Student–Centered On–Line Teaching During COVID–19:
Maintaining the Human in Instruction

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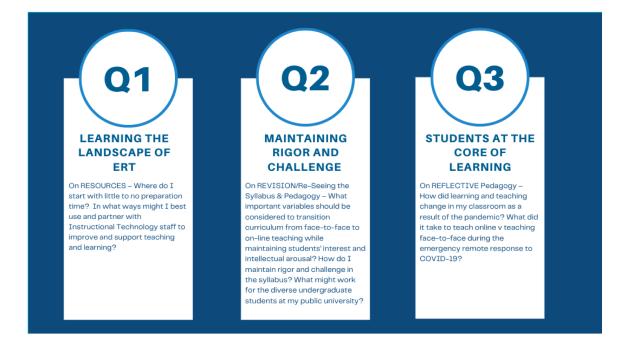*University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to share challenges, successes, and continued efforts to keep students at the center while adapting to the demands of integrating technology into the college classroom during a pandemic. COVID-19 disrupted our teaching practice unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. In order to keep communication open with students once the pandemic set in, the authors collected data during and after teaching for two semesters to learn about students' academic behavior self-assessment, their needs, and their thoughts about the changing pedagogy and teaching practice to best respond to their urgency. Collaboration between a faculty member and Instructional Technology Specialist scaffolded learning and teaching in this one course in ways that proved to be transformative.

INTRODUCTION

Mid-March 2020 presented a very arduous set of circumstances. Due to the immediate uncertainty about the epidemic, we were all faced with the threat of disconnectedness with everyone outside of our immediate family for an unknown amount of time. I desperately needed to ensure that I maintained that human-to-human link with my students and them with each other regardless of the immediate outbreak of COVID-19. The following three (3) types of questions serve as the foundation for this chapter and ultimately impacted my practice and helped me keep students at the core of teaching and learning:

Figure 1. Three questions that guided my practice

BACKGROUND

The University of Massachusetts at Boston (UMASS Boston) is a nationally ranked public research higher education institution in the city of Boston. It is one of five campuses in the UMASS system to primarily serve the residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Amherst, Dartmouth, Lowell, and the UMASS Medical School in Worcester are the other sites), and it is the third-largest campus. In 2020 there were 12,871 undergraduate, and 3,388 graduate matriculated students. UMASS Boston is proud to serve the most diverse student body in the entire New England region and has a student-centered teaching philosophy with an anti-racist, health-promoting vision.

I taught two undergraduate courses during the Spring 2020 and Fall 2021 academic semesters; both offered in the Teacher Education Program in the College of Education and Human Development at the University. Students in these courses, *Sociocultural Perspectives in Education* and *Introduction to Education*, examine the interrelationships among children, schools, and society. They learn about the ways in which race, class, gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, et al., influence how we define ourselves and how we see each other in the larger society, world, and especially in the K-12 classroom. We investigate the historical antecedents influencing how the lives of immigrant, refugee, and colonized people are defined in relation to urban public schools. Both courses are an introduction to the advantages, promises, and challenges of teaching and working in city schools, given UMASS Boston's urban mission focus on the City of Boston and its greater environs.

These courses provide a safe space for students to examine their own purposes for pursuing specific professional careers in schools (e.g., teacher, counselor, sports leadership, etc.) and are particularly important because this is where we either welcome students into the Teacher Licensure program or actively guide them to other possible careers if they are academically inept or/and show a disposition incongruent

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