

A Single Case Pandemic Analysis: Leadership in a Pandemic - The Response by Molloy College's School of Education

by Dr. Vicky Giouroukakis

In mid-March 2020, all schools in NYC, Long Island and the entire education community closed and had to move to a remote teaching format due to the COVID-19 situation. That was the last time teachers and students were physically in their classrooms and the last time they saw each other. At that time, teachers and staff were asked to do extraordinary things regarding course delivery and learning and to engage in what is now called "pandemic pedagogy."

Pandemic pedagogy required Long Island teachers to provide opportunities for student engagement and much-needed connection to students who need learning continuity but also social emotional support. Most districts implemented three phases of online learning: Phase 1 allowed teachers and students time to plan for remote teaching. Phase 2 focused on increasing delivery of instruction, while phase 3, in effect until the end of June, provided more access to direct instruction and supports.

Schools had several challenges when going remote. Balancing synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods while maintaining flexibility was one educational challenge. Another challenge for our schools was providing emotional support to students and staff who were in situations where they suffered loss or illness, were taking care of loved ones, or were feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or uncertain about the present and/or the future. Support staff, such as school social workers and psychologists, worked around the clock to make available that necessary care. Most schools also ran day care centers for essential workers and provided free meals to students in need. Access to computers and the internet was also the focus to enable students to engage in the remote learning.

The Molloy College teachers in the field and alumni, who were in line with the college's mission joined teachers in their respective Long Island districts to transform education and provide service and leadership. Michael Ferretti, an alumnus and administrator in

a high-needs LI school district expressed some of the challenges experienced by other leaders: "Our greatest challenge was getting the appropriate technology to our homeless families and making sure they had the capability to utilize it. In a low income community, you are also dealing with families that don't have WIFI, so the initial challenge easily became a multi-phase process for us that included making initial contact, setting up the technology with instructions, and a follow up visit to ensure the technology was fully operational."

A recent graduate of the School of Education and Human Services, Noel King, works as a teacher during the day in one school and early mornings at another school serving as a translator for their free lunch program. She stated, "The team I work with is incredible; on our busiest days we give out 3000 meals. The work of teachers has changed in appearance in the last couple of weeks, but at its core it is the same - we're just here to help the kids, any way we can." Another alumnus, Laurie Bocca, despite managing in this pandemic, said she "missed the kids so much."

The COVID-19 experience taught our alumni and all educators a few things about online teaching that informed the planning for when schools reopened in that fall:

1. Shared Vision:

Leaders need to develop a vision for the future that reflects a reimagining of schools and that is shared by the stakeholders, i.e., parents, families, administrators, teachers, staff members, students, administrators, and the local community. They need to consider what effective schooling in an epidemic situation that includes an online environment looks like. Attention must be given to educating the whole child and addressing the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of all students, including those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds who will need access to support.

2. **Safety:**
Schools need to create safe environments for children and staff. This requires sanitization and social distancing protocols. It also means promoting testing, tracing, and isolation to ensure the virus is contained and those who are infected get the proper treatment. Only then will parents feel safe sending their kids to school and only then will teachers and staff trust that they can return to work.
3. **Pandemic Pedagogy vs. Online Teaching:**
Pandemic pedagogy is not the same as online teaching. This emergency pedagogy was different from a robust online environment, the design and implementation of which requires time and effort. All schools must plan for online or hybrid pedagogy in the future. We don't know when waves of the virus will hit again forcing schools to go remote. However, effective online pedagogy is possible but requires a range of collaboration efforts and engagement methods that take into consideration learners' individual needs and situations.
4. **Community Building:** Community building should be a priority in this environment as a successful learning environment cannot be cultivated without the collaboration of all the stakeholders.

Parents homeschooling in the pandemic will need schools to help address their needs by providing childcare, access to information, support, and guidance in facilitating learning for their children.

5. **Perseverance:** This pandemic has brought out the best in teachers and other stakeholders as they have come together to work for the good of the students. Students have risen to the occasion as they have persevered through this crisis and, as a result, will be stronger in the future.

This article is dedicated to the community of educators out there, including our Molloy alumni, who showed great resilience, strength, leadership, and service in this global crisis. Molloy is grateful for your work!

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Dr. Vicky Giouroukakis is a Professor of Education, Literacy, English Methods, TESOL, in the School of Education and Human Services at Molloy College, Rockville Centre, NY.

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