Transitioning to Student-Centered Culturally Sustaining Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during COVID-19: The Process of Humanizing Instruction

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 disrupted our teaching practice unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. As I prepare for the start of the fall academic term, I am forced to recall the sobering lessons learned earlier this year at the outset of the coronavirus. One week from the start of this pandemic before the university March spring break began, my teaching life was dismantled. I was forced to use the one-week hiatus to prepare for 100% online instruction. I spent the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester considering and re-visiting the following questions:
1. How did learning and teaching change in the classroom? Subsequently, what does it take to teach online?
2. How might we best use and partner with university IT staff to improve teaching and learning? What are significant variables to consider to transition from face-to-face to online teaching while maintaining academic rigor?
3. How might we tap students to co-construct the syllabus moving forward? What worked for the students in my university undergraduate classroom?.

Keywords: Student-centred teaching, Sociocultural Perspectives, Interactions, Qualitative feedback

BACKGROUND

The University of Massachusetts at Boston is a nationally-ranked public research university located in the Dorchester neighborhood in the city of Boston. Academic excellence and student-centered teaching are the cornerstones of its mission, as the institution serves the most diverse student body in the New England region. Students from a variety of racial, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds constitute our undergraduate classrooms. The university's mission embraces student engagement in urban and global issues. Last year (2019-20), there were approximately 12,714 undergraduate students enrolled.

The focus of study for this article is a course which I taught, entitled, *Sociocultural Perspectives in Education*. Christina Bohr, UMB PhD student, was my Teaching Assistant. She took a PhD pedagogy seminar with me the previous semester. She and I spent time planning and re-thinking *Sociocultural Perspectives* together during the 2020 Winter-session. Jouliana Bosneva, EdD student at University of Glasgow, is a full-time Instructional Designer at UMASS Boston in the E-learning and Instructional Support Department. She and I have worked together over eight years. She introduced the UMASS Boston Blackboard portal to me and my graduate students in 2012.

Students enrolled in the *Sociocultural Perspectives* course examine the interrelationships among students, schools, and society. They learn about the ways in which race, class, gender, culture, and ethnicity influence how we define ourselves and each other in the larger society and world. The course examines the historical antecedents influencing how the lives of immigrant and colonized peoples of the U.S. are defined, especially as they reflect who sits in urban public schools today. Students are expected to develop cultural consciousness that we each bring to the teaching experience and/or our interactions with individuals. This course is both an introduction to the promises and challenges of teaching/working in urban schools as well as a chance for students to determine whether or not the

pursuit of professional careers in schools are for them.

The students in our class were from diverse backgrounds, including Latinx, Haitian, Aruban, Eastern European, Chinese, African American, Irish, German, to name a few. Gorski (7) defines socio-economic status as a students' or families' access to financial resources in the U.S. and categorizes socio-economic class models as: poverty, working class, middle class, managerial class, owning class. Based on this working definition, Bohr and I surveyed our class to allow them to self-identify their socio-economic class association. 14 students identified as working class, 12 students identified as middle class. One student lives in poverty, while another one lives in the managerial class setting. Two students did not disclose their socio-economic status.

Relationships and community are at the core of the *Sociocultural Perspectives* course, so the first month of the course is devoted to students forming relationships with each other and developing community. This was done quite successfully at the onset of the spring 2020 term as noted in the mid-semester student-centered qualitative feedback collected right before the pandemic outbreak:

> *I like that we all know each other's names in this class.*

> *This is the first time that I have been assigned a book to read that is written by a woman from the Latin X community, somebody who sounds like me.*

> *This was always my last class of the day and I looked forward to it and the joyous atmosphere.*

> *Honestly, this is an amazing class. One of my favourite classes at UMass Boston. I feel like this is a non-traditional class where we learn from each other. I enjoyed every day in this class, unfortunately now we are moving online, but we need to take the best lesson from this chaos. Having very flexible teachers where they support me at anything I need is very important and I love it. Another element that I like from this class is the diversity. Implementing conversations, discussions and cooperation between students and instructors about relevant and important topics are very productive for me. The relationship between students and the instructor is amazing as well.*

The relationships that formed during the first half of the semester presented a strong foundation that continued throughout the remote learning sessions. As we re-structured the syllabus to reflect the necessary changes because of COVID-19, we tried to maintain the overall structure of our face-to-face (f2f) meetings during our remote meetings. Our classroom was as lively as could be, full of students' voices sharing their experiences, opinions, thoughts, and knowledge. Based on student feedback, we knew how much they valued each other's voices, how much they learned from their colleagues, and how important peer-review and peer-feedback was to them. One student anonymously wrote in her mid-semester feedback:

> *I think the group work works best for me, writing on the (black)board, sharing our answers out loud, and just hearing what everybody has to say gives a nice perspective from other people's eyes on different topics.*

Another student shared with us:

> *I think all the small group activities we do in this class really help to get your own point across as well as hear other classmates' thoughts and points of view. I like that most of the underlying questions in this class are open ended and do not have one right answer; this is helpful to get an idea about how other people learning the same information think and perceive things differently.*

Our students enjoyed and benefited from the lively discussions in our classroom the most. We wanted to do our best to provide students with a similar experience during the remote learning session, and our aim was to maintain some form of consistency and familiarity during the early traumatic experiences of the pandemic. We, as a class, were challenged to continue in-depth discussions around potentially uncomfortable issues in a synthetic format – ZOOM.

The ISSUE

As the professor of record, I had experience using Blackboard (Bb) as a space to share course materials for my students, I was totally apprehensive about using other Bb features, let alone introduce a totally new platform to keep the magic alive in my highly interactive f2f classroom. Despite the reality that I earned tenure at UMASS

Boston in 2000 and have almost 25 years of teaching at the college level, I was horrified by the thought of relegating my craft to an electronic device. I felt my humanity was far deeper than that. How could I "read" and gauge my students' interest/engagement/questions without "seeing" them in a room with me? Furthermore, I assumed that my students were far more savvy about using technology than I. I worried that I would be exposed as a dinosaur professor who was not "hip" about the use of all of the ubiquitous online programs and apps. My university office is filled with books from ceiling to floor. Admittedly, I am not much for reading whole texts online. Nevertheless, my class was the least of my worries. We were facing the realities of life or death. The daily news about COVID-19 haunted us all.

A mysterious virus had come upon us - throughout the world. People's health was deteriorating a minor cough in the morning would make you wonder if you were infirmed with this new virus. There was not enough medical equipment - where were the ventilators? There was not enough protective equipment - doctors and nurses were told to re-use masks. Hospital beds were filling so fast that there were pop-up COVID-19 triage tents in major northeast cities like New York and Boston. My worry about teaching online seemed so trivial. I was forced to recognize what was truly important for the greater good of humanity. My vanity about not knowing the latest technology became the least of my worries, so I dove right into the work. How best could I make the transition during this emergency from f2f to online teaching and learning at the outset of the pandemic?

READING the RESEARCH and Blending Expertise

Immediately, I contacted Bosneva who explained that the main difference between fully online learning and emergency remote learning was that the shift was very fast and did not give much time for preparation. It takes a significant amount of time and effort to design and develop effective engaging online courses so that our campus mission to provide student-centered, interactive content can be accomplished successfully. She explained that the online teaching and learning environment was designed to create opportunities in order to leverage technology. This in turn will provide students with degrees without them needing to be in a f2f classroom setting. Also students volunteer to opt for online learning and are therefore prepared for the experience. They have adopted the online learning mindset. Faculties are trained and there is no urgency.
Materials are accessible and faculty know where and how to get support.

On the other hand, due to the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote teaching and learning would look very different. The instructor and the students may lack resources and a developed mindset to optimize the online experience. Neither faculty nor students have a choice in the use of this modality of learning. They may not have access to educational resources, skills and technology which hinders their adaptability to this new platform. In a fully developed online course, learning is more self-directed, active, and personalized. In a remote learning environment, faculties are forced to deal with emergencies and crises. There is very limited professional development for course design. The main focus of remote learning is on academic attainment,
and most faculty need help on how to get started with teaching in an emergency situation. In order to help students in their academic success, schools need to be able to provide advising and tutoring services which require administrators and support staff to be prepared for a new way of communication and interacting with students. Bosneva offered a lot to consider about re conceptualizing a course for emergency remote teaching (ERT).

Due to COVID-19, universities and schools throughout the world had to move to ERT. UMASS Boston was not alone. Faculty, students, administrators, and all staff outside of security were faced with a new unfamiliar modality of teaching, learning and providing classroom support. All had to become familiar with web-conferencing, a new form of course content delivery, and new technology tools to help students achieve success in courses during this emergency. Bosneva emphasized that faculty would need to be extremely flexible and would need to make changes to the way they deliver course content. She reminded me though that this would be a temporary
shift; nevertheless, a shift indeed.

Bosneva referenced the Aguliera et al, 2020 study that found that ERT is distinguishable from online teaching because it reflects a sudden and unplanned shift from f2f to a distance
educational model. Moreover, students from marginalized communities may be heavily impacted by this shift due to inequitable education conditions and therefore present challenges for these students to achieve academic success. "Over 90% indicated that they felt either highly or moderately impacted by the crisis in various ways (p.475)." Students in this study indicated blocks like lack of access to technology, inability to engage in their learning outside of the traditional classroom, and stress - academic and personal. Most importantly, the article shows how important it is for instructors to be more humane and compassionate in times of crisis. The authors refer to this approach as "humanizing pedagogies." Bohr and I felt good about this conclusion since we had already checked in with how students felt about the course when it was f2f instruction after the first half of the semester. We felt affirmed about using a student-centered approach as a cornerstone of our pedagogy.

Alaverez (2020) reflects on teaching and learning during COVID 19 in Luzon Island, Philippines. The study underlines the four main themes that emerged during the ERT that negatively affect students: poor to no internet access, financial constraints, lack of technological devices, and emotional support. These variables

impacted the survey questions that we designed for use with our students in EDCU 406. Another takeaway from this article was how faculty and school administrators need to collaborate on their efforts to support students during an emergency situation. While the homogeneous population in the Alvarez study is different from our UMass Boston campus, the socioeconomic status of both populations is similar. Compassion and awareness are key factors for helping to ease students' anxieties during difficult times.

In another study, Whittle et al. (2020) collected and synthesized data to understand what involves ERTE as a framework for understanding/supporting teaching and learning during emergencies. This study suggests that educators must revisit and reevaluate their learning design plans frequently during ERT. They must identify necessary changes and make adjustments to their content where appropriate.

Though these studies were helpful, I was still quite uncertain about my personal online skills compared to my students' know-how but felt slightly reassured after reviewing <u>Blended</u> <u>Learning in Action</u>:

> *"The assumption that students, as digital natives, are instinctively 'good at' technology can cause teachers to presume a higher level of competency and comfort using digital tools than students actually have. While it may be true that students have more familiarity in using tech tools, their skills may be more social and recreational. The skills required to succeed in an academic environment are related to those social skills; however, moving students into digital spaces under the assumption of readiness...can set them up for failure...it is our responsibility to plan a bridge across the 'digital divide'...introducing a new device, app, or the internet itself still requires that we pay attention to equity issues and differentiation."*
> *Tucker, Wycoff & Green (95)*

Capturing Students' Voices: What We Did

As we moved from f2f to emergency remote learning, we were challenged to restructure our classroom to keep our students engaged, provide opportunities for participation, and maintain expectations while being more lenient with due dates and assignments. Our f2f meetings were primarily focused on group-activities, partner-work, sharing of opinions and thoughts, and engaging in lively discussions. How could we possibly continue these interactions through Zoom? As we became more comfortable with using breakout rooms and the chat box function on Zoom, we found new ways to navigate and account for student participation, group-activities, and in-class discussions. Nevertheless, we were not able to fully comprehend what students thought about our new approach and how well (or even if) our techniques actually worked. We decided to create an online survey to capture students' opinions and voices about their experience with the transition to emergency remote learning in order to help us improve our classroom ERT practice.

We designed our survey on surveymonkey.com, online cloud-based software, that allowed us to collect students' responses anonymously. The 10 questions on the survey consisted of yes/no, open-ended, and multiple-choice questions (see Appendix A). The questions were categorized as: access to technology; overall curriculum/college transition; study space; personal mental health; food challenges. Once we finalized the survey questions, we shared a link with a total of 59 students and asked them to respond over a period of 2 weeks after the transition to emergency remote learning. The timing allowed us as instructors to establish consistency and a new routine and it gave students time to familiarize themselves with our new teaching approach. 30 students completed the survey.

Findings

Access to Technology

One of many resources offered by UMass Boston was a loaner Chrome book. Many students of UMB relied on computers in the campus library and may not have the necessary technology at home to access online resources and remote classes. While the majority of students in our class had access to technology (93%), UMB's efforts to provide students with the necessary technology helped one student in particular, as the first quote below shows. While students were supported in getting computers, some unfortunately experienced issues with their internet connection.

> *I was lucky enough to hear about UMass offering laptops for its students [...] This was unexpected and not all of us were ready for the change. But I'm glad working together and communicating, it was possible in the end.*

> *I do have the tech like phone, computer, and wifi. However, my wifi is so bad that for my nutrition exam I had to take it at a friends house which was hard during a time like this because of quarantine.*

Do you have the technology you need at home for your online learning?

Answered: 30   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▾ Yes.	93.33%	28
▾ No.	6.67%	2
TOTAL		30

Figure 1: Access to Technology

Overall transition experience

We asked our students to describe their overall experience with transitioning to emergency remote learning, taking into consideration all classes they were registered for during the Spring 2020 semester. Students' overall experiences were mixed. 11 students described the transition as challenging and/or very difficult, while 10 students felt the transition was okay in general. Some of the challenges described by students were difficulty to focus/learn with distractions at home, confusing, inconsistent and overwhelming expectations about remote learning and difficulty managing the workload based on different courses/professors, experiencing a different quality of education compared to face-to-face learning, not having access to a library and/or a quiet space, and not being able to go outside or socialize. Students also mentioned how difficult it was for them to be motivated to focus on schoolwork. Few students expressed difficulty accessing the online platforms that were required by different professors, and feeling like the many options interfered with learning. Some positive aspects described by students were feeling safe and more comfortable at home, describing remote learning as more convenient, and benefiting from professors' flexibility with workload and assignments.

> *It has its pros and cons. It works out fine but it can be hard to study with so many distractions and no library or a quiet place to study.*

> *It depends on the professor when asked this question. Some of my professors have a clear idea of how technology works and it is clear when assigning work and the submission process for each. The transition ultimately has not been an easy one for an in person learner such as myself, but definitely manageable at the least.*

> *Not good. I take 5 classes and some professors have been accommodating, some have given up and some are expecting too much out of us. It is really inconsistent and a confusing time. I am unsettled*

> *So far it has been ok. I am comfortable and safe at home and am able to keep on top of my assignments (mostly). My biggest challenge is keeping myself motivated and disciplined (i.e., designating a set time for assignments and studying and sticking with it), since I'm not leaving my house as much and it is easy to fall into a rut and become stagnant. If I were still going to face-to-face classes on campus (as I was 4 days per week before COVID), I feel I would have an easier time staying motivated with schoolwork.*
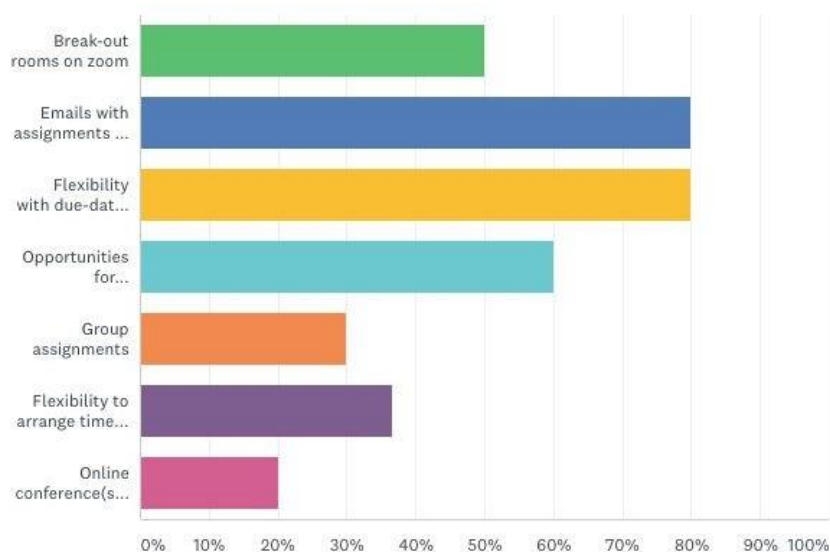
EDCU 406 transition experience

We wanted to learn specifically how our students experienced the transition to emergency remote learning in our classroom. More than half of our students expressed an overall positive attitude about the transition to emergency remote learning in our classroom. When asked about which aspects students found most helpful, we learned that

sending out detailed emails after class to summarize and highlight assignments, readings, and expectations for the next meetingwas overwhelmingly helpful, despite it being time consuming. Similarly, being flexible with due-dates and/or assignments, including adjusting requirements for assignments and allowing extra time for students to complete their work made the transition to remote learning easier. More than half of the students also found helpful the opportunities we provided for participation. Those opportunities included awarding participation points for sharing thoughts and opinions in the Zoom chat box, raising their hand (either on camera or via the "raise hand" function of zoom), asking students to send brief commentaries or critiques of topics that were introduced and discussed in class (awarding with check plus, check, check minus participation points), and providing brief summaries of break-out room discussions. Connected to these opportunities, half of the students found breakout rooms over zoom to be helpful. This approach was used to imitate the f2f group discussions we had before the transition to emergency remote learning. Based on students' feedback, we knew how much students appreciated being able to share their thoughtsand opinions with their classmates while learning about their partners' viewpoints and experiences. The graph below provides a breakdown of students' responses to our question,"Which aspects of the transition do you find helpful?"

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Break-out rooms on zoom	50.00%	15
Emails with assignments and expectations	80.00%	24
Flexibility with due-dates and/or assignments	80.00%	24
Opportunities for participation (e.g. chat function, brief written assignments, discussion board)	60.00%	18
Group assignments	30.00%	9
Flexibility to arrange time with your group-partner(s) to meet	36.67%	11
Online conference(s) with Professor Patmon	20.00%	6
Total Respondents: 30		

Figure 2: Helpful Aspects of Transition

EDCU transition challenges

In contrast, we asked students to describe aspects of the transition that were challenging. To oursurprise, 10 students felt that group assignments and partner-work were difficult. Based on the feedback we received of how enjoyable f2f group activities were, we wanted to keep utilizing this teaching approach. Unfortunately, it provided a challenge for a lot of our students.

> *I do not personally get a lot out of the partner/group assignments, as we often struggle to have everyone respond to emails or have a good enough connection to stay online for the entire session using whichever method wehave chosen. The web conference*

on blackboard kept kicking my group members offline one week, and another week I was unable to get incontact with group members.

It can be hard meeting with people in the groups because there could be a lack of communication.

Sometimes I feel like when we are arranged into these random groups it can be hard to contact everyone.

Group assignments were a bit messy at first and confusing, keeping in mind that technology always has its own technical difficulties, it can get inthe way of timing.
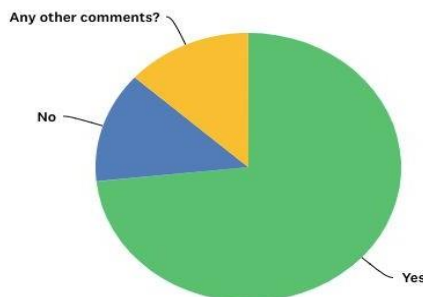
Study Space

Our students' well-being and opportunities to engage in learning were important to us. During f2f meetings, the classroom time was a protected time that allowed all students to devote their full attention to their education, to engaging with fellow classmates, the professor and TA, and course content. The transition to emergency remote learning unfortunately required our students to find a new study space that would allow them to continue their learning. The majority of our students (see graph below) were able to find this space in their homes during the pandemic,while others were not as fortunate.

My back room! It's a wonderful space, like a second bedroom to me. I conduct my classes and oftentimes homework back here.

It is difficult to find my own space while everyone is at home. It is challenging to do deep work where distractions are around.

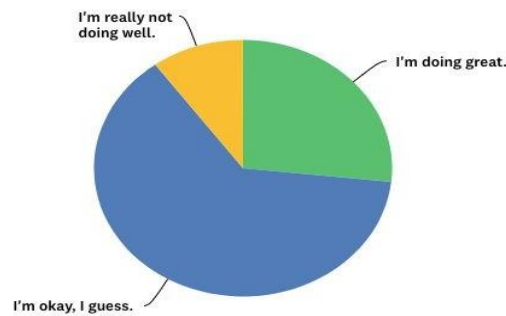| ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		73.33%	22
No		13.33%	4
Any other comments?	Responses	13.33%	4
TOTAL			30

Figure 3: Study Space Availability

Mental Health

Checking in with our students' physical and mental health at the beginning of class was an important part of our f2f meetings. Acknowledging how the pandemic affected everyone, we took 5-10 minutes at the beginning of our Zoom class meetings to discuss the social-emotional,mental and physical aspects of personal and professional self-care. It was important for us to understand how our students were feeling, and to give them time and space to express their feelings, concerns, and their own self-care routines. We wanted to make sure our care for students was reflected in our survey, and we wanted to provide them another way to express how they were doing during the pandemic and transition to ERT. We included a question about students' general well-being. We directed all students to university-based mental health structures in the hope that the 3 students who anonymously self-reported their poor mental healthwould take advantage of institutional support. We provided information available to them about the federally funded CARES Act Student Emergency Aid money to help them with expenses related to emergency remote classes offered at that time.

Generally, how are you doing?

Answered: 30   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I'm doing great.	26.67%	8
I'm okay, I guess.	63.33%	19
I'm really not doing well.	10.00%	3
TOTAL		30

Figure 4: General Well-Being

On our survey, we provided a comment box for students to share more details about their mental well-being, if they felt comfortable doing so. Some of the challenges described by our students follow:

> *It is hard to do course work with a toddler. There is no daycare open and it can be hard to stay focused. I used to go to the library or a quiet place at the university to stay motivated and focused.*

> *I am not an online learner so it is challenging for me to still feel as if i am in school still. some days i forget that i am even still a student and have assignments that are due.*

> *At first I was doing OK with this change in the learning style. Most of my teachers were sympathetic or accommodating. As we approach the end of the semester I have found it extremely difficult to take part in deep work. It is that we shouldn't be expected to do the same type of work as we did in the in-person setting. I feel as though the group work is confusing and adds more stress to my week than needed. This crisis has left an uncertainty to my life.*

> *As I mentioned before, I am only struggling with staying motivated and disciplining myself since now I am leaving my house only to go to work, 3 days per week. Other than that, I am happy to have more free time and more time to rest and relax.*

> *I'm an essential employee, therefore balancing a full time job and school has become increasingly difficult for me. I feel tired a lot therefore lacking motivation to get things done. I'm trying my best to stay positive though.*

> *Just feeling bored. I've always been busy, working and studying and now I feel like I'm in a cage.*

> *I found it difficult to access some of the apps that professor's required*

> *I just feel overwhelmed and hate that my last semester has been ruined*

> *I am very stressed and unable to communicate with my professors. Moreover the whole pandemic is overwhelming, concentrating has become difficult and I tend to drift off into thoughts of sadness and hopelessness.*

> *I think I'm doing okay. I'm lucky enough to have parents that understand and support me. I just feel uncertain for my next steps. This is more of a personal issue in the sense that I need to figure out where I should start finding a job that I enjoy. I know I love education and I would love to help students as a staff member or a non profit organization. I know I should use this time to figure out my next steps and how to earn the remaining credits I need in order to graduate.*

It is a big struggle balancing all the assignments I have especially since I cannot find a peaceful work space at home.

I'm not going to lie, it was very tough in the beginning, and I'm still not quite used to the change till this day. It's gotten to a point where classes are giving me anxiety and I'm just avoiding getting work done.
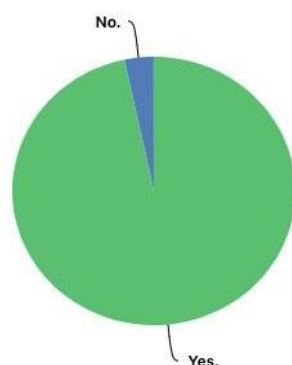
I'm taking it one day at a time! I live with four other relatives and two of them are under 18, so I'm a bit worried about their mental health and such, but I actually think everyone in my family is doing better than I thought they would in terms of managing stress and anxiety under quarantine which in turn helps my own anxiety

Access to food

A further concern for us was students' access to food. Understanding that UMB serves students from diverse socioeconomic populations, and food scarcity may be a serious concern in some families, we felt it was necessary to ask students about their ability to obtain food during the pandemic. While this question may not overtly relate to teaching strategies, understanding students' situation is essential to being able to offer assistance and help when needed. We werecertain to share with students the UMass Boston resources such as connections to food banks in students' neighborhoods. The majority of the students in our class had enough food at home. Onestudent responded with a need for food, but did not provide further information. Here too, we made announcements in class about institutional support but kept everything anonymous.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes.	96.67%	29
No.	3.33%	1
TOTAL		30

Figure 5: Access to Food

DISCUSSION/Takeaways

Transitioning to an emergency remote teaching platform required significant changes to pedagogical practice, knowledge of digital stools, and forced me/us to entirely re-conceptualize

1. course design that included adjustment to curriculum content, activities and assessments. New tothis platform, we were compelled to understand: the critical importance to constantly keep avenues of communication open between myself, Bohr, Bosneva, and students. Building and extending communityin the classroom is essential;

2. the need to be flexible with my pedagogy and to try different teaching approachesto help all students who have diverse learning styles – particularly with this modality of teaching;

3. to not assume that all students had academic technology skills. Several students had limited access to the internet, did not own a laptop/computer, were unfamiliar with Learning Management Systems (LMS) and web-conferencing tools and other technologies. Students needed to learn and become comfortable with a newway of

receiving information and of being assessed;

4. to be patient with the technology which sometimes did not work as planned. I learned to accept that which I could not figure out in the moment but that I neededto have Plan B at the ready in case the technology failed;

5. to reduce course content in order for students to go in-depth about content-relatedissues that interested them. Less turned out to be more and my directions and

expectations for students' work needed to be crystal clear;

6. the challenge of getting students to turn on their visual screen and not the blackname box;

7. that I could not simply translate the f2f syllabus to an online modality. This wasunrealistic. I learned that I had to totally re-conceptualize what I needed to teachand to constantly check-in with students about course content;

8. interaction was a part of every class session, but not always a dominant aspect of the teaching learning exchange;

9. assessment of students' learning was far more nuanced and compounded versusbeing linearized;

10. working with IT staff is critical to grow my technology skills and provide the necessary support to students. Bosneva's deep IT knowledge and passion for herwork was infectious.

CONCLUSIONS/Further Issues

There is much to consider concerning teaching and learning in a remote online environment. Faculty and students might be faced with fears and resistance to the new modality, but online learning is here to stay. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, as previously stated, I, the professor, had limited experience using an LMS and felt totally intimidated by the technology and the new way of interacting with my students. Most importantly, I had to completely change my mindset.This semester, I kept students engaged during the Zoom sessions through breakout groups, whiteboard use, Google jamboard, and active discussions. Students were asked and encouraged to participate during the live synchronous class discussions. I made sure to incorporate student engagement as part of my lectures. Asynchronously, I divided the students into groups, and each week they worked together via Bb collaborate and Bb discussion board. The group activities created an opportunity for students to get to know each other better and feel more confidentabout working together. Students also had each other with whom to delve into the course content. Furthermore, they discussed with high school teachers and their students teaching,learning and the application of course content during the pandemic via ZOOM. While I still prefer f2f teaching, I learned to appreciate and to have fun with the technology at hand during theemergency. Though ERT was different, it did not mean that it could not be positive for both myself, TA Bohr, and most of all - our students.

Time was the critical factor in transitioning from f2f to remote teaching. We learned that we needed time to adjust to the new format and to get the necessary training to get comfortable withthe technology. I recommend working with one IT Designer/Support Staff member. The relationship between staff and faculty is critical. We respected each other's areas of expertise and committed ourselves to keep a student-centered focus. It was important to have honest communication with students about the fact that we were doing our best to adjust to the new environment, and we asked for their patience in order for this to become a successful experience for all. Bohr, Bosneva, and I learned to be more flexible about our expectations of students' performance as we realized that many students faced numerous challenges and experienced levels of fear, anxiety, and resistance to the new way of learning and assessment. We learned to embrace the changes and challenges and encouraged our students to do so. Time continues to be a challenging variable moving forward. In order to support community building among all involved in the course, it is important to develop and nurture an individual relationship with eachstudent. This takes time, in addition to completing all of the other time-consuming necessities related to course delivery. Juggling the demands of our time continues to be a challenge.

Another challenge related to remote teaching and learning concerns low attendance, spotty participation, disappointing outcomes that students experience, all which are related to studentengagement in the course. Bohr, Bosneva and I identified 4 stages of engagement:

- Student to content
- Student to instructor
- Student to student
- Student to self

Although we tried our best to create student momentum and full immersion in the learning process, sustaining a high level of engagement remains a quandary. We recognize that students will be successful if they feel engaged with the course content, the professor, and their peers. In order to create such an environment, faculty need to provide students with as many low-risk opportunities to learn, practice and apply what they are learning, as much as possible. This becomes much more problematic at the application stage where K-12 public school teaching is remote as well. I was fortunate to have established relationships with Boston Writing Project (NWP network) teachers who were confident and competent veteran practitioners, and allowed my undergraduate students to visit their online teaching classrooms during the late spring. This turned out to be a highly successful experience at the high school level where the BWP teachers and their students met with me and my students after the lesson to discuss what had transpired, teaching and learning during the pandemic. Moving forward, I have designed virtual grades K-12 classroom visits with BWP teachers. I have learned to keep my syllabus flexible and to constantly monitor all levels of engagement so that I may take advantage of opportunities that may become available and adjust accordingly during these most uncertain times.

Bohr reminded us that one key challenge that requires effort to be addressed is how to maintain student accountability during remote learning while being equitable and fair towards all of our students. The diversity of the UMB student body requires us as instructors to take into consideration what our students' learning environments at home might be like. Keeping in mind that many of our students are essential workers themselves and/or have children without access to full-time daycare, a regular school-schedule, or other childcare options, we as faculty must become and remain aware of their living situations and how those might impact their learning. We do have the advantage of having learned from our students what worked for them and what challenges they faced during the transition to remote learning. In the future, we will be able to plan group activities in a way that makes it easier for students to connect with one another and maintain a professional working relationship. We can use those learning and create a more equitable, supportive, and accessible remote learning environment that provides students with flexibility to attend classes, complete assignments, and meet deadlines. The learning from this study can benefit all educators and instructors to make remote learning accessible and equitable for all students.

The remote teaching environment provides wonderful opportunities to customize teaching and learning. E-Learning tools and technology allow for personalization so that we may best meet the variety of learning needs of our students. As a result of this painful, deadly, global pandemic, we have learned to embrace the use of technology, e-learning, and lifelong learning for all involved in the classroom. THAT is the enduring message we hope our students internalize as a result of their college education.

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Helpful Resources:

https://blog.citl.mun.ca/instructionalresources/remote-vs-online-instruction/

https://blog.citl.mun.ca/instructionalresources/files/2020/05/Remote-vs-Fully-Online-Instruction.pdf
https://blog.citl.mun.ca/instructionalresources/files/2020/05/Remote-Teaching-Infographic.pdf

ttps://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Appendix A

* Transition to online learning: Online learning survey

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, UMass Boston and all other universities were required to move from in-person classes on campus to online classes for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester.

We understand the challenges this transition may bring about for some of you, and are here to provide assistance. Please respond to the questions in this survey to the best of your ability so we can get a better understanding of your needs, challenges, requests and experiences during this time.

The responses of this survey will be collected ANONYMOUSLY. Your responses will be kept without knowing who answered what.

** Please respond to this survey by April 28. THANK YOU!

1. **Please identify the following:**
   a. Major
   b. Minor (if applicable)
   c. Graduation class status (1st year, sophomore, junior, senior)
   d. Educator licensure you wish to pursue/are pursuing (early childhood, elem., middle school, secondary, HS)
   e. Discipline, if applicable (e.g. math, English, history, etc.)

2. **What is your overall experience so far with the transition to online learning?**

3. **Do you have the technology you need at home for your online learning?**
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. If no, please explain your challenges.

4. **What is your experience with transitioning to online classes for EDCU 241 and/or EDCU 406?**

5. **Which aspects of the transition do you find helpful?**
   a. Break-out rooms on zoom

    b. Emails with assignments and expectations
    c. Flexibility with due-dates and/or assignments
    d. Opportunities for participation (e.g. chat function, brief written assignments,discussion board)
    a. Group assignments
    b. Flexibility to arrange time with your group-partner(s) to meet
    c. Online conference(s) with Professor Patmon
    d. Please let us know what else works for you

6. **Which aspects of the above do you find challenging? Please explain in as much detail as possible so we can address those concerns.**
    a. Thoughts/concerns/questions
    b. Other comments

7. **Generally, how are you doing?**
    a. I'm doing great.
    b. I'm okay, I guess.
    c. I'm really not doing well.
    d. If you feel comfortable, please share what you are experiencing so we can bestsupport you

8. **Do you have enough food at home for yourself and others?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Comments

9. **Do you have adequate study space at home to optimize your learning?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Comments

10. **Using Gorski's definition of socioeconomic class, please identify your SES at themoment:**
    a. Poverty
    b. Working class
    c. Middle class
    d. Managerial class
    e. Owning class
    f. Other (please specify)