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Submitted by Doug Lederman on March 18, 2020 - 3:00am

Welcome to "Transforming Teaching and Learning," a column that explores how colleges and professors are reimagining how they teach and how students learn. If you'd like to receive the free "Transforming Teaching and Learning" newsletter, please [sign up here](#) [1].

What a difference a week makes.

[Seven days ago in this space](#) [2], I went out of my way to say that I hoped to make this column a "coronavirus-free space" to the extent possible, given *Inside Higher Ed's* excellent coverage of the pandemic elsewhere and the "recognition that the rest of what we all do professionally each day isn't stopping."

That all may still be true, but the new reality is that COVID-19 is increasingly dominating not just our collective head spaces (in ways helpful and not) but also what our jobs are day to day. That's especially the case in certain realms, including for those of you responsible for helping to deliver instruction and learning at your institutions.

So today, at least -- next week seems very far away at this point -- this column will focus on a question that is generating a good bit of discussion among thoughtful observers of teaching and learning issues: What impact will this sudden, forced immersion and experimentation with technology-enabled forms of learning have on the status of online learning in higher education? Below, 11 experts share their thoughts on how the explosion of remote learning -- much

of which may be primitive and of dubious quality -- could affect attitudes and impressions of a mode of learning that already struggles to gain widespread faculty and student support.

The prospect of hundreds of thousands of professors and students venturing into academic cyberspace for the first time has prompted some commentators to take to social media to predict that this period could alter the landscape long term for online education. "Every faculty member is going to be delivering education online. Every student is going to be receiving education online. And the resistance to online education is going to go away as a practical matter," James N. Bradley, chief information officer at Texas's Trinity University, wrote in a LinkedIn post [3].

Goldie Blumenstyk, my friend and former colleague at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, went so far [4] as to suggest that the coronavirus could be a "black swan" moment -- "more of a catalyst for online education and other ed-tech tools than decades of punditry and self-serving corporate exhortations." She continued, "It seems safe to say that this will be not only enormously disruptive but also paradigm changing. The 'black swan' [5], that unforeseen event that changes everything, is upon us."

That's surely possible -- but a very different outcome seems at least as likely. Surely some of the professors who will be venturing into virtual education for the first time because of COVID-19 will be going online with the sort of high-quality immersive courses that the best online learning providers offer. But much of the remote instruction that many professors experimenting outside the physical classroom for the first time will be offering to their students will be nothing more than videoconferenced lectures supplemented by emailed assessments.

That raises tons of issues, from how instructors and colleges treat student grades to how institutions treat student evaluations of professors. But in today's column a collection of sharp and thoughtful analysts answer a more fundamental question: Will forced exposure to and experimentation with various forms of technology-enabled learning lead professors and students to view online education more favorably -- or less so?

The full prompt, and the answers from our experts, follow.

In short order, hundreds of colleges have announced in the last week that because of health concerns related to COVID-19, they are ending in-person classes and moving all instruction to virtual settings. They're using different language around this -- some are specifically talking about shifting to online education, while others talk about remote classes and the like. Many of them are taking advantage of (and in some cases extending) spring breaks and other cessations of coursework to prepare for the shift, and it will be some time before we can really tell what forms of learning the institutions will adopt during this period.

Several commentators have hypothesized that this time of emergency adoption and experimentation will speed up the adoption and embrace of online and other forms of technology-enabled learning. That is one scenario. Another is that the way colleges and universities transform all of their instruction in this compressed time frame will be a pale imitation of what the best in today's online learning looks like, and that exposing entire faculties and student bodies to this flawed product will set back, rather than advance, faculty and student attitudes about the quality of technology-enabled learning.

The question/questions I'd ask you to address: What impact do you think this emergency immersion into online/distance learning by many/most institutions might have on faculty and student confidence in technology-enabled learning? Do you believe the end result (recognizing that it may be some time before we can judge) will be more professors believing in the quality of online learning and wanting to incorporate the best of what it can do into their teaching, a blurring of the distinction between online and in-person and a closing of the perceived quality gap? Do you think it could produce greater skepticism about the efficacy of technology-enabled learning, either because the experience for instructors and students alike will be substandard, or because institutions will not sufficiently prepare their instructors to teach in these new ways? Or do you envision some other outcome?

And lastly: What can institutions and individual instructors can do to ensure a better rather than worse outcome?
