



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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For Immediate Release

October 16, 2020

Reimagining Schooling in the Wake of COVID-19:

How Can We Make our Schools Anti-Racist?

New York, NY - The current pandemic that has engulfed every country around the globe has also altered the methods used to deliver educational instruction. Are these new educational practices promoting more equity among students, or creating a more unjust classroom experience?

Recently, a panel comprised of GSE faculty, administrators, and students was held to discuss how education professionals can use the shift in the ways education is being delivered to consider the culture of all students and help dismantle anti-racist practices. Using Dr. Bettina L. Love's idea of abolitionist teaching to imagine schools where all students thrive, co-moderator Jane Bolgatz, GSE interim associate dean for academic affairs and associate professor of curriculum and teaching, noted the importance of examining microaggressions and ways to deliver anti-racist teaching, especially in the online learning environment.

According to the panelists, a world of possibilities has opened in education since the COVID-19 pandemic began, in both post-secondary and K-12 institutions. The focus for the discussion was, first, how do you move education online? And second, how do you do that in a way that's equitable?

Clarence Ball, a co-moderator and panelist, began the conversation by sharing his personal experiences in the classroom as a doctoral student in the GSE's Contemporary Learning and Interdisciplinary Research (CLAIR) program. His comments were also informed by his roles as Gabelli School of Business clinical assistant professor and director of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ball commented, "I've had positive experiences as a first year CLAIR student; my classes have been extremely inclusive. The professors are including all of the students in the discussions and making sure that we can share our thoughts about the readings."

Bolgatz agreed there have been many positive examples like this, during COVID, that showed educators' abilities to improve classroom experiences (even virtually) and address inequities. She also noted that there have been many challenges within education. For example, the New York

City Department of Education (NYC DOE) is trying to get computers into the hands of all children, but some children are still without computers or devices. Therefore, some students are being left behind as they are not participating in remote instruction with their peers.

But according to panelist Clemencia Acevedo, a special education teacher at PSMS 161 in West Harlem, putting devices in the hands of students is only the first step. She noted that in her school, through the Apple ConnectEd program (which serves 114 underserved schools across the country) every student got an iPad. Even with those resources, communication with parents was initially very challenging, particularly because not all teachers (or parents) are tech-savvy. Acevedo supported the administration in helping other teachers and encouraged activation of the school's website; she also helped with school/parent communication and created an Excel form to collect more parent emails. She commented, "I have found that video tutorials are one of the best ways to support parents and families."

"The pandemic in many ways has allowed us to be much more focused and have a much better set-up, to create a support system that is more efficient," voiced panelist Sara Martinez, a resource specialist with the GSE's Center for Educational Partnerships and the center's Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (R-BERN) program. Doing all online consulting allows her to service all five of the schools she works with every day, which wasn't possible before. Perhaps even more importantly, she is able to "provide help for students living in shelters, particularly by advocating for Internet access."

The practical aspect of Internet access is a key consideration for educators. Bolgatz reminded the group that it's important to evaluate learning platforms such as Canvas to see how often students and families are utilizing them. "Families need Internet access, and they need to know their passwords and how to use these technologies. It doesn't matter how good your system is if people don't have the password to get in or don't have access to Wi-Fi. Sometimes the people with the least amount of power are the least willing to ask questions, so it's important to ask directly: do you have Internet access?"

"Listening to needs and communicating with families and students is the number one thing to do," agreed Panelist Soto Kingsley, teacher at All Middle School in the Bronx and doctoral student in the CLAIR program, and provided an additional perspective. "When our online learning switched from Google Classroom to Canvas, we listened to input from families and students via surveys, focus groups, working groups, and weekly calls." And we started making sure all students had devices and even purchased MiFi for those students who did not have access to the Internet." To make sure that her work is especially beneficial for students, her every day advisory periods include social-emotional learning and anti-racism themes.

GSE Interim Dean Akane Zusho commented that learning is more effective when students are engaged and attending to things. She pointed out that when comparing asynchronous versus synchronous sessions, students often report they like asynchronous ones better because you can pause, rewind, and listen to something again at your own pace.

Ball added, "For educators teaching at universities like Fordham, I would recommend using a resource like Top Hat to create interactive lectures – it allows for including elements like

pictures and video links. I've learned is that it's really good to have the synchronous lectures as well as something like Top Hat to help promote the student interaction."

Ball also mentioned how critical it is to have psychologists on campus, especially those who are specifically designated for diverse students and those who need additional services. "We are also building an anti-racism resource bank for curriculum. It includes articles, case studies, Ted Talks, and video clips," he stated. "All of this will help faculty find ways to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion content in their courses."

Panelist Gordon Van Owen, English teacher at the Urban Assembly School of Business for Young Women and a GSE Ph.D. student at Fordham, noted that his school has focused specifically on what online platform modes have been most effective for teaching and learning. "Teachers were encouraged to be mindful of the limits students were experiencing related to housing," he said. "We were asked to maintain an equity mindset, and we were given opportunities to engage in professional development with an emphasis on anti-racist teaching."

Bolgatz said that the GSE is also taking steps to institutionalize the ways courses are created, including making sure an anti-racist lens has been considered. In other words, asking whether diverse voices are included in the curriculum is a key question. Annie George-Puskar, GSE assistant professor of curriculum and teaching, explained that she does this by making sure her course readings incorporate a wide variety of different sources as well as researchers who are from a variety of different backgrounds.

Bolgatz also noted that microaggressions will happen in the classroom, and that it's important to make sure we recognize them in how we talk to each other day-to-day, and then address them in the moment. She concluded, "Let's take advantage of all the things that we are learning and that we're getting out of this situation – the things that have become possible – and let's move to make this a more equitable system for all of our students."

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