

May 13, 2020

Prompt:

How has the pandemic changed the practice of teaching and the goals of education?

Response:

Practice of Teaching

The pandemic has moved the practice of teaching from face-to-face interaction to online distance learning for the time being. Teachers across the world are conducting class sessions through video-conferencing applications like Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet, and others. My placement school has transitioned to using Google Classroom to deliver content to students and collect assignment submissions. My mentor teacher has been using WebEx to conduct individual meetings with students and answer their questions, while my role has been to produce tutorial videos for the students in my class. We have been using a blend of synchronous and asynchronous instruction to facilitate student learning during this challenging time.

Some changes to the school system seem like they will be here to stay once the shelter-in-place is lifted. If students return to school in person in the Fall, we may see continued physical distancing and online instruction. Desks may be spaced 6-8 feet apart, fewer students may be present in the school at any given time, and classes may be spread out across the day from 8 am to 6 pm. Teachers will likely rely on Google Classroom more than before, and supplementing instruction with tutorial videos will become more common. Although the practice of teaching will probably be significantly different, I hope that our goals will stay the same and we will develop new ways to reach them.

Goals of Education

To me, the purpose of education is to help students see that there are ways they can contribute to making the world a better place by using the skills they have learned in school. I think the ways we can do this are to promote student learning through engaging students, differentiating instruction, and ensuring equitable access to education.

Although online learning is a practical and easy way to reach large numbers of students, it comes with problems in these areas. Students who comply with the instructions to mute their microphones and turn off their video cameras in order to limit distractions become silent and invisible to their classmates and their teacher, making it difficult to foster student engagement and differentiate instruction. To mitigate this, teachers can help students learn norms for online interaction so that they can remain engaged. Doing this will be a greater challenge for younger students, though.

In addition, not all students have access to devices that they can use to attend and participate in classes delivered online. Although schools across the nation have made enormous efforts to secure Google Chromebooks, Apple Macbooks, and iPads to distribute them to students and their families, they are likely not reaching every student in need. The Silicon Valley is home to many tech companies but students in poorer districts in other areas may have reduced access to these devices. The ability to physically come to class contributed to equity, but now students with Internet devices have a privilege over those who do not have them. We can make greater efforts to give devices to the poorest communities so that they will have the needed infrastructure to continue education during this time. In addition, poorer districts that do not have adequate training programs to prepare their teachers for

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delivering instruction in this environment need to be provided with excellent instructional coaches, so that the teachers will become better equipped to guide students' instruction.

Although there will always be challenges that we need to address in the field of education, I believe that by adapting our practice, staying true to our goals, and improving the ways in which we reach our goals, we will do well as educators in the world that we will enter once the shelter-in-place is lifted.