“...due to the spread of the coronavirus...”

...a sudden, swift reminder of when it all began.
Sitting at my dining room table with my husband, the news came across the New York Times app on my phone.

People were getting sick.

This new virus appeared extremely contagious. And it had arrived on the scene in China just when people there were taking a holiday.

Traveling. To all parts of Asia, and also to the United States.

Living in Portland, I knew that Seattle, just three hours north of me, would be a hub for that travel. That this new virus would quickly make its way to America.

I looked at my husband. “This is going to come here. Everything is going to change.”
I’ve been doing work in digital learning for two decades—mostly on the fringe of education—but now my expertise became the expertise. Suddenly, calls came raining in. From NPR, the Guardian, The Economist, the Associated Press. Groups at my own institution, and others as far away as South Africa, asked me to come speak with them. Because this is what I have been doing. This is my expertise.
But I am not an expert. I was also unprepared.
The harsh glare of the LCD screen is no warmth decent enough to replace a held hand, the echo of laughter in a room down the hall, a smile in full relief. We all longed for something we never knew we had been taking for granted: a too-crowded room, the polite “bless you” following a stranger’s sneeze. Maskless faces. The hint of mint on someone’s breath.
Online learning has never been what teachers and students had hoped it would be. The default approach to online education which has made institutions like Southern New Hampshire University, University of Arizona, and Western Governors University so financially successful has been aimed at a replicability, at a sameness of instruction and outcomes, that was never the goal of classroom learning.
In response to a need for more and new kinds of human contact, the traditional approach to online learning offered the sterile environment of the LMS, the cordiality of assessments aligned with outcomes, the polite de rigueur of a post once, reply twice conversation.

When they were pointed to technology as the solution to the multitude of dilemmas created by the pandemic, teachers and students didn’t find the help their hearts needed.
So I became a peddler in hope and compassion. I stood at the virtual corner on my soapbox, waving my copy of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and saying to anyone who would listen: Teach *through* the screen, not to the screen. Screw technology; find each other.
“To really understand how to teach or work or learn online, we have to remember that every learner is human, and there are no humans existing in digital space. The screen is not a venue, it’s a tool. We don’t ever teach to a screen, we always teach through the screen.”

~“Teaching through the Screen and the Necessity of Imagination Literacy”
One of the biggest struggles we have when we find ourselves in crisis is tightening up, bracing for impact.
Educators tend to hoard things like grades and academic integrity. Instructional designers hoard that consistency of design across courses. Administrators hoard the stuff of seat time, attendance, and keeping class schedules running. We all worry that our most precious resource—students—will slip through our fingers if we aren’t prepared for the worst.
When there is no as-usual, we have two choices: hoard our resources, or read our world and fess up to what really needs to be done.

Transformation isn’t serene or delightful, nor is it a survival mechanism. Transformation is a reasoned response to a reality that no longer serves our needs.
Critical pedagogy aims to deeply question our epistemological assumptions—about teaching, about education, about power, about expertise—and while this can be exhilarating, it is almost never a picnic.
“Often when university students and professors read Freire, they approach his work from a voyeuristic standpoint… Many times people will say to me that I seem to be suggesting that it is enough for individuals to change what they think. And you see, even their use of the enough tells us something about the attitude they bring to this question.”

~ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*
Most of us didn’t want additional responsibility added to our work when we all really just wanted ‘normal’ again, and we still want ‘normal.’ That makes it hard to imagine that out of this crisis might grow a new educational approach, a new kind of institution, a constructive change motivated by this crisis.

Lasting change comes from small, intentional, critical steps—decisions we make that we won’t unmake.
Maha Bali, Autumn Caines, and Mia Zamora—faculty developers and designers who launched Equity Unbound to provide clear practices for educators to approach online learning in equitable ways.

Shea Swauger—a librarian who wrote a critique of remote proctoring services that use facial recognition software and started a movement on his campus to ban such services.

Robin DeRosa and Martha Burtis—collaborators at Plymouth State University who developed the ACE framework for hybrid teaching that puts adaptability, connection, and equity first.

Jesse Stommel—whose work on ungrading and new assessment has opened up that conversation in spaces it didn’t exist before.

These educators have responded to their own uncertainty not by hoarding but by sharing, not by trying to continue business-as-usual but by imagining things as they might be otherwise.
Change the way you teach. Ask what do you want to know about learners from the very start of your relationship? What should they know about you? What barriers might exist that will inhibit your connection to students and from student to student?

Develop a digital literacy that’s an interpersonal one. Always ask: “Who is not in the room who could be?” Allow time in synchronous meetings and collaborations for connecting and relationship-building. Find back-channel and ungraded spaces for communication, like virtual office or “coffee” hours. Perhaps most importantly, develop empathy for one another in virtual or digitally-inflected spaces. But at the same time, don’t assume you understand the challenges students face. Empathy is best developed by listening.

Imagine your own digital pedagogy. Ask yourself: What counts as digital? What is your overall pedagogical approach, and how does that translate or not translate to digital environments? What is the most important part of your pedagogy that you don't want to lose when you teach online?
Things are not normal, and in order for any normal to return, we will have to invent it ourselves.