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Leading during Difficult Times

The October edition of *ELQ* explores timely questions around leading during difficult times: What lessons in leadership are you learning from this unprecedented time? What principles guide you in a time of crisis? How do you work to sustain yourself, your colleagues, your students, your work? What strategies do you consider when a change in direction becomes necessary? How do you evaluate next steps? How do you support learning during this process—and beyond?

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From Crisis to Continuity: The Role of the LMS in the Future of Learning

Sarah Pazur, *CS Partners; member of NCTE since 2020*

The Case for Continuity

I WAS A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL in the late '90s when I gave birth to my son. Adults in my Catholic high school questioned whether or not I could continue my education from a distance, and, quite frankly, whether they felt I deserved the opportunity. Those questions still haunt me today. In the end, my teachers prepared work packets for me and every day for three weeks between Halloween and Thanksgiving, as I acclimated to young motherhood, I labored over math problems in an antiquated textbook and typed essays on my Brother word processor. I kept pace with the daily curriculum during and after my absence and graduated high school with my peers.

As I look back on these experiences, it is clear to me it did not have to be that way. If my school had only been humanized in a manner that permitted me access to flexible, asynchronous learning, I would have been spared a significant amount of shame and anxiety from not being there in person. Those like me—young moms; students with chronic illness; youth who have experienced trauma; incarcerated, displaced, and homeless teens—understand that learning continuity is not a new challenge in education; but widespread school closures have suddenly made it an urgent one for the mainstream population.

> " *When we introduce distance learning—at scale—to mainstream education, we reconstitute the conditions for student achievement.*

The education landscape has evolved since the '90s, and blended and virtual classrooms are certainly more common than when I attended high school, but the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted brick and mortar classrooms into the cloud faster than anything we had experienced before. To manage this rapid shift, state education departments required districts to submit Continuity of Learning Plans that outlined how they would transition their students from in-person to remote instruction with minimal disruption to learning. These plans mandated that district leaders address equity and access issues exacerbated by the pandemic. In response, administrators rethought everything from meal distribution to internet access in a matter of a couple weeks. Nevertheless, inequities abound.

At the same time school administrators scrambled to implement an emergency online learning program, they battled virtual learning's stigmatized legacy. Traditionally, educators and stakeholders have not wholeheartedly embraced virtual learning, pointing to low course completion rates and lack of compelling student performance data as indicators of its ineffectiveness. Furthermore, online learning has been stigmatized in the eyes of those who see it as a last resort for "nonconforming" or "alternative" students. It is true that virtual high schools disproportionately provide credit recovery solutions for students at risk of not graduating on time; it is also true they offer second chances for students no longer welcome at their home districts.

To add to this skepticism of online learning, the mass closures prompted a heavy dose of nostalgia. Parents, students, and educators now refer to school using evaluative binaries—pre- versus post-pandemic school, online versus in-person learning—but the reality is that technology in education is an ever-evolving ecology, and we are on a change continuum. Neil Postman (1992) in his anti-technology manifesto, *Technopoly*, described this continuum best:

> Technological change is neither additive [n]or subtractive. It is ecological. I mean ecological in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival; the same is true if you add caterpillars to an environment that has had none. (p. 18)

Despite his polemical opposition to educational technology, Postman's caterpillar metaphor ironically serves an important point about the nature of virtual learning: When we introduce distance learning—at scale—to mainstream education, we reconstitute the conditions for student achievement. Of course, the necessity for a coordinated distance learning pedagogy that is available to all students predated and will postdate this crisis. But now, as leaders

INEQUITY IN EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTED BY SCHOOL CLOSURES

▶ The coronavirus crisis shines light on educational inequalities, *Washington Post*

The Disparate Impact of School Closures: Measuring the Unequal Educational Costs of the Coronavirus Pandemic, *Forbes*

plan for students to return to school this fall, they must honor what virtual learning environments can do to reach all students. They must embrace the many ways that virtual school environments reflect and affirm our students' realities outside of the physical school building. An important and overdue step in that process: implementing a district-wide learning management system (LMS).

The LMS as a Third Teacher

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach to education referred to a child's environment as the "third teacher." Reggio Emilia ambassadors believe the environment shapes and is shaped by the learning process, creating a "constant dialogue between architecture and pedagogy" (Reggio Emilia Approach, 2020). In our present learning ecosystem, the architecture of school has changed. Classroom walls are permeable, school is amorphous. In this version of school, the LMS functions like a classroom environment, a third teacher.

LMSs are software applications used to deliver educational programming, but like a good teacher, an effective LMS is inclusive, supportive, responsive, rich with resources, and able to foster connections within and across communities. Unfortunately, the abrupt shift to remote teaching outpaced many districts' readiness and capacity to implement a coordinated web-based or remote infrastructure; for districts who were not already using an LMS, the transition to online learning was especially disjointed and difficult.

Lessons Learned from the Pandemic

Michigan Virtual, a nonprofit organization that provides online courses and professional development for educators, in partnership with design firm Sundberg-Ferar, conducted a qualitative study on the effects of the pandemic on educational leaders, teachers, parents, and students. They found across the board that districts with an LMS in place were relieved they had one, and those who did not have one were frustrated (Byron, 2020). One English teacher said this:

> I can't imagine how I'd tackle online learning without our LMS. I use it and the tools within it to give students information, videos, docs, models, etc. We use Zoom and Meet for online meetings. It is effective because my students know how to do it. I didn't need to train them much. I also put up plenty of mentor texts and videos of my lessons and my own modeling, so that helps them.

The schools that lacked an LMS specifically discussed their districts' inability to communicate effectively. An administrator shared her frustration:

> ❝ *In our present learning ecosystem, the architecture of school has changed. Classroom walls are permeable, school is amorphous. In this version of school, the LMS functions like a classroom environment, a third teacher.*

The biggest challenge has been to have a central place to go for all communication. *Not* e-mail, not a Classroom stream. Messages get lost in those formats. We need to have a bulletin board/dashboard that all people expect to go to. This is true for parents, for students, for staff to get questions answered. (Different boards for different audiences.) We need to have an infrastructure for learning so that everyone knows where to find the resources they will use most. Students need to have a place to keep work that is in progress, and students and parents and teachers all need to be clear on what the priorities are and what work needs to be turned in.

In other words, remote instruction during the pandemic taught schools the importance of a universal, coordinated platform with common social and communication norms to facilitate the flow of information between all stakeholders. The lack of a district-wide LMS caused a hyper-decentralization of school: multiple sign-ins for students and parents, slews of applications to navigate, confusion on where to go for information, too few or too many places to store and share documents, the list goes on. An LMS can mitigate a significant number of those frustrations.

Selecting the Right LMS

Having an LMS in place is not a substitute for a compelling vision for teaching and learning; it is the vehicle to help districts achieve that vision. Like any effective initiative, implementing an LMS into your school district will require careful and long-term planning as well as dedicated resources and thoughtful and ongoing professional development for all users. Michigan educational leaders developed a guide to assist districts in choosing the best-fit LMS that aligns to their school's mission ("Guide to selecting," 2020). The guide outlines a comprehensive selection process; to summarize the essence of the selection process, consider these four questions on the role that your LMS will play on the future of learning:

- Does the LMS facilitate student-driven learning?
- Does the LMS integrate with other tools and applications so students can work, learn, and collaborate seamlessly?
- Can the LMS be altered in scope and functionality so that it grows over time with our district?
- Does the district have the commitment, time, and resources it will take to effectively implement the system across all user groups—students, teachers, administrators, and parents?

Answering these questions can assist with choosing an LMS that fosters learning continuity; continuity that empowers students to work synchronously and asynchronously, to collaborate, to

communicate, and to feel connected to the school community and culture.

The LMS as Social Connector

In addition to leveraging the LMS as a common learning platform, it will be important to leverage it as a way to keep students socially connected as they move from face-to-face to online classrooms. The new reality of school will include in-person, hybrid, and 100% virtual experiences—and students will flow between these models. David Jakes, educational design thinker, wrote about the concept of using the LMS to create a "virtual third place," a place for students to socialize with other students that is not exclusively an academic space, or exclusively a social space, but something in between (Jakes, 2020). This concept is another illustration of the way that

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> *Having an LMS in place is not a substitute for a compelling vision for teaching and learning; it is the vehicle to help districts achieve that vision.*

technology is neither additive, nor subtractive, but transformative. Previously, students relied on school as a place to stay connected with their peers. But now that

HOW AN LMS CAN SUPPORT LEARNING

▶ **How to Align Your LMS with the Science of Learning,** *Edutopia*

Teaching SEL skills in online education, *NEO Blog*

face time with their peers at school will be reduced and fragmented with longer periods of virtual time in between, they will need a school-sponsored social application to satisfy these gaps. The LMS is one way to address the need for a virtual school-social space.

The LMS and the Future of Learning

The history of distance learning is storied and complex. Its legacy is wrought with bias against disenfranchised learners. It has been misappropriated in a way that alienates students from their learning communities. Distance learning, however, can also be extremely redemptive. Students who otherwise would not have been able to complete school have earned their diplomas and degrees. Students against difficult odds—COVID-19 being one of them—have persisted and succeeded. The LMS plays a critical role in supporting

learning continuity for all students. The right-fit LMS promotes networked learning and social connectedness. A district-wide LMS is no longer a perk; it's an integral part of distance learning pedagogy. As Nicholas Negroponte (1998) said in his prescient article, "Beyond Digital": "Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence." COVID-19 demanded that school systems provide learning continuity at scale and the LMS will prove to be a ubiquitous presence in the future of learning.

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Leading through a Pandemic: Lessons Learned from the *Cleveland Teaching Collaborative*

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Introduction

AS THE **COVID-19** PANDEMIC SPREAD across the globe in the spring of 2020, it became clear that all levels of education in the United States and around the world would face critical structural and pedagogical challenges. In a matter of days and weeks, teachers from early childhood to higher education scrambled to provide accessible and high-quality learning opportunities for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds while practicing social distancing to help flatten the curve. Regardless of prior experience with or interest in online and web-based education, educators transitioned from face-to-face teaching and learning to exclusively online platforms without the luxury of time to reflect, train, and implement best practices. In many P–12 cases, including the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), districts did not have a unified learning management system in place and most students did not have individual devices and/or consistent, reliable wireless access. Indeed, in this unprecedented situation, there was no blueprint for how to lead schools, teachers, students, and students' families in and through the kind of abrupt transition to remote learning that was necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many universities benefited from existing learning management systems, e-learning centers, and offices for instructional support and technology, many classes were still taught exclusively face-to-face and many instructors were not using web-based platforms as part of their instructional design.

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The Cleveland Teaching Collaborative

In response to the COVID-19 crisis and the related pedagogical challenges, NYU Shanghai released their *Digital Teaching Toolkit for Remote Learning* (NYU Shanghai Digital Teaching Toolkit, Research and Instructional Technology Services, NYU Shanghai Library) based on faculty and staff experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This kit, launched on March 6, 2020, was widely shared among educators and provided a critical resource for teachers around the world as they scrambled to convert face-to-face courses to remote delivery. Thus, with inspiration from NYU Shanghai's work and the recognition of the summer of 2020 as a critical window for educators to gather data, evaluate remote learning experiences,

and recommend promising approaches and strategies for the 2020–2021 academic year, we proposed and launched the *Cleveland Teaching Collaborative* (CTC). Modeled on the successful efforts of the NYU Shanghai *Digital Teaching Toolkit*, this project was built on existing partnerships between Cleveland State University faculty and P–12 educators in Cleveland-area schools to create case studies of remote teaching and learning.

With this vision, the *Cleveland Teaching Collaborative* was launched in May 2020 with the goal of fostering partnerships between educators at CSU and in P–12 schools. As educators weather the uncertainty of this unprecedented time, including various combinations of remote and hybrid teaching and learning strategies and vast digital inequities, the need to reflect on these experiences and adapt them to new conditions is paramount. This partnership aimed to provide educators at all levels with the tools needed to provide mindful, critical learning experiences for students in imperfect circumstances. Part of the partnership included setting aside time together to reflect as a community and make recommendations for future teaching and learning.

COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS

▶ **Teacher Collaboration during a Global Pandemic,** *ASCD*

Collaborate with Colleagues to Make It through This School Year, *Education Week*

The CTC was also designed to build a *local* network of educators across institutional contexts and grades. With the recognition of the need for remote and hybrid learning strategies for months, and perhaps years, to come. Similar to NYU's toolkit, we hoped that the CTC would put forth a mix of tutorials, webinars, and case studies on remote instruction. The *Cleveland Teaching Collaborative* could serve the CSU community, Cleveland P–12 educators, and teachers across the globe. We ultimately recruited 23 educators from the greater Cleveland area. Every educator authored a case study about their transition to remote learning, focusing on the strategies, tools, and guiding principles they used to make their

choices and describing some of the challenges they experienced and what lessons they will carry forward. The case studies were reviewed and then published to the newly built WordPress site, https://cleteaching.org . It was important to us to use a platform that would be user-friendly and able to accommodate multiple contributing authors. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of an excerpt from the CTC homepage:

FIGURE 1. THE *CLEVELAND TEACHING COLLABORATIVE* WEBSITE.

We think that a particularly unique element of this collaborative project is our living and growing "resource referatory," available through a tab on the home site (http://referatory.cleteaching.org). As an online gathering space for networking between educators from all levels and disciplines, the toolkit has grown into a central repository for case studies of remote learning platforms and recommendations on best practices. See Figure 2 for a description of the referatory and Figure 3 for a sample entry included in the referatory.

Teachers as Leaders

In keeping with this issue's theme, this reflective article will share some of the lessons in leadership that surfaced during our experience imagining, launching, and facilitating the *Cleveland Teaching Collaborative*. All of the collaborating authors who contributed to the CTC have specific stories of how they worked to sustain themselves, their students, and their work as well as specific strategies they considered as they navigate this crisis. We hope that you will visit https://cleteaching.org to read the individual case studies and learn more about how the different educators, individually and collectively, led during this time.

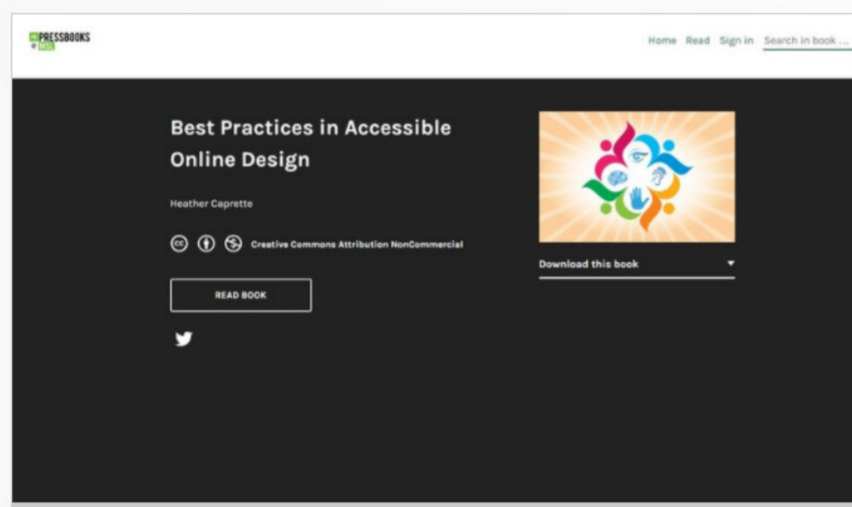FIGURE 2. EXCERPT FROM THE HOME PAGE OF **CTC RESOURCE REFERATORY**.

Drawing on our experiences reviewing the case studies and listening to over 20 contributing authors talk about how their stories, decisions, and strategies reflected leadership, we chose to focus this piece on what we learned about leading during this time. We think it is important to note that the case studies represent a group of educators working in a variety of disciplines and educational contexts, including many educators working outside the English language arts. In addition to language and literature teachers from grades 6, 9, 10, 11, and the university, the collaborative includes a film and design teacher, an intervention specialist, world language (Spanish and Arabic) teachers, social studies teachers, and more. We believe this transdisciplinary collaboration is, and will continue to be, a critical component of leadership during this pandemic and, we hope, a critical aspect of school leadership moving forward. A critical component of teacher leadership within and across the cases appeared to be focused on building community; connecting with students, other teachers, and parents; and heightened attentiveness to the student as a person, all of which live outside a specific discipline, grade level, or content area.

> *A critical component of teacher leadership within and across the cases appeared to be focused on building community; connecting with students, other teachers, and parents; and heightened attentiveness to the student as a person, all of which live outside a specific discipline, grade level, or content area.*

One aspect of the project that was built into the design of the summer 2020 cohort was the opportunity for case study contributors to participate in a video-based discussion group. Our cohort of case study collaborators (teaching grades 6- graduate students) met in focus groups of 4–6 participants to discuss their reflections on the transition to remote learning during Spring 2020. The discussions were guided by four core questions:

FIGURE 3. EXAMPLE CTC RESOURCE REFERATORY RESOURCE, "BEST PRACTICES IN ACCESSIBLE ONLINE DESIGN," 2020.

1. If you were in a conversation with a school/university leader or other key stakeholder (e.g., student, parent), what is the one thing you would want them to know?

2. How did your work represent leadership in this moment?

3. Based on your reflection, what are 2–3 things you will do differently in your future teaching?

4. Based on your reflection, what are 2–3 things you will carry forward/improve on in your future teaching?

Drawing on a National Writing Project protocol that Molly uses frequently, we began the Zoom-based focus groups by writing our way into the meeting on a shared Google document. We focused this writing around questions 1 and 2. The written reflections and oral conversation that unfolded during the focus groups surfaced many lessons in leadership during this unprecedented time. The teachers shed light on the critical role that teachers have played in determining how teaching and learning continued during the pandemic. Discussions varied by group, but five core themes emerged across our groups.

Based on what we heard from the Cleveland Teaching Collaborative, leadership at this time requires: (1) listening, (2) meeting students where they are, (3) not being afraid to try new

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FEEDBACK IN REMOTE LEARNING . . .

. . . *for* Students . . .

7 Ways to Do Formative Assessments in Your Virtual Classroom, *Edutopia*

. . . and *from* Students

How College Students Viewed This Spring's Remote Learning, *Inside Higher Ed*

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things, (4) keeping it simple, and (5) mixing up the course "readings." Collaboration was the common theme throughout our discussions, and it is clear that our participants modeled leadership through cooperation with students, peers, administrators, staff, and—especially at the P–12 level—parents.

1. Listening: The importance of listening is a common theme for our collaborators. In almost every case study, educators discussed reaching out to their students for feedback as they planned the transition to remote learning. In addition to listening to students, almost every group mentioned the need for institution leaders to listen to their educators about issues ranging from technology choices and training to rethinking the roles of support personnel in a remote learning environment.

2. Meeting students where they are: One of the effects of soliciting student feedback (outside of institutional evaluations) and taking it into account when planning courses is that our collaborator instructors emphasized the need to meet students where they are. This often means being flexible about learning management systems, technology tools, and methods of communication. Instructors have been thinking about how this idea manifests in various ways. For instance, institutions can create a tutorial on how to be a student in a remote learning course, or teachers can create trailers for their courses as part of their initial, "intro" class.

3. Don't be afraid to try new things: One of the consistent messages from our groups is that educators should not be afraid to try new methods or tools in their courses and planning. During this moment in discussions, the majority of our participants revisited past professional development sessions on small teaching, digital tools, project-based learning, and other topics. Instructors spoke about the importance of sharing what they tried with colleagues, including the different challenges faced and the possibilities of various approaches.

4. Keep it simple: While almost every participant emphasized flexibility and trying new things, we also discussed the need for having some uniformity across courses in the same institution for the students' ease of use. It may not be the best idea to overload your students with multiple platforms and tools for remote learning, and we should all consider that each student's burden for learning new tools is multiplied by taking several classes with different instructors. Participants also discussed the benefit of shorter videos or other media for student engagement. Instead of a traditional one- or two-hour lecture, divide that same lecture up into 5- or 15-minute videos. Provide students with short video or audio introductions to assignments to replace face-to-face instructions.

5. Mix up the course "readings": Our collaborators are rethinking the ways in which students consume course materials. In some cases, this means replacing traditional textbooks in favor of open educational resources (OER), like *A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing* (https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/), developed by Melanie Gagich and Emilie Zickel at Cleveland State University, open access textbooks like *The American YAWP* (www.americanyawp.com), podcasts, or eBooks and electronic articles available through institutional libraries.

Finally, one theme that cut across all five themes was *collaboration*. Leading in this time required high levels of collaboration. We started the CTC project as a way to support collaboration between and among educators, but the case studies and reflective focus groups revealed the multitude of ways educators sought out new kinds of collaborations, especially collaborations with other educators and their students. We look forward to continuing this collaboration and learning with and from one another during the 2020–2021 academic year. We hope that readers of *English Leadership Quarterly* will join us as readers, consumers, and contributors as we all find ways to lead through this pandemic.

Teaching Hybrid Online College Composition Classes to International Students during COVID-19: Equity, Diversity, Inclusiveness, and Community Building

Qianqian Zhang-Wu, *Northeastern University; member of NCTE since 2019*

I am an assistant professor of English and the Director of Multilingual Writing at one of the leading international student host institutions in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2019). Having once been an international student from China, and now as a faculty member and administrator in the English department working closely with international students, I would like to discuss several important issues college instructors and administrators need to consider when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students online during this global crisis of COVID-19.

The Urgency to Support International Students during The Global Pandemic

Given international students' large presence and remarkable diversity in American higher education, it is important to support their academic, language, and cultural adjustment through effective literacy instruction. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, top-down policies and visa restrictions together with racism and xenophobia have posed additional challenges to the academic, social, and emotional wellbeing of international students. This altogether has made it urgent to support these learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

> **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES**
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> ▶ **How International Students Are Changing U.S. Colleges,** *The Wall Street Journal*
>
> **There are more than 1 million international students in the US. Here's where they're from,** *CNN*
>
> **The Globalization of America's Colleges,** *The Atlantic*

According to the Institute of International Education (2019), the total number of international students enrolled in US colleges peaked at 1,095,299 during the 2018–2019 academic year. The vast majority of international students studying in the United States are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with those from China representing the largest group (369,548; 33.7%), followed by India (202,014; 18.4%), South Korea (52,250; 4.8%), and Saudi Arabia (37,080; 3.4%). The continuously growing international student population has not only earned America the title for being the world's largest international student host country but also generated positive economic impacts. In 2018 alone, for instance, international college students have injected more than $45 billion into the US economy (Institute of International Education, 2020). Despite the enormous financial benefits international students have brought with them into American higher education, they are often perceived as threats to national security and cash cows to boost revenues overseas (Li, 2019) and are stereotyped as linguistically incompetent (Zhang-Wu, 2018). Research has found that while American colleges are witnessing increasing diversity in their student bodies, their faculty are often underprepared to effectively support international students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (e.g., Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Matsuda, 2006; Zhang-Wu, 2019).

The recent COVID-19 global crisis has added another layer of challenge to international students in American higher education. Not only have they been faced with travel and visa restrictions, they are also subject to racism and xenophobia. In March, promptly after COVID-19 cases soared in the US, many universities responded with sudden dormitory closure announcements, leaving students scrambling to make last-minute arrangements (Sacks, 2020). International students, while trying to manage the abrupt transition to online learning in the middle of the spring semester, were immediately faced with the tough choice between finding an international flight home in the midst of change of travel policies and mass flight cancellations (Arnolt, 2020) and securing off-campus housing in the US within a few days.

Those international students who chose to take a flight home were then caught in constantly shifting mandatory quarantine policies (Cheng, 2020), which could pose substantial challenges to their remote learning and socioemotional wellbeing. In contrast, those who remained in the US were anxious about the recent swaying policies on whether to deport international students who choose to pursue remote education in fall of 2020 (Jordan & Hartocollis, 2020). While the Trump administration rescinded the deportation policy days after its release, international students were concerned about their visa status and continuing education opportunities. The policy swing coupled with the

violent killing of George Floyd and xenophobic biases toward East Asian communities has further impeded the academic, social, and emotional wellbeing of international students of color. This altogether has added to the urgency to support international students during this global crisis.

College Composition Classrooms as a Site for Community Building, Empowerment, and Care

To tackle the many challenges international students are faced with during this global crisis, I argue that college composition classrooms can potentially function as a site for community building, empowerment, and care due to the following reasons:

1. *Small class size*. Often capped at 15 to 20 students, the small size of college writing classes enables students to receive individualized attention from instructors and makes it possible to form a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998).

2. *Space for acculturation into new literacy environments and practices*. As one of the undergraduate core courses, college composition classes often represent international students' initial encounter of the new literacy environment and practices in American higher education.

3. *Cultural and linguistic diversity*. The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity has made college composition classrooms a natural site for intercultural communications.

4. *Writing as healing*. According to the American Psychological Association, expressive writing has a healing power to reduce people's negative emotions (Murray, 2002). Focusing exclusively on writing, the college composition classrooms provide a much-needed space for students to heal and reflect during the current global crisis.

Supporting International Students through Hybrid Online Teaching: Why and How

I open this section with discussions of synchronous and asynchronous online instruction in US college composition classrooms from an equity and inclusion perspective and argue for a hybrid instruction model for teaching international students. Reflecting on my hybrid online instructional experiences in the summer of 2020, I introduce activities and instructional practices that could promote equity, diversity, inclusiveness, and community building in online writing classrooms.

Rationale for Hybrid Online Teaching in College Writing Classrooms

Ever since the abrupt transition to online teaching due to the COVID-19 outbreak back in spring 2020, there have been many controversies between synchronous and asynchronous online teaching. Some colleagues prefer synchronous teaching, believing that the real-time interaction and the sense of community built through this experience is empowering to students and teachers alike. However, others disagree, suggesting that synchronous lectures may not be the best option given their logistical difficulties (e.g., scheduling, internet connectivity) and teacher-centered nature (Supiano, 2020).

From an equity and inclusion perspective, I argue that in US college composition classrooms, exclusive synchronous instruction is likely to put international students at a disadvantage due to the challenges of different time zones, difficulties in active participation, and unequal quality of knowledge acquisition. Firstly, since international students are from all over the world, the drastic variation in time differences tends to pose challenges to synchronous teaching and learning. For instance, if I were to have a synchronous online lecture at noon (EST), my Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students will have to join at midnight and 1 a.m., while my Indonesian students need to go online at 11 p.m. In this scenario, exclusive synchronous online teaching could result in unfair learning conditions with those who are in the US joining the class during the day and international students burning their midnight oil to catch up with remote learning.

Even assuming international students were *all* able to cope with the remarkable time differences throughout the semester, they are still subject to various difficulties in oral participation in synchronous online classrooms.

BALANCING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS TEACHING

▶ **How Do I Balance Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning?** *University of Massachusetts Center for Teaching and Learning*

Best Practices for Remote Learning, *NYSUT*

Best Practices: Online Pedagogy, *Harvard University*

> " *From an equity and inclusion perspective, I argue that in US college composition classrooms, exclusive synchronous instruction is likely to put international students at a disadvantage due to the challenges of different time zones, difficulties in active participation, and unequal quality of knowledge acquisition.*

The challenging nature of entering conversations in cyberspace, the fear of talking over people, and the concerns about not being able to express oneself clearly due to language barriers could further silence international students during online discussions and burden their already overly stressed minds during the pandemic.

Although one may disagree, some argue that since all synchronous lectures could be recorded, international students could simply choose to watch a video recording afterward and learn at their own convenience. While this indeed is a possibility, the quality of learning in passively watching recordings (let's assume that the recordings were always clear with good sound quality) is nothing compared to actual participation in a live, interactive online class.

Furthermore, such passive receptive "individualized" learning may also exclude international students from valuable learning community experiences and peer review activities that are both key components in US college composition classrooms. Unless assessment of students' learning results (i.e., quizzes and essays) are also adjusted based on students' varying accessibility to quality learning materials, making comprehensive synchronous learning only feasible for some but not others jeopardizes educational equity and inclusiveness.

While arguing against exclusive synchronous teaching, I by no means insist that we should go to the other extreme to deliver all online instruction asynchronously. Instead, I argue for a hybrid online instruction model, in which both synchronous and asynchronous elements are present to ensure quality, fairness, accessibility, flexibility, and community building. On the one hand, the asynchronous components in online teaching could create an inclusive learning environment that may alleviate the difficulties posed by time zone differences and reduce some learners' anxieties in actively engaging in real-time online discussions. On the other hand, the synchronous elements in online teaching make it possible to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), making college composition classrooms an ideal space to facilitate international students' linguistic and academic transition and a safe zone to practice writing as healing and reflection during the current global crisis.

How to Conduct Hybrid Online Teaching in College Composition Classrooms

In this section, I propose a model for conducting hybrid online teaching in US college composition classrooms based on my recent experiences teaching advanced writing for technical professions in the summer of 2020. Capped at 19 students, among whom approximately half were international students, this online course was designed specifically for undergraduate engineering majors who have completed at least 64 credits. Table 1 below summarizes my proposed hybrid online teaching model.

TABLE 1. A HYBRID MODEL FOR TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING ONLINE

Modality of Instruction	Course Components
Asynchronous	Ongoing needs assessment and reflections
	Weekly and midweek check-in letters
	Q&A discussion board on Canvas
	Mini-lessons: instructor screencasts
	Ongoing peer review using a Canvas discussion board
	Using creative writing for healing and reflection
Synchronous	Office hour consultations (live online)
	Mini-lessons: short online class gatherings
	Virtual coffee group meetings between students

Based on the five components of asynchronous instruction listed in Table 1, right before the beginning of the semester, I conducted needs assessment of students' accessibility to tools and platforms often used in my online class (e.g., students' backgrounds, accessibility to video, audio, streaming services, and collaborative platforms, etc.). This helped me adjust course design accordingly. For instance, thanks to this needs assessment, I became aware that most of my students had little previous online learning experiences and had concerns about poor internet connectivity, accessibility to certain learning resources and platforms, time differences, family conditions, and internship responsibility.

Furthermore, my international students from China pointed out their difficulties in accessing Google collaborative products (e.g., Google Drive, Docs, Sheets, etc.) and live streaming platforms such as YouTube. Consequently, I adjusted my teaching materials and course collaboration platform to adapt to students' needs (e.g., choosing Microsoft Office 365 products instead of Google Drive, avoiding the usage of YouTube videos in class). Throughout the semester, I invited students to write short, ongoing reflections to self-assess their learning progress, needs, and concerns.

Additionally, I conducted frequent check-ins on a semiweekly basis. I sent out a weekly letter on Mondays outlining announcements, reminders, key learning goals, major assignments, links to resources, and a suggested weekly study schedule detailed to each weekday. On Wednesdays, I would follow up with a midweek check-in letter providing comments on students' learning progress and addressing any questions and concerns based on teaching and learning during the week. In addition, I created a Q&A discussion board on Canvas, where students were

invited to post their course-related questions and help each other. I checked the Q&A board regularly to provide answers and comments when appropriate. The discussion board has functioned as an asynchronous, community-based platform where students are able to seek support, help each other, and learn from each other. As for asynchronous lecturing, I made short screencast lessons (usually 10–15 minutes each) to provide genre-based instructions and comment on students' writing. Students were instructed to watch these screencast mini-lessons at their own convenience. Their understanding was assessed based on their quality of reflective entry in the Canvas discussion board.

Since writing is at the center of my curriculum, I have tried to provide as many opportunities as possible to engage students in writing activities. On the one hand, students were guided through at least three drafts before finalizing each of their papers. After each draft, they were expected to receive comments from me and were also assigned two to three peer reviewers who provided constructive feedback on their writing. On the other hand, students were invited to use writing as a tool to heal and reflect. For example, Figure 1 below illustrates an example of my students' collaborative creative writing to express their feelings during the global pandemic.[1] In this example, my students creatively used 19 COVIDs to form a curve to depict the peaking and stabilization processes of COVID-19 from March to June as well as their trajectory of mental

> *Faced with the COVID-19 global crisis, we as English leaders and administrators are also teachers and learners who are eager to reflect on our everyday teaching practices, to put theory into practice, to support each other, and to provide the best instruction possible to our students.*

The 19 COVIDS

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FIGURE 1. STUDENT SAMPLE TITLED COVID-19: FLATTENING THE CURVE, AND TRAJECTORY OF OUR MENTAL STABILITY

stability during that time. Based on their ongoing reflections, my students found activities like this very helpful as they were allowed a safe space to collaborate and vent about their concerns with their peers during this time of crisis.

Coupled with these asynchronous elements, I also incorporated three synchronous components in my advanced writing class. Every week, I hosted live office hour sessions during which students were invited to drop in whenever they wanted. For each focal genre of the course, I also organized at least one short synchronous lesson during which students were able to ask questions and participate in discussions in real time. These activities were beneficial in strengthening the relationship between my students and me. In addition, I assigned my students to small virtual coffee groups based on their time zones. They were instructed to meet with their group members weekly via live Zoom meetings at a mutually convenient time during which they brainstormed drafting ideas and engaged in peer review activities.

Concluding Remarks

Faced with the COVID-19 global crisis, we as English leaders and administrators are also teachers and learners who are eager to reflect on our everyday teaching practices, to put theory into practice, to support each other, and to provide the best instruction possible to our students.

In this article, I highlighted the urgency to support international students in US composition classrooms and proposed a hybrid online instructional model which promotes fairness, accessibility, flexibility, and community building.

While the hybrid online teaching model has shown potential for my own teaching practices, many uncertainties remain. Will such a hybrid instructional model work for advanced writing courses targeting non-engineering majors (e.g., advanced writing for business professions, advanced writing in health sciences, etc.)? Will it be applicable to first-year college composition classrooms? Will it be transferable to K–12 level English classrooms? We must not stop our exploration as English leaders, administrators, teachers, and life-long learners. Faced with the many uncertainties ahead during this time of crisis, I hope our conversations on how to deliver the best instructional practices possible to support the equity, inclusiveness, and community-building among all learners can begin here, today.

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[1]. This example was adopted with permission from my students.

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When Life Gives You Lemons . . . Learning to Learn during a Pandemic

Delia M. Cruz-Fernández, *San Marcos CISD*

I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN, DESIGNED, and offered traditional professional development for over two decades in education; however, I never thought I would have to change my professional development within days due to a pandemic. In this article, I narrate how I reinvented professional development opportunities offered during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 at a central Texas school district. I also provide information on how cross-department collaboration can support teachers in providing the best remote learning experience for emerging bilinguals and *all* students.

> " *I faced reality; my passion is for teaching and helping teachers become better at their craft; ultimately, I knew I was helping an emerging bilingual student acquire the English language and succeed in their schoolwork.*

ELL AMID THE PANDEMIC

▶ **Supporting English Language Learners Through COVID-19: Resources for Educators,** *Reading Rockets*

Less Learning and Late Guidance: School Districts Struggle to Help English Language Learners during COVID-19 Crisis, *Chalkbeat*

English-Language Learners Need More Support during Remote Learning, *Education Week*

On March 13, 2020, my notion of educational leadership was challenged like never before. As I was getting ready for spring break and the completion of a week of home projects, little did I know that these were going to be put on hold. Under the circumstances, my to-do list was transformed into continuing to be an advocate for emerging bilinguals in a school district in central Texas. In the middle of the spring break, educators in central Texas were informed that we were not going to return to school. We were instructed to work remotely and be available during school hours.

Before spring break, we had been preparing for the possibility of having to work remotely. We had two weeks of remote learning lesson plans ready, and we were finishing the details about how we were going to have them available for those students who did not have access to the internet or the technology necessary to complete the lessons at home. Content area instructional coaches were developing more lessons to be sent to students' homes in less than a week to create remote learning opportunities. I knew

I could only do so much, being the only ESL instructional coach (ESLIC) for the district. While collaborating with the other instructional coaches, I revised the content and language support added to the lessons before uploading them to the remote learning portal. I also was translating school notifications to parents for their social media pages and call-outs.

The Sheltered Instruction Academy Development

During the 2019–20 school year, I developed a weekly Sheltered Instruction Academy (SIA) for a face-to-face environment. The sheltered instruction strategies are best practices that support the emerging bilingual student in acquiring English (Echevarría, 2008). The purpose of sheltered instruction is to make the content accessible to students while they are developing English (Baecher et al., 2016; Echevarría et al., 2008; Echevarría et al., 2011; Fritzen, 2011; Kareva & Echevarría, 2013; Seidlitz & Jones, 2012; Short, 2013). At the end of the second semester, school principals asked me to bring SIA to their campuses and target professional development to their campuses' specific needs. For an entire semester and a half, instructional coaches and educators were participating in SIA. During the pandemic and remote learning, with the support of the bilingual department, I kept in mind and reminded my colleagues of the monthly SIA that had been offered since August. The content area instructional coaches were able to provide support to teachers while including content and language support on the lessons during remote learning.

LEVERAGING INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING IN A CRISIS

▶ **Why Virtual Coaching Is the Answer to Supporting Teachers in the Age of COVID-19,** *Engage 2 Learn*

Coaching for Teacher Resilience during COVID-19 | Part 3: Coaching for Resilience, *RTO International*

How Coaches Can Help Teachers Provide Deeper Learning Online, NGLC

Once the schools opened remotely, I collaborated with instructional coaches in different content areas and participated in the middle schools' time planning. I joined the bilingual department personnel at a food distribution center to distribute paper copies of

the weekly lessons to parents and to be a point of contact for the district in their language, Spanish.

One person was not enough to support all teachers in the district during remote learning. As mentioned by Coryell (2020), I moved the SIA from a face-to-face format to a biweekly meeting via an online synchronous platform. I faced reality; my passion is for teaching and helping teachers become better at their craft; ultimately, I knew I was helping an emerging bilingual student acquire the English language and succeed in their schoolwork.

Learning to Learn during a Pandemic

According to Hansen-Thomas et al., "Teacher professional development is at the heart of improving practice and student achievement" (2016, p. 312). As part of my learning experience, I chose to participate in various free professional development webinars. During the spring of 2020, I also decided to participate in school district planning meetings; I attended at least one webinar per day, five per week. I chose webinars by theme—for example, supporting emerging bilinguals or supporting families online—or if I had heard of the featured speakers. My notes from these webinars varied according to the reason why I chose to attend. At one point, I began taking notes on how to make my webinars more engaging: What tools, types of visuals, and activities could I use to engage the audience? The webinars were an opportunity to learn in three different areas:

This opportunity for teachers to reveal their best practices and share them in a professional environment was the foundation of SIA Online.

1. Learning to learn. While watching the webinars, I started taking notes to answer the following questions:

    a. How was the professional development introduced?

    b. How did they incorporate a hook?

    c. During my professional development sessions, how do I include modeling strategies that engage teachers when I am not talking to the camera or screen and without seeing faces?

2. Shifting sheltered instruction strategies to work in the online remote learning world and relearning the sheltered instruction strategies for remote learning. What was the experience of the presenters teaching remotely?

3. Learning to create a professional network. The Educational Region Center, which supports us, had weekly meetings for educators to participate, learn from each other, and develop a professional network. Each week they had a theme that

their personnel presented. They also provided a space for participants to present what was working for them. During this time, participants shared new free platforms being used in their classrooms. Teachers shared results, what was working, and what was not working. Some discussed how they adjusted their lessons to best support students.

As I was working on remote learning during the pandemic, my professional network grew. The professional network supported each other not only with educational knowledge but also with ideas on improving mental health, such as how to relax after a long day in front of the computer screen. This professional network became the human contact beyond the computer screen. We continuously checked on each other and shared anecdotes to lift our spirits, knowing that this too shall pass and learning will continue.

Sheltered Instruction Academy to Online

The SIA Online sessions were offered twice per week. We had at least one guest teacher every week. The guest teachers varied from a first-year teacher, more experienced teachers, and a college professor who's specialized in reading and long-term English learners. We have the privilege of a strong relationship with the College of Education from the local university.

Gleeson and Davison (2016) mentioned that it is essential to provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their practices to better support their English-learner students in engaging with the content. This opportunity for teachers to reveal their best practices and share them in a professional environment was the foundation of SIA Online. We had a wide range of presenters with one purpose in mind: to share what they have learned, how they support their students, and the understanding that this is not simply one more thing to cross off one's to-do list but a best practice in developing support for students in various groups. The SIA Online was developed with the following three components in mind:

1. Teachers as professional guest speakers. Identifying teachers implementing sheltered instruction strategies in their online environment was the first step in SIA Online. The second step was inviting teachers to SIA Online. Teachers were invited to present and share sheltered instruction practices that they were using during remote learning. The third and final step was to grow the potential of the different district campuses to support each other with improving student achievement as the end goal.

a. During SIA Online, we wanted to model best practices for teachers. The presentation was carefully developed to model these strategies during each session:

   i. SIA Online has a particular format. In order to formalize the presentations, a slide deck template was developed. The guest presenter was introduced with a biography and Twitter handle, if applicable. The presenter followed the district lesson template that included an essential question, the main content, and a language objective. There were a variety of topics presented, such as language support in the different online extensions and programs in the district, strategies for organizing and supporting *all* students, and a bilingual schedule to communicate with students and parents.

   ii. After the guest teacher presented, the bilingual department also presented more topics on sheltered instruction. The themes varied, covering how to include content and language support in reading, using sentence starters for students' online discussion, and using game boards to develop and support language acquisition.

2. Going district-wide. SIA Online was an opportunity for cross-campus, cross-content, and cross-department professional development that encouraged collaboration processes that best support our students. #nosilos, mentioned in one of our cross-department planning meetings, emphasized the collaboration and planning that our school programs and departments incorporated to best support the teachers.

   a. Cross-campus. In each of the two sessions per week, we invited teachers and administrators from all schools in the district to participate.

   b. Cross-content. Teachers from different content areas presented how they were implementing sheltered instruction during remote learning, providing the opportunity for professional and collegial discussion with peers on how they would incorporate these strategies in class.

   c. Cross-department. Several departments, including the bilingual department, AVID, 504, gifted and talented (GT), and special education were represented during the SIA Online presentations. We collaborated with each department to demonstrate a best practice strategy and

> *As a result of the spring 2020 semester, I found myself in uncharted waters in terms of my learning experience: How do I provide professional development during a pandemic?*

how it supported the remote learning experience for all learners.

3. Teachers already have enough on their plates. As an educational leader, I did not want the teachers to feel they had to do one more thing and relearn their craft during the transition from face-to-face to online learning. I certainly did not want to add a mandatory professional development attendance to their workload. I wanted to grow with them, learn from them, and support them through this process.

Reinventing SIA Online strengthened our cross-department collaboration. Indeed, school administrators and department directors held conversations regarding SIA Online, and learning to learn during the pandemic included us, the instructional coaches. As described by Cruz-Fernández (2019), it is essential to provide instructional coaching after professional development. We needed to reinvent how to provide feedback during remote learning. It was through participation in SIA Online that the departments and participants were able to testify how the strategies previously presented were beneficial for their students.

Gordon (2004) discussed the importance of allowing teachers to choose professional development that is beneficial for them and their growth. As a result of the spring 2020 semester, I found myself in uncharted waters in terms of my learning experience: How do I provide professional development during a pandemic?

BEST PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

4 Tips for Effective Virtual Professional Development, *EdTech Magazine*

Strategies for Virtual Professional Development, *Tech & Learning*

5 Tips for Remote Learning PD Success, *Education Week*

A wide range of participants attended these SIA sessions, and attendance varied from 25 to 50 people per session. Participants included classroom teachers ranging from kindergarten to high school, school administrators, and instructional specialists. In the next section, I present a list of lessons learned during remote access to school and professional development.

1. Collaborate across the department. Reaching out to my professional colleagues to prepare professional development in support of *all* learners, this cross-department collaboration

helped our school district to grow professionally, increasing our capacity to provide professional development to other teachers. SIA Online became a weekly collaboration within different departments, such as special education, 504, AVID, and GT. The collaboration continued during the preparation of new teacher orientation during which we presented strategies together in partnership.

2. Unidos Valemos Más. Collaboration cross-department was more critical than ever. I supported teachers during their planning times, but I also supported families. I translated documents for the district. I collaborated with the technology department, translating their videos, recording the videos in Spanish, editing, and sending them back to the department to make it available for our Spanish-speaking parents and students.

3. Create a schedule. Maintain a schedule to stay focused and honor your personal time; it is crucial to create a detailed plan. The plan should include time for meetings, developing curriculum support, and personal time for physical activity, preparing food, grocery shopping, and engaging in hobbies.

4. Do what you like and repeat. It was clear I enjoyed being an educator and a school leader. It became clearer that working from home could interfere with one's home life and routines. On March 26, I noticed I was working over 10 hours on my laptop, going from meeting to meeting. On that day, I decided to take my sewing machine out and started sewing fabric masks for my family and colleagues. Sewing was my "me time," and I enjoyed being creative again and helping my colleagues stay safe.

Remote learning came in a blink of an eye. We have the opportunity to collaborate with other school districts and learn together. We are in the higher section of Bloom's taxonomy in which we can decide how our schools, curriculum, and classes will look like from now on.

Let's continue making history in education and analyze, adapt, and design as we did during spring 2020.

After spring 2020, when the theme was "learning to learn during a pandemic," the following courses were included in the online platform at the bilingual department:

Basic Spanish for Communicating with Families

Participating in middle school planning sessions gave me insight into teachers' desire to remove the language barrier, to personally communicate with their students' parents and families. For summer 2020, I prepared a nine-week course in which I modeled

sheltered instruction strategies. At the same time, I taught Spanish to a group of 12 teachers. The course was asynchronous with the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting twice per week. At the end of each week, teachers had to complete a reflection on what sheltered instruction strategies they identified and how they can implement them in their classes. Participants engaged in a variety of activities while acquiring basic Spanish vocabulary and developing reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. The final product included placing information in Spanish on their website. The course's participants varied from classroom teachers and school administrators to central office personnel and other professional staff at school.

Professional Spanish

In an effort to continue developing academic Spanish in the dual-language teachers, the bilingual department offered a professional Spanish course. The course was designed for nine weeks and covered three topics. During this course, the teachers had to incorporate the discussion from face-to-face courses into lessons and present them the following week. This course had at least five participants in each session.

Sheltered Instruction

During SIA Online, each session was recorded, and the bilingual department had a video collection of all the courses teachers offered to their colleagues. We are currently working on editing these videos and uploading them to the online educational platform that the district is using during the 2020–21 school year. The self-paced online version was designed to extend the learning from SIA Online and included short videos and tutorials on how to incorporate these strategies in face-to-face, synchronous, and asynchronous classes. Each school will also be offering an SIA session developed with the campus needs in mind for teacher orientation week.

As part of SIA, I am currently creating a descriptive list of effective strategies for school administrators for face-to-face or remote instruction. My professional goal is to continue identifying the professional talent currently in the district and grow the teachers' leadership capacity on each campus. With this in mind, our students will benefit from having teachers on campus who can teach and coach other teachers to develop lessons that include best practices, like sheltered instruction, to support all learners. All the departments that collaborate in this process have a goal in mind: our students' academic growth and success for life after high school.

Spring 2020 changed my 20-year-old vision of professional development. As a result of this change, I'm currently working

on developing a mixed Sheltered Instruction Academy with the opportunity for participants to join in a face-to-face session or concurrently online. This model will allow the participants to choose professional development according to their learning style preference. Additionally, face-to-face and online professional development allow collaboration with experts from each campus and the university. The sessions will be recorded and housed in the district online classes platform to accommodate the teachers' busy schedules so they may use them as a reference when needed.

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Submission deadline: December 2, 2020

April 2021

Teacher Leaders

What lessons about supporting teacher leaders are you learning? What principles guide you in this work? What practices are effective? How do you evaluate next steps? How do you support teacher leaders during this process—and beyond?
Submission deadline: February 17, 2021

August 2021

Professional Learning That Transforms

What do you know about professional learning that is transformative? What considerations guide you in this work? What practices are effective? How do you evaluate next steps? How do you support professional learning toward continued growth?
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