**Voices from the Field:**

**My First Year Teaching... During a Pandemic!**

By: Nicole Mleczkowski (T-19)

This year, I started teaching at St. Agnes Academic High School in College Point, Queens. We have in-person instruction four days a week and remote instruction one day a week. Because of my student teaching experience where I taught lessons both in-person and remotely, I felt more than prepared to use technology in my lessons for remote instruction days at my new job. Using what I learned about incorporating technology into mathematics lessons from Professor Hart’s SEYS 350 (Cognition, Technology, and Instruction for Diverse Learners) class, I was able to make interactive lessons to engage students even during remote lessons.

On my first day of remote instruction, I thought my lessons were going well. Of course, this day was a first for all of us as my students and I were having this “different” experience for the first time together. I struggled with participation and time management, trying to make online lessons as similar to in-person classes as I could. Because it was easy to enter and exit classes at ease, my Assistant Principal popped into one of my Geometry lessons. She was so impressed with how interactive my lesson was despite it being remote that she asked me to lead a professional development session to share tips with my colleagues. I was honestly shocked that I was being asked to do this but, because TIME 2000 gave me the necessary skills to be prepared for any challenges coming my way, I evidently had valuable experiences and advice to share.

Starting my career in the middle of a pandemic is definitely not something I ever imagined doing. As mathematics teachers, we usually read students’ faces to see if they look confused but, since it is hard to do that remotely, I now implement different assessments to see how they are doing. Something I love to use is called “thumbs up, thumbs sideways, thumbs down?” which has students show whether they understand the material (thumbs up), are kind of confused but kind of get it (thumbs sideways), or do not understand it at all (thumbs down). In doing this, I am able to assess how they feel in that moment which helps me decide how to proceed.

My favorite lessons so far have been deriving the midpoint and distance formulas with my students and just told to practice using it. However, I derived the formulas with my students and am so glad I did. To see them develop the formulas and have the lightbulbs pop up made spending the extra time on the derivations worth it.

I started my master’s degree at Queens College during the summer. Movina Seepersaud (T19) and I actually took all of our classes together. It was really nice to have a friend from TIME 2000 with the same work ethic with whom to study. We completed 5 classes and our oral exams during the summer since there was nothing else to do while other things were still closed due to the pandemic. I have learned that balancing my time is critical to succeeding; I am working on it and it is getting better and better as the weeks roll by.

Overall, I am having an amazing first few months teaching. I care for each of my students and I have already created a special bond with them. One piece of advice I have for undergraduates is to pay attention to all of the teachers you observe. You are exposed to many different approaches to teaching, so you can pick and choose which aspects you want to use when you become a teacher. Being observant now will help you become a leader in the classroom later.

TIME 2000 students with questions about applying to jobs during the pandemic are welcome to email me at nicole.mleczkowski36@gmail.cuny.edu.
Lessons Learned: Takeaways from 2020

As the Queens College fall 2020 semester concluded, we completed another historical part of our education: learning remotely during a pandemic. The TIME 2000 students were asked to reflect on lessons learned by sharing what they learned about themselves and what has shaped them, their college experiences and/or their future goals. Their responses included the following:

I have learned that Queens College is a great place even though I have never stepped foot on campus. Once we are able to access in-person schooling, it will be even better! I am excited to see the campus, hopefully soon!  

- Irene Carbente (T-23)

This year has really changed a lot in our lives. At the beginning, online learning suddenly became the norm and was difficult to adapt to but, gradually, we have become used to it. I appreciate my cohort and the TIME 2000 family because we all faced it together.

- Yuqin Liang (T-22)

HELP EACH OTHER. In these difficult times, it is very important to do that. While learning remotely, the TIME 2000 community really helped me a lot. My classmates' discussing course material and helping each other has made me feel the warmth of this big family. With their help, I have been able to get through this difficult year.

- Pei Liu (T-22)

Self-control!  

- Yanhao Luo (T-22)

In 2020, I learned that everyone needs to develop their self-regulation to do anything and, as students, we need to study harder. For my future goals, I hope that I can be an excellent and professional mathematics teacher. Not only do I need to help my students learn mathematics, but I also want them to feel the power and beauty of mathematics.

- Meijin Chen (T-20)

Because of COVID, I was not able to experience my first semester on campus. I was not happy about it but it allowed me to meet other students and make friends more easily. Also, being in my pajamas for class and not having to worry about waking up too early was the best. Yes, there are more cons to the situation but some pros came out of it, so it has not been all bad. I just hope that, one day, I will be able to step on campus and meet everyone who I have come to know throughout the semester (and meet many more people in the future).

- Kalila Gaines (T-23)

A positive learning environment can easily boost the quality of learning and heighten the excitement of exploration. I wish to keep my learning groups in the future.

- Yao Huang (T-21)

I feel that the pandemic has drawn me closer to my friends but apart from my family.

- Xiaoyan Zheng (T-20)

In 2020, I stayed home more than I ever have. I was once home for over thirty consecutive days. Every day, I cooked, ate, washed dishes, cleaned, studied, rested, and repeated. In doing so, I realized that we need so little in our lives. There were not many people to see or dinner parties to go to. 2020 really changed me, and I thought most about the fact that I was just one human being with such little power. I had a little strength and a little love which I could only give to a few people. Going forward, I want to be kinder to my family. We closed our ties to the world and discovered the beauty of life.

- Fengqi Lai (T-22)

After a semester of college, I have learned that I like to experience a variety of interests. For example, I learned French and began to sew. Next semester, I will take a dance course and continue exploring fashion design more deeply. Going out of my norm and trying different things has been very cool. I look forward to having more great experiences in the future when we are back on campus.

- Fangfang Lyu (T-23)

2020 made me realize the importance of friendship.

- Shayna Newmark (T-21)

Something that I have learned this past year is that remote learning is difficult for primary, secondary, and college students. Remote learning is also a challenge for educators. I have learned through my own experiences as a student, tutor, and student teacher the value of in-person teaching. Many students,
Professional Development

There are a number of organizations and teacher support programs that have shaped the past almost eight years of my teaching career. TIME 2000, Knowles Teacher Initiative, Math for America, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), Stanford Hollyhock, EduColor and others have given me the space to reflect on my identity as a teacher, improve my pedagogy and best serve my students as math learners and people. While you may be familiar with the amazing support that TIME 2000 affords mathematical educators just starting out on their journeys, I would encourage you to consider a few other organizations once you've started on your career including the following:

Knowles Teacher Initiative - an opportunity for teachers who are currently student teaching or in their first year in the classroom as a mathematics or science educator across the country. Knowles is a five year program designed to support and keep teachers in the classroom by providing them with quality professional development, a cohort model, dedicated staff and funding for materials and outside conferences. Apart from TIME 2000, Knowles has been a huge part of my growth and I am available to talk about the benefits of this amazing organization with anyone at any time.

Math for America (MfA) - exclusive to NYC DOE mathematics and science educators at any point in their careers. There is a plethora of TIME 2000 grads in Math for America that it feels like a continuation of my time at QC. They offer a very helpful stipend to keep teachers teaching and rely on the community to provide each other with professional development opportunities. I have led and participated in many MfA sessions and have definitely met phenomenal educators and felt supported in ways that sometimes my school community could not provide.

NCTM - while I'm not sure what this will look like moving forward, attending an NCTM annual conference is a unique and exciting experience. I have attended NCTM conferences in Boston and San Diego (with plans to attend the Chicago event which was postponed due to the pandemic) and have presented sessions that have really increased my professional growth and helped me make connections with some big names in Math Education.

Stanford Hollyhock - open to teachers in their second to seventh years of teaching, Hollyhock is unique in that it is a team opportunity.

Lessons (continued from page 2)

including myself, struggle with motivation, organization, and self-efficacy especially now since we do not have teachers reinforcing strategies to aid us in maintaining motivation to learn and helping us establish our individual ways to learn productively. After this year, I have also seen the benefits of remote learning and have discovered mathematical software and online resources that can aid all students including diverse English language learners and students with special needs. I have experienced both dull/uninteractive remote classes and very interactive Zoom sessions. I learned that it is possible to create engaging and interactive lessons online. This experience has shaped me to value both remote and in-person learning. Thus, a new goal of mine is to incorporate both aspects in my future mathematics classes to best prepare my students!

-Tatijana Lonic (T-20)

I applied with three other members of my school building and committed to two years of content-based and equity-based professional development. Similar to Knowles, we were assigned a content specialist and an equity coach to guide us through improving our pedagogy and worked to develop genuine equity practices in our school building.

EduColor - a newer organization designed by teachers for teachers to give us space, resources and support to discuss and enact aspects of equity. We recently launched EduColor NYC, an inclusive community for educators in our city as a place to provide a safe home hub.

While there are so many other experiences that have contributed to who I am as an educator today, these are my top five that I'd recommend to anyone looking to push themselves to improve as a mathematics educator.

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