Article type

Commentary, double-blind peer review.

Publication history

Received: 26 January 2021. Revised: 25 March 2021.
Accepted: 27 March 2021. Published: 14 April 2021.

Cover image

stux
via Pixabay.

Special issue Technology enhanced learning in the MENA region | **More at** <https://doi.org/10.21428/8c225f6e.1fd869f8>

A brave new hybrid world: Teaching, teamwork and technology under quarantine

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Keywords

remote learning; pivot; teaching during Covid-19; Communities of Inquiry; VoiceThread; student centred learning; commentary

Citation

Taylor, M. (2021). A brave new hybrid world: Teaching, teamwork and technology under quarantine.

Studies in Technology Enhanced Learning, 1(2), 345-357.

<https://doi.org/10.21428/8c225f6e.65d99a1d>

Abstract

In early March the United Arab Emirates shifted to Ministry-mandated remote learning. As the Campus Dean for the Abu Dhabi Campus of the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) this posed logistical challenges but also promised opportunities for my campus. As a teacher, I had many questions about how the territory of cyberspace would accommodate a pedagogy and process of active learning. I worried, too, about how the loss of community in the form of a physical campus and classrooms would impact students' mental health and well-being. The open door policy of the Dean's Office would certainly be a casualty of the shift to on-line learning. Propelled by the curiosity of a life-long learner, I decided to jump into the fray rather than sit on the sidelines as verdicts were rendered daily about remote learning. I registered for Idesign—an on-line course to learn the fundamentals of on-line teaching. By summer, I was ready to pivot fully with the rest of the campus and the world in explorations of on-line learning. I offered two hybrid remote Arts and Science courses (The Sociological Imagination and Reading the Harlem Renaissance) in the summer of 2020. In weekly encounters and pandemic journals, students and I grappled with the frustration of quarantine and our forced condition of on-line living and learning. In both classes, the web-based tool VoiceThread was used to take advantage of a "multisensory environment" to create Communities of Inquiry (the CoI framework is widely understood as a place where teachers promote an active

cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence). Following a brief overview of the timing and conditions of the shift to remote learning in the U.A.E., this paper will explore three pieces of student work as case studies in which role-play, virtual protest and writing projects were produced using VoiceThread. In each case, content, collaboration and community (building) bridged synchronous and asynchronous modalities producing new innovations for high-impact student centered learning in the face of Covid-19.

1. Ready, set go: Assessing campus readiness

In this time, as the Covid-19 pandemic burns through us, our world is passing through a portal. We have journeyed to a place from which it looks unlikely that we can return, at least not without some kind of serious rupture from the past— social, political, economic, ideological ... As we pass through this portal into another kind of world, we will have to ask ourselves what we want to take with us and what we want to leave behind. Arundhati Roy, *Azadi*

By late February 2020, with a global public health crisis gathering more insistent media attention my Provost in N.Y. advised me to prepare the NYIT Abu Dhabi campus for the distinct possibility of disruption. How would you respond, he asked, to the increasingly likely event of campus closures or other restrictions to proceeding with an on-campus semester? We talked through a range of practical considerations: What might an interruption mean for students and teachers displaced from physical classrooms? How could lessons and assignments be delivered? While his warning proved prescient, I had been a step ahead having already convened the NYIT Abu Dhabi faculty to discuss communications measures we should take with the student rumor network already abuzz. At the faculty meeting, we also debated what logistics planning would position us for a range of then-unknown scenarios.

After the meeting, all teachers were asked to complete a Remote Readiness form in which they addressed questions framed around teaching and learning expectations, communication and course delivery mechanisms:

- Am I prepared to take my course(s) on-line/remote?
- How? (e.g., Blackboard, Google classroom, Voice Thread, Jing, Zoom, DL-room, other)
- When and how will I communicate with students in advance of and during a possible shift away from campus?

- What types of course work remain in the class? (e.g., lecture(s), homework and other written assignments, oral presentations, group work, quizzes & exams, final exam or final projects)
- What are the current due dates for remaining coursework in the syllabus?
- What are some challenges I might encounter with a remote plan?
- What support will I need in advance and during the shift to remote learning?

I was familiar with the value of taking a collective inventory of teaching and technology from my days as campus dean at NYIT's China campus. Because of slow internet connections and the restrictions of China's Great Firewall it is common practice for Western teachers in China to frequently share knowledge about accessible digital tools (apps, platforms) and to talk about how these inform pedagogical practices. Tools that Chinese students make everyday use of for shopping, entertainment and connecting to friends can quickly be leveraged for teaching as well as communications. If there is one great lesson about teaching with technology in China it is that there is always a workaround with tech challenges.

From the current fog of "zoom fatigue" it may seem a distant memory but also useful to recall that when the U.A.E. first shifted to remote learning, Zoom was not a widely available option for remote classroom use. Because NYIT Abu Dhabi is hosted on a government campus we had not faced Zoom restrictions and thus made frequent on-campus use of Zoom for collaborations (including on-line and DL classes) with NYIT global campuses in N.Y., Vancouver and China. The U.A.E. block raised initial worries. Colleagues and I immediately identified Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex as similar videoconferencing options and we each devoted time to reviewing and sharing similarities and differences with Zoom. These options could constitute the virtual "face-to-face" or synchronous aspect of remote learning. We also monitored daily any indications that restrictions might be eased on Zoom for educational use—a shift that came to pass, making Zoom the preferred video conferencing platform for the NYIT Abu Dhabi campus.

The NYIT Abu Dhabi faculty and staff also attended a series of "crash" training sessions about on-line teaching with Blackboard which is the primary learning management system (LMS) for NYIT (note: since fall 2020 the university initiated a shift to Canvas which will take full effect by summer 2021). For now, Blackboard would be useful but the training primarily delivered a "nuts and bolts" approach to

the practical aspects of managing the shell. In a larger sense, our training experience with Blackboard deferred broader inquiries into the pedagogical aspects of online teaching with Blackboard (or any LMS for that matter).

Generally, the School of Management colleagues were most prepared to shift if remote learning were to be implemented. In part, this was because Blackboard was an already widely used tool for communicating with students and receiving assignment submissions (checked through plagiarism detection). School of Management students were also familiar with on-line simulations and global business competitions which are frequently used to promote active and experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom. Issues for the Mechanical Engineering department were minor: whiteboards would be necessary for solving equations and more major: missed time in the fluids laboratory. In the end, technology solutions were close at hand for the engineers. We discovered the whiteboard features in Zoom and Webex which we made use of along with repurposing a wireless graphic tablet foraged from our campus DL room and put to use in offices converted to teaching studios. Software simulations were a serviceable replacement for missed lab time. It seemed that we had many tools at our disposal and would be ready to go remote when needed.

A colleague in the Interior Design department, however, was panicked. A final campus challenge was the design department “pin-up.” This end-of-semester experience for architecture and design students is where student work is displayed to be presented and critiqued in front of an audience of guest critics (usually current internship providers and potential employers) along with alumni, family and friends. The pin-up is an academic big deal: After a semester of sprawling messy studio work in isolation, the pin-up is when disheveled students operating on little sleep and a lot of caffeine pull all together in the department’s gallery space. It is a bit like a graduation ceremony for big projects. And, the pin-up is a big social production too: hair and makeup, coffee and snacks for the invited guests along with an electric buzz crackling throughout the design building. In all of our campus discussions of remote readiness we had been eager to adapt and embrace a range of technologies and push beyond our comfort zones. What we hadn’t thoroughly explored was the spatial losses we would experience in shifting our learning environment and teaching tools. The pin-up was a reminder of this.

Thankfully, the N.Y.-based NYIT Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) had a suggestion. After reviewing the remaining assignments in our design program

semester she proposed that we take a look at **VoiceThread**¹, the collaborative, multimedia slide show that allows students and teachers to work cooperatively for coursework using voice, text and image along with audio and video files in an asynchronous format. Student presenters and external audiences also can come together using VoiceThread asynchronously for presentations, feedback and critique. This was an inventive solution for the challenge of the moment (Kirby and Hulan, 2016). Three sets of guest critics were invited for each student presentation—industry professionals and a mixture of current students, recent and older alumni from the program. All users were quick to adapt to the collaborative features of VoiceThread without orientation or training which proved useful in its rollout as a quick fix.

As we were learning, the disruptions that pandemic brought to educators around the world and at all levels (K-12 and university) called on teachers not only to be inventive but also to be pragmatic and reflective. It is safe to say that the spring semester was for many teachers a salvage job. Lessons and assignments were tossed overboard and Pass/Fail grades were implemented in many programs—but we got our students to the finish line. In the case of the U.A.E. this was a mercifully short period of time in which we were able to bring the semester to a close. I have talked to dozens of teachers in the time since who admit that they welcomed the chance to refresh and in some cases reinvent courses. Many teachers, too, have welcomed the reflectiveness that remote learning invited as we considered choices about what students really need to know and how to ensure that happens. On the horizon, bigger challenges loomed as the pandemic and quarantine extended remote learning into summer and fall semesters.

2. Remote learning

Once I felt that NYIT Abu Dhabi faculty and students were safely settling into the rhythms and routines of remote learning I decided to enroll in a course on the fundamentals of on-line teaching that was made available to NYIT teaching faculty and administrators. For me, this became a reflective time (and space) where I could think about teaching and learning challenges from the perspective of faculty and students. The course served as an ideal companion to the more nuts and bolts approach that had been delivered in the NYIT Blackboard on-line teaching certification. At the end of the Blackboard certification course I felt like I knew *what to do and how* in terms of navigating blackboard as a tool. I didn’t however feel like I was equipped for *what to do and*

¹ <https://voicethread.com/about/features/>

why if I wanted to create an outstanding on-line learning experience. The I-design course I was enrolled in bridged the gap through an introductory level overview of some of the pedagogical aspects of on-line teaching.

The main takeaway from the course was the concept of Communities of Inquiry (COI) defined as a focus on the process of inquiry with connections to Dewey's collaborative constructivist principles. The COI is a concept familiar to long-time practitioners of on-line education but worth reviewing for newcomers:

- The teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 5).
- The cognitive presence refers to the extent to which the participating members are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). The cognitive presence reflects the acquisition and application of high-order knowledge, which depends on careful instructional design and support in the teaching presence and an interactive social learning environment in the social presence (Garrison et al., 2001).
- Garrison (2009) defines the social presence as “the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities”

Through distinct modules on Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Cognitive Presence we received practical tips about the design and delivery of on-line courses. Throughout the I-design course modules we were pushed to think (anew) about teacher behavior, expectations, content selections, assessment models, varied learning styles, the importance of collaboration. The three conceptual areas of the Communities of Inquiry framework—Teaching Presence, Social Presence, Cognitive Presence—were introduced separately but were constantly linked as interdependent aspects of successful on-line teaching which also must reflect an “integration of social, technological, and instructional processes.”

This meant that *intentionality* was brought front and center to allow reflective teachers to contemplate how to translate the learning experience from an on-campus to an on-line environment. In particular, the I-design course especially challenged me to think about how the “space” of on-line teaching transforms the roles, relationship and

identities of teachers and students. The course also centered technology—not just as a tool but as a matter of pedagogy: In I-design, Bloom's taxonomy is given a digital update—from apps to TED talks and blogging, every level of cognitive development can be linked to various digital tools chosen with a purpose.

Broadly speaking, the I-design course emphasized some important differences between remote and on-line teaching. At the same time, the course provided a conceptual framework to inject on-line best practices into hybrid and remote learning environments. A surprise for me as well was the way that the I-design course also celebrated many now familiar concepts I have seen in my last 20+ years as a teacher in training. Ideas that once seemed shockingly new and challenged our sense of self (as teachers) were also greeted decades ago with “I can't,” “This doesn't,” “Not in my class” (think flipped classrooms, the very idea of student-centered learning, think-pair-share). The I-design course pushed me to see that whether in the classroom or on-line the “performativity” of teaching/learning always requires constant questioning and thoughtful reflection about design, goals and outcomes as well as how we create learning communities and visualize spatial practices.

For the remainder of this paper I will explore three pieces of student work as case studies in which collaborative reading and writing projects, role-play and a virtual protest were produced using VoiceThread. In each case, content, collaboration and community (building) bridged synchronous and asynchronous modalities producing new innovations for high-impact student centered learning in the face of Covid-19 (Ward et al., 2019).

The first piece of student work we will review here came from students in the sociological imagination course. The assignment was designed as a report to the Ministry of Education to encourage students to approach the real world—and in this case, the realities of the pandemic—as an arena for problem solving, applied learning, collaboration and communication.

3. Robots and remote learning

In the U.A.E., remote learning entered a second phase when students did not return to campuses for summer session courses from May to July. No longer were we looking to simply survive with quick fixes and hastily arranged Zoom conferences. This is what we are doing. Remote just became our shared reality. By summer, armed with an I-design certification, I was ready to pivot fully with the rest of the

Table 1. The Ministry of Education Cyber Proxy Student Initiative

THE CHALLENGE: University students in the UAE have grown tired of remote learning. What if our schools reopen ... but we have to send cyber proxies or robots to campus in our place? At the request of the local Ministry of Education, ICBS 300 students will prepare a programming guide to “socialize” the cyberproxies so they can capably navigate the university social scene and setting. The guide should accomplish the following:

- *Clear overview and introduction* of the project with background and context
- *Clear review and explanation of terminology* of distinct chapters in The Presentation of Self (Teams, Communication Out of Character, Discrepant Roles, Regions and Region Behavior, Performances and the Arts of Impression Management)
- *Clear programming strategies* that address fundamental ideas and concerns raised in each of the chapters of The Presentation of Self (Teams, Communication Out of Character, Discrepant Roles, Regions and Region Behavior, Performances and the Arts of Impression Management)
- The presentation is a *small team AND whole class collaboration*
- The presentation will be *designed with Vt* as an innovative way to modernize the traditional white paper format with a multisensory media experience.

(see Purdue Owl https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/white_papers/index.html).

world in explorations of on-line, hybrid/remote learning. I offered two hybrid remote Arts and Science courses (ICBS 300: The Sociological Imagination and ICLT 300: Reading the Harlem Renaissance) in the summer of 2020. In weekly encounters via teleconferencing, on-line discussion forums and pandemic journals, students and I grappled with the frustration of quarantine and our forced condition of on-line living and learning.

It felt especially ironic not to be meeting face-to-face with students in ICBS 300: The Sociological Imagination given that the sociology we were studying, with its focus on the *interactions* of individuals and institutions, left us pondering what is society without face-to-face contact. As an assigned course reading we studied Erving Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, a well-known work of social psychology that applies the metaphor of theater to social interactions through a theory called dramaturgy. If all the world's a stage, goes Goffman's thinking, then men and women are but 'socialized' players on it.

On-line we focused our imagination on questions quixotic yet quotidian. What if we were unable to return to campus but could send cyborgs in our place? Students' internet explorations into AI and cyborgs unearthed ethical dilemmas and unanswered aspects about relationships between society, psychology and technology. Our Goffman reading raised serious doubts about the ability of a cyborg, robot or

other creation of technology to adequately and effectively substitute for the in-person, face-to-face selves that we know. But could Goffman's dramaturgy as a programming guide be used to equip robot proxies with social skills like etiquette, tact and teamwork? I challenged students in a formal assignment to imagine that the Ministry of Education had asked the ICBS300 class to produce the guide to “socialize” programmed proxies so they could capably navigate the social scene and setting of schools and universities (see Table 1). (NOTE: Shih-Hsien Yang's assertion that teacher presence, which is not the same as teaching presence, will be found in assignment instructions).

The resulting VoiceThread project employed a Communities of Inquiry framework— including Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Cognitive Presence. Two foundational layers and a collaborative framework were built into the assignment to support cognitive and social presence for the students. First, students were assigned the book as a collaborative reading exercise. This meant that everyone read the Introduction, two chapters and the conclusion of Goffman's book to have a shared starting point. The second part of the collaborative reading was done by teams. Each team had an individual reading assignment, meaning that others in the class could not “know” the whole of the book unless and until as teams the parts were effectively brought together in the class VoiceThread. To ensure this, each team was charged with defining relevant concepts and terminol-

ogies from their respective chapters. A white paper format was identified as the presentation model which would be adapted to VoiceThread for the Ministry report.

ICBS 300 students used VoiceThread as an innovative way to modernize the traditional white paper format with a multisensory media experience. The final stage of the project was peer review.

Students were asked as reviewers to weigh in on whether the project would be ready to go the actual Ministry of Education and whether they had been successful teachers and learners. Students used a rubric scoring guide and reflective evaluation with comments about i) What worked well (for example, what is something they might adopt in a future project) ii) What would be even better if (suggestions for improvement) and iii) whether they had gained a solid understanding of each chapter in *The Presentation of Self*, including chapters they had not been assigned to read, and the book as a whole. The overall conclusion from students revealed their dual roles of producing a teaching presence for one another as active learners.

The second example of student work in the Sociological Imagination course, like the assignment about robots and remote learning, was inspired by students' developing awareness of the impact of Covid-19. In this case, media coverage about gender disparities brought to light during the pandemic allowed us to again use coursework as an arena for problem solving, applied learning, collaboration and communication.

4. Gender and pandemic

Students in ICBS 300 had been assigned to read Arlie Hochschild's book *The Second Shift*. In the book Hochschild documents the hours of labor women undertake in their homes which essentially adds up to a second shift of work for women who also have paid jobs in the formal economy. As more and more women have been pulled into the workforce there is an identifiable lag in culture and ideology along with men's conceptions of wives and mothers and women's' understanding of their own position in the work and family balance. Hochschild identifies this as a stalled revolution playing out as a mismatch between traditional and transitional egalitarian values in families and society. During the semester we could see frequent media references to the vocabulary of our course as the ideas of a second shift, a male-female leisure gap and a stalled revolution offered a window into the gendered stresses of the pandemic.

For many students, the first take at reading *The Second Shift* can often be superficial—men should do more, that husband thinks he helps out enough, the leaning feminists in the class are on the side of the beleaguered career women and frustrated with the notion that women who make more money than their spouses still take on what they see as 'dated' roles. But at a deeper level we are offered a complicated cast of characters and a complex set of internal and external factors that bring these people to life. Hochschild's study combines interviews with families and ethnographic research. Her book introduces the biographical details of each couple in the study, facts about their work life and professional statuses (a range of class positions from blue collar to white collar work and a wide range of income levels). From the site-based interviews, Hochschild allows students to make visits to the families' homes and as readers we are provided with minutely detailed descriptions of kitchens and appliances, vegetables on the chopping block and simmering pots of dinner, living areas with big screen televisions and family play spaces littered with toys, piles of laundry, curtains and carpet, garages strewn with tools, lawns and patio furniture, in short the three-dimensionality of real lives that helps us put our actors in context.

Table 2. Second Shift role play script and scene preparation

Explain the title of your chapter
FAMILY MEMBERS:
Names/Bio details
Occupation or profession
Work, marriage and family expectations
Description of Household setting
Second shift details:
How is the second shift described in the chapter?
Time of day/days of the week
List of "chores"
(*outside help or not)
List and define any particular terms/concepts (like stalled revolution or leisure gap) used in your chapter
Gender Ideologies?
Solutions this family creates for problems of the second shift
Examples: myths/avoidance/vocabulary/tricks
How does your family reflect larger sociological issue(s)

Having the class enact role play is an effective way for them to walk a mile in the shoes of others—be they high heels or wingtips. While this is typically an assignment that would be done in class, with students preparing and reading scripts on the stage of the classroom, here we will translate this into cyberspace. Each student is assigned a character. Each character belongs to a couple. From the outset all classwork will be individual and teamwork with a partner. Each student must learn as much as they can about their character as an individual and as a partner in one of the married couples in Hochschild's study. Students are provided with a table with character assignments and script preparation again following Shih-Hsien Yang's assertion that teacher presence, which is not the same as teaching presence, will be found in assignment instructions (see Table 2).

Two sets of VoiceThread projects were the final stage of work in this unit of study. Here students employed a Communities of Inquiry framework—including Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Cognitive Presence. The first Vt was a team submission with couples introducing themselves as the husband and wife in the family they were assigned to study. At this stage, students were asked to be creative in sharing as many details as they could from the personal/family script development. Early in the semester students had shared that many were familiar with asynchronous communities from experiences with simulation games on-line. This supports the idea that today's students are poised to take advantage of asynchronous learning environments if properly structured: "In terms establishing social presence," argues James Farmer, writing about weblogs and other on-line interactive technologies, "it can be argued that weblogs offer a significant opportunity for users to project themselves as "real" people" (Farmer, 2004).

I found that my students were easily able to translate previous experiences with on-line simulations to the strategies and approaches of the asynchronous aspects of our remote course. Here students used the ethnographic details of Hochschild's work not only to develop characters but to produce richly detailed visual spaces that depicted the household and work environments of their families (see Figure 1). With text and voice entries as well as detailed slides students were able to create a multisensory identity for each of their characters: as individual men and women, husbands and wives but also in their family roles as mothers and fathers and work identities as well (see Figure 2). For some students this was a tightly scripted (at times stilted) exercise that allowed them to adopt the tone of a PPT delivery.

Figure 1. At Home with the Myersons

Figure 2. At Home with the Myersons

Figure 3. Ann's career and aspirations

For other students, the initial set-up in Vt yielded more animated and creative deliveries— male and female students tried on a range of tone and timber with their voices to suggest their shifts along a spectrum of masculine and feminine identities. Bravado, doubt, romance, gentle bickering and simmering resentments edged into the “couples” introductions of themselves and the details of their lives, careers and households. The text and slide presentations of what students imagined home and office spaces looked like were the context for the characters they introduced (see Figure 3).

As a final stage of the gender and pandemic project based on reading *The Second Shift*, VoiceThread was used to produce a class-wide collaboration in which students could choose from one of three scenarios to join as wives, husbands and families in joint discussions/activities. The final stage of the class project would be a role play where the couples would come together with others. In the last week of class, students received instructions about the format and were asked to do three things to prepare:

- Get into character (a shortened version of the table of information they have already prepared)
- Arm themselves with enough vocabulary to be able to make informed contributions to the discussion (they have already learned the majority of these terms by reading and completing study questions for the individual and shared assigned reading)
- Read the three scenarios (school/office/beach gathering) and be prepared to join a role play

VoiceThread which would be assigned on Sunday.

Students set themselves up in the space of VoiceThread and conducted forums/conversations as assigned. Their role play was lively, animated and informed by the knowledge of the text. With image, audio and text, information and imagination came together in the space of VoiceThread scenarios. In terms of evaluating knowledge construction and collaboration students completed peer review forms in which they were asked to use a rubric to score what they had learned. From a teaching perspective, my focus was on assessing the application and creative responses in connecting a book that was first written in 1989 and reissued in 2012 to argument and analysis about the current pandemic situation.

Thinking about the constructivist foundations that underlie our work as Communities of Inquiry, it is clear that there are fruitful ways that we can leverage asynchronous and collaborative technologies such as VoiceThread. In “Community of Inquiry: Social Presence Revisited,” Karel Kreijns, Frederik van Acker, Marjan Vermeulen, Hans van Buuren disentangle the social presence construct, arguing that “it actually represents two constructs, namely (1) ‘social presence’ (degree of ‘realness’ of the other in the communication), and (2) ‘social space’ (degree to which social interpersonal relationships are salient).” The role play scenarios using the *Second Shift* and its families to establish both a social presence and a social space put this to the test (see Tables 3, 4, and 5).

Table 3. Role Play Scenario One—School Meeting with parents

SCENARIO ONE

Your neighborhood school just sent an e-vite. You and your spouse are asked to attend a virtual town hall meeting with other parents to discuss post-Pandemic planning for school re-opening.

Three proposals are on the table:

- School will fully open and all children will return to class but with modified timings;
- Schools will partially reopen and there will be a blend of remote and in-person learning for your child(ren);
- School buildings will remain closed and all classes will continue on-line

As she clicks through slides on her shared screen, the school head introduces a provocative question: Is the post-pandemic school arrangement related to the second shift? A rather heated exchange breaks out between the parents but in the middle of moderating the discussion the school head has a child care crisis and hands the reins of the meeting over to her deputy. He steers the meeting back to the topic of school and clicks onto the next slide that asks for a virtual show of hands about which of the three school reopening choices parents prefer. But some parents want to continue the discussion about the second shift. Others think this is off-topic and want to stick to details about school and cast votes about their re-opening preferences. What do you think—is there room in this discussion for the Second Shift? Why or why not?

Table 4. Role Play Scenario Two—HR Meeting at Work**SCENARIO TWO**

Your in-box dings, signaling a work announcement: there will be a company-wide HR session at work tomorrow to discuss the current situation. After a few rounds of employee furloughs, layoffs and downsizing at your job, all continuing employees will be required to work from home. The HR department convenes a zoom meeting to solicit input about what type of support is needed for employees working at home. Your company has never been known to be very family friendly and most of your co-workers expect the meeting to focus on work-related matters only. Some colleagues, however, want to raise the Second Shift as a pressing workplace issue. Others are worried about the job climate (lots of pink slips in the region) and think it is better to stay quiet on this subject. Of those of you who do speak out—what's on your mind about pandemic and the second shift? For those who think it is safer to stay quiet let us hear how that conversation is playing in your head. And for those who don't really see why the family should be brought into the workplace tell us why not.

Table 5. Role Play Scenario Three—A Day at the Beach**SCENARIO THREE**

All the families in Second Shift are invited for a reunion--we're going on a post-pandemic camping trip to the beach!! Everyone arrives in separate cars and after much effort and many mishaps a small cluster of tents has been pitched and folding chairs arranged around the fire pit for an evening bonfire. As the sun is going down, the group decides to split in two:

- One group takes charge of dinner duty which includes food prep and grilling
- A second group gathers the kids (and dogs) for a short hike to the beach for some frisbee and futbol on the sand

The adults in both groups quickly catch up and turn to everyone's favorite topic of the moment— how wonderful it is that the pandemic has ended and a vaccine has been successfully delivered around the world. All agree that it is good to be outside again and to have social contact with others. While they share tales of being housebound and swipe through pandemic photos on their I-phones the conversation turns to the second shift. All agree that from what they hear the pandemic exacerbated the burdens of the second shift for many of their friends and family members. Why are the adults in this group not surprised? How did the second shift collide with the pandemic in their own households? What advice do they have for each other?

Following this line of inquiry, the final student VoiceThread project I will discuss below, a virtual social protest, evidences the idea that “a sound social space is manifest if, among other things, group members trust each other and if group cohesion, a sense of community, and an open atmosphere exist amongst the members.”

5. Protest and pandemic

A literature course on the Harlem Renaissance proved equally challenging but no less inspiring during pandemic. The course was a hybrid/remote model, with a synchronous face-to-face meeting via Zoom on Thursdays and asynchro-

nous work done in Blackboard discussion forum. Students would be assigned VoiceThread work for final projects. Thursday Zoom sessions were typically discussion based classes with breakout room small group hands-on-activity used to prepare students as recorders and reporters responsible for guiding and contributing to whole class discussions.

The students had been walking through the end of the era of slavery and reconstruction and into the Jim Crow period of U.S. history (late 19th and early 20th century) when real life ripped from the headlines intruded into the space of the syllabus. On the day of class, in the week of George Floyd's murder in the United States (see Figure 4), I arrived at a point familiar to many teachers of color—do I soldier

Figure 4. Mural, USA summer 2020

on with what I prepared for class? Wall off emotion from intellect? Do I breach that line between the personal and professional? Can I make it through class without crying? While the course syllabus was exactly at a point where we were considering the extreme violence of lynching in America, live televised and social media coverage of a present day killing was disturbing to say the least.

I rattled through the zoom roll call, asking each student “How are you doing this week?” and “How is your family?” but before I could shift to my customary “Any questions?” L, the top student in the class, asked if we could discuss what had happened. Anticipating (hoping?) that students would arrive at connections and conclusions themselves, I had prepared a lesson about the summer of 1917 when the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) sponsored a march—The Silent Protest—as a response to lynching and racial violence (see Figure 5). The protest was announced in fliers with a question—Why do we march—which was followed by an evidence list itemized as reasons: We march because. Using VoiceThread, I had created a space with a mini lecture and supporting materials: archival documents, photos (protest flyers, protesters and placards) as well as audio (speeches) to bring the students into the space of the 1917 protest at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

My challenge to the students this day: work in small groups with VoiceThread to create their own Silent Protests linking them to current on-going protests. Show that you understand contemporary responses to the question: Why do we march? Update the NAACP’s statement: We march because. Create a virtual space where you can join the world (see Figure 6).

The VoiceThreads that students produced blew me away with creations that were full of history and knowledge, facts and figures, anger and resolve. They touched inequities that shaped their own lives as children of migrants from Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. One team included a mural in memory of George Floyd painted on a piece of rubble in a tucked away corner of war-torn Syria (see Figure 7).

Another group incorporated a grainy black and white image of Bloody Sunday Selma stretching the Black Lives Matter protests back to the 1960s Civil Rights era. Along with hip-hop music and #slogans they challenged each other with questions of their own: Why does this keep happening? What can we do? and answered each other with names of social justice organizations, links to websites and reminders about a range of global injustices from human trafficking to climate crisis. Their slides incorporated so many forms and

Figure 5. NAACP Silent Protest, 1917 **Figure 6. Protesters at Columbia University, summer 2020** **Figure 7. Mural in Idlib, Syria**

sources of text and reading: walls, cardboard signs, t-shirts, banners, murals, Covid masks, I-phone screens and social media. My text and audio feedback included links to NGO reports and news commentary to keep these conversations going. We returned to the VoiceThreads many times later in the semester as the past and present continued to collide in our explorations of the Harlem Renaissance.

There are some days when class simply cannot be ordinary. The best laid plans will go awry. This will always hold true the more closely our subjects touch on the realities of the world: gender inequities, social injustices, public health challenges, racial justice and more. As the suddenness of the pandemic has shown us, we can turn the ordinary into extraordinary. With flexible adaptations that make our teaching experiences and learning opportunities more interactive and creative, students can take charge of the business of their learning. In the week(s) of the protests against the murder of George Floyd I could see and hear that my students needed to raise their voices, joining others in a global moment of outrage and indignation. What seemed to matter most at that moment was that their education had purpose. For the ICLT 300 Community of Inquiry in the summer of 2020 this was a defining moment. VoiceThread technology helped them connect themselves to a present and past that was not limited by time or space.

6. A final note

A final note: Both courses that I have discussed in this paper, ICBS 300 and ICLT 300, are among upper division seminars that NYIT students can select. Since 2010 when NYIT introduced its Discovery Core Curriculum for the 21st Century, undergraduate students in all majors incorporate a 12-course complement of foundations courses in critical thinking, the scientific process, writing, and effective speaking and professional communication. Year three and year four students enroll in focused seminars across a variety of disciplines: Behavioral Science, Literature, Philosophy, Social Science. The “Core” as it is known, has seven learning outcomes:

1. Communication
2. Literacy
3. Critical/Analytical Thinking
4. Interdisciplinary Mindset and Skills
5. Ethical/Moral and Civic Engagement
6. Global Perspective
7. The Process and Nature of the Arts and Sciences

Along with the intention of establishing Communities of Inquiry and being equally mindful about how to integrate the synchronous and asynchronous aspects of the two summer courses, both ICBS 300: The Sociological Imagination and ICLT 300: Reading the Harlem Renaissance were solidly grounded in the seven outcomes of mindset and skills that define the CORE curriculum.

I would like to believe that these are three areas of concern that outlive the pandemic and that conversations will continue about how we teach and where (whether online, in a classroom or somewhere in between). In the end, education will always be facing brave new worlds we have yet to encounter. As we contemplate the tools and technologies we choose for our teaching it is important to distinguish the means and ends. Through carefully designed projects with technologies of the moment I believe we are able to place the processes of inquiry, creativity and collaboration in the hands of our students.

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