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Editor

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, EdD—New England College: cfitzgerald@nec.edu

Contributing Editors/Readers

Rich Andrusiak, EdD—Mathematics Department Chair, River Valley Community College

randrusiak@ccsnh.edu

Simona Laurian-Fitzgerald, PhD—Associate Professor of Education, University of Oradea

(Romania) mmonalaurian@yahoo.co.uk

Betty C. Mulrey, EdD—Instructor and Field-Based Experience Facilitator, Merrimack College

bettymulrey10@msn.com

Laura Nelson, JD—Adjunct Professor, New England College: lnelson@nec.edu

Debra Nitschke-Shaw, PhD—Senior Professor, New England College dnitschke@nec.edu

William Preble, EdD—Professor of Education, New England College: wpreble@nec.edu

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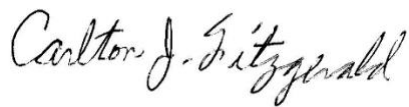
The main purpose of the *New England College Journal of Applied Educational Research* (*NEC JAER*) is to further the ability of educators to provide equity to all students. In order to make education become transformative for all students, *NEC JAER* offers professionals in the field, pre-school through higher education, opportunities to share original research and access to the latest and most accurate research information in the practices of teaching and learning. In alignment with the New England College (NEC) mission statement, our goal is to create an equity-based scholarly journal that focuses on current and applied research in the field of education to expand upon the institution's desire to be a creative and engaged learning community. The *NEC JAER* will further NEC's vision to be an equitable, creative, innovative, engaged, supportive, and environmentally sustaining learning environment by establishing the college as a center for international research in education.

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Message From the Editor

During the past 3 years, it has become abundantly clear how important teachers, professors and educational leaders are in the learning and lives of their students. All educators have read and listened to the reports about how seriously the stress of the pandemic continues to affect students, parents, and education professionals. More importantly, the professionals working in K–12 schools, colleges, and universities have lived and worked with learners who were dealing and continue to deal with the complex social and emotional issues that continue to cause social, psychological, and medical problems for our students. Education professionals are critical elements in helping young people weather the storms, past and present. In this special edition of the *NEC Journal of Applied Educational Research*, education professionals share their experiences and lessons learned during and post the pandemic. Hopefully, this was cathartic for the authors and is helpful for their readers, as educators attempt to develop our skills as K–12, college, and university professionals so that our students gain form our experiences.

Any person who reads this edition is welcome to add your ideas and experiences for other colleagues to read and consider. If you wish to add to this edition, send me an email at: cfitzgerald@nec.edu. We would love to build our common knowledge and support each other in positive ways. Thank you for all that you do for your students and their families.

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, EdD

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What Teacher Preparation Programs Can Learn From Preservice Educators in a Post

Pandemic World

Christine A. Oskar-Poisson, EdD

Columbia College

For comments or questions for the author, contact Christine A. Oskar-Poisson at

cpoisson@columbiasc.edu

Abstract

For the past 2 ½ years, the current population of undergraduate preservice teachers have

persisted in their education programs despite unimaginable obstacles. As students, they moved

in and out of remote instruction, often taking practicum and student teaching courses without

access to in-person K–12 classrooms. At the start of the 2021 academic year, many K–12

schools welcomed back students in-person, and undergraduate preservice teachers once again

had the opportunity to complete practicum and student teaching courses face-to-face. This

article synthesizes voices of undergraduate education students captured at the close of the

2021-22 academic year. Results indicate that, despite the obstacles to their own education,

preservice teachers sought out positive relationships with peers and professors to help them to

navigate challenges and persist in their education programs. In addition, participants noted the

desire to learn more about trauma-informed education practices as well as social emotional

learning (SEL) pedagogies to help their students. This article concludes with research related to

social emotional learning and trauma informed education practices to advocate for key areas to

elevate teaching and learning in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: teacher preparation, post-COVID learning, social emotional learning, trauma

informed education

It is an understatement to say that students, teachers, preservice teachers, and

communities have had a challenging 2 years. Like many organizations, schools have had to

pivot multiple times to best meet the needs of their community of learners. The 2021 academic

year brought a "return to normal" mantra that school administrators, teachers, and students hoped would lead to a comfortable school routine. In August 2021, I welcomed my preservice education students back to face-to-face meetings; their energy and hope for the academic year were palpable. From the start, though, the 2021 academic year proved to be anything but normal. As K–12 schools moved back and forth between in-person and remote learning in response to COVID-19 viral surges, preservice teachers in practicum and student teaching courses needed to adjust quickly—often overnight. In addition to the constant disruptor of the continued pandemic, the relentless political, social, and economic unrest bled into classrooms. One of my students summed it up nicely, "Even the cast of *Saturday Night Live* looks tired trying to keep up with everything!" Preservice teachers soon discovered that the K–12 classroom is a microcosm of society and when society is in a state of free fall, students act out this chaos in the classrooms.

At the close of the 2021-22 academic year, I asked the preservice teachers in my courses to take an informal survey so that I could capture their experiences. More importantly, I wanted to learn from them so that I could be better prepared for the challenges of the 2022 academic year. As educators, we look toward the future and a school year that aspires to bring more stability to our students, we have the opportunity to reflect on what these 24 months have illuminated as needs for the future educators. Teacher preparation programs are already packed with curriculum and adding to it is a daunting but necessary task. Hattie (2021) warned "perhaps the greatest tragedy to come from COVID-related distance learning would be *not* learning from this experience to improve our teaching" (p. 14). This article synthesizes voices of education students with research related to trauma informed practices to advocate for key areas that will elevate teaching and learning in a post-pandemic world.

Reflections From Preservice Educators

At the end of the 2021-22 academic year, I surveyed 91 undergraduate education students simply to get the "pulse" of the year. All participants were enrolled in either a practicum

or student-teaching course that required between 10–30 hours of weekly K–12 observation and/or student teaching. Of the 91 students, 23 students (25%) responded. Although much of what they shared I felt in my gut throughout the year, some of their answers surprised me. The following narrative synthesizes the 23 responses and offers lessons we can learn from our current education students.

The Kids Are (Mostly) Alright

One of the first questions I asked was a simple, "How are you feeling?" To my surprise, 61% (14) responded they were doing relatively well, even optimistic about the next academic year. Responses ranged from, "I am rocking it out; the pandemic did not derail me" to, "I am slowly getting back into the swing of things." One student remarked, "I had a good semester, but it took forever and flew by at the same time." On the other end of the spectrum was 17% (4) who responded that the year did not go well for them. Of the students who struggled, 35% (8) stated getting back into an academic routine after a year of remote learning was the most challenging part of the year, followed by 22% (5) being concerned about their emotional well-being. Situated in between those who felt the year went well and those who struggled was 22% (5) who responded they were "in a daze" and one rhetorically asked, "Did the semester just end?" Of this group, 22% (5) cited fearing that they missed out on academic content due to the extended time of remote learning.

Relationships Helped Students Navigate Challenges

As I dug a little deeper with my questions, I was struck by the vulnerability and honesty in the survey results. I asked the students to describe their own behaviors or actions they attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 26% (6) admitted to feeling more depressed or skipping courses more than pre pandemic. Even with struggling with their own challenges, though, 83% (19) cited positive relationships as being the best part of being back on campus. 26% (6) cited seeing friends as being the best part of returning to in person instruction, while

35% (8) cited working in schools with students face to face as being the best part of their year. 35% (8) reported that working with caring professors was the best part of their year.

Witnessing Trauma in the Classroom

All education students surveyed participated in face-to-face practicum or student teaching courses throughout the 2021 academic year. Although I had heard anecdotal accounts from my students about the traumas they were seeing in the K–12 schools, I wanted to capture data through three specific questions. Through these three questions, I discovered that all participants observed and described an increase in classroom management issues attributed to trauma exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first question specifically asked the preservice teachers about their perceptions of the ways the COVID-19 pandemic affected P–12 students. Unsurprisingly, the preservice teachers surveyed noted multiple areas. Loss of content learning and loss of consistent relationships with teachers was noted by 87% (20) of the preservice teachers, with 13% (3) believing that students felt a loss of sense of stability.

The second question asked the preservice teachers to report on behaviors they observed in the K–12 classes that either they or their cooperating teacher directly attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. An overwhelming number, 91% (21), reported observing more behavioral issues such as student anger followed by 9% (2) reporting observing student risk-taking behavior.

Lastly, I explored the research around childhood trauma and trauma-informed practices to craft my third question. The ACES (Felitti et al., 1998) study is the benchmark for identifying childhood experiences that negatively impact students into adulthood. Using the ACES survey as a foundation, I asked students to identify any of the identified areas that they had first-hand knowledge of their students experiencing in the 2021 academic year. Thirty-nine percent (9) preservice teachers reported knowledge of their students experiencing divorce; 61% (14)

preservice teachers reported knowledge of physical or emotional neglect; 26% (6) reported

knowledge of abuse; and 17% (4) reported knowledge of substance abuse in the household.

They Know They Want to Help Their Future Students

Given that some participants were preparing to graduate and start their careers, I was

interested in finding out what strategies they would bring to their classrooms. I asked, "Given

that your future students will still be navigating their own traumas, what will you do to help

them?" Their responses demonstrated their resilience:

- I will be their support guide no matter what. I want my students to feel comfortable
  enough to talk to me about whatever is bothering them. I want to be able to help
  others.

- I will hope to make sure that my future students will know that my classroom is a safe
  environment. That they can come and talk to me about anything and everything and
  not have to worry about anything.

- Provide a "I wish my teacher knew . . ." box for my students to provide anonymous or
  signed writings. This will provide me an opportunity to help someone individually or
  teach something related to their concern.

- I think putting the teacher-student relationship above content and working with the
  students' parents is the best thing we can do for them. Also, being aware of services
  in the area to give the families resources.

- Provide a safe space for students.

<div align="center">Lessons From Preservice Teachers</div>

Repairing Relationships Through Social Emotional Curriculum

In a poignant student editorial in the *New York Times* titled "It Took a Global Pandemic

to Stop School Shootings," 17-year-old Lauren Koong (2021) expressed relief when she learned

that classes would be moving online in March 2020, because she would no longer fear the

trauma created by active shooting drills or, in her case, active shooters running through her school. This sentiment has been echoed by students and teachers alike and illuminates the need to reset school climate and rebuild a sense of community. As we move back to face-to-face instruction, it is critical that we recognize the need for positive K–12 school climates.

Yet, of the education students surveyed, 83% (19) cited being back on campus with their friends and their relationship with caring professors as being contributing factors to managing the stress of the academic year. There is a disconnect between those preparing to teach in schools and those currently learning in them. This group of future educators knows that relationships are key to building resilience, but they need instruction on how to transfer that to their students when they enter the K–12 schools. Preservice educators need direct instruction on social emotional curriculum and must also know how to work with issues for students caused by trauma.

School relationships and trust grow when all students believe they have worth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). A school curriculum rich in social emotional learning activities is a way to repair the trust our students have in their future. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) recommended that school districts create an infrastructure where resources are readily available to share. In its roadmap for school reopening after the March 2020 school shut downs, CASEL (2020) offered a path forward with suggestions such as creating multiple spaces to grow the whole child both in and out of the school.

Students learn best when they feel safe and are in a trusting relationship with their teachers and their peers (CASEL, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2015) found that social and emotional skills in kindergarteners were also positively correlated with their personal well-being and inversely predictive of involvement in crime and substance use. Creating an environment where students are given the platform to demonstrate agency can transform social, emotional, and academic behavior (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Kamei & Harriott, 2021). Kraft and Falcen (2020) provided practical ways for schools to do this by

recommending cross-aged peer tutoring as a way to remediate loss of learning due to the pandemic while also building trusting relationships between the K–12 student body.

Providing Instruction on Trauma-Informed Practices

Education students have lost much in the last 24 months. They have lost loved ones to the COVID-19 virus, friendships due to social distancing and remote instruction, and, most importantly, trust that their future will be better than their past. Our education students are also entering the teaching profession at a time when K–12 teachers are reporting an increase in behavioral issues due to the stress of the ongoing pandemic (Vestal, 2021). There is much research calling out the need to attend to our students' social and emotional needs as we move from a time of crisis to a new normal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Kamei & Harriott, 2021). K–16 students are experiencing chronic stress as a direct result of the traumatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Vestal, 2021). Although there has been some progress of infusing trauma-informed practices into K–12 schools, there is no model or standard for preparing preservice teachers in the pedagogy (Thomas et al., 2019). Teachers often report feeling underprepared to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma (Hobbs et al., 2019). Brunzell et al. (2019) found that teachers had not been provided with specific strategies to help students who had experienced trauma. According to Brunzell et al., when asked what types of courses they would like added to their teacher preparation program, 37% stated courses in trauma-informed education. Education programs need to make room for direct instruction on trauma-informed teaching practices.

Alleviating Compassion Fatigue and Burn Out through Self Care Strategies

Brunzell et al. (2021) concluded teachers "benefitted when modelling and mirroring the same capacities they were hoping to nurture in students, thereby showing by living examples the benefits of consciously embedding strategies to bolster wellbeing" (p. 102). Education students have witnessed first-hand the excessive stress of the teaching profession. They understand the irony that they will have multiple job offers upon graduation simply because so

many veteran teachers are leaving the profession (Giffin et al., 2021). They are willing to do the hard work, but they also need the tools to avoid burnout and compassion fatigue. Post et al. (2022) found many teachers are not only inadequately trained in responding to students who have experienced trauma, they are also not trained in ways to manage their own stress responses. When asked what types of courses they would like added to their teacher preparation program, 26% (6) of the preservice teachers in this study stated courses in teacher self-care strategies. A school community needs to attend to the needs of all involved. CASEL (2020) recognized the value of tending to educators' health and wellbeing by recommending time for self-care be built into professional goals and professional development be geared towards trauma and fatigue.

Conclusion

There is much work to be done, but this global pandemic has stirred the muck at the bottom of the lake and what has floated to the surface are key areas of growth. Early findings show that from tragedy can come opportunities for positive changes in our educational systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Kraft et al. (2021) went so far to conclude "catastrophe *can* be a catalyst for positive change" (p. 29). Teacher preparation programs can add in more coursework focusing on SEL and trauma-informed teaching pedagogies. Classroom teachers can be mindful of SEL strategies and trauma-informed practices when building curriculum by empowering students to take control of their learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Professional learning opportunities need to focus on SEL and trauma-informed practices so that our students, our teachers, and our communities can heal and move forward together. Most importantly, educators need to remember that life is now different. We have this small moment in time to make education better for our students.

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Leading During the COVID-19 Pandemic: One College Administrator's Perspective

Christine M. Wilson, PhD

University of Maine Farmington and New England College

For comments or questions for the author, contact Christine M. Wilson at

christine.wilson@maine.edu

Abstract

Working at the university level prepares campus employees to deal with a diversity of negative issues and even with crises. COVID-19 did away with the rule book for how to handle university crises as universities fell into the middle of a worldwide pandemic beyond what almost every university employee could have imagined. When administrators first closed schools around the nation, many believed we, as educators, were entering a fairly short-term crisis. What started as a few weeks or a few months of total disruption, turned into one of the worst pandemics in the history of the world. Almost nobody could imagine that more than a million people would die in the US, or that the world of business would come to a standstill, or that people would spend months of not being able to even see their family members in the hospital, other than through their hospital room windows or video calls. At our small university, institutional leadership developed an incident command (IC) team to work as a group to try to manage the everchanging pandemic while also attempting to continue to effectively educate as many of our students as possible. In this article, I describe our efforts, our successes and our failures, and discuss the lessons my colleagues and I learned from our experiences. I hope that these experiences will help the reader to be better prepared for the next life-changing crisis that their institution will face.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, incident command teams, quarantine, social distancing, proactive health

Over the past 2 ½ years, our campus, The University of Maine Farmington, experienced what most college campuses did: at first, coming to grips with managing a deadly phenomenon

we did not understand; next, managing a highly politicized pandemic; then, managing the continuing, ever-changing pandemic and its negative impacts, and wondering if it will it ever be over.

This essay will explore the management and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a small, regional, public campus that is part of a system of universities. Like many campuses, we are understaffed and have no resources to spare. I am one of six administrators on my campus, and since February 2020, have served on the four-member incident command (IC) leadership team managing COVID-19 related affairs.

I started my job at our university in July 2019. During the fall 2019 semester, I was positive and hopeful. Our dynamic new president had set the stage for meaningful progress. My first awareness of COVID-19 came in early February 2020 from the faculty member responsible for study away programs and international studies. By the end of February 2020, our IC team and emergency operations center were activated and engaged.

Guiding Principles

I have taught leadership studies to college students for many years, including classes on leadership in crisis. And as a long time, student affairs practitioner, I have led and been a part of managing many crises. Early on, I knew I would draw upon those lessons I had experienced and the many things I had learned from my colleagues, leaders, and students over the course of my career. As I thought about dealing with the pandemic, I organized what I had learned into four guiding principles: look for something different from people, be aware of negative opportunism, center on who and what are important, and operate from the benefit of the doubt.

Look for Something Different From People

Often crises give individuals opportunities to exhibit different talents and skills than what is expected during non-crisis times. I resolved to look for opportunities for individuals to participate, problem solve, and even excel.

Be Aware of Negative Opportunism

In any crisis, some individuals and organizations will take advantage, exploit the situation, and benefit from the crisis, even as it negatively impacts others. I committed to ask myself, who or what would benefit from any given aspect of our actions? Who is trying to control the narrative for a particular perspective or outcome? I was determined that if negative opportunism crept into our operations, we would be able to regroup or pivot to make sure we were centering the right concepts, groups, and individuals.

Center Who and What Are Important

What should be centered during this pandemic? The IC team centered "public health" and our students. Most of our policies were created at the system level in collaboration with campus leadership. When participating in system meetings and making decisions related to public health, we asked: What is the best option to maintain public health? What are the costs of the best option? Can we manage these costs? Next, we made the best decision we could. When making decisions centered on our students, we asked ourselves: What is the impact of any given decision on our students' experiences; on our marginalized or oppressed students? on the students' pursuit of their academic goals?

Operate From the Benefit of the Doubt

I made a personal decision to give everyone the benefit of the doubt during the COVID-19 crisis. People react differently during crises, individuals have different needs, have varying capacities for managing stress, and have particular responsibilities during hard times. I told myself to put aside anything anyone did and attribute actions to how folks move through the world during a crisis.

Totally Consumed

The early days of managing the COVID-19 crisis were wild. Campus and IC leaders worked 12–16 hours a day managing everything from moving students out of the residence halls during spring break, to organizing technology needed for staff and faculty to work from

home, to grappling with how many of our students would not have what they needed for online learning. IC leadership committed to answering COVID-19 questions in a timely manner and set up a special health info email account. The email traffic was voluminous.

Faculty on our highly residential, traditional campus transitioned to online classes. For many, it was challenging not only technically, but to their spirits; some were demoralized because the in-person classroom environment was where students and faculty thrived. Students struggled with a multiplicity of issues including the abrupt change to an online environment, lack of connectivity and appropriate technology, disrupted friendship groups, financial challenges and worries, and the heart wrench of canceled international classes and trips. How is a student supposed to persist when they are going to classes on their phone (because they do not have a laptop) and are getting Wi-Fi in their car while parked outside of a big box retail establishment or when they had to work extra jobs because breadwinners in their households were laid off? The stories of what students experienced were both inspiring and tragic.

Athletics and graduation were two very sad points during early COVID-19 times. Telling the senior spring sport student athletes their seasons were over was heartbreaking for the athletic director and the athletes. And our decision about spring 2020 graduation was protracted and agonizing; at first, we planned on having it in August 2020 when the crisis would surely be over . . . then December 2020 was considered, but the pandemic had not improved by then.

Relying on our guiding principles helped. For example, when we were criticized for letting too many students stay on campus after they were supposed to go home, we explained that for some of our students, the concept of "go home" was problematic. Not all students had homes to which to go. Some were abused at home. Some did not have beds or bedrooms, or study spaces, or the internet. For many of our students, staying on campus helped their mental health and academic persistence.

Individuals and offices across campus stepped up in a variety of ways. Our alumni department had an emergency fundraising campaign for students. Student organization

advisors helped student leaders salvage what they could of their year, from holding virtual leadership awards to developing the infrastructure to hold our first online elections. Student life staff implemented online social and educational programs through social media. Our fitness staff created virtual classes and challenges. The counseling and student health department transitioned to tele-health.

I was personally challenged. Both my parents were ill with COVID-19 in March and April 2020, my father seriously so. My daughter was laid off from her job. But I barely had a chance to talk with them about their woes, because I was so busy with COVID-19 related work. In addition, my spouse was 5 hours away. I took the job in Maine, and he stayed to continue his job as a firefighter. We were prepared for regular long-distance travel, but between the travel restrictions among states and COVID-19 work tasks, I hardly saw him that spring, which made the work-from-home isolation and loneliness even more acute.

Building the Road as We Drove on It

The end of the spring 2020 semester did not mean rest for campus and IC leadership. We worked long hours with system leadership to prepare for a return to campus the following semester. I served as the convener of the planning section in the IC structure and worked with a large campus group, as well as IC and campus leadership, to plan our return in Fall 2020.

IC prepared for fall 2020 asymptomatic testing for everyone and move-in testing and quarantining for our residence hall students. Facilities created cleaning protocols, measured every space on campus, and reset offices and classrooms for social distancing. Academic leadership tried to figure out how many online classes were enough and how many would be too many for our residential campus. Academic support staff worked to help faculty move from the emergency state of in-person classes being taught online to effective online education. Faculty prepared to teach socially distanced and with masks, and they helped update schedules for students who could not travel for student exchanges or international programs. Orientation staff reimagined welcoming new students into a hybrid environment to be as inclusive as

possible. Admissions and financial aid offices adapted in-person visits and a high touch environment to using virtual spaces. Athletics staff and coaches balanced NCAA, conference, and campus policies related to sports, and developed local protocols for practices, travel, and competition. Dining staff analyzed spaces to plan how students would get food and where they would eat, and how to provide take away meals. Student health staff prepared pandemic educational materials and determined how to deliver healthcare safely during a pandemic. Staff in our federally funded student support program figured out how to deliver activity supplies to students. A number of us worked with our webmaster to create website content. And we continued to use our email account as the communications hub.

In early July 2020, we had several online community meetings to discuss our fall 2020 return to campus plans. During those meetings, I realized many students, faculty, and staff were experiencing COVID-19 and its impact on their lives in multiple ways. Managing these highly individualized needs was going to be a major challenge. It was obvious by this point that anything related to COVID-19 was being politicized. We had community members on both ends of a philosophical range from, "How can you even think about being in person given the danger of this virus?" to, "Anything you are doing to manage this fake virus is ridiculous and illogical."

Fall 2020 move-in days were a very low point. We were organized, prepared, and even excited going into check-in—our students were back on campus! But the process did not go as planned. The final step of check-in was an asymptomatic test. Unfortunately, due to several factors beyond our control, the medical staff provided for us was not large enough to expeditiously move our students through required testing. As a result, students spent hours in line. And to make matters even worse, we had an unexpected thunderstorm with a "seek shelter immediately" directive requiring our socially distant lines outside having to crowd inside, resulting in a confusing, anxious scene. Some parents called their senators or representatives, some called system leadership, many called our president or wrote angry emails to our email account.

During the required posttest/move-in quarantine, the situation further deteriorated. IC leadership had committed to releasing everyone from quarantine after all test results were back, estimated to be within 2 days—the best decision for public health as we were trying to create a bubble of safety. But it turned out the sheer volume of tests delayed analysis at the lab. Some tests had to be redone, which further delayed the process. Students could see their results online, and as negative results started coming in for some students, those students questioned why they had to stay in quarantine. After 3 days, our students were agitated, and some said we were keeping them "in jail." Again, some parents called their senators or representatives, some called system leadership, many called our president, or wrote angry emails to our email account. After 4 days, we decided to release everyone who had a negative result.

After our move-in testing and quarantine debacle, IC and campus leadership regrouped, licked our wounds, and recommitted to serving our community in the most effective local ways possible. IC also solidified our operating principles and a new communications approach.

Incident Command Values

Deliberation Is Necessary

In our almost daily IC leadership meetings, we interrogated ourselves and each other by regularly asking: Are we centering public health? Are we centering our students? Are we looking at things from the students' perspectives, and thinking about the impacts on students? What is the right public health thing to do? Can we do that? Why or why not? If not, what is the next best right thing? We also asked who else should be at our meetings, and regularly invited colleagues to help us deliberate important issues.

Communication Must Be Direct, Focused, Informative, & Void of Political Perspectives.

In all crises, people crave information and will seek what they can somewhere else, if there is a vacuum of communication from leadership. Our communication plan included accurate and up-to-date web information, frequent meetings of the various IC teams during which information was shared and questions asked, emails informing campus of changes in

policies or protocols and an email address that individuals could use to get their own specific questions answered. We applied the direct/focused/informative/neutral process to all of these communication channels. For example, we avoided incentives to encourage our community to participate in asymptomatic testing, and we did not shame them into testing either. asymptomatic testing would be a function of public health—period. We sent weekly asymptomatic testing updates to our campus after our first positive result in November 2020. These notes included positivity rates on campus and in our county, references to policy and protocol changes, and a thank you to folks for participating in testing—simple and routine. We monitored the email account 7 days a week and worked to answer folks within a day. And no matter how mean, sarcastic, or political folks were, we answered informatively, empathetically, and with no drama.

These values created a relatively consistent and predictable situation on campus. People generally understood how IC leadership was addressing issues and why decisions were made the way they were, even when they disagreed with us. And when there was discord, individuals knew who to engage with and how things would be handled. This did not mean things had gone well or all outcomes were positive, but it does mean folks could participate, and would be heard and assisted if at all possible.

Lessons, Just Not the Ones We Imagined

From the time of our first positive result in November 2020 to the fall of 2022, our lives were a blur of COVID-19 related work that included implementing a weekly asymptomatic testing (2–5 days every week) program; managing positive results 24/7/365; taking care of students in isolation and quarantine in collaboration with student health, dining, student life, and facilities; informing and supporting faculty when students were in isolation and quarantine; updating policies and protocols as the system, the state, and the Centers for Disease Control changed things in response to the constantly evolving trajectory of the virus; and continuously updating all communication content and channels. Over time, we were able to learn from our

experiences, regroup, and use precious resources to tweak our operations. We hired a few temporary and part-time staff members to help with three areas that take a great deal of time to manage—testing, contact tracing, and compliance. We also hired a very small group of students to serve as peer care managers. These brave individuals provided peer support to students in isolation and quarantine. They delivered meals, did laundry, and served as liaisons between the students and IC leadership/case management staff. These eager and proactive staff and students made space for IC leadership and staff to do a little more of our regular work. The lesson is: if there is any way to use resources to increase capacity to serve the community during a crisis, do so, because there will be people who want to help, and leaders need space to reflect in order to move forward effectively.

Another lesson learned is that the focus of the crisis cannot be about each of us, or our individual skill sets or interests in a crisis. We do whatever needs to be done to assure the mission is fulfilled. When we were short peer care managers, others would deliver meals. When we ran out of laundry cards in our isolation building, I did student laundry at my house. When students ordered meals after the deadline, our director of student life delivered them because he believed that no student in isolation should miss a meal, even due to their own forgetfulness. One IC leader made sure we all had proper personal protective equipment, sharing some from her personal supply, and our IC testing leader made sure IC members who interacted with positive students had test kits in case they were exposed. Campus police transported student belongings to and from our isolation hall. Dining staff took the initiative to serve special things to students in isolation over holidays. A small but mighty group of staff, students, and faculty planned a creative hybrid graduation for the class of 2021. Many, many folks focused on the mission and supported our students in ways outside of their job descriptions.

One of my personal lessons relates to grief. I have had to come to terms with the grief of not getting a chance (yet) to be the vice president I wanted to be because most of my time has been spent helping manage the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The other personal lesson relates

to one of my original, personal guiding principles: operating from the benefit of the doubt. This was extremely helpful in the early COVID-19 days, and has grounded me throughout the crisis, particularly through the hardest times when the IC leadership team, our president, or I received a lot of negative feedback and significant criticism.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has impacted everyone, and in a wide variety of ways. Some of our staff still feel betrayed that we came back to campus for in-person classes and activities in fall 2020. Some staff were extremely stressed by the constant writing and rewriting of policies and protocols as the situation evolved. Residential students were afraid that other residential students' carelessness in common spaces would harm them, and many of them moved home or off-campus to the perceived safety of familiar faces and small circles of friends. Some students moved home to take care of their families and never came back—and for some of them, it was just too much to juggle work and responsibilities and classes. Some students could not succeed in the online environment. And some could not succeed in the highly restricted in-person environment. I think about these students often and wonder what has become of their academic dreams.

There have been positive outcomes. Our academic online infrastructure and teaching capacity is stronger, and our virtual programmatic improvements have made us more inclusive. In addition, we now have both in person and virtual health and counseling services, which means we can serve more students. We also realized activities which fostered a sense of belonging and mutual accountability, like sports teams or research projects, positively impacted the student experience. Places where folks could gather casually improved experiences as well. I'll never forget the students cheering when the dining hall put its tables back in fall 2021, or watching students joyfully meet outside when the weather improved. In the future, I will prioritize activities based in belonging, mutual accountability, and casual gathering.

One thing is crystal clear: everything we did to manage public health was necessary, but it took a toll on our community. People are exhausted, and not because they do not care about

others' health, but because what they experienced is so grounded in *fear.* Fear of transmission,

of losing control, of losing time or important activities in life, and, of course, of losing a loved

one. We are now keenly aware of the importance of managing fear in a crisis, not with hollow

reassurances, but with information and empathy-demonstrating awareness of impacts and

bearing witness to those impacts.

   In the end, my experience at our university during COVID-19 times has been bearable

because of a supportive and trusting president, as well as hard working colleagues, jointly

focused on effective communication, and intensely committed to health, safety, and the student

experience. I have a great deal of respect for these individuals; I appreciate their collegiality, am

inspired by their humanity, and honored to serve alongside them. They give me the strength to

carry on as we move to the next phase of living with COVID-19.

Navigating the Pandemic in Dual Education Roles:

A Combined K–12 & Higher Education Perspective

Malia A. Minnick, EdD

New England College

For comments or questions for the author, contact Malia A. Minnick at

maliaminnick@gmail.com

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts in the lives of American students and educators. Educators faced an upheaval and adjustment to a "new normal" as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, involving extensive use of technology and remote learning. During the pandemic, I was employed as both a sixth grade English language arts teacher in rural New England and a remote adjunct instructor for a higher education institution with over 30,000 students. These positions were starkly different in their academic scope, population demographics, and response to the country-wide shut down, yet the students faced many of the same obstacles as they progressed in their education. The COVID-19 pandemic caused teachers and staff to rally together to support students, brought to light great gaps in the education of the children in the K–12 school system, and necessitated shifts in educational platforms and curriculum to ensure the health and safety of our students and educators. With all of the lost classroom time, something more damaging was present as well: the loss of social and emotional readiness for learning. With proper social supports integrated into the education system at all levels moving forward, students may begin to regain their motivation and success in academia and in life outside of school.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education, K–12 education, social/emotional support, teaching

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts in nearly every sector of our lives. As educators, we often had a front row seat to the chaos and challenges that families

went through over the past two years. I have had the privilege of viewing the pandemic through multiple educational perspectives during this time period: as a parent of a student navigating learning during a country-wide shutdown, a doctoral student, a 6th grade English language arts teacher in rural New England, and a remote adjunct instructor for a university with over 30,000 students.

As a parent, I faced issues regarding balancing my professional work and supporting a child with high educational needs in her first and second grade curriculum. As a 6th grade teacher, I spent countless hours building and adapting a curriculum that could be delivered in both remote synchronous and asynchronous environments with little hands-on support from staff. Even when students returned to physical classrooms, physical distancing mandates were still in place in the district and administrators encouraged teachers to avoid shared physical materials, making previous hands-on lessons more difficult. As a doctoral student, I was part of a small and tightly-knit cohort, which provided a lot of social and emotional support through the doctoral process. When our program went fully remote, we missed out on the casual social aspects that we had grown to appreciate within our cohort, making our work feel less collaborative and, at times, more daunting. My role as a student at this time helped me to empathize with the children and adults I was teaching. I recognized the difficulties in working on academics from home, where distractions were rampant and space was limited. I also recognized the fatigue students faced in using computers for all of their schoolwork. My participation in each of these roles helped me to be a more understanding and creative educator as I faced the pandemic alongside my students.

Addressing a Pandemic in an Educational Setting

Educators faced an upheaval and adjustment to a "new normal" as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. My roles as a mother, doctoral student, sixth grade teacher, and adjunct university instructor were starkly different in their academic scope, population demographics, and response to the country-wide shut down.

K–12

No one was prepared, whether parents or educators, for the United States to shut down its schools in March of 2020 in response to the growing COVID-19 transmission concerns. Initially, our school district shut down for just a week or two with no instruction given to students during that time. The thought was that the schools would be able to reopen relatively quickly. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Our district extended the shutdown two more times before "calling it quits" for the year. Teachers had an opportunity for a one-week mad dash of pulling together curriculum and creating packets and Google Classrooms to deliver lessons for the remainder of the year.

Our school district had established a reopening plan prior to the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year with charts regarding thresholds for when students would be sent remote versus stay in-person for their education based on school and community transmission rates of the virus. This plan in itself caused a great deal of tension in the school and larger community. The year was throttled with a haphazard in-person, remote, in-person, remote, etc. schedule that made student transitions and teacher planning difficult and disrupted. Additionally, the district hired and/or reassigned educators to work in fully remote positions spanning multiple grade levels to educate the students whose families wanted them to stay in remote instruction full-time.

With a new reopening plan in place for the 2021-2022 school year, the school district, under supervision from the state of New Hampshire, elected to not offer remote instruction through district staff. Instead, students were given the option to come to school in person while wearing masks full-time or parents and their students could homeschool traditionally or by using a remote platform, such as Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS), which some families elected to do. During peaks in COVID-19 cases in the area, students remained learning in-person. The reopening plan included verbiage that specified when students and staff would be required to wear masks, how far apart desks had to be in the classrooms, etc. The school

board revisited this plan several times, and, upon the return from February break, the district went "mask optional" for all students and staff at all times.

Higher Education

I began working in higher education mid-pandemic in October 2020. This was a unique role as an adjunct instructor teaching 5-week courses back-to-back all year long. Due to the remote nature of my institution, the pandemic had very different impacts than it did in the K–12 sector in which I was working. In this setting, students were not expected to meet for classes and work was done asynchronously. However, their education was still impacted by the ramifications of the pandemic (e.g., lost jobs, sick family members, quarantining). For in-person colleges, like the one my younger sister was attending for her undergraduate studies in sustainable agriculture and food systems, education was more directly impacted. Science majors, like my sister, were especially impacted by changes that included smaller class groupings, different timing of courses, lab classes being put online (less effectively), constant COVID-19 testing to keep on-campus privileges and wearing masks and PCP to lab classes that were held in-person.

I finished my doctor of education program during the pandemic as well, which led to postponement and reduction of graduation festivities, residency sessions being moved into virtual formats, and an online dissertation defense. This showed me how, even within higher education, each school had to individually navigate what they could do to meet the needs of their students while keeping them safe.

Teaching in a Pandemic

Working in both the K–12 and higher education environments during the pandemic helped me to recognize similarities and differences between these populations. I recognized that despite the difference in ages and experiences of my students, using technology for educational purposes remained an obstacle for many students, ranging from how to upload assignments to how to format academic assignments. While the demands on students at home

were starkly different for sixth graders versus adults in college, they all faced challenges in prioritizing time and minimizing distractions when working from their homes (some of which were not equipped for academic work with proper space and/or technology). These challenges, and others, were exacerbated by changes to the academic routine based on decisions of the school board and/or public health officials.

K–12 Teaching

When COVID-19 was first introduced as a crisis in the United States and the initial shutdowns began, it was overwhelming to our rural education system. At that time, I was on maternity leave from my work as a school counselor at a K–5 elementary school in New Hampshire, but my eldest daughter was in first grade at my school. We were faced with the social and emotional impacts of the initial shutdown, just like everyone else, largely due to the fact that we did not leave our house, even to see close family members, for a month and a half. My daughter's school supplies and lunches were delivered to our door with no contact. Eventually, the district organized the school using Google Classroom, which facilitated some online work but much of it was asynchronous, and I supplemented school learning with direct teaching of my own child at home (a luxury many non-educators and working parents could not accomplish with their children).

With the pandemic still going strong in late August of 2020, staffing became a huge issue in my district. By providing students and families with the option of remote learning, our already skeletal staff was broken down into those who would be providing remote education versus those who would be providing in-person education. The pandemic and the additional classes for online learning caused the district to have numerous teaching positions to be unfilled. At that time, I was 38 weeks pregnant and had another baby at home. That was when I found out, with a week to go before school (teachers were already back in training for the new year) the sixth grade team was lacking two of their four core teachers (and there were no applicants). I jokingly told my mother, who was one of the remaining sixth grade teachers, that I

would come teach English for them, if they did not mind me taking a few weeks off to have a baby. I was hired within 3 days, with administration knowing that I could have a baby at any time.

I ended up teaching for 2 weeks before giving birth (even going to work the day that I went into labor) and taking 6 short weeks off with my baby before returning. The district continued to face a severe substitute and staffing shortage, causing me to spend my time at home during my unpaid maternity leave writing and adapting my lesson plans, grading assignments, and occasionally redirecting children who were off task in their online classroom. The administration was never able to find a long-term substitute for my classroom, meaning the students were faced with a revolving door of different faces attempting to deliver instruction during an already tumultuous time in society.

When I returned to work in late October, the pandemic concerns were still rampant. Our district had a detailed reopening plan set forth by the school board and based on the guidance of health officials. This plan included a matrix that determined when we would be doing in-person versus remote instruction based on the number of active COVID-19 cases in the community and within the school. At times, our community made great progress, such as when community members banded together to make and distribute masks to all of our students. At other times, our reopening plan caused additional stress for students, teachers, and parents/guardians with constant transitions between remote and in-person learning, inconsistent curriculum delivery within grade levels due to lack of communication between the remote and in-person teachers, and transiency between students electing to work remotely versus in person (and limitations on this transiency, such as not being allowed to change one's option until the quarter marks). The teachers also heard many comments about students wanting to "go remote," which some teachers interpreted as a way to disengage from learning. The tracking of education for students and ensuring they were participating in their academics was complicated with all of the different options available.

Another part of our reopening plan was a mask mandate. This caused a lot of tension in our community, eventually resulting in threats of lawsuits and picketing outside of our school. Students struggled to wear masks appropriately, sometimes resulting in suspensions after repeated offenses. When the 2021–2022 school year began, the reopening plan was adjusted to include no option to go remote at all, and masks were required based on another decision matrix based on community spread and transmission at school. Mask wearing became a politicized debate at school board meetings, with the mandate eventually being dropped at the end of February 2022.

Our district made an effort to physically distance students from one another, with desks in traditional rows rather than more collaborative formations as they had been in the past. This physical distancing disrupted typical types of teaching and learning, as science labs could no longer be done in small groups and partnerships and peer editing of English papers were often done by sharing documents on a computer rather than sitting together. Teachers and administrators made a large effort to call this "physical" distancing rather than "social" distancing in hopes that it would be less damaging socially to our students.

Despite all of our efforts with masks, remote instruction, physical distancing, and more, there was a great deal of inconsistency and discomfort across the district with the new methods. The school district received grants from the federal government at this time for various purposes, such as adding a privacy fence between the elementary school and a neighboring business, re-turfing the athletic fields, expanding our technical education center, and installing a book vending machine. These grants, though, did not combat educator fatigue. Our district saw extreme turnover at the end of each year, oftentimes with teachers choosing to leave the profession entirely. Additionally, many teachers and staff members broke their contracts and quit their jobs mid-year, something that I had never experienced in K–12 education in the past. These growing concerns only exacerbated the impacts of staffing shortages and not being able to meet the needs of our students.

Higher Education Teaching

The format of teaching and learning did not change for me as a remote adjunct instructor for a popular online university. Students still enrolled in courses, and I continued to teach in asynchronous formats online. However, there were noticeable differences in the motivations and barriers that my higher education students faced as they tried to complete their work. For example, in the past, students typically would reach out ahead of time if they planned to be late on an assignment or had confusion on a task. The pandemic caused students, many of whom are non-traditional students with jobs and families outside of their schooling commitments, to face additional hardships. Oftentimes a student would "disappear" from class for a week and later reach out to report that they had tested positive for COVID-19 and wanted to make up their work. Other times they were faced with the death of family members and/or friends due to the virus, impacting their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Luckily my institution offers many support services to students for both academic and mental health concerns, leading to faculty making referrals for members of their classes who were unable to complete their work in a timely fashion or who were otherwise struggling.

During the pandemic, I also became part of a new faculty initiative called the "Power of One," which allowed me to offer additional support to vulnerable students. This initiative allowed more flexibility for students to turn in work late or take an "incomplete" for a course and finish later. As an instructor, this initiative helped me to grow deeper connections with my students through frequent check-ins and communications which helped me to develop rapport with and trust from my students. I believe this program was a major influence on many of my students' ability to persist with all that was going on in the outside world.

What the Pandemic Taught Me

As a member of both the K–12 and higher education worlds during the COVID-19 pandemic, I learned many things about emergency responses in schools and about myself as an educator. These discoveries included needing more access to education, building

transferable technology skills for students, working collaboratively within and outside of education to improve students' learning opportunities, and maintaining a positive mindset despite obstacles.

Even When We Think We Have Access; We Need More Access

It seems like everyone today has access to the internet in their homes. I learned that this was not the case for many of my sixth grade students. When the schools shut down, some students went completely off the grid, and we did not see them for months on end. With the drastic increase in families choosing to homeschool, it was hard to track down where some of our students were (and often we did not know if they were supposed to be in class or not). When our schools went remote, for the students who did not have access to their lessons through technology at home, it took many, many months for my K–12 district to set up an in-person learning space that students could access.

We Need to Build More Transferable Technology Skills Into Our Curriculum

When I was in elementary and middle school not that long ago, we took keyboarding classes in which we learned about proper placement of our hands on the keys, how to type without looking, etc. The students in my district are no longer having this direct instruction. Instead, typing games are used as a warm-up for some classes or as an "extra" assignment to do (by choice) when they finish a task early. There is a lack of direct keyboarding instruction that is negatively impacting the efficiency in which our students can communicate their ideas when working remotely. Perhaps because there are so many families with computers at home today, or maybe because we are so used to texting at this point, the emphasis on keyboarding skills has dwindled in schools. Without having the background knowledge of how to use word processing software, students are at a disadvantage when submitting assignments, not because they do not know the content, but because they do not know how to format it. Playing video games using a computer system is not the same as typing a report or creating a PowerPoint presentation. As educators and community members, we should not equate these very diverse

sets of computer skills. Instead, we should reintegrate direct instruction of word processing programs and keyboarding skills back into our curriculums, if we anticipate continued use of these modalities in the future.

Teaching Cannot Be Done in a Silo

There are so many parts to education that must be addressed collaboratively, so bringing together multiple agencies and resources to support our students is essential. No one comes to school just to be focused on school, despite their age. Many students are carrying with them the baggage of their family dynamics, income level, food security (or insecurity), health, hygiene, and much more. I believe educators must remind ourselves of our early psychology courses in which we learned of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Gardner's multiple intelligences theories and address the bottom tiers of this pyramid, both physiological and safety needs, before we can expect students to critically think about the content in our courses. Educators can do this by validating how our students feel and what they are going through. Schools can reach out to connect families with resources to help them find housing, jobs, food, etc. Classroom teachers must not forget that school is typically a place of consistency for our students. When students lose that small piece of consistency, it can be even harder for them to stay "afloat" in life.

We Can Do Our Work With Good Intentions

It is important to understand that schools and educators cannot please all of the people, all of the time. As a people pleaser, it was difficult for me to accept this concept. The pandemic brought a lot of strife to my community. It seemed that the town split in half, and people had to pick a side. Much of this conflict trickled into our schools with picketing out front, mandates, school board tension, and much more. As an educator, I had to learn to accept that not everyone was going to be happy with how the classes worked or the decisions of the school board. Regardless, I needed to continue teaching my students in the best way I knew how,

through rigorous, engaging curriculum. Perseverance is a skill that the pandemic has instilled in many of my colleagues and me.

Final Thoughts

Teaching during a pandemic was difficult. It caused teachers and staff to rally together to support children. It showed great gaps in the education of the children in the K–12 school systems as well. With all of the lost classroom time, something more damaging was present as well: the loss of social readiness. The sixth graders that entered my classroom in 2021 were significantly less emotionally regulated and mature than the students who had entered my classroom the year before. Many students appeared less resilient, more resistant to help, and had greater expectations that their work should be easy or done for them. These were the ramifications of missed time to explore with one another socially over the past two and a half years. Not only were writing and reading skills weaker than in years past, many students were less ready to be in sixth grade in general. Catching these students up over the next several years might be a long and arduous process that will need to start in kindergarten, so that we may raise our expectations for these students again.

As a previous school counselor with a current passion for improving access and persistence of students at all levels, I believe the integration of a variety of social supports (instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal supports) will improve the outcomes for students. I believe this must be accompanied by a holistic approach to support students in regaining their drive to work hard for their goals. As educators, high expectations and support should be given to students, encouraging students to rise to the occasion to progress in their learning and in their lives.

Teaching and Learning During and Beyond the Pandemic

Simona Laurian-Fitzgerald, PhD

University of Oradea

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, EdD

New England College & University of Oradea

For comments or questions for the authors, contact

Carlton J. Fitzgerald, EdD at cfitzgerald@nec.edu

Abstract

Although educators and students around the world are still dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, college and university professors are moving forward with the lessons we have learned since March 2020. Like all teachers throughout the world, college and university instructors were forced to change how we taught and how our students learned during the pandemic. Many of the results of the pandemic have been traumatic, and many of us will never be the same again. We, the authors of this article, believe that the traumatic results of the pandemic, though, cannot cause us to just become victimized by the awful events of the past 2 ½ years. We must use our experiences to make us better instructors and our students better learners. In this article, we share our experiences and the lesson that we learned during our time working with our students during the pandemic. The three biggest lessons for us included:

1. As we developed our skills as online instructors, so, too, did our students develop their skills as online learners.

2. Our students are unique, and, as we adapted to the different needs of our students, they became more effective learners.

3. If we are going to deliver equity to learning for our students, we must give students options for how they learn, how they are assessed, and what they learn.

In this article, we share some ideas about how HyFlex learning might assist instructors and our students in gaining more equity in education.

Keywords: HyFlex learning, student-centered learning, student choice, flexible education, equity, pandemic teaching and learning

There are events in our lives that periodically reshape our world in profound ways, negatively and positively. March of 2020, for us, was the beginning of such traumatic and life-changing events. Fortunately for us (the authors), we had been teaching in online asynchronous programs and hybrid programs for several years. Therefore, we had experiences to help us and our students, when we received the emails from the college and university about moving completely online. At first, we were thinking this would not be an astronomically difficult process for us to move to synchronous online learning. We also believed our experiences would help our students in their transitions to synchronous online learning. Wow, were we in for a surprise!

All of our lives were changed dramatically almost overnight. As an older person, in our town in Romania, I (Carlton) was allowed 1 hour per day to exercise, and I had to make sure that I did not go near other people. Police were patrolling the streets, telling people to go home. We were allowed one trip per week to the grocery store and we had to fill out a form online to verify where and when we were shopping. This became much more than watching, on tv or on our phones, other people in other places losing their freedom of movement, losing people they love, and suffering in many different ways. People we knew were losing family members, and we lost some friends. This pandemic was directly and negatively affecting the lives of most of the people we know. The stress caused by the pandemic was astronomic, peoples' lives were turned upside down, every non-essential business was closed: the malls, restaurants, local stores, coffee shops, salons—closed.

As essential workers, teachers had to, almost overnight, overhaul how they taught and how their students learned. Students, who had never engaged online in their schools before,

also had to drastically change their lives as learners. Nobody knew what we were going to face, and many educators and parents prepared themselves and their students for some short-term emergency learning. Little did teachers, parents, and students know about how drastic this pandemic would become. According to Hassan (2022), as of May 12, 2022, in the United States, more than one million Americans had died from COVID-19, and the 7-day average was still more than 300 deaths per day.

At the beginning of the pandemic, teachers in the United States were being lauded for their efforts to adapt their teaching so quickly for their students. Soon, though, many of those cheers were changed to jeers, as parents began to demand more and more face-to-face learning for their students. Some parents were unable to be home to help their children and daycare was difficult, if not impossible to find. Other parents felt their students with special needs were falling even further behind. Many students were displaying signs of stress and even depression, and many parents were overwhelmed with the whole process of the pandemic.

Significant numbers of teachers began to retire or quit their teaching jobs; some because of fear of the threats of physical harm aimed at them; some because of fear of COVID-19 for themselves and their families; some who had reassessed their lives during the pandemic and decided their families or their own emotional health was more important than working with other peoples' children; some teachers decided to change careers (Goodrich et al., 2022; Sainato, 2021). According to Sainato (2021):

> Nearly 10% of teachers in Providence, Rhode Island, either quit or retired early from the city's school district before the school year began. Public schools in Michigan saw a 44% increase in midyear teacher retirements this past school year over the 2019-2020 school year. In Fort Worth, Texas, the school district had 314 vacant teacher jobs at the beginning of this school year, compared with 71 at the 2019-2020 school year, before the pandemic. (para. 9)

Now schools are struggling to hire enough people to teach and to run other aspects of their schools. For example, three of our grandchildren in the United States have had their bus rides to school go from 15 minutes to 50–60 minutes, due to a lack of bus drivers. Our need to adapt as parents, teachers, and students is not yet complete.

Trauma, the Pandemic, and Learning

At the beginning of this process, teachers, parents, and students were telling us that they could handle the drastic short-term changes we were forced into by the pandemic. Teachers moved quickly to learn how to run the applications to organize and implement online classes for and with students (e.g., Google Classroom, Zoom, Moodle, Blackboard). We all moved as rapidly as we could to learn the applications and then learn how to adapt our curricula to the apps. At the beginning, many of us thought we were embarking on a short-term process. Many of our colleagues from the public-school sector told us they had been asked to develop a few weeks' worth of lessons. Colleagues at the university used meeting applications (e.g., Zoom) to run their classes, figuring they and their students could get through the short-term adaptations and get back to normal classes in a few weeks. Unfortunately, it quickly became clear that we were facing much more than a short-term interruption. The institutions for which we teach communicated that we would be teaching and learning remotely for the rest of the 2019–2020 academic year. That rule turned into another semester, a third semester, a fourth semester, and for us, a fifth and a sixth semester of a combination of remote and hybrid learning.

It was obvious that the pandemic was having a major negative effect on many people. Burke Harris (2018, 2020, 2022) explained in great detail what the effects of constant trauma have on children, young adults, and adults. She explained that it is imperative to help students deal with their stress, and that teachers and professors should be part of that assistance in schools. Burke Harris (2022) described how the traumas caused by the pandemic were

negatively affecting adults. During the pandemic, Burke Harris described how the extraordinary amount of stress placed on everyone was making matters worse, and she explained how important it is for the adults who work with students of any age to help students and to teach them how to care for themselves and their families. We heard the reports of teachers who were retiring, quitting their jobs, or changing careers during the pandemic (Sainato, 2021). Goodrich et al. (2022) described how teachers were observing that students were finding it difficult to be enthusiastic about and resilient in their learning. Many teachers also reported they were unable to teach the quantity and quality of their teaching efforts prior to the pandemic. We verified (Laurian-Fitzgerald, et al., 2022) that second and fourth grade student achievement scores in reading and mathematics had been significantly negatively affected during the pandemic.

Sousa (2017, 2022) has reviewed the research related to how the brain works in relation to learning and described the role that emotions play in the teaching and learning process. Not surprisingly, the brain works more effectively under positive conditions than it does under negative conditions. When a person is facing stressful and/or traumatic situations, their brain concentrates on survival. When the brain is in survival mode, it reduces or shuts down other aspects of thinking. Thus, under great stress, people find it more difficult to learn and retain information. Burke Harris (2018, 2022) explained how constant or long-term stresses have negative impacts on people emotionally and physically. Therefore, it was important for us as educators to try to develop ways to help our students (and ourselves) to positively deal with the stresses of the pandemic and the abrupt and ongoing changes to our lives in schools at every level.

Remote Teaching and Learning

We (the authors) had been teaching online in an asynchronous fashion for a number of years, so, we thought we would easily adjust our lessons and other kinds of experiences for and with our students. In some ways, we think our transition was easier than some of our colleagues

who had never worked online with students. For our asynchronous classes, the transition was easier in the sense that the technology and applications did not change. What was different was the amount of stress that our students faced, compared to their normal stressors of life. Most of the graduate students already work in schools as teachers, administrators, or paraprofessionals, and many of the students are married with a significant number of students who have young children. These students are used to dealing with the normal stresses of families, work, raising children, and going to school. Consequently, we already had begun working to develop ways to make our experiences together with our students be more flexible, to help students be successful in school while taking care of business in their jobs and in their families.

With the onset of COVID-19, it seemed like everyone was dealing with more stress and with more severe issues in their lives. People lost their jobs, people became ill, and many people lost loved ones. Another major issue was social isolation caused by the closing of schools and many businesses. This was not a short-term emergency but an ongoing and ever more severe world-wide pandemic. It seemed like everyone had someone close to them who either became severely ill or who lost their life. As the pandemic dragged on, the pressures seemed to only increase in most families. We had to, as teachers, first, deal with our families and the stresses with which we and our loved ones were dealing. Second, we had to figure out ways to help students cope with the pressures they were facing. In one of our surveys that we used to gather information from our students, two of the questions we asked students included: What are instructors doing that you want them to keep doing? and what are your instructors not doing that you would like us to know that we should be doing? The overriding responses to these two questions were the same—be empathetic and help us to be successful in spite of everything with which we are dealing. For instructors who were already becoming more flexible and understanding (i.e., more empathetic), students shared how grateful they were. One student wrote, "Tell the teachers that we love them for helping us." Students also asked us to

tell teachers who were not being as flexible to "please understand that we need their help."

During the pandemic, even teaching and learning in an asynchronous manner was a different

experience for everyone, because life was so different, and the added stresses from the

pandemic changed people's ability to concentrate and be motivated to learn.

For our face-to-face classes, in addition to everything else with which people had to deal

during COVID-19, instructors and students had to drastically adapt how we taught and learned.

Meeting remotely was fairly easy to schedule and begin to implement but engaging in classes

remotely was a very different process. At the beginning, we (the authors) attempted to

understand how to make the process work for students and for us as teachers. Many students

were very uncomfortable being on a video camera and did not want to turn on their cameras

unless it was absolutely necessary.

There were many reasons for students to not turn on their cameras in addition to the

uncomfortable feelings of being on camera. Some students did not have adequate quality of

their internet connections. Other students had children in the room for whom they were

babysitting. At times other family members were in the room where the students were online.

Some students were driving from work to home or from one job to their next job. These different

issues meant that as instructors, we should have been empathetic for our students, and not just

consider students were being passively aggressive in their in-class attention. To add to the

issues, many students were uncomfortable to communicate with professors about their internet

or other issues, making it difficult for students to turn on their cameras.

For the instructors, not being able to see the students was frustrating. We tried different

ways to communicate—turning cameras on to take attendance, when a student was speaking,

while in a chat room, and as students were leaving class. Students were asked to respond

online (anonymously) to polls we developed to see what they were thinking during class; then

we shared the overall results with the class. During classes, we asked students to create visuals

in response to a question or a prompt and turn on their cameras to show their products. In the chat rooms, we asked each group to choose a student to share their ideas with the class (so just the speaker turned on their camera during sharing times). As we all became more comfortable with meeting through a video camera, the process began to work more effectively.

Quickly, it became apparent that long lectures were excruciating for students online. We learned to chunk our work into smaller components and to create ways for students to do something with each chunk of information (e.g., meet in a chat room and create a list or a visual, create a visual for each student's own classroom, write a definition, create a chart or a symbolic representation of their ideas). We offered bonus points for their work in class; we asked students to take pictures of their work and post them on our class forum. Students were also assigned to use what they had accomplished in class to complete homework assignments. One of our colleagues has suggested to use screen shots of student work to share on the platform, so students could see examples of what their colleagues were doing. In order to keep the energy high in our classes, we integrated what we thought were motivating videos, music clips, movie clips, sections of speeches, artwork, graphics, TED Talks, clips from the Got Talent shows, etc.

Educational Equity

Education is supposed to be the great equalizer, but during the pandemic, we found that equity became an even bigger issue for many students. We define equity in our teaching and learning as the assurance that every student has access to a great education, and that our job as teachers is to help each student be successful in learning the curriculum, social skills, and emotional self-regulation to be successful in life. Every student, in our eyes, is unique, and unique students require unique opportunities and assistance to graduate from school ready pursue their life dreams and goals.

Although we understand that schools are not equitable in many ways, teachers and schools have been working to enlarge the net of teaching and learning to catch more and more students. Educators are all familiar with the important legislation (e.g., Individuals With Disabilities Act, No Child Left Behind, Anti-Discrimination, Title I Reading and Mathematics, Title 9, Race to the Top) to help every student earn a free and appropriate education in K–12 schools and an appropriate education in colleges and universities. Educators have been working hard to create inclusionary schools and classrooms, develop universally designed teaching and learning activities, differentiate for students in need, and assist students and their families to connect with public agencies to help with healthcare, food and housing insecurities, economic insecurities, and other social and emotional issues with which people of poverty, racism, gender bias, religious discrimination, homophobia, language barriers, disabilities, and other discriminatory mistreatments must deal.

During the pandemic, we (the authors) learned, as college instructors, that we must use a larger tool box of ideas and techniques for and with our college and university students. Teaching at the higher education level is becoming more inclusive, less restrictive, and more equitable, though we still have a long way to go. For example, more institutions of higher education are implementing different programs to make college experiences more equitable [(e.g., credit bearing classes instead of remedial classes (Andrusiak, 2020), HyFlex (Beatty, 2007; 2019) learning opportunities, student-centered teaching and learning (Laurian-Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald, 2019)].

Equity and the Pandemic

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020):

School closures related to the current COVID-19 pandemic mean that students from diverse backgrounds who are more at risk of increased vulnerability are less likely to

receive the support and extra services they need, and the gap between students that

experience additional barriers and that do not might widen. (para. 1)

Educators have been concerned about equity in schools for a long time, and the pandemic

appears to have made those concerns loom larger at both the K–12 and higher education

levels.

Hough (2021) explained:

Our educational system in the United States was already highly inequitable and plagued

by opportunity gaps in learning that have widened during the pandemic. Although we

may see the light at the end of the tunnel on the coronavirus crisis, the educational

equity crisis is just beginning. (para. 11)

What we have been trying to accomplish in our classes must be the beginning for us and our

students. As we move forward this academic year (2022-2023), we want to continue to grow as

instructors so that our students continue to grow as learners and as educators.

Student Centered Teaching and Learning

We (Laurian-Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald, 2019) had previously developed ideas for teaching

and learning employing a student-centered philosophy. We developed 10 elements that were

generated from asking our students and other teachers what they thought were effective ways

to become more student-centered. Table 1 displays the ten student-centered ideas with a short

example for each element. The goals are to attempt to proactively remove as many barriers to

learning as possible and to work with students through their interests and strengths so students

feel their work is meaningful and worthwhile. During the pandemic, to help students who were

learning in very different ways, we believed, more than ever, that we should attempt to create

ways to implement our student-centered elements in our classes; the key for us was to develop

effective ways to be student-centered in an online environment. At the same time, we realized

that we had to attend to the social and emotional (SEL) aspects of our students.

Table 1

Student-Centered Teaching & Learning Elements

Student-Centered Element	Example
Constructivist Activities	Using curriculum learned, create a proposal for a school garden and waiting area
Metacognitive Reflections	Working with a partner, students assess where they are on a project, what they are doing well and where they need more work or help. Create a plan of what to do next to move forward.
Student/Teacher/Professor Partnership	Teacher and class develop and implement a proposal for a class community service project
Collaborative/Cooperative Efforts	In small groups college teacher preparation students develop and run a Future Teachers Fair for high school students
Authentic Assessments	Science students identify a local environmental issue and develop a plan to work on the issue (e.g., plastic waste, lack of green space, energy waste)
Active & Ongoing Student Engagement	Students identify an interest or a passion, and, in communication with the instructor, students develop a project to meet curriculum standards and become skillful in their area of interest.
Explicit Teaching	Take an essential skill, teach an element, give time to practice, rehearse, and receive feedback; refine; generalize the skill set into an authentic project
Student Control of Some Learning	Help students learn to develop and set and implement their own goals (e.g., for a semester/term).
Peer and Instructor Feedback	Teach students how to give explicit and useful feedback; Teach students to implement feedback in their learning (e.g., writing a research paper)
Learning Based in Part on Strategic Student Effort	Students develop a portfolio of their goals, progress, reflections, and learning actions. End with a student-led Portfolio conference with peers, instructor, advisor

To address some of the SEL needs of our students, we decided to include fun and

motivational experiences for and with our students. Since we work with teachers and future

teachers, we included education videos (usually TED Talks) with experts in the field [e.g.,

Angela Duckworth (2013, 2021); Carol Dweck (2014); Rita Pierson (2013); Sir Ken Robinson

(2015, 2020); Tony Wagner (2013)]; we also included videos of other experts [e.g., Daniel

Goleman (2013, 2018); Simon Sinek (2010, 2021]; we used music [e.g., Shakira (2018), *Try*

Everything; Louis Armstrong (2011), *What a Wonderful World*; Phil Collins (2010), *Another Day*

in Paradise]; we used movie clips [e.g., *E. T.: The Extraterrestrial* (1982) leaving scene; Tom

Hanks (1995) *Apollo 13*]; and we used a variety of speeches [e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr.

(1963), *I Have a Dream*; J. K. Rowling (2008), *Commencement Speech at Harvard*]; we used

anything we could find with artwork and poetry to help us help our students with their SEL

needs. Simona created a monthly birthday page for her students. One class per month, the

classes sang happy birthday to their colleagues. For a short period of time, students could laugh

and wish each other well. One of our colleagues has students introduce their pets to the class to

help students feel good and to make more bonds among the professor and the students.

As we developed our skills to become more effective online instructors, we found that

our students were also becoming more effective online learners. We found, for our master of

education and undergraduate weekend students, that online attendance was higher than when

we had solely face-to-face classes. Since most of our graduate and weekend students worked

full-time and have other obligations, attending classes online became easier for a significant

number of students. Many of our students also had more family obligations, dealing with ill

family members or helping their elderly relatives survive the pandemic (e.g., shopping or picking

up groceries for elderly relatives that had underlying health concerns). To gather information

from our students, we developed surveys to give students opportunities to give us feedback

about how they felt they were doing in our classes. In one of our student surveys, 97% (76 of 78

responses) of our students indicated that it was easier for them to attend classes on a regular

basis in their online classes.

It became clear that we had to create more ways for students to be successful in our online classes, and we believed that giving students more options for their work would help more students be successful. When surveyed, 96% (75 students) of our student respondents indicated they wanted to have some freedom to choose their learning, and 99% (77 students) reported they wanted to learn from some of their personal goals. These responses were in line with what Knowles (2015) had described in his work with adult learners. Our students had very specific goals for their future lives, they were or were working toward becoming teachers. One student wrote: "I want to eventually be a reading specialist. It would be great to use our program to begin gaining some of the knowledge I will need to become a reading specialist." Our students who were teaching wanted to be more effective with specific students or with specific issues they had struggled with in their classes. One teacher wrote:

> I have a student who was diagnosed with dyslexia. It turns out his real disability is
> dysgraphia. So, now we are developing new strategies to help this boy. It would be great
> to be able to work on these real issues in some of my special education classes at the
> university.

Teachers wanted to take what they were learning in our classes and directly implement those ideas with their students. Students asked for specific advice to help specific students in their classes.

Our adult students were, in general, much more independent than younger students, and as they (and we, their instructors) were becoming more comfortable meeting and working online, they were gaining confidence in their academic work. Unlike the second and fourth grade students whose scores we reviewed, the majority our adult students were learning as effectively or more effectively as they did in their traditional face-to-face classes. When asked if their grades were higher in their new online classes, 44% (34 students) indicated their grades were

higher in their new online classes; 36% (28 students) of respondents indicated their grades were the same; and 21% (16 students) indicated their grades were lower.

From our review of the results from our student surveys, we determined that online learning was a viable and valuable platform for our master degree and weekend program students. We also realized that a significant number (16) of our students (21%) did not feel as comfortable online as they did in their traditional face-to-face classes. For our undergraduate students, from our discussions with our education students, it appeared that a significant number of the younger undergraduate students were not as independent as our graduate students, and more undergraduate students preferred face-to-face learning. Since one of our important goals in education is to move students along the continuum from dependent to independent learners, it makes sense that we consider how to help our younger students become more independent as learners. Our university also runs a hybrid weekend program for undergraduate students. The students in the weekend program tend to be older, more have full-time jobs, more are married, and a significant number have family obligations. The data from the weekend program indicated that these students align more with the graduate student results than with the younger undergraduate students. Our review of our data and discussions with our students led us to conclude that there is not one perfect way to help all students to be successful. We determined that we needed to consider ways to approach students that offered options for how students learn.

Student Voices

We asked our students in our master of education and undergraduate weekend program to rank their agreement to the following five Likert-style prompts: When we return to our new normal, I would like to have:

All face-to-face classes;

Online classes that meet synchronously;

Hybrid – F2F and online work;

Asynchronous online classes and work;

Multiple options for how I do class and work.

Table 2 displays the responses for the students. The student ratings were very interesting. All of the master students were already working in schools. Many of the weekend program students also worked full-time. All of the students in the survey were older than students in the "traditional" day program for the university. This group of students had its own needs and outside responsibilities, compared to the traditional undergraduate students. Our results indicated that the course option that most students agreed they would like to experience was having multiple options (84.7% agreed/totally agreed), followed by synchronous online classes (70.5% agreed/totally agreed). The next highest option chosen was hybrid—face-to-face and online work (46.1% agreed/totally agreed), and 44.2% of the participants agreed/totally agreed they would like to engage in asynchronous online classes. Trailing far behind these choices, only 3.8% of the participating students agreed (with no students totally agreed) that being in all face-to-face classes was their preference.

Table 2

Student Choices for Upcoming Classes

When return to our new normal I would like:	N	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree
All face-to-face classes.	78	38 (48.7%)	24 (30.8%)	13 (16.7%)	3 (3.8%)	0 (0%)
Online classes that meet synchronously.	78	1 (1.3%)	9 (11.5%)	13 (16.7%)	13 (16.7%)	42 (53.8%)
Hybrid – F2F and online work.	78	7 (9%)	14 (17.9%)	21 (26.9%)	16 (20.5%)	20 (25.6%)
Asynchronous online classes & work.	77	5 (6.5%)	11 (14.3%)	27 (35.1%)	15 (19.5%)	19 (24.7%)
Multiple options for how I do class and work	78	3 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	9 (11.5%)	19 (24.4%)	47 (60.3%)

The first point we took from this survey from our weekend and master degree students was that the majority of these students did not want to return to full-time face-to-face classes. 70% of the students indicated they were in favor of meeting synchronously online. Thus, the majority of students was in favor of meeting together, but their circumstances certainly make it easier to meet synchronously online rather than physically face-to-face. The results also indicated that different students have different ideas of what is best for the educational interactions. Approximately 85% of the students indicated they would like some flexibility in the schooling.

We also asked the students to respond to the following prompts: I think students should have some freedom to choose their learning and learn from personal goals. Approximately 96% (75) of the students agreed or totally agreed to the first statement. 99% (77) of the students agreed or totally agreed to the second statement. Almost all of the students indicated they would like more choice in their learning, and they would like to develop and work toward some of their personally set goals. One student, who entered the program after we had begun our synchronous and asynchronous online classes, wrote: "The online system we have been enrolled in from the beginning can certainly give us more access doors in the following for us. The teaching-learning-assessment process has been adapted according to the conditions." Another student wrote: "I would not like to lose the activity carried out on the University platform and the online evaluation method!" We were forced to become more flexible during the pandemic, and students were encouraging us to not retreat from that flexibility.

HyFlex Teaching and Learning

Our students indicated that, in addition to student goals and student choice, their courses should be flexible. One of our students wrote:

I would prefer to be flexible and be able to choose how we want to work in this semester,

because for us it is something new to do all the hours physically in the context in which

we became familiar with the platform, and everything goes smoothly in the activities.

Another student put it simply: "There should be flexibility." Our interpretation, from what our

students wrote and told us during our classes, was that students wanted options as to how they

worked in their classes to learn the curriculum.

According to Beatty (2007; 2019) HyFlex learning is a process through which professors

and their students can create courses that are flexible in terms of developing different ways for

students to learn and be assessed in their work. The term, HyFlex, is derived from the terms,

hybrid and flexibility. According to Beatty (2007; 2019), a HyFlex course should contain the

following four elements: (a) learner choice, (b) equivalency, (c) reusability, and (d) accessibility.

First, in a HyFlex system, students choose, from the available options, how they want to interact

with their course. Second, whatever ways the students choose to participate must be equivalent

(e.g., the students will accomplish all of the goals of the course). Third, the choices and the

materials developed should be created so they can be used across the course (e.g., the same

materials can be effectively implemented among the choices for students). Fourth, all students

should be trained and have the availability to use each of the options developed for a course

(e.g., access to training, technology, and assistance). One question about this is who is going to

train the students?

In addition to the four elements for a HyFlex course, Beatty (2019) wrote:

At a high level, we constrain our use of the HyFlex label to those that are purposefully

designed to 1) combine at least two complete learning paths; classroom and at least one

online, and 2) support ongoing student choice (flexibility) among these learning paths.

(p. 18).

In Simona's undergraduate weekend program classes, although physical face-to-face attendance was not required (students could work asynchronously online), 32 students chose the face-to-face option for attending classes. The other 33 students decided to attend classes asynchronously online. Thus, about half of the undergraduate students chose each option. In this case, it appears that undergraduate university students understood their needs and chose wisely how to interact in the class successfully. Student attendance was great in both choices, and the average grades for students were higher than previous years when just face-to-face attendance was required. As we move forward, it will be important for us to assess how many students choose preferences for their ease of doing instead of for the best ways to learn for individual students.

The HyFlex course model is a promising process to help teachers, professors and students become more effective instructors and learners. It is important to remember, though, that every model for instruction and learning has strengths and weaknesses. One of my mentors would remind me that when we make choices, there are strengths and weaknesses to every choice. It makes sense to understand the areas of concern for any model. Implementing a HyFlex model will mean more complex work for instructors. Each choice aspect of the HyFlex process must be managed effectively. Each choice students and instructors generate will create more planning, and a variety of assignments and assessments. The more complex the system, the more complex it is to manage assignments and assessments and tracking of progress. Since technology is an important element of any HyFlex class, it is vital to ensure that the hardware and software needs are available for every student. Students also will need training for the platform, applications, and technology. Additionally, students must have access to the internet and to equipment outside of the institution. If a course is developed for in-person and synchronous online attendance, then the technology for effective access for students online must be available for each class session. It is important that each option created by students

and instructors will lead to equal knowledge and skills for students. Organizational skills are integral for successful HyFlex courses; students and instructors must keep accurate records of what has been accomplished and how, and appropriate feedback must be given and incorporated into student progress.

There are many forms that HyFlex courses can take, and professors and students must agree on what they are willing and able to reasonably accomplish. For example, if a professor develops options for attendance (e.g., face-to-face, online synchronously, online asynchronously), then the professor must decide what they can or are willing to accommodate. Do students have the option to choose how they will attend class weekly, monthly, or by the term? The more choices students have, the more complex keeping track of student progress becomes. Additionally, the more options a student chooses creates more complexity for the student to keep track of how they are progressing. Both students and their professors must develop a system, so they know exactly what students have accomplished and what they need to do. Thus, at the beginning of the process, it might make sense to begin with fewer options and add more options as instructors and students gain more experiences in the process. It is also important to consider when options are appropriate and when they are not appropriate. In addition to the format of attending class, HyFlex courses may offer options for the format for assignments and/or assessments. For example, for a final exam, a professor may offer students options for a face-to-face written exam or presentation or interview and/or an online version of each option. The point is, since we know that each of our students is unique and have to deal with all kinds of different circumstances and situations, it makes sense to give as many options as possible to help each student find a viable way to succeed in our classes. We found that as we became more proficient at teaching online, and as we became more proficient at working with students to develop options, we became more effective instructors, and our students became more effective learners.

Conclusions

In any emergency situation, it is important to contemplate what we should have learned from our experiences. Hopefully, we will not wait for the next world-wide emergency to remember what it was like during the last emergency. In today's fast-paced world, it is easy to move on without considering what we have and/or should have learned from our experiences. So far, we have developed four important lessons for our work with our students, listed below.

1. Different students have different needs—young students, middle level students, secondary students, undergraduate students, "non-traditional" undergraduate students, graduate students, students with special needs all require different considerations when teaching.

2. Teaching and learning should be student-centered—students need some choice, personal learning goals, and flexibility.

3. Students and teachers/professors need social and emotional support.

4. Education must be equitable.

When we ask our students: Are your students all the same or are they unique, they always respond that their students are unique individuals. So, then the question becomes: Then, how should we change how we teach to address the unique qualities of each student? Researchers such as Robinson and Robinson (2022) and Zhao (2022) reported that the majority of schools are still organized around an industrial mentality. Zhao (2022) called the model still being used in many classrooms today the one for many model or system—one curriculum for the many, one teaching and learning system for the many, and one assessment for the many. Robinson and Robinson (2022) believed schools should be modeled around a garden metaphor instead of a factory metaphor. They argued educators should set the environment so that each plant/child is more likely to grow to their potential. They and other educators posited that we should listen to our students and give them more choice in their

learning, help them create and address more of their personal learning goals, and be more flexible in how students can interact with the curriculum and show what they have learned.

The pandemic has taught parents and educators that the social and emotional (SEL) support that schools offer students and teachers are critical for the wellbeing of everyone in schools (CASEL, 2022). Our recommendation is that every teacher should integrate SEL into most of what we do with each other and our students. We believe it is imperative to teach students, from a young age, how to identify their emotions and how to deal with them positively and effectively. We also believe that learning how to relate to other people should be a part of every curriculum through high school. Every student must understand how to develop and maintain positive and strong relationships throughout their education. We must help our students to grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially to become positive and cooperative citizens in our world. We cannot afford to have another generation that believes it is acceptable to demonize people who are different from them.

Finally, education is supposed to be the great equalizer. Boaler (2022) contended that we can teach and have student learn in ways that will help all students be successful in schools. Teachers and schools should not limit our students, we should provide each student with ways to learn effectively, find their interests and passions, and become the people they are meant to be. Educators should not deny access to learning to any student, we should open doors of learning and access for our students. Students want to learn so they can pursue their dreams, in spite of any barriers, and educators should help each one of them to be successful.

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A Flashback of Teaching in the Pandemic

Rosana Stan, PhD

University of Oradea, Romania

For comments or questions for the author, contact Rosana Stan at stanrosana@gmail.com

Abstract

The world of education, like every other aspect of life, was changed probably forever by the experiences of teaching and learning during COVID-19. As educators and students return to some form of normal in which teachers and students have a relatively clear understanding of what it means to attend classes at the university, I believe that we can improve education based on our experiences of teaching and learning during the pandemic. In this article, I try to acknowledge what I had to learn to be a more effective online educator, and I attempt to share some thoughts about moving forward. Many educators, with whom I have discussed some of the issues of returning to our new normal, agree with me that we should not lose this opportunity that we have to improve our institutions for our students. Clearly, if we as educators emerge from our stress-filled experiences stronger and more knowledgeable, our students will surely become more effective learners. During COVID-19 I learned some important lessons that have helped me to be more individually effective with students, and I learned that communication and flexibility skills are keys to helping our students to prosper. I do not want to just go back to a new normal, I want to be more effective as an educator in our new normal university.

Keywords: communication, online teaching, digitizing university learning, hybrid learning

In March 2020, in the second semester of teaching at the Department of Psychology of the University of Oradea (Romania), I met, for the first time, over 100 students from the first-year program. I was more familiar with the other 100 students from the second-year program from two courses I had previously taught with them. We already had completed 2 weeks of school in which we created a state of well-being, because we had discussed everything on which we were going to work, and we had established how we would take the face-to face final

exam. But all this comfort that had been enhanced by the predictability and control over our work was shattered in the 3rd week of classes, when we were forced to switch to online teaching and learning, as a measure for managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost no one knew what we were going to have to do, or what it meant to teach and learn online. In early April 2020, after an effort to enroll the more than 900 teachers and over 18,000 students at the university, our technology department operationalized the university's Moodle platform. With fear and curiosity, I began to configure my disciplines in the new "workspace". I spent over 10 hours per day for more than 2 weeks preparing materials, recording myself while demonstrating ways of working, learning how the Moodle platform and other new applications like Zoom work, and looking to keep my students close to me to assure them that we would find a solution for completing the academic year. However, I frequently felt frustrated, because I received technical questions from the students, and I did not know how to answer most of them. I always put myself in their shoes, and many times, I used a student ID to check how I could improve the course. I did not meet my students on Zoom from the very beginning, because it was an unknown app for almost everyone. We communicated through the forum and chat sections of the Moodle platform, and that meant I had to give individual feedback to over 200 students at least twice a week. It was exhausting but I was glad that I could maintain contact with my students under the psychological conditions generated by the lockdown.

Overcoming Obstacles in Online Teaching

What more could I say about other experiences with students and how we overcame the obstacles we faced? I think the most relevant points would be related to communication. Communication while meeting online became more complicated and time consuming. For example, at face-to-face meetings when I was directly transmitting the working procedures and concepts, I would clarify questions or issues for students on the spot, ensuring that most students were understanding the most important information I was giving them. Online teaching has lost some of the advantages of face-to-face oral communications. Even though the students

and I had agreed that we would use the Moodle platform as the main communication channel, student questions came not only on the institutional email address but also from the personal accounts, on the chat of the Microsoft Teams platform, on Facebook Messenger, and even on WhatsApp. I felt that I had no other solution but to answer each student by understanding the need of the students to clarify some aspects of our work, because most of their observations or questions were pertinent. To overcome this obstacle, I analyzed which were the most frequently asked questions and moved on to develop detailed procedures for the organization of teaching and evaluation based on those frequently asked questions.

As far as I am concerned, this issue of how to communicate online was the most difficult issue with which I dealt. At first, I used the free Zoom app, because the class meetings on Microsoft Teams were not available until October 2020 at University of Oradea. The process of communicating through Zoom was extremely unusual, because I felt like I was being seen and heard not only by students but also by the members of their family and/or friends of my students. There were times when the meeting was recorded, or pictures were taken of the screen. I confess that I felt more like a TV presenter, extremely focused on my speech because in fact I did not know for sure who my audience was. As only a few students were opening their cameras or answering the questions I asked, my feeling of lack of control was even more intense. But I succeeded in developing tolerance for this situation, because I chose to consider these circumstances as a challenge and an opportunity for me to be different, to do things differently. It proved to be a good approach, because in the end of 2020, I felt totally comfortable with teaching in online settings, and I quickly started to observe positive outcomes in my students. As I became more proficient and more comfortable, so, too, did my students.

Another obstacle that my students and I faced was related to the requirements of some subjects that I teach. Specifically, each practical seminar activity involves direct interactions with people for the purpose of psychological evaluation. Because these interactions were no longer possible, a group of students and I generated and provided anonymous protocols of responses

as a substitute working materials. The substitute simulations helped us to overcome some obstacles, but not all challenges were overcome, because the preparation for the practical work of a psychologist cannot be done in the absence of the subject of an evaluation or intervention, who is the real person.

In the end, I consider that the unpredictable and demanding nature of the sudden transition to online teaching was a good opportunity for me to test my adaptation ability to new situations. The main lesson I learned is that clear and transparent written procedures are useful and appreciated by the students, regardless of the context of the teaching activity. I realized that as I became more proficient and more comfortable working in an online environment, my students were also becoming more comfortable and effective.

Challenge Moving Forward

At this moment I am facing a new challenge—that of integrating the benefits of online learning in the context of returning to face-to-face teaching, because the benefits brought by digitalization to the instructive-educational process are obvious (e.g., scheduling flexibility, giving students options, taking more advantage of multimedia in teaching and learning, creating online asynchronous practice, blended learning). I wish that in the future the university will make it possible to achieve a mixed approach of my work, because I consider, after my online experiences, that a blended learning structure would be more effective. Thus, all the information organized for the pandemic period could be accessed by students at any time when they have questions of a procedural nature, and the precious time gained could be used in the face-to-face meetings for a customized instructive-educational activity according to the needs of each student. For this, universities should not give up the online work platforms they have made available during the pandemic, and the teachers should keep an open attitude towards the digitalization of the education.

Is Every Educational Philosophy the Best?

Miranda Shorty, MEd

Rhonda Campbell, MEd

Neil Kelly, MEd

Ken McDowell, MEd

Melissa Moultroup, MS

William Preble, EdD

New England College

For comments or questions for any of the authors, contact:

Miranda Shorty at mshorty_gps@nec.edu

Abstract

Students and the professor of a doctoral-level class, titled Educational Reform, studied eight philosophical traditions in the West that have had great influence on the preparation and development of teachers and administrators in the US. The eight philosophical traditions that we studied included (a) perennialism, (b) essentialism, (c) progressivism, (d) reconstructionism/critical theory, (e) information processing, (f) behaviorism, (g). cognitivism/constructivism, and (h). humanism. The authors each self-assessed our individual stances in relation to the philosophical traditions using the *Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment* questionnaire (Cohen, 1999). After reviewing and discussing our individual scores, it became apparent that, depending on our experiences in schools as students and as educators, each author had their own preferences for our approaches to education. It also became clear to our group that education in the United States continues to function in a one-for-many mentality—one curriculum for many, one process for many, one pathway for many, ignoring the interests, passions, and talents of too many students. Our conclusion is that United

States education must become more multi-faceted in our approaches to teaching and learning if we truly believe that every student can and should be successful in school.

Keywords: educational philosophy, teacher preparation, philosophical traditions, pedagogy, professional development

As part of a course on educational reform, our cohort of New England College doctor of education students wrote this article to share the results of our work with a wider educational audience. As we explored multiple educational philosophical traditions that have evolved in Western culture over nearly 2,500 years, we learned how fixated our schools and teaching profession have become on a small number of educational philosophies that have yielded a narrow array of teaching practices and learning experiences for students (Clark, 2020). These philosophical traditions, both "new" and "centuries old"; have shaped our teacher training, which has critically influenced the development of our teachers and administrators. Traditionalists have embedded deeply engrained assumptions and core educational beliefs, which has impacted the development of our repertoire of teaching practices. They have framed educators about what "great schools" and "good teaching" (best practices) should be, and what we as teachers and students should do every day. These philosophies have served as internal and external drivers of our educational beliefs and values, and they continue to exert influence on school policies, norms, and expectations.

As our cohort explored these eight philosophical traditions, a set of clear, exciting, and empowering alternatives emerged. We decided to write this article to share some of what we learned, in the hope that it may inspire other educators to consider the practical value of exploring, adopting, and applying some of the many available educational philosophical traditions to their teaching and their efforts to inspire students to learn and engage with learning every day.

The Problem

Nearly a half century of standardized test results have demonstrated that traditional PK-12 schooling practices have failed to meet the diverse needs of far too many American students. Traditional instructional strategies, curricular decisions, and assessment practices along with typically applied punitive, compliance-focused approaches to addressing student discipline and behavior management challenges, are not working, as many educators have hoped and expected they should (Mohamed, 2020). These traditional practices are firmly grounded within two traditional philosophical educational traditions: behaviorism (Skinner, 1938) and essentialism (Sahin, 2018).

Over the course of the last 20 years, data collected from the Program for International Student Assessment (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2000, 2018), a triennial survey of 15-year-old students, suggests that American students have shown minor improvements in the areas of reading and science and have regressed in math achievement. Additionally, the National Center for Educational Progress noted that in the last 30 years, results of the traditional instructional paradigm have been disappointing. Zhao (2022), in his compelling book, *Learners Without Borders,* labeled the current educational model as the "one-to-many" model. He stated that the current model has failed to achieve the results Americans would want and expect for our children.

In this one-to-many model, there is "one outcome for many students, one curriculum for many students, one pathway for many students, one teacher for many students, one assessment for many students, and one school for many students" (Zhao, 2022, p. 16). Because of this "one-to-many model", our school systems and decades of attempted educational and pedagogical reforms have not met the needs of all students. This model has failed to deliver the promise of a quality education and educational equity to all students.
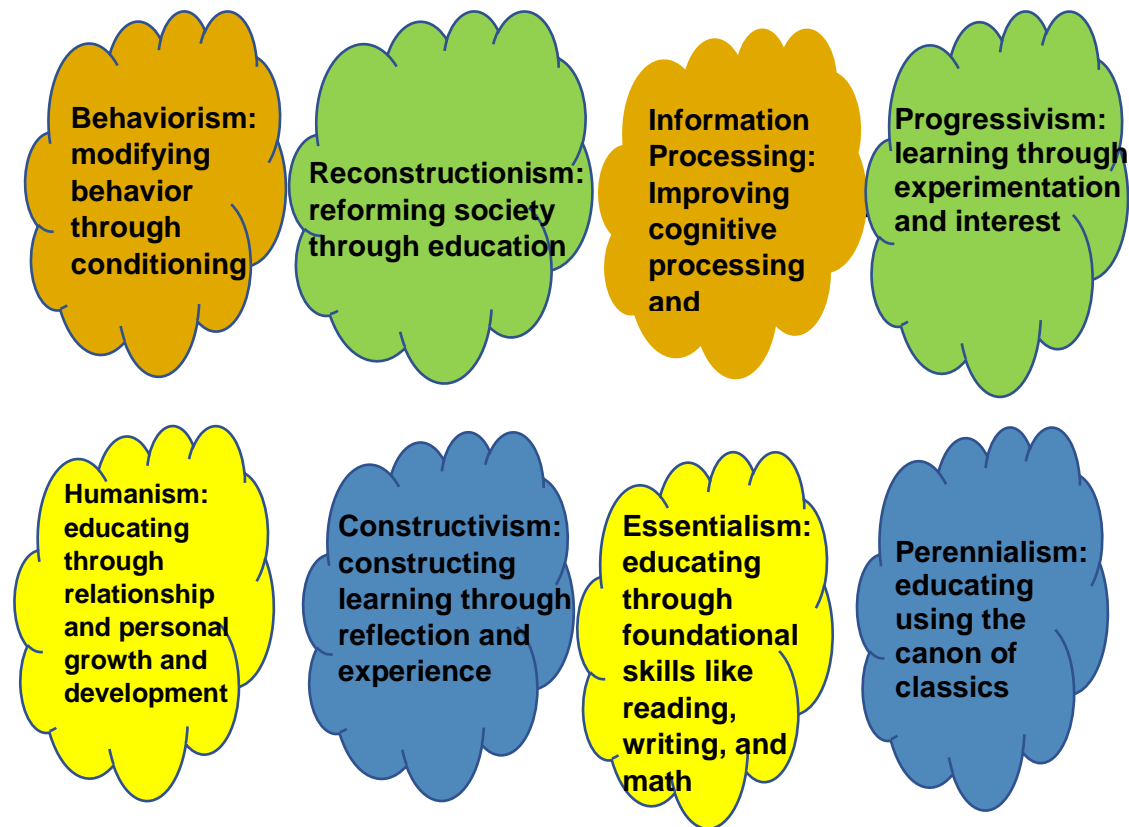
Our Team Activity

As a team of five education doctoral students and our professor, we assessed where we aligned with the eight educational philosophies as outlined by the _Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment_ questionnaire (Cohen, 1999). We compared the outcomes of our individual results assessed using the associated _Scoring Guide_ (Cohen, 1999), with the individual results of others in our cohort to identify themes and commonalities that were representative of effective educational philosophies for modern learners. Our goal was to determine which of the eight educational philosophies most effectively aligned with the current educational needs within our respective school systems.

Our professor directed us to spend 20 minutes individually evaluating our educational philosophies utilizing the self-assessment grading. Once we completed the self-assessment, we used the _Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment Scoring Guide_ (Cohen, 1999) to ascertain scores that would indicate our educational philosophy preferences. Figure 1 is a holistic view of the educational philosophies we used to self-assess our personal educational philosophies. While we acknowledge there is an impulse to present these philosophies juxtaposed based on their intrinsic "power dynamics" (e.g., in some traditions, the power is held by the traditional authoritative figures such as teachers, administration, policy makers, etc., and in other traditions the power and autonomy is held by students), we chose to present the eight traditions as a mélange of possible educational philosophies, without divisiveness or hierarchical value. At times, the eight different educational philosophies can be seen as competing with one another for value and relatability. What we concluded is that, within each situation in public education, there is a need for aspects of each of the different philosophies so there exists no real hierarchy of value.

Figure 1

Educational Philosophies and Psychological Orientations

Behaviorism: modifying behavior through conditioning

Reconstructionism: reforming society through education

Information Processing: Improving cognitive processing and

Progressivism: learning through experimentation and interest

Humanism: educating through relationship and personal growth and development

Constructivism: constructing learning through reflection and experience

Essentialism: educating through foundational skills like reading, writing, and math

Perennialism: educating using the canon of classics

Note: This illustration depicts the eight educational theories using the metaphor of clouds. As the winds of change blow clouds to a school district, teachers and students are forced to follow different theories. Then when the winds blow in a different direction (leadership changes), new requirements appear. We recommend that teachers, the biggest constant in most schools, should be trained to understand each educational philosophy, so they can make more strategic and situational decisions for the benefit of their students

After self-scoring our individual philosophical preferences, we reconvened to discuss our findings. We each reviewed our scores in the philosophical categories and self-reported our highest and lowest scoring philosophical preferences and reflected on the results. Lastly, we reflected upon and discussed which experiences have contributed to our individual results and

how those results translate into our applied practice in the classroom. Table 1 lists each cohort

member, their educational background, their dominant philosophies, and a quote(s) that

represents that philosophy.

Table 1

Results of Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment

Cohort Member	Educational Experience	Dominant Philosophies	Quote
Member 1	M.Ed. English teacher 7 years alternative education English high school teacher, 7 years after-school English credit recovery teacher, 7 years summer school English credit recovery teacher, First-year civil rights team project advisory	Reconstructivism Critical Theory	"I was not surprised to see that I ranked very high in alignment with Reconstructivism/Critical Theory. I believe education should seek to change our society for the better in a way that is universally better for all people. I believe education should promote equity in all areas of life."
Member 2	M.S. teacher of reading, 14 years middle school reading teacher, certified reading specialist, lead teacher mentor, 5 years building representative for local union chapter	Humanism	"I already knew that I value, above all else, providing a nurturing environment in which my students feel safe so they can try out new ideas and learn from one another. I was not surprised that my primary philosophy is Humanism."
Member 3	M.Ed., board certified behavioral analyst, 25 years in education as educator, district behaviorist, and administrator	Humanism Constructivism	"It was interesting to see the results of my cohort and realize how different we are in terms of our philosophies. The results helped me realize how we all can have different philosophies and want the same outcome, which is educating our students towards success!"

Cohort Member	Educational Experience	Dominant Philosophies	Quote
Member 4	21 years K-8 special education teacher, autism specialist, dyslexia specialist	Cognitivism Behaviorism	"I was surprised to learn how much my philosophies have changed over my years of teaching. When I began my career, my teaching was rooted in staunch essentialism."
Member 5	M.Ed. science teacher, 6 years middle school science teacher	Progressivism	"I think education nowadays is, and should be, vastly different from what many of us experienced years ago. I strongly feel tapping into the lived human experience is one of the most impactful means we have in creating quality learning experiences. While I am not totally surprised by this result, I feel strongly the progressivist philosophy is one that will continue to permeate the educational landscape in the time to come."

Each member had different ideas and philosophies as to what each of thought is most important in education. Member one is a reconstructivist/critical theorist, and wrote:

I was not surprised to see that I ranked very high in alignment with

reconstructivism/critical theory. I believe education should seek to change our society for

the better in a way that is universally better for all people. I believe education should

promote equity in all areas of life.

Member two, on the other hand, was not surprised by her humanistic scores. Member

two wrote:

I already knew that I value, above all else, providing a nurturing environment in which my students feel safe so they can try out new ideas and learn from one another. I was not surprised that my primary philosophy is humanism.

Member three, who is a humanist and a constructivist, realized that we each had our different views of the world and teaching and learning. Member three wrote:

It was interesting to see the results of my cohort and realize how different we are in terms of our philosophies. The results helped me realize how we all can have different philosophies and want the same outcome, which is educating our students towards success!

Member four, who believes in behaviorist and cognitivism, was surprised to see how they had changed over the years. Member four wrote, "I was surprised to learn how much my philosophies have changed over my years of teaching. When I began my career, my teaching was rooted in staunch essentialism."

Member five, who is a progressivist, wrote:

I think education nowadays is, and should be, vastly different from what many of us experienced years ago. I strongly feel tapping into the lived human experience is one of the most impactful means we have in creating quality learning experiences. While I am not totally surprised by this result, I feel strongly the progressivist philosophy is one that will continue to permeate the educational landscape in the time to come.

It was clear from our reflections that our philosophies stemmed from both our experiences as primary school and secondary school learners, as well as our experiences in undergraduate and graduate schools. At times, we were surprised by our results, and sometimes the results confirmed what we already knew about our individual educational philosophies. Regardless, we were able to find situational effectiveness in the philosophies with which we identified most.

Reflection

Anecdotally, our experiences in public education suggested that federally mandated educational reform initiatives create a hierarchy of educational philosophies. Based on the trending initiatives in public education, we have found that an emphasis can be placed on the use of one or two philosophies to be used significantly more readily than others. Federal, state, local mandates, and current social or political issues can result in the preference for or exploitation of one philosophy over others. Figure 2 shows our current perceived conceptualization of the hierarchy of educational philosophies. These notions come from a top-down initiative-based level of importance from federal, state, and local educational powers (Zhao, 2022).

**Intertwining Situational Philosophies in Education**

So, after all the questions, and the assessing, and reflecting, which approach do we believe is the best? Much like there is no "best piece of yarn" in an ornate Middle Eastern tapestry, we believe the philosophies all work together to create a beautiful decorative textile (see Figure 2). Our conclusion is there is no single, best educational philosophy. Some philosophies are more successful in certain situations, or with specific students encountering unique challenges, than others. For example, if there is a string of bathroom vandalism incidents in a school, and the bathroom is left without soap dispensers, paper towel holders, and faucet knobs, a solution is needed quickly. A Reconstructivist approach might help long term by allowing students to create and construct the learning environment and experience they value most, but it would take time to get the students to understand why they want to construct a school environment that has adequate supports, resources, and facilities that work with fidelity to their values. In the meantime, everyone else needs soap in the bathroom. A behaviorist approach might be appropriate short term, to create an appropriate school environment

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immediately where there are consequences for vandalism in the bathroom and rewards for treating the facilities well.

Figure 2

Situational Pedagogy Strategies
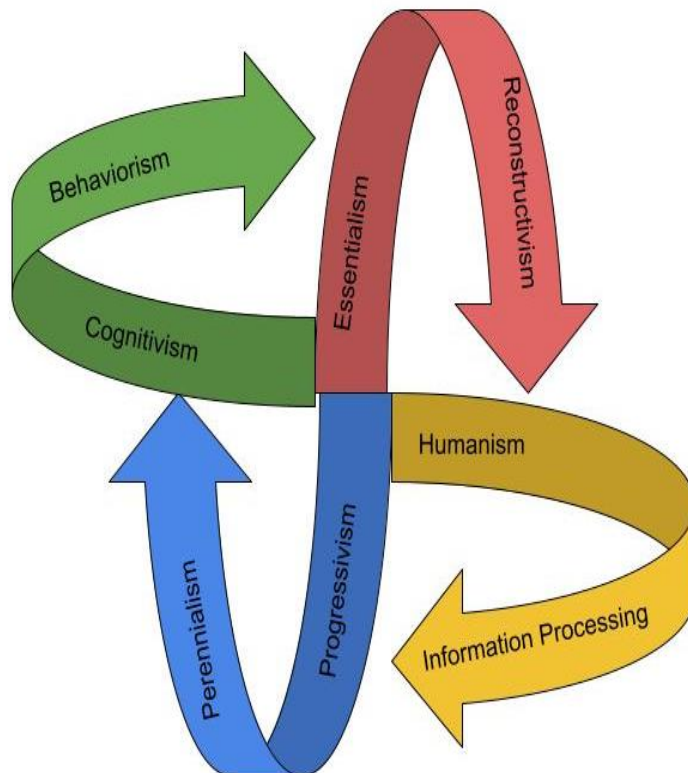
As another example, while a student may truly need to know their times tables before they leave the 3rd grade classroom, although drilling them with the information using online math resources is a great plan for helping them retain this knowledge, this method of learning may be unsuccessful at home, if the student does not have housing, internet, electricity, or an environment conducive to learning. A humanist approach to teaching would provide a holistic view of the child that would allow the teacher to make decisions about their methodology in a way that would make an essentialism and information processing approach to fundamental mathematics more successful. Each of these eight approaches is the best approach in

situations where they create successful acquisition of knowledge and understanding and allow students to make progress toward their goals.

The Practicality of Using Situational Strategies Going Forward

The *Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment* (Cohen, 1999) can be used by all staff, faculty, and administrators of a school system to see where their philosophies fall on the interconnected flow of educational philosophies. Once educators score themselves, they can analyze their results in comparison to the trends in their school. We recommend that the most beneficial approach to using these philosophies in a school is to see the benefits in each philosophical tradition and use a specific philosophical approach when it is appropriate and applicable to the learners and the learning environment. Policies and practices in the school should reflect the philosophies that best fit the situations in which the policies and practices apply. We believe that this is the best approach to using these education philosophies to improve the quality of education and to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand, connect with, and retain what that are learning. We believe, for schools to successfully educate the whole student, and enable all children to access learning, all eight of these philosophical traditions will create the most situational success. The answer to our original question in our title, is every educational philosophy the best, is it depends on the situation, the students, the teachers, the administration, the community, and the biggest at a given time. Each education philosophy is the best when it is used at the appropriate time and in appropriate ways for serve the students and their teachers.

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