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Abstract

This article considers the experiences of teachers and learners in higher education institutions that led to the need for adapted learning modalities during COVID-19. It is critical to provide reflective faculty narratives. We position them as Street-Level Bureaucrats on the front lines, who as de facto policymakers, made adaptive decisions impacting students' educational opportunities. Consequently, this article engages experiential reflections of two university professors in the field of education, one in the US the other in India. It examines how known ways of learning changed as universities closed and teachers and students were mandated to switch to online, remote or distance teaching and learning. Rooted in a critical theory of love, which calls for justice-centered and humanizing orientations, and the critical need for a quality education, as outlined in SDG 4, reflections are discussed regarding opportunities for supporting university policy discussions, which can enhance classroom-level student success during traumatic times.

Introduction

The global higher education teaching corps, like those in other professions, was greatly tested during the COVID-19 pandemic. Decision-making often needed to occur rapidly, often patiently, and with a deep, keen sense of care for both students and the teacher as well. Engaging in dialogic, reflective interaction aided the two authors of this reflective article (who regularly work together as researchers and thought partners), both faculty in the field of higher education in the US and India, respectively, in working through this challenging time. We sought to provide our students and ourselves with the highest quality educational experiences, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG), possible during a time of flux. As front-line professionals, we envision ourselves as street-level bureaucrats (SLB) who must make decisions at the intersection of policy and discretion ([Lipsky, 2010](#)), that impact the educational experiences of students in real-time. We consequently invoked the critical theory of love ([Brooks, 2017](#)), which calls for socially just, humanizing, and socially transformative experiences, which are even more critical to be attuned to during such challenging times. Our reflective, critical dialogs supported our mission of adapting to the moment(s) that students and teachers needed during the pandemic. Therefore, this article highlights the adaptive actions we utilized to ensure that the highest possible level of education transpired during a time of crisis. We begin this article by: a) first, reflecting on the state of education broadly during Covid-19; b) then engaging with the critical elements of our experience as professors that frame our experience such as CToL, SDG 4, and SLB; c) sharing our reflective experiences as educators during the pandemic; and d) offering adaptive potentialities to support higher education faculty members during crisis times.

COVID-19 and the State of Education Broadly

The COVID-19 pandemic has created one of the largest disruptions of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. The crisis is exacerbating pre-education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults . . . to continue their learning ([UNESCO, 2020](#), p. 2).

In stark contrast to UNESCO's mandate of Education for All, the reality for many learners during COVID-19 has been the loss of access to typical educational environments students and teachers are used to. Ultimately, the sudden onset of the pandemic led to the loss of learning, or at the very least, a major barrier to the higher quality learning experiences received prior. For many learners, the burden of the pandemic is forecasted to be irreparable with serious future repercussions connected to lives and livelihoods. "Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress . . . Some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone" ([UNESCO, 2020](#), p. 2). The pandemic has also compromised the capacity of education systems to achieve the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 goal to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities

for all." ([UNESCO, 2020](#), p. 2). SDG 4 was developed as one of 17 critical goals in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) ([2015](#)) report, particularly focused on education.

Clearly, major and nuanced adaptations had to be made by both students and teachers in higher education spaces as COVID-19 arrived. Therefore, this article considers the experiences of teachers and learners in higher education institutions that led to the need for adapted learning modalities in the face of the pandemic. It examines how known ways of learning changed as many universities across the globe closed and teachers and students were mandated to switch to online, remote or distance teaching and learning platforms and modalities.

This points to the need to focus on ways of mitigating drastic change and becoming more adaptable in the future by examining the positive and challenging experiences of learners and teachers. New knowledges based on this focus can lead to futurecasting ways of working that better support learners and teachers during times of crisis. This requires plans that facilitate the move from school to home and community-based education for all. Therefore, in the future, when crises arise, continuity of education can be maximized for all learners (and teachers), and in particular, marginalisation of more vulnerable groups of learners can be minimized.

Purpose

Life experiences and future possibilities and opportunities are critically impacted in higher education classroom spaces. Positioned at the juncture between private and public spaces, college classrooms can alter life trajectories, thereby demonstrating the immeasurable responsibility of faculty members ([Brooks, 2017](#); [Lipsky, 2010](#)). Inarguably, traditional conceptions of these classroom spaces were disrupted during COVID-19, forcing college teachers to quickly reflect on nuanced ways to provide meaningful, quality education in a rapidly changing context. In this article, we position higher education faculty members as street-level Bureaucrats (SLBs) who [Lipsky (2010)](#) envisioned as the highly trained professionals at the bottom of the bureaucracy (in this case a college or university) who become de facto policymakers through their interpretation of policy via their discretion in decision making and ability to cope and adapt to their work on the "front lines." This scenario became viscerally clear across the globe as college faculty members nimbly reflected upon their resources and skills in order to meet SDG 4, so they could do their level best in providing students a quality education.

Emerging literature has grappled with COVID-19 responses and planning at the meso and macro levels of a country's higher education system ([Karalis, 2020](#)) and broadly for faculty at the institutional level ([Zhu & Liu, 2020](#)). However, it is critical to provide reflective narratives of faculty members, SLBs on the front lines who, as de facto policymakers, made adaptive decisions that impacted the educational opportunities of their students.

Furthermore, the mettle and well-being of the global higher education faculty core were greatly tested and need to be reflectively considered in concert with students' needs. Their narratives and insights could provide critical knowledge for adaptively revising faculty member capacity during

crisis times. Consequently, this supports Hordatt Gentles's (2021) clarion call to "futurecast" for meaningful adaptive teaching and learning spaces by unpacking the narrative experiences of teachers during a crisis like COVID-19.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to begin filling this literature and practice gap through better understanding these narratives as a mechanism for offering policy adaptations from the bottom up and of course for providing SLBs who are educational leaders, with meaningful adaptive possibilities and opportunities to incorporate into their own teaching and learning practice and leadership. This paper is based on the experiential reflections of two SLBs who are university professors in the field of education, one in the US and the other in India, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Critical Theory of Love

Steeped in the Critical Theory of Love (CToL), which calls for justice and humanizing orientations, reflections on opportunities for supporting university policy discussions are discussed that can lead to, and enhance, classroom-level student success during traumatic times. Durryle Brooks (2017) CToL emphasized social transformation with socially just outcomes, and grounding justice in forms that center the dignity and personhood of each individual. Additionally, Brooks (2017) emphasized that "classrooms lie at the intersection of both public and private spaces, and that a critical theory of love demands justice, compassion, and intimacy in this space…" (Witenstein & Niese, 2019, p. 4). Justice should be a fundamental student and teacher right in classroom spaces (Brooks, 2017); therefore, a humanizing approach of engaging with uncertain, continuously evolving scenarios during pandemics requires more consciously reflective, justice-centered practices supporting student learning and development (Leask & Younie, 2021). As professors, both of us work diligently to acknowledge the dignity and humanity of our students, utilizing a human-centred approach that connects with CToL. Affirming personhood in its fullest capacity across all of a student's social and economic identities is a critical component of CToL (Brooks, 2017). One can see how the elevated level of consciousness for each students' personhood becomes even more critical for a professor during crises like COVID-19, since students have diverse social and economic contexts and means that may impact their ability to participate as learners, sometimes at any level. By engaging in this type of practice, it leads to "…a praxis-oriented approach for supporting them as well" which provides more clarity in guiding this reflective article (Witenstein & Niese, 2019, p. 4).

CToL and SDG 4

There is also a critical link between CToL and the UN's SDGs, particularly with SDG 4. In the current UN SDG scheme, higher education has been more centrally included than in past ones. This should come as no surprise since higher education should serve as a critical educational partner and communal link toward achieving the goal (Owens, 2017). Additionally, an emerging body of literature has begun to illustrate how higher education supports meeting the SDG goals (Chankseliani et al., 2021). As Chaleta et al. (2021) importantly noted, the critical importance of higher education as central to SDG 4 in particular, (and sustainable development broadly) connects to its mission toward building knowledge production which occurs in these spaces along

with teaching and learning. Eventually these components, lead to skill building that supports the overall goal of sustainable development for both the current and future world needs (Leicht et al., 2018). This provides meaningful connection to our work, specifically with SDG 4 whose focus on providing an inclusive, quality education for all students (even through higher education levels) fortifies a powerful connection with CToL.

As mentioned in the last section, students' diverse social and economic identities must be taken into account at all times, perhaps even more saliently during pandemic times. By connecting our work with SDG 4, we are more acutely ensuring that we center our work in human-centered and justice-oriented ways that should support the highest possible quality education during such a traumatic time. In our article, the Indian scenario reveals the widening digital gap due to socio-economic inequality and injustice during COVID-19 while the US scenario connects with humanizing practices & justice-oriented needs for teachers at all times, especially during the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the racial injustice pandemic (which has been ongoing for hundreds of years in the US).

Professors as SLBs

Comparative nuances and intersections between the two different scenarios in the US and India are unpacked in this article, particularly from the SLB context, which considers how front line professionals like faculty engage in decision making (Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky (1971) included teachers as SLBs when conceptualizing his framework because they "directly interact with citizens in the regular course of their jobs" (p. 393). SLBs have recurrent interaction and contact with students and have a great impact on their lives and life chances (Witenstein & Abdallah, 2022). While Khelifi (2019) proclaimed that street-level bureaucracy has not been widely used to study higher education contexts, this work has begun to emerge recently. As Witenstein and Abdallah (2022) noted "studying policy impact from the "shop floor", where faculty reside, can offer keen insight into policy implementation barriers" (p. 5). In other words, by positioning ourselves as SLBs, we can offer insights into considering how we actually implement policy in real-time. This is critical because successful SLBs also become de facto policymakers. During a crisis like COVID-19, the pace at which this occurs may be more rapid than during typical times. Clearly understanding coping and adapting behaviors in SLB work is critical, and therefore we would be remiss to not engage in self-reflectivity regarding how this transpires in our work, too.

Keenly honed in through a human- and justice-centered viewpoint, the goal is for this discussion and reflection, from the two of us as university professors on the front lines, to be rooted in CToL. We envision this as an opportunity to highly support the goals of SDG 4. Moreover, CToL frames and guides this reflective discussion about the challenges of engaging with teaching and learning during a pandemic in adaptable ways. The guiding research questions addressed in this reflective article are:

1. How have two college teachers in India and the US (respectively) engaged with the critical theory of love to adaptively respond to students' and (their own) needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do educators do all this while keeping in mind implications toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 for inclusive and quality education for all in these difficult times of pandemic?
3. How can these reflective responses from faculty members (positioned as street-level bureaucrats) support other teachers and possibly inform policy during challenging times like a pandemic?

Reflective Faculty Narratives

The responsibility of providing quality educational experiences during COVID-19 was mighty, and reflective practice was critical in working toward that goal. Narrative can be framed as a sense-making and storytelling method that elicits voice while contributing knowledge-construction (Sunderland et al., 2015). Reflective narrative combines one's training (in this case that of educators) contextualized and distilled through work experience, linked with storytelling (Olshtain & Kupferberg, 1998). Since it is challenging to reflect while actively teaching, this method provides the teacher with profound possibilities for meaning-make of the past to impact current and future contexts (Eraut, 1995). A reflective narrative offers opportunities for the researcher to engage inwardly, learn from their work and therefore enhance their practice, while offering the opportunity of sharing insights for readers to also reflect and learn through the storyteller's writing.

Goin Kono and Taylor (2021) reflected on their use of faculty narratives in their study "with the goal of identifying and deepening equitable practices within online learning and teaching" (p. 152). Their study provided a meaningful bridge to use unto our reflective narrative since they also studied university-level teachers who navigated the online sphere of teaching during COVID-19. They also used an ethos of care as their guiding framework, which dovetails well with our human-centered CToL framework. We similarly view teachers (especially through the SLB perspective) as critical navigators of student success in online learning environments and acknowledge that the ways in which teachers engage students through online teaching and learning can greatly impact student perseverance and engagement (Jaggars & Xu, 2016; Goin Kono & Taylor, 2021).

Who We Are

We are two professors who have a significant number of years of both teaching and research in the field of education, and we collaborate on research projects together regularly. We also spend significant time processing and critiquing our teaching and research work together on a consistent basis. Consequently, we are essentially and reflexively collaborators and mentors to one another regarding our pedagogical and critical perspectives on the field of education.

Author 1, the US professor, is a white male who teaches at a Catholic research university in the Midwest. He predominately teaches doctoral students and often teaches online, even prior to COVID-19. The Doctor of Education (EdD) program which will be reflected upon in this narrative, was built to be online even prior to COVID-19 and commenced just prior to the pandemic. The first two cohorts of students began right before the pandemic began and represent the only cohorts to experience the program pre-COVID-19. Author 2, the professor from India, is a male who teaches at a college affiliated with one of the preeminent universities in the country. He primarily

teaches undergraduate students and has a background in economics which provides him keen insight into the broad and specific experiences of college students, particularly those with marginalized identities. His program was not offered online prior to the pandemic.

Reflections

Adaptive Responses to Students' Needs

Author 1's reflections. The first semester, spring of 2020, when COVID-19 hit, was shocking and traumatic for our students and for me. Our students live across the US (with a few residing abroad) and being scattered while caring about one another during the beginning of the pandemic created concern for some students and definitely for me as the instructor. With all of the political tensions in the US over the last several years acutely magnified, students were engaging with the racial injustice pandemic (perhaps even more so than usual) while also adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were numerous times at the beginning of class meetings when I needed to make time to debrief about what was transpiring in our lives as students (and the teacher) adapted to the new realities with childcare, work, school, taking care of family, etc. It was up to me to adapt our in-person, live class session time on the Zoom meeting portal to give space for their reflections and updates. (Clarifying note: Half of our class time is spent asynchronously online while the other half is live each week.) Part of my goal as the instructor was to give this space and also shepherd those conversations alongside, and integrated with, the course materials to make sense of how organizations work or do not work during the traumatic pandemic time. Considering how to shift the course narrative a bit while staying on track with what they needed to learn and accomplish educationally was a meaningful challenge to live up to.

Unsurprisingly, students often had their own health scares and since our students are professionals who typically have many years of work experience, they tend to have families and live with multiple people, often that they provide for in multiple facets. This created some intense situations for students as they coped and adapted to their new realities regarding how to support themselves and their loved ones, beginning in the spring 2020 semester. For example, one of my students who served as an educator in his professional life, lived with his spouse and parents. His family was my first experience encountering a household ravaged by COVID-19. With his parents becoming hospitalized, his class work needed to take a back seat for some time. Another student who was a single parent of two teenagers that worked as a manager, fell extremely ill from COVID-19 and had to quarantine from her children while trying her utmost to complete her course assignments. She was incredibly resilient and finished her final assignment in spite of being very ill. These examples highlight the dramatically different types of student needs and adjustments that are typically made by students and teachers in comparison with non-pandemic times. Since my goal was to support each of these students and consider ways in which I could adapt my grading and feedback to both of them, I quickly learned how to shift and differentiate learning even more specifically to individual students' needs while still working on maintaining an inclusive and quality educational experience that met the moment. Consequently, this helped me adapt teaching and learning spaces over the next couple of semesters as COVID-19 continued.

In the summer of the 2020 semester, I worked with a notably astute group of students who deeply connected the twin pandemics with the course material quite skillfully. At this point, I was more adept at (re)shifting and leading conversations that engaged both the pandemics and the course materials in tandem since we had already been through parts of two semesters that spanned COVID-19. Numerous students chose to use either or both pandemics as a topic with their work organization as the central dilemma they processed through their course assignments. It was stimulating to see how students desired to pull in viscerally real and recent dilemmas and narratives linked with the pandemics as opportunities to develop working solutions through the organizational theory class's course materials. This helped lead to nuanced adaptations of the course, yet also provided a perfect fit. It demonstrated that students often wanted to write about work organization issues salient to their current experiences and consider options for how to solve them and adapt to them.

Our online doctoral program has an in-person immersion program in the third semester of the nine-semester program. Because of COVID-19, these programs shifted to the online sphere versus bringing students from afar to our campus. This has shifted the dynamic of building community in the program and, notably, this shift was made prior to any cohort reaching semester three. Moreover, it has been compelling to witness the ways in which different cohorts have managed and curated the development of community knowing that they were not going to have an in-person immersion. They aspired to have the semester nine immersion in person, and many of them longed to meet one another. They greatly appreciated that our program has a "live session", a weekly component to it in concert with the asynchronous materials so that they can engage with one another. I have the feeling it has helped them, in some respects, tighten their sense of community during such a traumatic time.

Author 2's reflections. As per the instructions of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the newly named Ministry of Education (MoE) and the University Grants Commission, the University closed in March, 2020 and re-opened in March, 2022. The closedown and online education mode affected teaching, examinations, evaluations, and admission processes in the two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were examination days in the months of April to June, 2020, however, the examinations were not held due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases and resulting fatalities in New Delhi. With the increasing number of cases, the students returned to their home states due to the close of the university and its affiliated colleges.

The University opened for online teaching and learning on 10th August, 2020 after 5 months of closure. I observed that disadvantaged students had numerous difficulties attending classes due to the digital divide. The percentage of online attendees of classes was approximately 50% and there were issues of continuity of classes due to poor connectivity and scarcity of physical spaces at their homes. Many students were frustrated by the poor voice and video quality of connectivity which they communicated to me and other professors. However, in order to adapt to students' needs, the University made plans to give old laptops to needy students.

The admissions process started abruptly at the University from 10th October, 2020 to 18th November, 2020 after notification of MoE and UGC. I was also the admissions and nodal officer in my college at the University. I was expected to multi-task from home which made it stressful to ad-

dress my duties in teaching, evaluation, and admission. The task was daunting with the increased working hours and increased work intensity. The multi-tasking mission was accomplished but with the opportunity cost of teaching which in turn was a great loss for students. During the assignment, I, as nodal officer of admissions, had two observations regarding the supporting team members in the college: first, the younger generation teachers and supporting staff are more trained and equipped in the information communication and technology (ICT) related academic and administrative works than the senior generation teachers and supporting staff. And second, the mathematics and commerce teachers were more authoritarian in their behavior than the social sciences and humanities teachers.

The challenges of online learning and teaching during Covid-19 pandemic faced by the students were often like the teachers. However, there were heightened issues of socio-economic inequalities among many of the students since nearly 50% of student spaces in the Indian public education institutions are meant for those from disadvantaged groups in Indian society, namely 15% of seats are for those from the Scheduled Castes (the disadvantaged castes), 7.5% from the Scheduled Tribes (tribal background) and 27% for those from Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The share of lower socio-economic class students is also higher in the affiliated college discussed in this article. It is a non-elite college located in the most underdeveloped region of the capital city, North-East Delhi. Moreover, the college founder belonged to the SC community.

The majority of students attended online classes on mobile phones which are often their parents' and siblings' phones. Many socially and economically poor students often contended with their inadequate housing infrastructure and the digital divide of the ICT infrastructure. Unfortunately, many of them felt uncomfortable switching on their videos due to this and the lack of adequate space and resources. Students also complained about the non-availability of the study materials due to the closure of bookshops and photocopy and printing shops for the notes and other stationary related products needed. Nevertheless, engaging CToL with my students provided the best opportunities for the highest quality education as possible during a stressful and traumatic time in the educational lives of students.

While both of our narratives demonstrate significant challenges that are often quite different, it became clear that learning to adapt was critical for successfully navigating (to the best of their ability) teaching and learning during COVID-19. Often, technology issues and access usurped the student learning environment, at least for a time. Coping and adapting to our jobs throughout the pandemic became a central component of sustaining our work beyond what we had previously experienced. Each of us further adapted to support students with extenuating circumstances regardless of the issue due to our central aspiration for providing a loving and asset-based learning environment. While deficit-based approaches should be avoided, a positive, asset-based approach was even more critical during this time of crisis. In order to perform meaningful work at our level best, we also had to work on supporting our own mental and physical health during COVID-19 to best support students.

Adaptive Responses to our own Needs as Professors

During the pandemic, the online mode of teaching was mandated for Indian higher education institutions by the central government. Clearly, this altered the lives of hundreds of thousands of students and teachers across the nation. The traumas of adjusting to this pandemic-induced mandate were manifold and varied. During online learning and teaching, there were several personal and professional challenges that emerged for Author 2 and also several strategies I adopted to address them.

Firstly, space was an issue at home, notably work space. Author 2 has four family members (two adults and two children) who each need room to continue their professional work and online learning and education. Costs heavily increased on many items, particularly technological ones. This was quite evident when Author 2 bought new laptops, tablets, updated broadband, and data packs for hotspots for my own professional work and for my family. Additionally, there was a need for buying additional Gmail storage for my work. Network connectivity was also interrupted often, despite using higher 4G speeds of broadband and hotspots. This made it difficult (at times) to perform teaching and learning activities for family members. This led to enhanced family communications and strategies which Author 2 parlayed into successfully overcoming the challenges in order to best support each individual's work and learning experiences.

The intensity of work was also greatly increased. As many professors may acknowledge (and those in diverse careers working remotely from home), there was a heightened need and expectation to multi-task. Alongside this, there were markedly increased working hours in the areas for Author 2 in student admissions, teaching, and evaluation. Finally, Author 2 had health concerns that emerged. In the initial period of the stringent national lockdown by the Indian government in the months of March, May and June, 2020, his blood pressure fluctuated due to the added anxiety caused by the pandemic and drastically low socialization. Consequently, this led him to move from the capital city, New Delhi- to his hometown in the Himalayan State of Himachal Pradesh for approximately three months.

Among the strategies utilized to adapt to these challenges included taking a bank loan to meet his and his family's digital needs, especially during the time the Government had not released his monthly salary for quite some time. Unfortunately, the inconsistent and irregular release of grants for salaries has continued in 2022. For Author 2's physical and psychological well-being, he increased the number of exercise and fitness hours (both running and yoga) in the morning and evening because of the distress caused due to work and fear of COVID-19.

The offline mode of education in Author 2' university started back in March, 2022 after a gap of two years. The in-person mode of education assures inclusive and creative processes of learning and teaching in the classrooms and outside of class through campus activities because of human interactions. The online experiences more acutely focused on the need for a critical theory of love, have meaningfully spilled over into Author 2's practices in-person.

Around 50% of enrolled students returned to their respective home states from New Delhi. The remaining students lived in the city, and attended online classes along with their non-Delhi classmates. Many amongst the non-Delhi students belonged to lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This in return affected their access to information technology resources, demonstrating the digital di-

vide between these two sets of students. It also adversely affected their online learning as most of the non-Delhi are either attending online classes via their smartphones or not attending classes due to not having smartphones, laptops and other digital resources at the disposal. Unfortunately, many were late to join offline classes in 2022, as the University abruptly opened without giving adequate time to return for out of town students.

Specifically, I empathized keenly with the socio-economic challenges, digital divide and mental health issues of students and teachers as well. I used several specific coping and adapting strategies and methods of teaching and learning during COVID-19, while serving as both a teacher and the Department Head. First, it was important to give more time to each and every student during online classes to check in with them and make sure all was the best it could be. To keep their curiosity and learning fresh, I played online, creative games (like a singing game -such as the Indian game *Antakshari,* Charades and Pictionary) with students while also making space for engaging them with cultural activities, singing, dancing, and music playing.

Collaboration was another key adaptation that helped me cope with my work while providing the highest possible inclusive educational experiences as exemplified above. Along with digital divide challenges prevailing in the Indian education system, I initiated online webinars for the digitally included students and teachers than usual with the collective efforts of students and teachers and promoted team assignments and homework as a mechanism for staying connected and engaged. To kindle co-curricular social engagement, I organized online programs for first-year students, farewell parties and online student competitions of dance, quiz, debate, essay and speeches. This inclusive approach was also adopted by a number of colleagues, too, which created consistency. Upon opening campus back up, student engagement seamlessly continued since our faculty members adapted co-curricular and curricular program in the online sphere, making it as smooth a transition as possible during a pandemic.

Similarly to Author 2, Author 1 encountered challenges regarding work space in similar and different ways. Firstly, Author 1's university is in the Midwest whereas his main residence is on the West Coast. While he typically spends time in both locations, when the university went to online only learning and shut down the campus, he had to make a choice whether to spend the time with family on the West Coast or stay near the university. Like Author 2, he decided to spend most of the time with family and shifted to the West Coast, especially since the EdD program where he is primarily assigned was completely online.

One of the more difficult challenges was filming the content for an upcoming new EdD course. The course planning took approximately five months planning the syllabus, guest interviews with the authors of class readings and interviews with other important guests. Author 1's program typically films the class in a film studio, yet this was not an option during the pandemic. In order to maintain the highest level of quality possible, the production company working with the EdD program sent materials to his home for a makeshift studio. Several practices and extra preparation helped to develop the best class possible while filming from Author 1's makeshift "studio".

While there were a number of challenges (like the abovementioned one) and adaptive work and life practices that needed to be made (as shared below), keeping up with university-wide technology updates often proved to be difficult from a remote location. There were times when these updates disrupted or turned off features Author 1 regularly utilized. By returning to the university from time to time, he was able to rectify some of these updates so he could return all technology functions to his laptop. He also invested in a personal laptop to counteract these technology issues that may arise occasionally.

In terms of mental health and physical wellness, Author 1, like Author 2, also partook in as much exercise as possible. He shifted from playing tennis and using the gym early on during COVID-19, to taking long walks around the neighborhood. As the pandemic continued, he was able to utilize gym equipment outside because his gym moved everything outside- a perk of living in a warm climate. He was also able to re-introduce tennis into his exercise regimen as COVID-19 rules were developed locally and state-wide for playing sports. Finally, cooking and baking became an even more therapeutic mechanism for taking time in between the endless multi-tasking for work.

Both of us utilized care for ourselves to overcome these challenges and practiced CToL in ways that not only dignified our own needs but that of our families. By (re)organizing some of our routines and practices, we were able to perform our level best for students and to support our university colleagues.

Using Reflective Responses to Support Higher Education Professors and Teachers During Crisis Times

During these times of learning deficits illustrated through our personal reflections, teaching during COVID-19 and more broadly across US and Indian higher education institutions, there is a need to employ CToL for inclusive and quality teaching and learning methods. These methods can be instrumentally facilitated by front-line workers, in this case, teachers and educators (which can be conceived of broadly) through higher public funding for quality physical and human infrastructure in higher education organizations. Clearly from our shared narratives, it is critical for the teacher to engage in de facto policymaking at the ground level as we demonstrated in our need for quick decision-making during a time of constant flux. Consequently, empowering oneself to become a de facto policymaker during crisis times can make the experience less stressful for students and teachers, while also providing a higher quality educational experience than if the teacher were to not do so.

Overall, more support for students in terms of psychosocial and infrastructural support is critical as well. As our narratives demonstrate, this goes along with the importance of professors in higher education institutions taking care of themselves both mentally and physically. As we have illustrated, by taking care of ourselves, we noticed we were more readily able and equipped to cope and adapt to the needs of our college students.

Achieving SDG 4 utilizing a CToL lens, the critical issues of socio-economic inequality and injustice (across all social identities and economic statuses) can be addressed in several ways. First, the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) tools and related infrastructure are

critical. Particularly in the case of Indian students, this is also supported by the goals of the recent National Education Policy 2020, which also focuses on using digital platforms in higher education ([Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020](#)). Inquiring in the most human-centered possible manner (so as to not embarrass a student) what their technology needs are may help build a better connection with students during a stressful time and better support their educational experience.

Utilizing humanizing teaching and learning methods by stressing more on preserving and nurturing physical and mental health and wellness creates a more justice-centered and caring environment where students have a better chance to thrive (even during crisis times). And thirdly, by learning lessons from 'good practices' like the immersion program in Author 1's US-based EdD program. This program brings students together in a format outside of the formal class where they can both learn and socialize in meaningful ways. Considering among the faculty how to develop these types of programs, whether online or in-person (as appropriate for the circumstance) can be a critical way of tying together curricular and co-curricular opportunities that strengthen quality learning. These programs can be developed as formal or informal opportunities based upon the abilities of front-line staff like professors to exercise their de facto policymaking skills. Finally, engaging in dialogic and asset-based approaches to curricula and assignments proved critical for student success. Therefore, adapting one's practices for the pandemic environment can foster quality educational opportunities, rooted in a manner that supports the dignity of your college students.

Conclusion

This work is significant because it shares two university professors' reflections rooted in a critical theory of love that offers fruitful, asset-based groundings for engaging in challenging work, particularly during a time of uncertainty. Furthermore, the authors' CToL-grounded narratives of coping and adapting during COVID-19 offer possibilities and opportunities to support the work of other university teachers and learners in future crisis times while also supporting possible policy adaptations from the bottom up that may inform adaptive practices that support SDG 4. Certainly, this study is limited to the reflections of two professors; however, our narratives may offer insights that connect with other university educators and steps forward that offer adaptive possibilities within their own work.

Professors should keep in mind the possibility of consciously utilizing an asset-based approach like CToL in conjunction with the concept of futurecasting. This combination can aid one during challenging times (like COVID-19 or other crises), which offers university professors who all work on the front lines, the opportunity to better cope and adapt to their work. Finally, this forward-thinking type of orientation better supports SDG 4 because your level of preparation and the mental model for how you envision teaching and learning will be ready for challenging times.

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Footnotes

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