Teaching in the Post-Pandemic Classroom

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It has been more than a year since we made that extraordinary pivot to remote teaching. By now we are holding our collective breath, in hopes that improved conditions and powerful new vaccines will allow us back into the classroom in the fall. It is a joy to imagine being face to face with my students again. All the same, there have been some positive discoveries this year. As we adapted to the challenges of remote education, some of the changes we made have made us more thoughtful, responsive teachers. When we return to the classroom in person, we should be careful not to relinquish everything we have built, adapted and imagined over this past year. The CTE Faculty Fellows met recently and discussed the changes we plan to make permanent.

On the level of classroom technology, we have all seen the potentials and possibilities of Zoom. The technology is not without problems but the old glitchy days of Skype are over (hallelujah!). Zoom not only kept us connected with our international students and colleagues, but also gave us access to scholars, artists and poets all across the globe, who we invited into our virtual classrooms. Our students were able to connect to industry professionals, building networks in a way that is increasingly streamlined and immediate.

Our individual isolation encouraged many of us to emphasize online community building. We developed strategies to connect students to each other and ourselves, including more group projects and online discussion threads, hyper-flexible office hours, and arrangements to stay on Zoom after class to chat with lingering students. Online teaching was surprisingly humanizing. We all caught glimpses of each other’s lives, as we taught from kitchen tables with small children and pets regularly in attendance, invited or not. And we checked in on each other: sharing ideas and advice, sending regular emails or texts to make sure our colleagues were managing and feeling supported.

On a national level, this pandemic year has exposed the degree and the impact of social and economic inequities on our students and faculty. Many have responded with a strategy of compassion and sensitivity. We rethought deadlines, which in some cases began to seem unnecessary and even meaningless. Others of us are completely rethinking traditional grading systems, experimenting with assessment strategies that are collaborative, student directed and process driven, with the goal of turning student evaluations into formative experiences that keep the focus on learning. There is a lot to learn but the review and revision of traditional pedagogies continues.

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We have found there is much of value that we can take with us into the post-COVID world. This was a year of real tragedy and loss, but we can make the decision to hold on to the communities we have built, the deep connections we have established and the empathy we have found in ourselves, for our students and for each other.

**CTE Blog: Reflections on Teaching & Learning**

Since 2015 the CTE blog “Reflections on Teaching & Learning” has featured posts detailing the current research on teaching and learning, highlighting our pedagogy resources, or generating discussion on the most current topics animating higher education. In the past few years we have also invited guest posts from faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and undergraduate students working with the CTE. We invite you to check out some of the most recent guest blog posts below:

- [First Time Publishing Pedagogical Research](#) by Rodrigo Ferreira, Rice Academy Postdoctoral Fellow
- [Student-Taught Courses: Learning and Discovering Yourself Through Teaching](#) by Anna Guseva instructor of the STC "Introduction to Synthetic Biology" and current Master's student doing synthetic biology research in the Silberg lab at Rice
- [Better Writing Assignments Start with Critical Reading Praxis](#) by Mallory Pladus, a PhD Candidate in English at Rice and graduate of the CTE Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning

**Spring 2021 Reading Group**

This semester the CTE hosted a reading group for discussions of the book *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College* by Peter Felten and Leo M. Lambert. Over three sessions, participants discussed how interconnected webs of relationships across campus can serve to support students, especially first-generation students and those who face other barriers to success at college. Faculty members and instructors discussed how they work to build strong, supportive relationships with their students, and emphasized the importance of strong communities and networks of support during dual instruction and remote teaching.

**Building Pedagogical Capacity: Collaborative Events AY 2020-21**

The CTE has been working collaboratively with pedagogy-oriented programs across campus to provide faculty and graduate students with opportunities to participate in events focused on specialized pedagogy topics and trainings.

**Fall 2020**

*Civic Rice: Voter Awareness In Your Curriculum* was a joint workshop hosted by the Center for Civic Leadership and the CTE. This event featured both student and faculty panels as well as a hands-on workshop for integrating civic engagement and voter awareness into course curriculum. This event took place on August 14th, 2020.

**Spring 2021**

*Conversations on Ecopedagogy*, with the Center for Environmental Studies, brought together faculty, staff, and graduate students for a conversation about pedagogical values, strategies, and approaches common to instructors teaching about environmental issues across disciplines. This event, which took place on March 26th, 2021, included a faculty roundtable and an assignment workshop for graduate students.

**Upcoming: June 7th, 8th, 10th 2021**

*Linking Research and Teaching* is a multi-day Pedagogy Institute, which will be hosted jointly by the Office of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry (OURI) and the CTE. The event will feature two days of workshops with an expert in inquiry pedagogy, Mick Healy (Higher Education Consultant and Researcher; Emeritus Professor, University of Gloucestershire, UK) and will be followed with a planning session facilitated by Elizabeth Eich (OURI), Robin Paige (CTE), and Ania Kowalik (CTE).