



*Faculty reflect
on lessons
learned,
skills gained,
unexpected
silver linings
and how they
will re-create
their craft
in the years
ahead*

Mark
Cirnigliaro

ON WITH THE SHOW

HOW COVID-19 CHANGED THE CLASSROOM

MARK CIRNIGLIARO
THEATER AND
ARCHITECTURE
TEACHER

What inspires him: Thinking about possibilities over pitfalls. “I approach everything by saying, “Okay, this is what I’ve been given. How do I make it work?”

What he’ll continue going forward: Increased efficiency in managing rehearsals; continued use of the best parts of virtual experiences; a greater appreciation for higher-quality, in-person interactions

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One of the benefits of the Zoom square is that all the viewer sees is a face; they don’t see anything outside of the box. So I can hide stuff, put on a wig and change character, step far away from the camera or up close – there’s so much to explore. The arts are flexible and adaptable. You look at the parameters as opportunities. There is so much possibility, but if you’re not curious, all you see is this square.

In the beginning of the pandemic, most of us saw only limitations. But throughout the year, we have evolved into seeing possibilities. Students are learning how to choose happiness; that’s what happened with the winter production, “High School Musical.” It was so much work, but every day those kids – whether remote or in person – were choosing joy. We shot the ending when most of the group was in person together. There was an unbelievable explosion of energy and positivity.

KATY LAMBSON
SCIENCE TEACHER

What inspires her: Students’ resilience, adaptability and willingness to try new things

What she’ll continue going forward: Pivot Interactives

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At first, I panicked. Research shows that kids need hands-on labs to truly appreciate chemistry and biology. How would I teach a lab-based physical science class?

Our department quickly came up with platforms and software that might work in the virtual environment. Each classroom was set up with a wide-angle camera on a tripod that connected to our laptops and could be moved around the room.

Pivot Interactives is a comprehensive library of interactive labs. Students watch a video of an experiment and answer questions about it. Teachers can add or take away questions and tailor them to lessons; we can even make our own labs from scratch. While simulations are not a full substitute for hands-on lab experience, I’ll continue to use Pivot labs supplementally.

We’ve tried hard to make sure students are getting similar experiences. I’ve had groups of in-person kids showcase a lab for their online classmates using the tripod camera. I tell them to treat it as an ESPN sportscast. It sounds silly, but the kids take their job very seriously. They’re learning to pass along observations and describe exactly what is happening, which are important science – and life – skills.



Katy Lambson

MICHELLE DEWEY-DAWSON SPANISH TEACHER

What inspires her: Students' resilience. "They are so determined and driven, yet so incredibly patient."

What she'll continue going forward: A new appreciation for Canvas. "I think it's far superior to any other web-based learning management system I've used. We can record and upload videos, lock down browsers so tests are secure, have conversations in a written forum — and it's all in one place."



Michelle Dewey-Dawson

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The social-emotional aspect of learning has been so important this year. Normally, students would walk in, and we'd start speaking Spanish right away. This year, I wanted to be sure we would bond — especially the freshmen. Sometimes at the start of class, students use the stylus [pen] on their laptops to create a sketch from a squiggle I give them, and then we share them. It gives me a little window into how they're thinking. I may lose five minutes of Spanish, but I end up with a group of students who trust and talk with each other. It's worth it.

I have such confidence in our administration. Knowing what the schedule would be and that it wouldn't change brought so much stability when there wasn't a lot. The tech team helped us prepare and provided the tools we needed; they even organized teacher-to-teacher learning sessions about various tech tools.

MEGHAN KOCAR HISTORY AND HUMANITIES TEACHER

What inspires her: New technologies. "I had heard of many of these pre-pandemic and thought, 'Oh, that would be a cool thing to try, but I don't have the time to explore it.' Now I realize how useful they are, and they're not that hard to learn to use."

What she'll continue going forward: Assigning projects with a personal element. "Building relationships with students has been harder. I've enjoyed inviting them to share about themselves."

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One of the things I learned from the Global Online Academy faculty resource was that it's better to assign student-driven tasks when teaching online, which our humanities team has talked about. What are ways we can give students agency? The experience of this year has shown us ways to do that.

We designed a scavenger hunt for our humanities classes. Some of the tasks had very specific directions, while others allowed more room for creativity and resourcefulness. The real world is often more about being resourceful, innovative and creative. So a big takeaway is that we want to do more projects that ask students to rely on these skills.

“THE ONLY WAY STUDENTS HAVE A TRULY TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE IS IF THEY ARE INVITED TO DO THINGS THAT ARE UNFAMILIAR TO THEM.”

MARC ONION CHAPLAIN AND ENGLISH TEACHER

What inspires him: The opportunity for change. “The pre-pandemic model of chapel will no longer be familiar to the majority of the student body. How will we recultivate and rebuild this experience?”

What he'll continue going forward: “Initially, I only saw hurdles in the digital classroom; I've come to realize that incorporating some digital tools can improve the classroom experience.”

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From the outset, our department head, Matt Roach, was very confident that both our curriculum and our collective strengths would make for a smooth transition to the remote classroom.

I started using Canvas with Google Drive. I can watch students compose in real time and quickly and easily give them direction as they work. I use Google Docs in breakout rooms with groups. It's easy to monitor activity by watching different-colored cursors on the screen and see who's contributing. When you see five cursors composing at different places on the page, it's exhilarating.

I've been excited about EdPuzzle, which places interactive content into existing videos. I assign video clips with questions that pop up during viewing. I learned to use Adobe Premiere to edit video clips, and I now use it for chapel recordings.

Between using pre-recorded and live chapel material and hosting a hybrid chapel experience, it's been challenging. Still, I've slowly gained confidence in my multimedia skills throughout the year.

This is my third year as Chaplain; I've spent half of that time in the virtual space. I see the future as an opportunity to rethink, reinvent and modify the Peddie chapel experience to make it more student-driven. The only way students have a truly transformative experience is if they are invited to do things that are unfamiliar to them.



Marc Onion

“THIS YEAR HAS CLARIFIED THAT EVEN IN MY MOST TEACHER-CENTERED LESSONS, INTERACTION IS AT THE HEART OF THE EXPERIENCE.”

TIM CORICA MATH TEACHER

What inspires him: Finding new ways to teach. “I’ve never been a teacher who takes last year’s folder out of the drawer. I have to reinvent things — that’s where the intellectual pleasure comes from.”

What he’ll continue going forward: “This year has clarified that even in my most teacher-centered lessons, interaction is at the heart of the experience. The small exclamations, the shifting of students in chairs, the shared emotion when something interesting or surprising comes up in mathematics — much of this depends upon us all being together.”

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Pre-pandemic, I would walk around the physical classroom and briefly glance at students’ notebooks to check that homework was done. Now, students submit photos of their notebook pages. Working on paper allows for a different kind of

thinking and lets me look over their work in detail at leisure.

In class, presentations used to take an enormous amount of time. This year, students recorded presentations on Zoom with a fixed time limit. We played each recording in class, taking questions along the way. All presentations were posted to Canvas as an assignment, and students had to make at least one substantive comment on the other presentations and include one point of praise.

I have a Smartboard in my house that plugs into my laptop. I teach from the Smartboard and turn around and see all my kids’ faces on Zoom; they can just wave their hands to ask questions. I can see if they’re nodding along or if they look happy or worried — and that’s very important to me.

Tim Corica



CATHY WATKINS
DIRECTOR OF VISUAL ARTS

Cathy Watkins

What inspires her: Motivated by an online class she took through Rhode Island School of Design, Watkins had Honors Studio artists create blogs with images of and reflections on their work.

What she'll continue going forward:

One-on-one meetings over Zoom. "Being able to check in with students privately has been a great bonus; we can look at their piece together on the screen, and I can be very prescriptive in guiding their work."



In an art classroom, conversations with students can sometimes last 10-15 minutes. And in that time, other students will often start to hover in the psychological space of that one-on-one conversation I'm trying to have. By isolating these conversations on Zoom, they no longer feel fractured; I can give each student my full attention.

KURT BENNETT
ENGLISH TEACHER AND
DIRECTOR OF SIGNATURE
PROGRAMS

What inspires him: "I realize the value of being in the room with each other, being in conversation in person, being able to react in person and in real time when you're discussing ideas."

What he'll continue going forward: A deeper appreciation of the value of in-person interaction and education.



Pre-pandemic, there had been significant discussion in the pedagogical world about the viability of online school and whether it posed a potential alternative to the in-person school experience. There was an uptick in the use of online learning platforms at both the high school and college levels. There is a lot of



Students at all levels have created portfolios using Google Slides. We exchange comments in the comment box. I can also pull out the stylus and draw right on top of their piece to give specific guidance – correcting lines to teach perspective or demonstrating how to create a sense of depth, for example. At the end of each project, students can see the evolution of their work in this series of slides.

When I walked into my art history class this term, with most of the students in person, the conversation flowed so naturally. And the freshmen were so happy to be in the room together – it was like opening a crate of puppies. That drove home for me how beneficial it is to have flesh-and-blood classes.

value in some of those tools, especially in relation to increasing access to educational opportunities.

In our work, certainly, Zoom makes conversations with individual students more accessible – it gives us the opportunity to interface in a way that better approximates the in-person experience.

But being able to compare online learning to in-person learning over this last year has made clear the value of being in the room together. And that's especially true in English, where classes are discussion-based, and our focus is on how we relate and respond to each other both in practice and content. It's been wonderful to come back in hybrid mode, and I'm looking forward to a full return in the fall.

VICTORIA MONTGOMERY MATH TEACHER

What inspires her: The “sparkling eyes” of her students. “I have so much respect for our students — they are smart, passionate and kind.”

What she’ll continue going forward: Efforts to meet personally with each new student over Zoom. “I think I understand my students better than when I was in the physical classroom.”

My job is to provide opportunities and experiences to students for intellectual, social and moral growth. This year, two major questions I had to ask myself were: Can I provide these experiences in a sustainable way? And to what extent can the students and I adjust and excel amidst the often rapidly-changing circumstances? We had to convince ourselves and the students that they could take charge of their education and learn how to learn in this environment.

JENATE BROWN ENGLISH TEACHER

What inspires her: “I’ve missed our office. ‘Hamlet’ is our shared senior text; we normally spend a lot of time talking about it during winter term. We missed that so much this year, so [Sarah] Jensen, [Matt] Roach and I recorded a couple of podcasts about it. We didn’t require students to listen, but we shared it in case they were interested in hearing us think through our ideas.”

What she’ll continue going forward: Remembering to play to students’ strengths and provide them multiple modes for demonstrating mastery. “All students, no matter the class level, should feel like they are bringing something valuable to the table.”

Our classroom is discussion-based, so it made sense to assess the students as such — and having them create podcasts was a great method. Departmentally, the project fits; it aligns with the colloquiums all seniors participate in upon completing their theses. We’re getting kids

My colleague Greg Koch and I teach Pre-Calc Honors. It’s an accelerated course, so it can be a bit shocking, especially for new students. Last summer, we met with every student in this course. Parents were also invited to attend. Getting to know them made their entrance into the class much more comfortable. I hope to continue these meetings each year with our new students.

I make sure to check in with students; I call our classroom a negotiation space. And it’s amazing how responsive students are when you hear their needs. If I give them a break from homework one night, they come back the next day and do twice as much work as expected.

together to talk about a thing they’re excited about, articulate ideas, quote books and talk through why they think a particular passage is important. Hopefully, they find some common joy in the work.

As we consider being more transparent about the ways in which diversity, equity, inclusion and justice find themselves in our curriculum, podcasts may be a good vehicle for sharing these thoughts with the community. We want our students to be humans who think deeply about their decisions and who are willing to explain, explore and challenge their own thinking. If we are going to make that demand, it’s only fair that we allow them to turn that critical eye to us.



Jenate Brown



**“AT FIRST,
WE WERE
BUILDING
THE BOAT
AS WE WERE
SAILING IT.”**

Marisa Green

MARISA GREEN
DIRECTOR OF CHORAL MUSIC

What inspires her: The hope of affording students real singing opportunities in the fall. “Students learn to be good singers by standing in a section with other singers and soaking up what they hear and see around them.”

What she’ll continue going forward: Digital audio mixing skills. “Until last year, these skills were not considered an expectation for conductors and music directors, but a basic understanding of these tools and how to use them has become a valuable asset.”



At first, we were building the boat as we were sailing it. It was like first-year teaching all over again. But unlike my first year, there was no one to use as a resource. No one had experience doing this. Out of necessity, I began to learn how to mix audio for choral projects and to produce the end-of-term concert video and the winter musical.

Making recordings in isolation is a very useful skill for students; it also allows us to share our story with a larger constituency. But it doesn’t allow students the experience of learning in a section with other singers, and that’s really how you become a good singer. In chorus, the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts.