberg**



Scan this QR code to download a summary of this presentation in English.

Thank you!