Learning in the time of COVID-19: Lessons From Teachers and Their Teachers

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As practitioners within global education, we recognize the need to ensure the continuity of our instruction during the uncertainty brought by COVID-19. With the pandemic as a backdrop, we take a narrative approach to discussing teaching in the midst of a global lockdown. We conclude with a discussion of the lessons learned for both individuals and organizations through the experience of pivoting for COVID-19.

Ruminating our Reactions

Professor in Global Education

In my role as professor, I ask my students to consider how global dynamics inform our profession. Teaching in a globally focused graduate program presented a unique experience, as the seriousness of COVID-19 became apparent worldwide. My initial response was to minimize change, demonstrate competence in teaching, and deliver a high-quality experience for my students. However, while attempting to role model for students how global education practitioners support students in need, I too was making sense of COVID-19. Questions I wrestled with included: How do I convey the appropriate message for international students whose distance from their families and home countries were now seemingly more distant, when I too was concerned for my family members who live outside of the U.S.? How do I help students make sense of the xenophobic centering of COVID-19 from senior U.S. officials, when my country of ancestry has also been criticized by the U.S. government ? How do I keep my students engaged during the transition to online

learning, when their thoughts, like mine, were focused on the potential effects of the health crisis to loved ones? Eventually, I shifted, giving myself permission to acknowledge that we were indeed in a place of uncertainty. I learned to be okay with not knowing answers to students' pressing questions, removing assignments because we all needed a mental break, and extending deadlines for course assignments. Perfection was not attainable—or wanted—and I had to be okay with things not being okay for the foreseeable future.

High School Re-Tooled

As a graduate student during the pandemic, the major change was not seeing my class in person. One assignment was changed from journaling about an in-person experience repositioning the student as the "other" to journaling about our implicit biases and reaction to documentaries about different cultures. My professor took pains to make assignments more feasible, time- and content-wise. Concurrently, COVID-19 and government directives necessitated a shutdown of the high school where I work as a teacher. I engaged students in the Manie Musicale de Mars with digital brackets and by watching selected music videos from around the Francophone world. As we transitioned to online learning via the already in-place Google Classroom and Suite, this softened our landing. Another invaluable resource for my classes were virtual tours. One student travel company offered them through in-country tour directors, who presented via slideshow on cultural and historical points—and even gave cooking lessons. I learned that students adapt highly successfully to online resources that bring the world to them in one click, drastically reducing costs for "visiting" cultural sites. As Spring 2020 unfolded, my teacher self took pages from my graduate professor's book. She modeled for me how to globally educate in a crisis. As a result, I took a stance of support, gratitude and intentionally holistic distance teaching with my high school students, both domestic and international. I extended deadlines on some assignments, changed some assessments and waived others entirely.

Lessons Learned: A Way Forward

Inclusion & Belonging as Antidotes to COVID-19 Inequities

Tye (2014), explained that global education "involves learning about those problems and issues that cut across national boundaries, perspective taking,...and taking individual and

collective action for social justice and the creation of a better world" (p. 858). The COVID-19 crisis can be characterized as a global social justice issue. Within the U.S., COVID-19 has uniquely impacted professionals from diverse backgrounds and presented challenges for institutions. The health disparities among immigrants and communities of color magnified the extent of health inequities for members of these groups (Clark, et al., 2020; Goody & Wood, 2020). Though there has not been robust data collected specifically on the effects of the pandemic on sexual and gender minorities, advocates have indicated that LGBTQ individuals are experiencing increased concerns related to mental wellness, chronic illness, loss of income, food insecurity, housing instability, and violence (The Trevor Project, 2020; Whittington et al., 2020). Scholars from ethnic minority groups have faced "extra emotional labor due to COVID-related racism" (Xu, 2020, p. 19) while international students have faced xenophobic and violent responses related to the coronavirus (American College Health Association, 2020).

To better serve international students and other BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color) learners, we highlight practices that promote the academic and socio-emotional success of these groups. We suggest providing academic accommodations for students who are experiencing personal/family health problems in light of the pandemic. Faculty may consider extending deadlines or waiving non-essential assignments all-together. These accommodations could also be applied to international students forced to return home, who may experience time zone differences, Internet problems or even government restrictions to LMS functionality. Considering the student holistically, we do not wait for them to reach out to us, but initiate connection; indicating what has been done, what is in process, and how to contact us. We speak to students directly; asking them what support they need. Critically, international and BIPOC students must know that they matter.

Challenges and Benefits to Virtual Internationalization

Drawing from internationalization at home opportunities, "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69), we use virtual resources for education of the whole person, in and out of the classroom. We have found that making use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other digital tools is a crucial and effective response to crises and situations that require distance learning. The robust nature of online resources, as well as Internet sites that include virtual museum tours and e-visits of cultural sites, in 2020, gives the educational community the capacity to

adapt to a fully remote or hybrid course environment, whether in the K-12 or university classroom.

Video conferencing has ensured the continuity of community engagement. Yet, zooming into the virtual lives of our colleagues and students raises privacy concerns. Individuals may be concerned about aspects of their identities being unwittingly revealed due to their homelife dynamics. Another unintentional outcome is that socio-economic concerns may be amplified due to unreliable WIFI and the sharing of technological resources among multiple family members. Community members working from home may have increased responsibilities to family members due to COVID-19 implications, but must also balance being ever present online. These realities provide opportunities for organizations to institute a "time out" from the endless and prolonged engagement online. Some faculty are already addressing these concerns by increasing asynchronous work to provide more freedom to students; senior administrative leaders can do the same. Just as institutions adjusted to operations having been moved online, they could now consider what of their online meetings can be adapted into "memo meetings" to diminish the constant need to meet virtually.

Learning from Teaching

Through this uncomfortable yet eye-opening global historical experience, we have gained some insights as teachers on supporting students and maintaining meaningful learning. We also learned what our own needs are. In our particular circumstances, we discovered the importance of teachers learning from their mentors, leaders, students, and their own instructors on how to teach and learn through global education in a crisis.

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