

Teaching in the Time of COVID-19: What to Expect and How to Meet the Challenge of the Unexpected



Coronavirus and COVID-19 are affecting the foundations of the educational landscape. The virus grows exponentially due to the ease of transmission coupled with the invisibility of the symptoms for the first few days. With the availability of vaccinations estimated over a year away and the severity of the symptoms making herd immunity a costly alternative, the short-term solution is quarantine and social distancing. Authorities have shut down non-essential businesses and places where people gather to prevent further contamination and keep the hospitals from becoming overwhelmed. Sports, concerts, and restaurants are feeling the brunt of the shutdowns, resulting in millions of layoffs across the country. Schools have been especially affected. The traditional classroom setting has vanished and has been inadequately replaced by distance learning, affecting the daily rhythm and routine for all. Teachers' adaptability and dedication have been tested beyond any reasonable standards in their effort to create a sense of normalcy, to sustain students' well-being, while still striving for academic progress.

Distance Learning: Struggling and Adapting

Coronavirus and COVID-19 have proven to be a disruptive force in every manner of life. We cannot overlook how this is affecting educators, the ones who are teaching our youth even in these challenging times. Teaching, a very social and interaction-based profession, has been forced into an isolating experience. Educators are working through the struggles, finding ways to adapt their virtual classrooms to fit our new reality and shifting the goal of teaching.

- **Skill-building over content:** Teaching new content to overwhelmed students is an ambitious endeavor. Focusing on what is controllable, like building better writing skills and reviewing content, will allow students to cement critical skills for their future amid a difficult teaching period.
- **Understanding the circumstances:** Being at home proves to be a challenging environment to focus on homework. Teachers are practicing relaxed policies on grading and due dates to alleviate stress for both themselves and their students.
- **Student well-being:** Looking after the mental well-being of students is as important as ever right now, showing that teaching goes well beyond the classroom. Remembering to ask students how they are doing is a small but powerful gesture. [Here](#) is a helpful blog on coping in these unprecedented times.
- **Accessibility for all students:** Chromebooks make this turbulent time easier in terms of the ability to provide for students. [LAUSD has provided resources to help get families with reliable internet access to affordable services during this time.](#) For those schools not able to provide Chromebooks, weekly packets are available for them to pick up at the school sites. As well, [LAUSD has partnered with PBS to provide educational tools to teachers and families.](#) Other sites, like [The Stanford History Education Group](#), have adaptable, free lessons available for teachers to access.
- **What is it like for first-year teachers?** As this year proves to be unforgettable, [first-year teachers are taking the curveballs and adapting in ingenious ways.](#)
- **Stay up to date; read teaching blogs.** Remember that no one is alone in this. Teachers and institutions are sharing their strategies on many different platforms. Here are a few helpful sites.
 - [Edutopia](#)
 - [UC Davis California History-Social Science Project](#)

- [UCLA History Geography Project](#)
- [Zinn Education Project](#)
- [Cool Cat Teacher](#)

Future Teachers: Moving Forward

Undergraduate Roadmap: The Teacher Preparation Option requires courses in pedagogy as well as varied subject areas that include Economics, Political Science, and Geography. A significant part of the program is the pedagogical courses that touch on history and social science teaching techniques and could be the first classes in teaching that undergraduates experience. The program is an optimal segue for undergraduates to go into the credential program.

- **Pedagogy Courses** - History 3085 (formerly 3000) Early Field Experience in History and Social Science. History 4960 Issues in Teaching History and Social Science
- **Observations** - To begin the placement process, students need to complete a packet that includes a TB test, [Live Scan](#) with a fingerprint, and liability insurance from the university. Afterward, the placement office will assist in finding a school compatible with students' preferences and availability. Though they offer immense help, students should **take the initiative** and call or email schools to expedite the process and show administrators their interest in the school.

Credential Applicants: It is a confusing and challenging time for those planning to pursue a credential from the Charter College of Education at Cal State LA. Students are wondering how this will impact their plans for continued education into the credential program. Specifically, what do students do if they do not meet the requirements for applying due to the pandemic? The director of student services, Augustine Cervantes, has also provided tentative guidance on how the credential program is changing and adapting to these circumstances.

- **How to apply during this time:** The CCOE has provided some [answers](#) for students who plan to apply to the college amid the pandemic.

- **This is a work in progress.** Faculty and students are adjusting to the new normal as they progress onward. The flexibility of the college with helping its students and staff has made training and development readily available to improve the process for all.
- **Field Work is directly impacted.** Schools and testing sites have been closed due to social distancing put in place. Luckily, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing has been responsive and collaborative in [finding solutions](#) to these difficult problems.
- **The CCOE is continuously working to find answers.** The program is working to develop courses in different mediums to fulfill requirements in collaborative efforts with its partners. These measures will introduce and expose credential students to the new realities we are currently living in.
- **How they are improving the experience:** With an ever-changing teaching landscape, the CCOE is always striving to keep up to par with state and federal standards within its program.

What Can We Learn From This?

Before the pandemic, teachers were encouraged, but not required, to connect with students online using websites to supplement their classroom instruction. However, the stay at home order is forcing even the most reluctant teachers and districts to embrace distance education.

Moving Forward - The change was abrupt and drastic, so it is not a proper representation of what hybrid K-12 education will be. However, there are positives to take away from it.

- It precedes a candid conversation about formally integrating online material to supplement face to face instruction. The change brings the classroom structure to the 21st century, where students can work remotely and still be able to collaborate and communicate with classmates and teachers.
- Challenges students' independent diligence as they will be responsible for their academics without constant supervision, which would further develop work habits and integrity. Though, this level of responsibility would benefit older students as preparation for college or the workplace.

Resource Allocation - The migration to virtual education did not happen smoothly. Some schools and districts can easily equip students with electronic devices, while others do not have the resources available to do so. Additionally, internet access is not equally accessible for all students. The disparity between schools and even classmates forces the issue of proper resource allocation for the future.

- Schools will earnestly consider providing devices for their students as a contingency for similar events in the future to begin supplementing the classroom with virtual learning.
- Internet companies have stepped in to provide services for students, and others affected by the stay at home orders. [T-Mobile and Sprint lifted data caps on their plans](#), [AT&T is offering special rates to limited income families](#), and [Xfinity has offered their Wi-Fi services to anybody who needs them](#). [Verizon is collaborating with the New York Times in offering digital access](#).
- **Lack of participation:** Online classes can never replace the comfort and intimacy of face to face instruction or the ability to ensure their participation. Teachers now have to create a new environment where students can still engage in materials and assignments without participation and class discussions.

Bringing Normalcy to the Online Classroom- Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers struggle to provide a sense of normalcy for themselves and, most importantly, for the students. While teachers adapt to online methods of learning, they find it impossible to provide the same level of support that they would in a classroom setting. Classroom management has all but disappeared in this space because this interaction is gone. These are the issues most highlighted by the interviewed teachers that are irreplaceable.

- **Relationship building** - Relationship building is the most crucial element in creating a positive learning environment. This type of environment reveals a level of communication that is unmatched, where students work hand in hand with their teacher to succeed; they learn to participate and guide one another through class discussions.
- **Social interaction amongst students-** In a classroom setting, students can learn from each other through class discussion and group work. With online learning, students cannot expand their ideas and or learn from one another.

- **Direct teacher support-** The ability of teachers to assist students who require extra help is now limited. Without face to face interaction, teachers are unable to explain and expand on topics.

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Useful links for your consideration

- **Mental Well-being**
 - <https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2020/04/06/resources-and-tips-for-supporting-your-mental-health-during-covid-19/>
 - <http://www.hunt-institute.org/resources/2020/04/covid-19-policy-playbook-student-well-being/>
- **Online Classrooms**
 - [Google Classroom](#), [Schoology](#), [ConnectED](#)
- **Interactive Engagement Tools**
 - [Edpuzzle](#), [Actively Learn](#), [PearDeck](#)