

WORKING PAPER

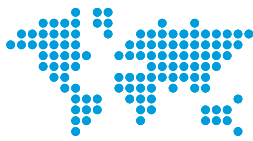
# ONLINE TRAINING AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES



SEPTEMBER 2022  
UN WOMEN TRAINING CENTRE



WORKING PAPER  
ONLINE TRAINING AND  
FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES



**UN WOMEN TRAINING CENTRE**

New York, September 2022

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# FOREWORD

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The UN Women Training Centre is dedicated to supporting the UN and other stakeholders to realize commitments to gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights through transformative training and learning. Training for gender equality is an essential component of UN Women's commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Training for gender equality is a transformative process that aims to provide knowledge, techniques and tools to develop skills and changes in attitudes and behaviours. It is a continuous and long-term process that requires political will and the commitment of all parties in order to create an inclusive, aware and competent society to promote gender equality. It is a strategy to effect individual and collective transformation towards gender equality through consciousness raising, empowering learning, knowledge building, and skills development. Training helps men and women to build gender competence and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for advancing gender equality in their daily lives and work.

Following the virtualization process due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of how to make online training for gender equality a truly transformative process was brought up continuously by the community of trainers for gender equality. In this context, the UN Women Training Centre set out on an exploratory process to initiate a dialogue on what achievements and challenges to date, and start bringing to light innovative and promising practices.

This working paper is the result of a dynamic, participatory exercise which relied on the insights and experiences of trainers active in the field of gender equality, led by Clemencia Muñoz Tamayo and Dr Lucy Ferguson. This collaborative process gave rise to new ideas which form part of an ongoing reflexive process.

The Training Centre would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in interviews and completed the questionnaire and other activities. Direct quotations used have been anonymized to give an overall flavour of the discussions.

As a working paper, this publication is a collection of reflections based on the experiences and perceptions of expert trainers and participants in online training for gender equality. In line with general practice for working papers, this paper has not been substantiated by further peer reviewed empirical evidence and data. As such, it is not prescriptive; instead, it seeks to present and discuss key issues, as well as to pose relevant questions to be addressed through research processes.



# INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and until the time of writing in December 2021, online training has become the predominant modality for delivering training for gender equality worldwide. While the impact of the pandemic on gender equality and women's empowerment has been extensively highlighted in recent research – as set out in Box 1 - there has been relatively little research and analysis on the implications of the shift to online learning from the perspective of feminist pedagogical principles and practices.

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“In April of 2020, we had no idea what was going to happen. We know a lot more now”

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The paper builds on work conducted in 2020 by UN Women Training Centre – a detailed mapping of analysis and tools for feminist online methodologies; a Virtual Dialogue including presentations by invited speakers. In addition, original research was conducted for this paper, including: a workshop at the International Feminist Journal of Politics Virtual conference in February 2021; in-depth interviews with experienced practitioners in training for gender equality; a qualitative survey completed by experienced trainers; and a review of evaluation questionnaires completed by participants of UN Women Training Centre online courses; and a review of the Virtual Dialogue report.

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“Why cancel? Let's find new ways of doing it”

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## BOX 1

### Global impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and women's empowerment

Crises are not gender neutral. Women's work and livelihoods are often particularly affected during times of crisis, as their access to income is less secure; the majority of women's work is in the informal economy (58 percent) with little or no social protection; and they have less access to finance and technology.

The COVID-19 crisis cost women around the world at least \$800 billion in lost income in 2020, equivalent to more than the combined GDP of 98 countries. Globally, women lost more than 64 million jobs in 2020 —a 5 per cent loss, compared to 3.9 per cent loss for men. This can partly be attributed to the impact of the pandemic on female-dominated sectors and the explosion of additional unpaid care work shouldered by women due to discriminatory gender roles and the stress on already weak health and care systems, as set out in more detail in the UN Women Policy Brief COVID-19 and the Care Economy.

Moreover, this figure does not take into account wages lost by women working in the informal economy. The impact of this economic crisis means that an additional 47 million women worldwide are expected to fall into extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.90 a day in 2021.

**According to the World Economic Forum, closing the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years due to negative outcomes for women in 2020.**

Sources: UN Women. 2020. Addressing the Economic Fallout Of Covid-19: Pathways And Policy Options for a Gender-Responsive Recovery, available at <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-addressing-the-economic-fallout-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=406>; <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/covid-19-cost-women-globally-over-800-billion-lost-income-one-year>; <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/this-is-why-an-equal-economic-recovery-from-covid-19-must-support-women>

As demonstrated by the interviews and questionnaire responses, the vast majority of trainers moved quickly to adapt their training rather than cancel existing commitments. The challenges of this rapid adaptation are outlined throughout the paper, but all trainers expressed that they had become much more comfortable with the format over time. As shown in Box 1, the research participants adapted a wide range of trainings from in-person to online formats.

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“They [my clients] all welcomed my decision right away; only one NGO asked for a trial session to see how interactive it can be. The results were satisfying and so I continued delivering online trainings.”

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However, not all courses were considered appropriate for converting to an online format, as they required experiential in-person learning.

For example, the Gender Team at ITC-ILO decided that a new training in development on disability and intersectionality should not be rolled out online. A large UN Women project on gender-responsive budgeting contained a training of trainers’ component. While some of the trainings were delivered online, it was agreed that the training of trainers would not be conducted online. Rather, a manual was developed, and a knowledge transfer activity was conducted to familiarize participants with the contents. Participants in the online survey commented that they only adapted trainings that were in demand during the pandemic, but not those that did not have an online audience.

**BOX 2**

Examples of training adapted to online format

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Conflict resolution   | Gender Equality and Leadership in Higher Education     |
| Gender sensitivity and generic diversity awareness training | Gender and economics                                   |
| Team Building/Creating a Vision/Diversity                   | Gender-responsive budgeting                            |
| Gender Specialist Bootcamp                                  | Results-based management                               |
| Gender programming  | Gender mainstreaming                                   |
| Gender-responsive tourism                                   | Professional Development Programme for Gender Trainers |
| Gender and Sustainability                                   | Transformative Change for Gender Equality              |
| Gender-responsive procurement                               | Empowering UN System Gender Focal Points               |
| GENDERPRO, George Washington University                     |  |
| EU Gender Equality Academy Training of Trainers             |  |
| Awareness raising on gender issues                          |  |
| Training of Trainers on Men’s Engagement                    |  |

Source: Research participants.



This paper takes a critical approach to this theme in order to explore to what extent feminist pedagogies are applicable in an online setting. In particular, the paper is concerned with how online training can be conducted in a way that is transformational, rather than merely technocratic or transactional.

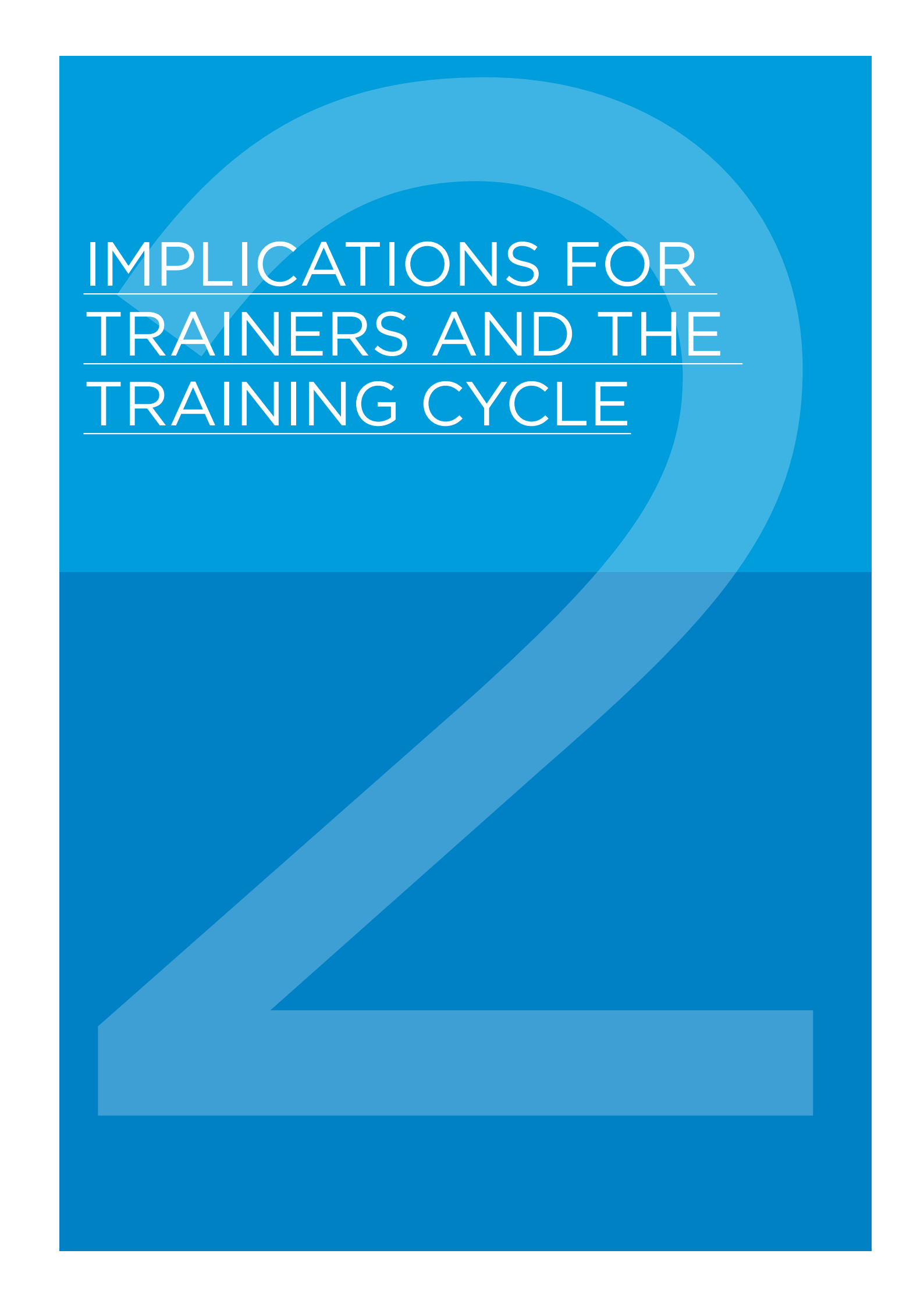
The first section explores the impact of the shift to online training on the training cycle, including what issues need to be taken into consideration at different stages. Feminist pedagogical principles need to be integrated at all stages of the training cycles, with some specific considerations for online training.

Second, the paper explores the challenges and opportunities presented by this new format in terms of feminist pedagogical principles, building on earlier work from the UN Women Training Centre Working Paper Series. The principles are: Participatory learning; validation of personal experience; encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability; and development of critical thinking and open-mindedness.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the paper, key issues are highlighted in order to shed more insight on specific aspects of online training. While there is no extensive research on good practices in this field, a number of snapshots are provided of emerging good practices throughout the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women Training Centre (2019) *Feminist Pedagogies in Training for Gender Equality*, adapted from Hoffman, F. L. and Stake, J. E. (2001) "Feminist Pedagogy in Theory and Practice: An Empirical Investigation", *National Women's Studies Association Journal (NWSA)*, 19, pp. 80).

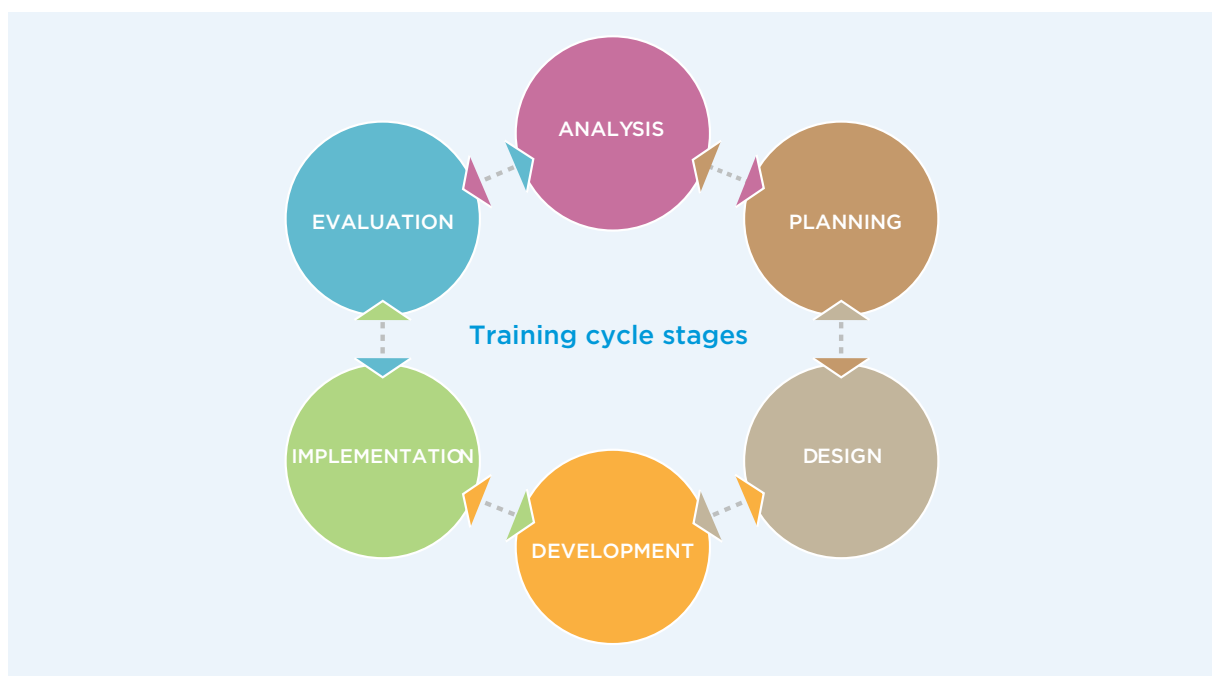


IMPLICATIONS FOR  
TRAINERS AND THE  
TRAINING CYCLE

# IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINERS AND THE TRAINING CYCLE

Research with trainers and participants conducted for this paper revealed a number of key insights into how the training cycle is affected by the new online learning modality. Some of these issues are procedural and pragmatic, while others highlight some more challenging aspects for how we understand the training cycle. As noted above, feminist pedagogical principles need to be taken account at all stages of the training cycle – not just the implementation phase. As such, it is useful to reflect here on how online training affects this process.

**FIGURE 1**  
**The training cycle**



Source: UN Women Training Centre (2019) [Manual for Training for Gender Equality](#).

## Analysis and planning

In terms of practical aspects, it is clear that online training can reach a much broader and more diverse audience than in-person training. This holds true not just for international training, but also for national training where previously training may have been held in the capital city only, making it less accessible to participants living in other regions. This lack of the need to travel by participants and trainers clearly frees up a lot of expenses for institutional budgets. Moreover, in some ways it has been easier to capture high-ranking participants for short online sessions, whereas before it may have been difficult to persuade them to travel for gender equality training.

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“Suddenly it was free” – we could train three, four or five people from the same organization at the same cost to them”

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Some research participants identified the analysis and planning phase as an opportunity to think more carefully about the purpose of training for gender equality and ask ourselves “what is the most important thing?” The lack of spontaneity was an issue raised by many participants.

Online training requires much tighter planning as there is little room to be flexible and adapt to the participant responses in the same way as in-person formats.

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“Maybe we assume too much about participants when designing a training – we can make this an opportunity.”

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A number of key logistical challenges were mentioned by the research participants, and it is important that these are factored into the planning stage of online training. For example, one challenge involves delivering training to participants in different world regions and time zones. In some organizations – and for independent trainers – this has had substantive implications on trainers’ working hours, requiring more work, longer hours, and more availability outside of traditional working hours.

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“Before there were compensation measures, but there was nothing to regulate these new circumstances”

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### GOOD PRACTICE SNAPSHOT 1

#### Adapt to participant needs

Conduct preparatory work to identify the intersectional needs of participants, e.g. where would they be participating in the training; did they have a quiet space at home or was it likely they would be in a shared room; what times of day would be best suited to take the trainings; what security issues did we need to take into account. For people who were likely to lose connection mid-way through (e.g. those in conflict affected areas),

a “Plan B” was developed - a set of worksheets that would be sent in advance of the training, which participants could work through in case they lose connection. They can then share their responses to the worksheets directly with the trainers after they have completed. It’s important to have an ‘offline offer’ for participants who regularly face disrupted connections (Survey respondent).

It is interesting to explore the budgetary implications of the sudden shift to online training. For example, larger organizations or large programmes were able to reallocate their resources and rationalize how and which training they would deliver online.

However, for many independent trainers, there was little space to negotiate on different terms, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Another important distinction to highlight is the amount of autonomy held by the trainer/institution compared to the commissioning organization/client. Some participants expressed the challenges of negotiating a longer timeframe for the training as there are currently no good practice guidelines available to justify this from a pedagogical point of view.

## Design and development

Nearly all research participants expressed the substantive amount of additional work required for the design and development phase of online training. Two key aspects need to be taken into account: the need to adapt materials and methodologies from face-to-face to online formats; and learning and managing all the new technological platforms required to be able to deliver the trainings. A point raised by several trainers was that some people are more suited to online training than others. Some trainers enjoy the challenge of managing online platforms and the level of physical distance allowed.

In turn, other trainers expressed a clear preference for in-person formats, and felt they were much more suited to this kind of work. As such, as we return to different modalities, it is useful to acknowledge these preferences and different skill sets, and this can help to select the most appropriate trainers for each learning scenario.

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“It was more work, and we didn’t change our prices”

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Even after the initial start-up phase, trainers are still reporting that the design and development of online training requires substantively more working hours than a face-to-face equivalent. This is partly due to the fact that previously, a face-to-face scenario allowed for a certain degree of flexibility and improvisation in response to the participants’ reactions to the training. In contrast, the online format is more formal and rigid, partly due to the requirements of the technology.

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“Using different platforms and resources to keep the class varied and engaging required a lot of time. I had to figure out how to use them and if they worked (or not) on my own.”

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### GOOD PRACTICE SNAPSHOT 2

#### Make the most of time zone differences

The pandemic struck halfway through the Professional Development Programme for Gender Trainers, run jointly by Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands and UN Women Training Centre. Participants were spread across 5-6 different time zones. New sessions were created deliberately to think together how to finish the active module and

convert it to a virtual format, including discussions on feminist pedagogies in online training, with participants included. It was agreed that four global groups would be established based on different time zones. These groups met individually in short sessions and then joined a plenary which worked for all time zones (Interviewee).

It is important to highlight the additional preparatory work required to ensure that this is taken into consideration in the Analysis and Planning phase. While budget savings have been made in terms of travel and other expenses, trainers have not benefitted from these savings and instead have tended to contribute additional unpaid hours in order to develop high quality materials. This is less of an issue for those working for established organization, but has had substantive impact on trainers working independently.

These issues matter as they require us to review the training cycle through the lens of online training, and suggest new activities to be included in the early stages of course development.

## Implementation

The trainers interviewed for this paper expressed a wide range of opinions about how implementation is different in an online format. One key issue highlighted is the need for specific skills to deliver an online training alone, particularly in terms of multi-tasking – in terms of both the technological and pedagogical aspects. Challenges for trainers included learning a wide range of new technological tools; keeping participants engaged through the screen; constantly dealing with participants' connection issues; reviewing the multiple windows and sources active at one time; and finding the balance between the technical and content aspects of the training.

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“The assumption that we can juggle more things just because they are not tangible or physical has had a large impact on organizations”

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Some interviewees expressed that they much preferred face-to-face training, and did not enjoy working online. For others, they found it less draining and more enjoyable, as they did not have the same physical and social pressures present in an in-person training.

As we moved forward with this format, it is interesting to explore the different training styles suited to different personalities, and see how this can be maximized for the optimal learning experience. The challenges for implementation in terms of feminist pedagogies – for trainers and participants - are discussed in detail below.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is an interesting challenge for online training. It has been relatively easy to assess the level of participant satisfaction with online trainings – using an online form similar to that used in face-to-face trainings. However, it is difficult to assess the level and quality of participants' learning and understanding.

### GOOD PRACTICE SNAPSHOT 3

#### Use the exit questionnaire to improve practice in online training

The evaluation form can be used to ask specific questions about the tools and platforms used. Participants can be asked for suggestions on other platforms that may be more suitable, as well as how to improve the exercises.

This can help trainers assess which instruments and techniques to continue using, and which to adapt or change (Interviewee).

For example, the ILO Participatory Gender Audit course involves a process of continuous evaluation, involving simulations, practical exercises, documentary revision, etc.

While some of these aspects can be recreated to a certain extent online, it is difficult to fully replicate the assessment of an in-person Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) in order to be able to issue participants with a certificate. This raises a broader question around how to evaluate participants' capacity in terms of formal participation using only online formats and tools. There is currently no agreed standard for evaluating the training skills of participants online. Skills required in online training scenarios – such as spontaneity, flexibility and physical classroom management – cannot be evaluated in an online setting. As such, new ways need to be found of evaluating the competencies of participants.

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“Feminist pedagogy is needed to document how the way we are doing things makes a difference.”

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In addition, the more participatory and transformative aspects of evaluation are often lost. Several interviewees expressed the need to work even harder on evaluation in the online format, as it is very difficult to gauge the level of impact that online training has at the individual, behavioural and organizational level. For example, it is difficult to measure the commitment of participants to the issues raised in the training with a long-term follow up plan. This highlights a need to think more deeply and critically about the evaluation of online training, in order to be able to demonstrate the impact it has compared to in-person training.



FEMINIST  
PEDAGOGICAL  
PRINCIPLES



# FEMINIST PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

The work of UN Women Training Centre is based on four principles of feminist pedagogy:

- Participatory learning;
- Validation of personal experience;
- Encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability; and
- Development of critical thinking and open-mindedness.<sup>2</sup>

Valuing the personal as a source of legitimate and valid knowledge encourages students to understand personal experience as political, historical and socially constructed. The goal is to help students develop a critical framework that will enable and empower them to link personal experience with institutional structures of subordination. The validation of personal experience is linked to empowerment. In training for gender equality, empowerment can be understood in two key ways – in that participants are empowered to reflect on their own personal experiences on intersecting inequalities, and then to use this critical engagement to act for the transformation of such inequalities in their own contexts. Attention needs to be paid to the politics of personal experience, and how this interrelates with other aspects of the learning experience.

Feminism is committed to social change, and feminist practice is integral to a feminist pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy is also deeply concerned with the accountability of both individuals and institutions towards social justice. Bell hooks' notion of "engaged pedagogy", for instance, emphasizes well-being which "involves a knowledge of oneself and an accountability for one's actions".

Learning processes guided by feminist pedagogical principles must hold learners, facilitators, and institutions accountable for their attitudes, behaviours, and practices/actions.

Feminist pedagogies support class participants not merely to acquire new knowledge, but also to develop their thinking in new directions. Learners are not simply "empty mugs" awaiting new and better knowledge from the "jug" of formal gender expertise; instead, training works best when it acknowledges its role in encouraging and supporting contestation over the power of discourse in the existing social relations. In feminist pedagogical approaches, critical thinking and open-mindedness are qualities that must be adopted by teachers as much as by students. In order to cultivate critical thinking and open-mindedness, feminist trainers can practice self-reflection, authenticity and connection, both with their inner selves and with – and between - their students.<sup>3</sup>

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*"My perspective is that it is always challenging to apply feminist pedagogical principles, because the expectations of the traditional classroom are deeply rooted. Therefore, online tools provide new options (media) to engage otherwise, that could be used transformatively."*

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Here we explore to what extent it is possible to apply these principles in online formats. Many of the trainers interviewed expressed a range of opportunities for applying feminist pedagogical principles. For example, it has allowed us to feel connected to colleagues around the world in difficult times.

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2 UN Women Training Centre (2019) Feminist Pedagogies in Training for Gender Equality, Working Paper Series.

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3 UN Women Training Centre (2019) Feminist Pedagogies in Training for Gender Equality, Working Paper Series.

Several interviewees mentioned how the online format had allowed them to engage with women living in difficult contexts - including Palestine, Syria and Lebanon – by being able to connect from their homes, when they would not have been able to attend an in-person training. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the quality and quantity of participation. Having higher participation does not necessarily imply a more participatory learning experience. This is an important distinction when analysing online training formats.

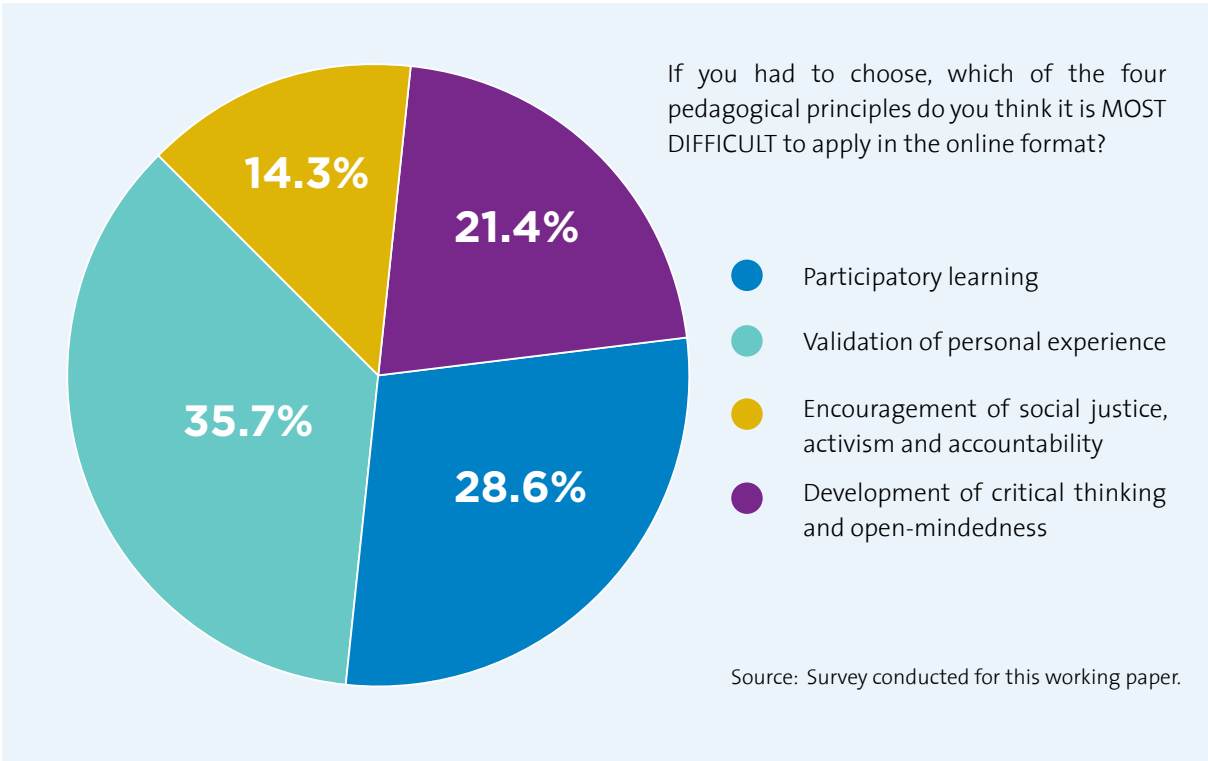
Other opportunities in terms of feminist pedagogies include: connecting more diverse groups of participants; allow for more flexible timeframes to build in reflection; inviting more guest speakers to share experiences with participants; and the possibility for anonymity and opting out of some activities for sensitive issues or neurodiverse individuals.

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“I believe new opportunities can be created when developing critical thinking and open-mindedness. For example, I had participants from different areas in Syria where they even mentioned that, if the training wasn’t online, they could never attend all together due to the current political/conflict situation. Having participants from diverse backgrounds and communities foster open mindedness and enrich the exchange.”

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**FIGURE 2**  
**Applying feminist pedagogical principles**



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### “Sometimes it’s better to write than to talk”

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As shown in Figure 2, the majority of participants in the survey found that “validation of personal experience” was the most difficult to apply, followed by “participatory learning”.

Some advantages identified by participants in the workshop included:

- The equal possibility for women to express their ideas.
- Online learning can break psychosocial barriers like proximity for people of varied genders.
- The ability not to think of how I look in front of others (especially male gaze).
- Ideally it would encourage female students express themselves with more confidence in a comfortable setting.

## Participatory learning

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“I have not yet really found a good technique for making sure that everyone is included equally in online training formats.”

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The online format raises several challenges for participatory learning, particularly in terms of constructing a “feminist classroom” with equal conditions for all participants. For example, some participants were not able to connect from home and had to be in a shared office. This usually meant wearing masks and not being able to use the microphone. For others, they were at home but in an intimate family environment – many women apologized for children interrupting or making noise around them. A second, challenge is the lack of body language. It is much more difficult to read the level of interest and engagement of participants when only viewing a small part of their body language.

This takes away the possibility to switch to a different activity or change the plan in a flexible way, as often done in in-person environments. In addition, it is challenging to ensure even participation across all participants – for example, it is difficult to judge whether people are not participating because they do not have anything to say or because they do not feel included. Many trainers expressed that it was much more difficult to share participation evenly compared to an in-person environments, and more challenging to stop the most vocal participants from dominating the session. This was echoed by participants in evaluation questionnaires, where often participants expressed not feeling fully included.

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### “It can be challenging to take space and be heard”

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Another key aspect missing in online training is the fun, joyful and playful aspect of participatory learning. It is much more difficult to use humour and – as outlined above – spontaneity is difficult in online environments. Humour and theatre are important vehicles and tools for training for gender equality and have a long tradition. Some trainers have experimented with role plays in the online environment, while others have adapted Forum Theatre for this modality. However, to date, not much substantive reflexive work has been done on how to integrate the theatrical and humour dimension into online training.

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### “A Miro board is no comparison for five flip charts around the room”

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One key issue which needs to be highlighted in terms of participatory learning is internet connectivity and technological skills. There was very little training on how to use Zoom and other online platforms – either for trainers or participants. Most people learned the skills themselves intuitively, rather than in any formal manner.

#### GOOD PRACTICE SNAPSHOT 4

##### Be ambitious and experimental with online methodologies

As demonstrated in ITC-ILO's work, some of the dynamics of a face-to-face Forum Theatre approach can be replicated in an online environment. While long performances are not feasible, many of the games used in this type of work can be used online. Techniques can be used to make it appear that the facilitators/actors are together, as well as

indicating when they are off/onstage, and when facilitating/not facilitating. This is currently being used in the context of ILO Convention No. 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work in order to guide participants to come up with fictional scenarios to identify unacceptable behaviour in the workplace (Interviewee).

The shift to online learning risks deepening the digital divide – in particular the digital gender divide. According to GSMA's 2020 Mobile Gender Gap Report, across Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), women are 8% less likely to own a mobile phone and 20% less likely to use the internet on a mobile device or to own a smartphone.<sup>4</sup> In many African countries, for example, it has been very difficult for participants to participate fully in trainings due to the high cost of data streaming. Even in countries such as South Africa with more reliable internet coverage, shortages and power outages can disrupt participants' experiences of the training. If a number of participants have connectivity issues, it is very difficult for the trainer to manage the situation.

While alternatives can be offered - such as offline documents - it still takes a lot of time and effort to be as inclusive as possible, while making sure that disruption to the other participants is minimized.

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“All the inequities in the world get projected with this situation. It is pragmatically and structurally problematic.”

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In addition to connectivity problems, technological issues have sometimes been challenging for older participants who are less familiar with adapting to new technologies. Highly participatory platforms such as Miro have often alienated participants, making it difficult for them to continue participating in the training. A solution to these issues is to simplify the tools and materials as much as possible; to integrate them into the platform being used; and to avoid using over-complicated platforms that do not add to the core messages and approach of the training.

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“I found men readily took on the role of “sharing screen” or “be note takers” on post-its collaborative MIRO and MURALS as they may be more familiar with those environments (as they have more time to “play” with computers..). This can reproduce stereotypes of men being better at handling tech than women.”

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## Validation of personal experience

This was the principle that the trainers involved in the research found most difficult to apply. Time constraints caused by the need to minimize the time participants spend online lead to the lack of an “informal space” such as that afforded by coffee breaks, lunch breaks and dinners in in-person training

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<sup>4</sup> “Technology and Gender amid COVID-19 Response and Recovery”, International Rescue Committee, <https://rescueapp.box.com/s/1cwys5e72vi4heifoer6ikrc45kjfla>

makes meaningful connection between participants difficult to establish.

This means a lack of space for individual and collective reflection in informal spaces outside of the formal training setting, a key aspect of any in-person training, where participants would have coffee together, go for dinner and perhaps all stay in the same hotel.

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“A lot happens in the informal space, but it is hard to recreate that online.”

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While some trainers have attempted more intimate activities that draw on emotional personal experiences, the outcomes have sometimes been difficult to manage. Without knowing where exactly participants are physically – and what they have to do after the training – it can be difficult to engage in these kinds of activities in a safe manner.

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“The lived reality of the participant remains unaccounted for or at least less accounted for as compared to the regular mode”

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There is no “container” as in an in-person training, and the online environment creates a disperse, disconnected atmosphere which it is easier for participants to leave or drop out of. As mentioned above, the lack of capacity to read body language limits the possibility to adapt in the moment to learner needs as they present themselves. Participants also highlighted this challenge – with too many

competing stimuli at the same time making it less easy to focus clearly on the training.

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“It is more difficult online to ‘read the room’ and check in with individuals one-on-one to see how they are doing and what they are need, to listen in on side conversations to find out what’s working and what’s not. And I think this affects my ability to be responsive to individual needs.”

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As such, it is important to be even clearer in the planning and design stages about the way in which activities will be carried out, and how the feedback and de-briefings will be managed.

A key challenge for validation of personal experience is the use of the camera. Different trainers have approached this issue in different ways. Some allow participants to choose whether they want to use the camera, others make it obligatory or strongly recommended. One way to tackle the camera challenge is to allocate some camera-free sessions in the training – for example, when the trainer is presenting – and ask participants to turn on the camera for small group work.

However, this is very much context-dependent, as in some scenarios women may not feel secure enough to work with the camera on. One way to tackle the camera issue is to ask participants in advance in the preparatory questionnaire whether they are willing and able to use their camera.

#### GOOD PRACTICE SNAPSHOT 5

##### Look after the physical well-being of participants

It is good to remain aware of the body during online training sessions and take regular physical breaks. For example, a quick yoga or breathing session can be used to help with presence and concentration. In addition, the use of pen and

paper can be encouraged to avoid participants looking at the screen at all times. Handwriting and drawing can be used to break up the dependence on technology (Interviewee).

This can help the trainer prepare appropriate activities based on the level of video participation anticipated from the group. Some participants expressed frustration at others not using their cameras, suggesting that it was unfair and made the training harder for those who did want to – or were able to – participate actively.

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“There can be tensions between ensuring accessibility and maintaining safety and comfort for people when it comes to the use of camera. For some participants, mandating the camera to be on makes them feel safer as they can see their fellow participants. However, for others who might be experiencing zoom fatigue or in some cases, may struggle with sustained video use as a result of symptoms relating to long Covid, the ability to turn off one’s camera is very important. Finally, for those in low-bandwidth settings, it isn’t possible to have the camera on all the time. This can create some tensions that need to be surfaced and negotiated openly in the space.”

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Language is another key obstacle for validation of personal experience. When participants speak other languages, the debate and discussion tend to be much richer when using their own language. This adds another challenge for the (already multi-tasking) trainer, who often needs to add interpretation and translation to the tasks required for online training. In addition, the majority of tools are only available in English, creating challenges for training in – for example – Arabic. Some participants expressed that they found it challenging to participate in online training due to language constraints, which can to some extent be overcome in in-person scenarios.

## Social justice, activism and accountability

The majority of interview participants believe that online training is a good vehicle for developing social justice, activism and accountability, as online spaces and social media have long been used for activist purposes. This is particularly true for online courses with a long-life span, where participants can reflect in between sessions. In particular, follow up sessions can be easily arranged to catch up with how the participants have implemented the learning since the training. Participants of many online courses have also gone on to create their own informal networks using Whatsapp or Facebook groups, such as the active group formed by the alumni of the Professional Development Programme for Gender Trainers.

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“Even with a five day in-person training, you go through the motions of getting that engagement, then when the Friday comes you lose them”

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Many participants who have shared an online learning experience have gone on to create their own networks – for example active Whatsapp groups - which continue to build on the knowledge and experiences learned in formal online space.

## Development of critical-thinking and open-mindedness

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“When dealing with institutions like ministries or the militaries, you need a couple of days to get the conversation going. Especially when gender is not their topic of choice. But this is harder in online settings, to create the space for personal engagement and all the dimensions of interaction.”

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The development of critical thinking and open-mindedness often depends on the type and context of the training, as in in-person scenarios. If a course is required to be a technical, knowledge transfer activity, it is unlikely there will be much room for critical thinking and open-mindedness.

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“Not all clients want a format where students find enough time to discuss or think together. In my experience, they are looking for something more easy, fast and direct. So, participatory and self-reflexive spaces have deteriorated.”

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When the trainer or institution are able to set the agenda and design a slow-paced training, it is possible to allow for critical thinking to develop both in the session and in between sessions. Many trainers have mentioned the challenges of facilitating “difficult conversations” online, and this is an area which still needs more work. As discussed in the conclusions, some types of training may be more suited to online formats, while others may be better reserved for in-person trainings only. Nevertheless, there is still space to reflect on the potential of online spaces for more critical and reflexive types of trainings, and what skills trainers need in order to be able to deliver these.

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“We sometimes strategically use silence to deal with difficult questions in a whole day workshop, where we can wait for longer for someone to speak up, but in online settings this is much harder. We often find ourselves filling in or moving on in these situations. It is much harder to hold your nerve in an online format and have the confidence to stay in that space.”

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Not all the challenges related to applying feminist pedagogies are novel to the online format. Many challenges are salient from previous in-person modalities. Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to the new challenges that massive and rapid shift to online learning that the pandemic has presented, and the way these new modes of working have highlighted and intensified existing inequalities.



CONCLUSIONS:  
CONSTRUCTING  
FEMINIST ONLINE  
TRAINING



# CONCLUSIONS: CONSTRUCTING FEMINIST ONLINE TRAINING

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“There is big potential here but it needs to be reshaped in a feminist way”

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When asked to speculate about the future of training for gender equality, the participants put forward a number of ideas. The majority agreed that the online format is clearly here to stay, and there will not be a return to in-person training in the volume of previous times. Many suggested that in-person training will be likely be conducted at the national or regional level, rather than trainings which bring together participants from a wide range of countries. Blended modalities may become more common – for example with one in-person meeting at the beginning or the end of the course, with all other sessions delivered virtually.

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“We are now more clear that it is not necessary to stop the training process, even if face-to-face training is not possible due to pandemic issues or something like that. I’m pretty sure we’ve learned this clearly.”

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Other modalities include hybrid learning – with participants in one room together and the trainer working remotely. A further – yet more complex – emerging mode involves some participants in the room together with others joining remotely.

However, hybrid learning models need to be explored separately from the perspective of feminist pedagogies, due to the different logistical and pedagogical challenges they raise. Emerging challenges of hybrid training models include: the need for a strong trainer to be in the room with the participants, with a good understanding of the course materials and methods; the non-horizontal nature of participants “looking up” at the trainer on a large screen; the additional complications when language and translation are involved.

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“We need to think about how to make the most of this that we experienced out of necessity and take it back to the classroom - the best of the online format joined with the best of being physically present”

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As the online format becomes part of the “new normal”, a number of key questions can be raised regarding the implications for feminist online training. The potential benefits of online training from a feminist perspective are highlighted throughout the paper – including a wider outreach and more diverse participants; the development of innovative tools and methodologies for feminist training; and the reduced financial and environmental costs.

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“Girls in El Salvador were able to connect to my training without needing permission.”

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However, a number of issues raised throughout the paper deserve closer attention here.

The first challenge for feminist online training is dealing with issues of power online. During this research process, trainers have identified examples of both increased democratization and increased hierarchy. In some examples, participants have been able to work in a more horizontal way, for example by being invited to trainings they would not previously have been involved in. In some cases, the “screen” has served as a tool to flatten hierarchical power relations, and participants have been able to speak more freely than they may have been able to in person. On the other hand, many of the tools used to deal with power dynamics in in-person trainings are very difficult to replicate in an online scenario. The use of the chat facility and online collaborative documents can also be helpful for participants who prefer not to speak out.

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“Simulations, pauses to reflect, creating a shared level of understanding – these are very hard to do online.”

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This is an important discussion for feminist online training, in terms of developing tools and methods for identifying and addressing power dynamics in online settings. How, for example, can issues of privilege be addressed in an online environment? How can discussions around highly personalized, challenging issues such as gender identity and gender diversity be tackled in these settings?

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“In some agencies, feminist is a very difficult word”

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In addition, attention needs to be paid during the analysis and planning phase to ensure that difficult issues remain on the agenda, and that space is crafted out for the kind of reflexive, critical thinking that is a fundamental component of feminist training.

Second, it is important to consider the working conditions of those delivering online training, as well as the well-being of participants. As set out clearly in this paper, this kind of work involves a great deal of additional time and skills from the trainer. The preparation time is much more lengthy and detailed, and the implementation requires a high level of multi-tasking in both technological and pedagogical terms. As such, actual real cost of online training in terms of development, preparation and implementation is much higher than the trainer costs for an in-person training. From a feminist perspective, two recommendations arise.

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“If money is being saved on some aspects of training, it should be reinvested elsewhere. For example, give translators more time to review materials”.

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The costing of online training needs to be recalculated to ensure that the labour of trainers is visibilized, counted and properly remunerated. Second, some of the money saved from in-person training budgets should be re-invested in improving online training. This could be in the form of hiring a technical person to deal with the management of the platform; or hiring a co-trainer to support implementation and allow for the participants to receive more individual attention.

As argued above, working conditions are not the responsibility of the trainers alone. Calculations need to be made to understand the real time required for preparing and delivering online training, and to ensure this is then reflected in costs. This is necessary from the perspective of decent work principles. An institutional response is required to address how these issues will be tackled in the “new normality”, now we are no longer in emergency mode. The well-being of participants also needs to be taken into account from an institutional perspective, employing a feminist ethics of care, as well as an understanding of the structural implications of the pandemic for women worldwide, as set out in Box 1 above.

Finally, the expanding digital divide – and digital gender divide – threatens the democratization of learning offered by the online format. If participants from countries with poor internet infrastructure are unable to participate – or only participate with cameras off and intermittent connection – there are dangers that this format will exclude broad swathes of the population. This paper includes some suggestions for dealing with these issues from the perspectives of trainers. However, a more institutional approach needs to be adopted and developed in order to address this systemic issue.

Third, it is important to acknowledge the technology used for online training is not gender neutral and free from gender bias. There is a potential for technology companies to apply a feminist lens to their work. It would be interesting to explore the extent to which the major platforms that have benefitted from the shift to online learning have taken into account a gender perspective – in terms of their own operations and their technological offer. As this format grows, the influence of these companies to shape the ways we train and learn grows with us. As such, it is necessary to adopt a critical analysis to the gender dimensions of large educational technology firms as we move forward. This is a recommendation for future research as we move into the next stages of online training.

This paper offers a preliminary reflection nearly two years into the pandemic, with no current end in sight. We have taken a breath and space to reflect on these changes and how they have affected our field of work. As argued throughout the paper, online training offers a wide range of exciting and innovative opportunities from the perspective of feminist pedagogical principles and practices. Trainers have adapted their work to accommodate the new conditions to the best of their abilities, creating a thriving and dynamic new modality for training for gender equality. However, a number of key challenges remain in order to convert this energy and innovation into long-lasting change for gender equality.

The UN Women Training Centre defines training as a tool for contributing to ongoing processes of transformative change for gender equality. More work needs to be done in order to understand and demonstrate exactly how online training contributes to these broader processes, with the long-term aim of generating transformative change. There remains much to be done in order to construct a feminist online training. This includes a deeper exploration of how online formats can be used for different types of training which involve “difficult conversations” and deep reflection, beyond knowledge transfer and awareness raising. There is also an urgent need to identify the research, networks and resources required in order to develop this new field of feminist online training.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1. Tools for information gathering

### Survey questionnaire

The results of this questionnaire will feed into an upcoming Working Paper by UN Women Training Centre. Thank you for your participation and contribution.

Email:

1. Have you adapted your in-person training into an online format since the start of the pandemic?

- Yes, I have adapted all of my training to an online format
- Yes, I have adapted some of my training to an online format
- No, I have not adapted my online training to an online format
- Please explain why you did/did not adapt your training to an online format.

2. If you adapted your training to an online format, please tell us what types of training you adapted and describe how you did this.

3. What are the key challenges you have faced when delivering this new learning format?

4. Have you encountered any specific challenges related to applying feminist pedagogical principles and practices? Please refer to specific principles where appropriate - participatory learning; validation of personal experience; encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability; and development of critical thinking and open-mindedness.

5. If you had to choose, which of the four pedagogical principles do you think it is MOST DIFFICULT to apply in the online format?

- Participatory learning

- Validation of personal experience
- Encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability
- Development of critical thinking and open-mindedness

6. Have you experienced different challenges in different contexts, for example level of technological competence, stable access to technology, issues with use of camera, over-complicated online tools, e.g. Miro, Google Docs?

7. Do you think this new adapted online learning format offers any new or promising opportunities?

8. Are there any specific new or promising opportunities in terms of feminist pedagogical principles or practices?

9. From the perspective of participants, what have been identified as the key ADVANTAGES of this adapted online format, as recorded in evaluation questionnaires?

10. From the perspective of participants, what have been identified as the key DISADVANTAGES of this adapted online format, as recorded in evaluation questionnaires?

11. From the perspective of participants, which of the four pedagogical principles have been identified in evaluation questionnaires as the MOST DIFFICULT to apply in the online format?

- Participatory learning
- Validation of personal experience
- Encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability
- Development of critical thinking and open-mindedness

12. How do you see the future of training in your work/ organization in the post-pandemic world?

13. Any other reflections?

## Interview questions

Name of participant/s:

Institution:

Date of interview:

### Background

This interview is being conducted as part of the research for the Working Paper on feminist pedagogies for online training.

Would you like to be credited in the paper? If so, are you happy for specific quotations to be attributed to you, or do you prefer these to be anonymized?

### Introductory questions

Please tell us a little bit about yourself and your experience as a trainer before the pandemic.

Which countries/regions do you usually work with?

Which specific topics do you usually work on?

Which institutions do you usually work with?

### A. Adapting to the new online training modality

How did the pandemic affect your work as a trainer?

What was most challenging for you in adapting to the new reality as a trainer?

What are the lessons learned from this?

### B. Challenges for trainers

What are the key challenges you have faced as a trainer when delivering this new learning format?

Does the online modality have an impact on the training cycle? If so, what?

Did the fact that you are employed help here?

Have you encountered any specific challenges related to applying feminist pedagogical principles and practices?

- Participatory learning
- Validation of personal experience
- Encouragement of social justice, activism and accountability

- Development of critical thinking and open-mindedness

If you had to choose, which of the four pedagogical principles do you think it is MOST DIFFICULT to apply in the online format?

Have you experienced different challenges in different contexts, for example level of technological competence, stable access to technology, issues with use of camera, over-complicated online tools, e.g. Miro, Google Docs?

From the perspective of participants, what have been identified as the key disadvantages of this adapted online format, as recorded in evaluation questionnaires?

From the perspective of participants, which of the four pedagogical principles have been identified in evaluation questionnaires as the most difficult to apply in the online format?

### C. Opportunities and potential

Have you experienced any positive outcomes from this new learning modality as a trainer?

From the perspective of participants, what have been identified as the key advantages of this adapted online format, as recorded in evaluation questionnaires?

Do you think this new adapted online learning format offers any new or promising opportunities for training for gender equality?

Are there any specific new or promising opportunities in terms of feminist pedagogical principles or practices?

### D. Reflection questions

Are there limits to online training? Are there some aspects of training for gender equality which should only be delivered in a face-to-face setting?

How do you see the future of training in your work/ organization in the post-pandemic world?

What would “feminist online training” look like, and how can we identify promising practice in this emerging field?

## Annex 2. Mapping of online learning tools and methods

These tools can be grouped depending on their specific usage: interactive tools to be used with Zoom; visual methods; and new technologies and innovation.

### Interactive tools to be used with online platforms

Qiqochat – software that connects to Zoom and allows participants to move freely among breakout rooms on their own, with interactive tools attached to each room.<sup>5</sup>



Photo credit: © Qiqochat.

Padlet – interactive boards for sharing.<sup>6</sup>

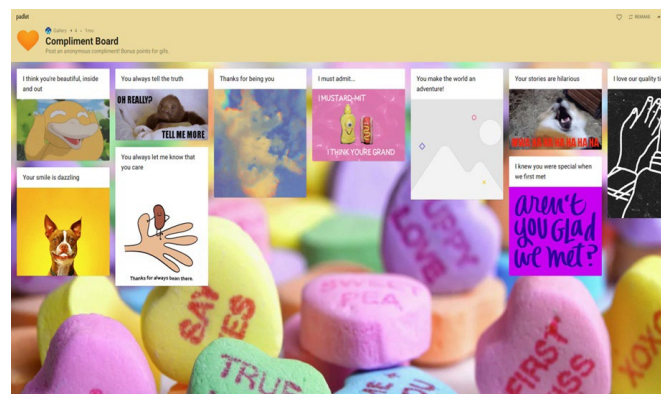


Photo credit: © Padlet.

5 Available at: <https://qiqochat.com/about>

6 Available at: <https://padlet.com/dashboard>

Cards to support facilitation.<sup>7</sup>



Photo credit: © UNITAR.

Miro – a dynamic interactive collaborative whiteboard.<sup>8</sup>

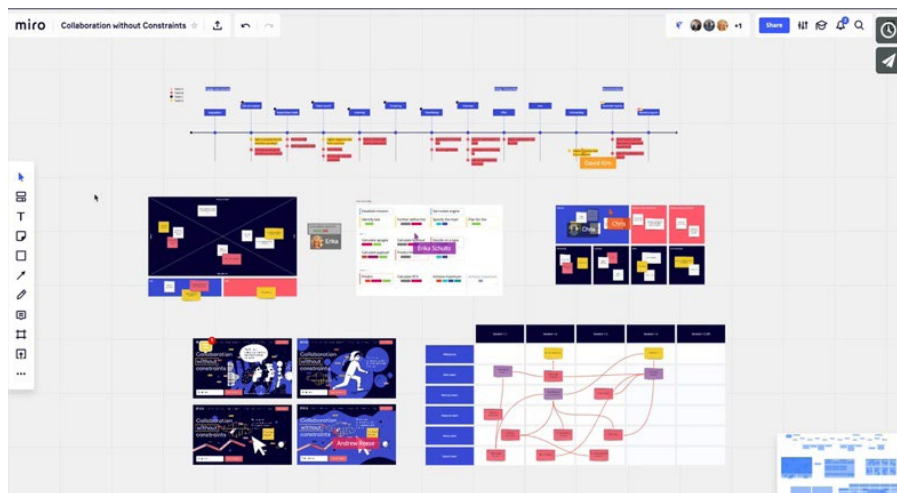


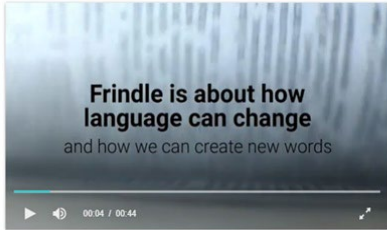
Photo credit: © Miro.

7 Available at: <https://www.unitar.org/sites/default/files/media/file/UNITAR%20Online%20Facilitation%20Cards.pdf>

8 Available at: <https://miro.com/app>

Animoto – allows participants to make a short, 30-second video of what they learned in a given lesson.<sup>9</sup>

Templates / Recommended for you



## Book Report

Give your students the option of creating an entertaining video version of their book report.

- Narrative highlights the characters and plot of a book
- Playful, cheery musical track
- Subtle slide transitions
- Bright blue background pairs well with neutral text

SHARE TO  
YouTube, Facebook Feed, LinkedIn Feed

GREAT FOR  
Education, Publishing, Community & Cause

CHOOSE TEMPLATE

*Photo credit:* © Animoto.

Dotstorming – a whiteboard app that allows digital sticky notes to be posted and voted on – good for brainstorming on different topics and questions.<sup>10</sup>



A space for real-time group brainstorming and decision making

### What is dotstorming?

Dotstorming allows people to easily collaborate on a topic and come to decisions as a group.

It uses dot voting which is quick and simple method for prioritizing a list of options.

It creates a sense of engagement and allows participants to see the decision process in action and understand how the final choice was made.

### How does it work?

Step 1 - Create a board

Step 2 - Invite participants

Step 3 - Add your cards

Step 4 - Vote on the cards you like

*Photo credit:* © Dotstorming.

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <https://animoto.com/builder/templates>

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <https://dotstorming.com>



Flipgrid – Participants can develop short 15-second to 5-minute videos to respond to input from trainers.<sup>11</sup>

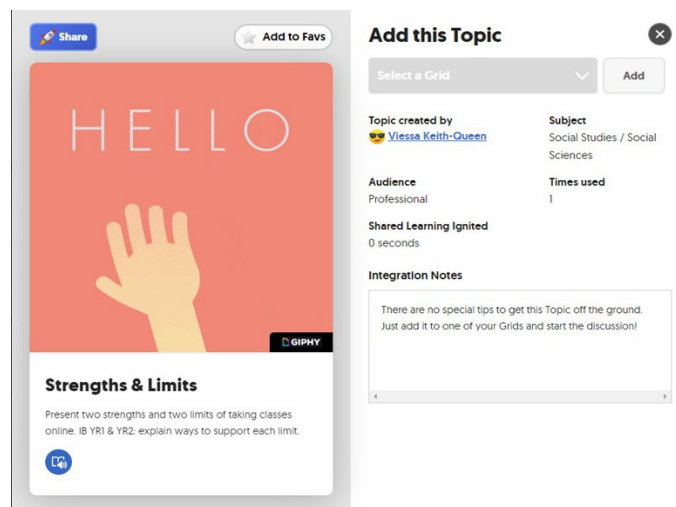


Photo credit: © Flipgrid.

Ideaflip – useful to replace group work using flipcharts and post-it notes.<sup>12</sup>

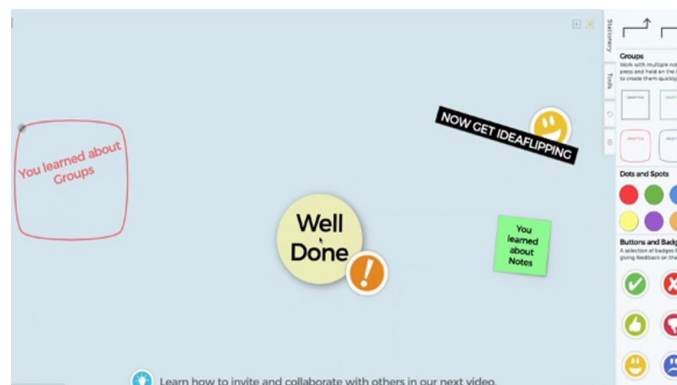


Photo credit: © Ideaflip.

11 Available at: <https://info.flipgrid.com>

12 Available at: <https://ideafip.com>

Mural – mind mapping and other team techniques.<sup>13</sup>

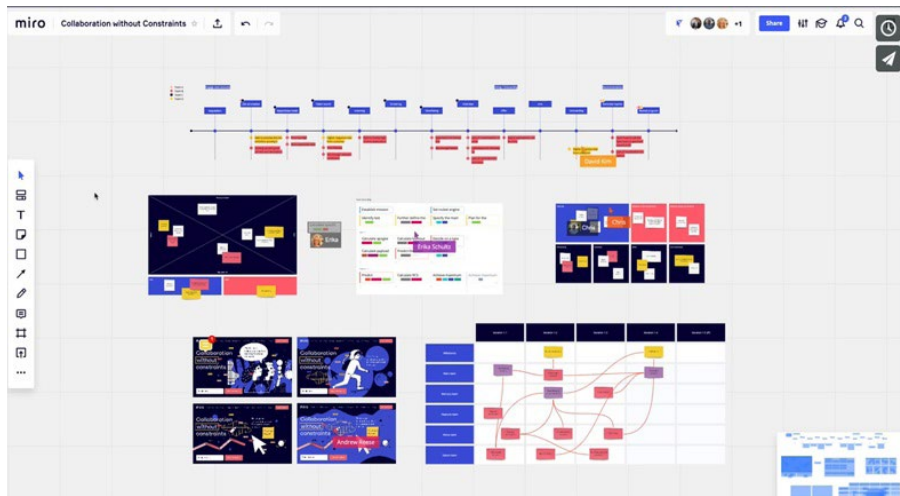


Photo credit: © Mural.

Mentimeter – used to create interactive presentations.<sup>14</sup>

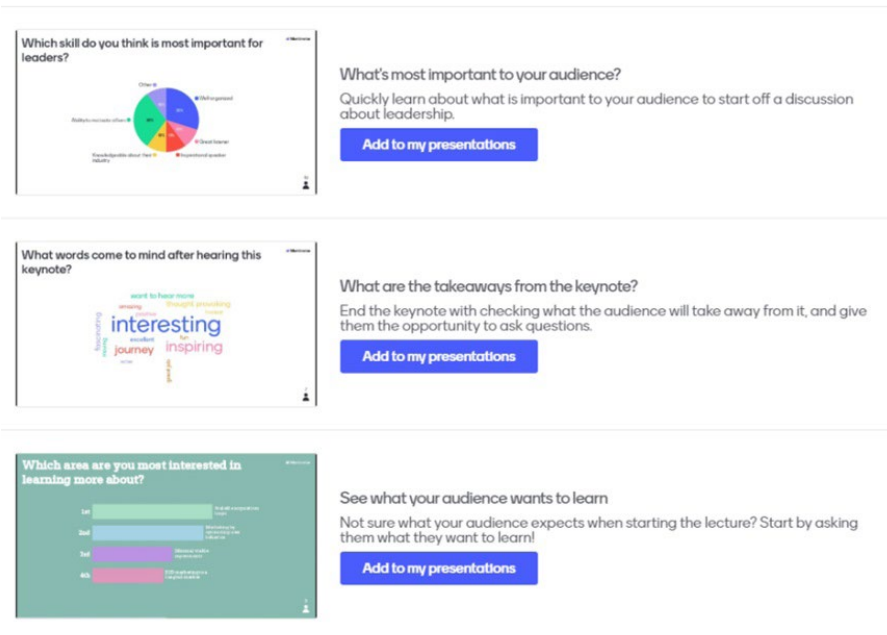


Photo credit: © Mentimeter.

<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://www.mural.co>

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://www.mentimeter.com/app>

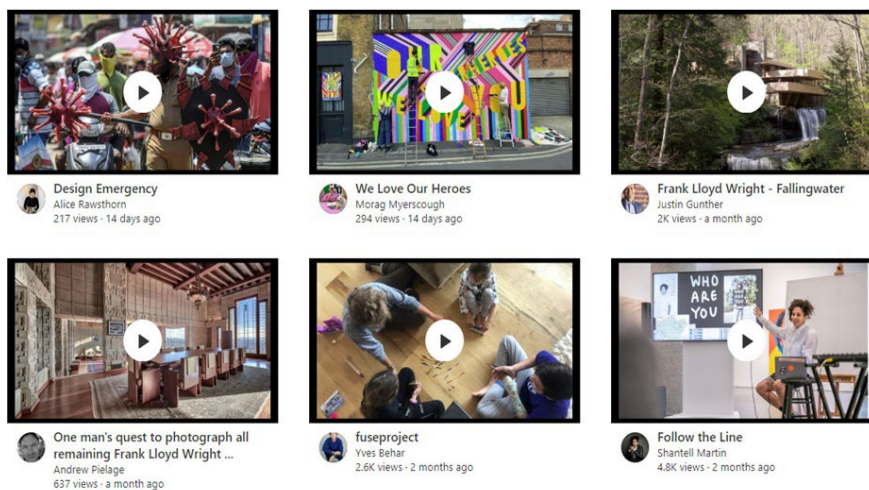
## Visual methods

ITC ILO Visual Learning Toolkit – a wide range of resources and tools to support visual learning.<sup>15</sup>



*Photo credit:* © ITC-ILO.

Pecha Kucha – 20 slides, 20 seconds of commentary per slide - create visually-compelling stories in less than 7 minutes.<sup>16</sup>



*Photo credit:* © Pecha Kucha.

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://training.itcilo.org/delta/VisualToolkit/archive-work.html>

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <https://www.pechakucha.com>

Five Card Flickr – participants use Flickr to develop stories out of photos.<sup>17</sup>

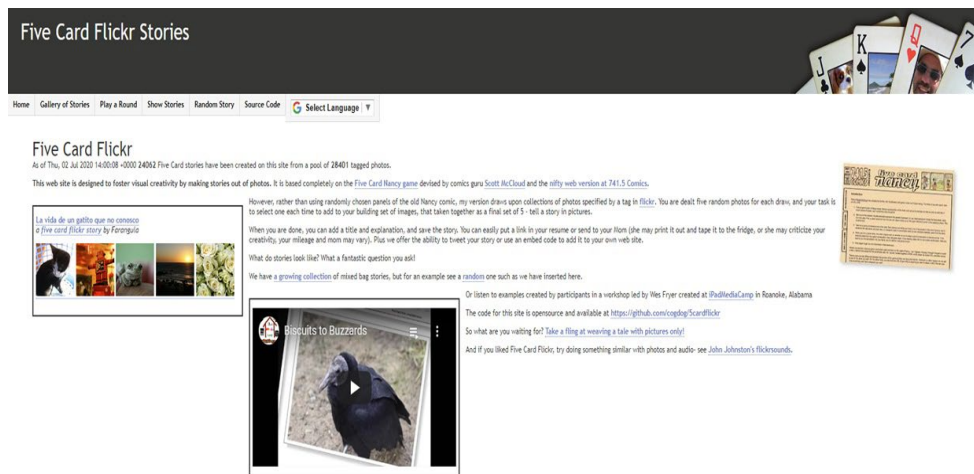


Photo credit: © Five Card Flickr.

WordArt – creates visual representations of key issues.<sup>18</sup>



Photo credit: © WordArt.

17 Available at: <http://5card.cogdogblog.com/index.php>

18 Available at: <https://wordart.com>

## New technologies and innovation

Leadership and Innovation Lab – an initiative of the Global Leadership Academy together with the International Training Center of the International Labour Organization (ITC/ILO) which offers an online collaboration platform for learning and co-creation to engage change makers from civil society, private and public sector in a multi-stakeholder dialogue process. Currently in early stages of development.<sup>19</sup>



Photo credit: © Leadership and Innovation Lab.

BodySwaps – Embodied Virtual Reality employs immersive soft skills learning. “Learning 3.0 is a multimodal approach to learning that combines the best of face-to-face, digital and immersive solutions to propose transformative personalized learning journeys.”<sup>20</sup> The gender dimensions of embodied virtual reality should be explored carefully before engaging in such technologies for training.



### VR boosts engagement and improves understanding and memorability

Even at its most basic level, VR improves the learner's engagement as it captures 100% of their audio-visual input. Moreover, the spatial and interactive representation of content improves understanding and memorability.

A 2018 study by the University of Warwick compared the learning performance of students confronted with the same content in text, video and VR. It concluded that “Virtual reality (VR) is the most engaging and emotionally positive learning method. VR shows great potential to supplement or replace traditional learning methods and create new experiences in the classroom”. (6)



### VR creates the illusion of presence and impacts one's implicit biases

In embodied VR experiences, learners are placed in simulations where they have their own virtual body, synchronised with their real body movements. Those virtual bodies are often of a different age, gender or race than the user's.

Research has shown that an illusion of virtual body ownership is created. In other words, learners subconsciously accept the virtual body as their own, which affects their implicit biases and behavior.

A 2018 study led by Natalie Salomanovitz found, that people who embodied a Black avatar produced significantly lower implicit racial bias and were more conservative when evaluating the guilt of Black defendants in mock legal scenarios. (7)

Photo credit: © Body Swaps.

Futures Platform – explores the future of organizations using Artificial Intelligence-driven foresight and trusted content crafted and updated by futurists, useful for strategic work on gender equality in organizational change processes.<sup>21</sup> The gender dimensions of artificial intelligence should be explored carefully before engaging in such technologies for training.

19 Available at: <https://labs.we-do-change.org/ai-lab.html>

20 Available at: <https://www.bodyswaps.co/vr-soft-skills-whitepaper.pdf>

21 Available at: <https://www.futuresplatform.com/product>



Trend cards & news



The radar view



Adaptable content



Collaborative tools

*Photo credit:* © Futures Platform.

REDXIR educational online platform – uses games to change the attitude and behaviour of health-care students in order to bring about a future generation of discrimination-free health-care professionals. Set in an imaginary world where the players are a young group that battles a mysterious enemy that symbolizes HIV-related stigma and discrimination, the goal of REDXIR is to fight back and defeat stigma and discrimination. Developed in collaboration with the UNAIDS country office in Iran.<sup>22</sup>



*Photo credit:* © REDXIR.

<sup>22</sup> Available at: [https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2020/june/20200616\\_islamic-republic-of-iran](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2020/june/20200616_islamic-republic-of-iran)



**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION  
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY  
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.  
A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON  
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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