

I graduated in 2013 with a degree in education. At that time, the teaching landscape was vastly different. Technology integration was minimal - most classrooms relied heavily on textbooks, and not all students had laptops. Blackberry phones were still in use, and the idea of digital learning platforms being central to education seemed far off (we used CDs). When I returned to teaching in 2018, I quickly realized how much had changed technologically. Classrooms were more tech-driven, with smartboards, online resources, and a growing expectation to integrate digital tools. My goal was to grow as a teacher, adapting to these changes while still ensuring that students received meaningful instruction.

However, shortly after, the pandemic hit, forcing all of us to rethink how we taught. Overnight, I had to pivot into a different mode of teaching, adapting to engage students remotely. This required a steep learning curve. I began incorporating simulations and modeling into lessons to make abstract concepts more accessible. Slides became an essential tool to guide students through lessons, structure activities, and maintain some sense of normalcy in instruction. At the time, I was teaching first grade, and adjusting to remote learning with younger students presented unique challenges.

The shift was difficult - not just for me, but also for my students and their families. As an educator, I had to rely on my willingness to learn and grow to support my students better. I realized that being an eager and continuous learner was essential in adapting to this unprecedented situation. While the technological tools were helpful, I also saw how the lack of in-person interaction made it harder to truly gauge student understanding, and engagement.

When I returned to in-person teaching in a new school, I noticed that both my students and I were still adjusting to the "pandemic way" of learning. Students were accustomed to completing assignments digitally, often on Google Slides or similar platforms. While this had some benefits, it also made it challenging to assess their understanding fully. Digital work often lacked the nuances of in-person engagement, such as body language or the ability to see students' thought processes unfold.

To address this, I leaned more into traditional approaches such as writing notes, encouraging student discussions, and creating posters to share ideas. These methods provided richer insights into my students' thinking and helped build a sense of community and collaboration in the classroom. While I still use slides to prompt and guide lessons, I reserve them for specific situations, like investigations or assignments requiring extensive reading - especially to support my English Language Learners (ELLs). Through this process, I learned that students were also undergoing significant changes. They needed to relearn how to collaborate, engage in hands-on activities, and communicate effectively. I discovered that patience and understanding were key in helping my students navigate this transition. It was important to meet them where they were, balancing digital tools with interactive and collaborative approaches that fostered deeper learning.

The pandemic taught me many things about the larger educational ecosystem. It revealed the inequalities in access to technology and resources that many students face. It also underscored the importance of flexibility and adaptability in education - not just in how we teach but in what we prioritize for our students. More than ever, it became clear that the role of an educator extends beyond academics; it is about supporting students emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Moving forward, I have been combining the lessons learned from both pre- and post-pandemic teaching. I aim to integrate technology thoughtfully while ensuring that the core aspects of learning - critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity - remain at the forefront of my teaching practices. By being patient, adaptable, and student-centered, I can better support my students in this evolving educational landscape.