

## Some Final Reflections

by the CFI teaching team

Sent: Thu 4/29/2021

Well, we've reached the end of this year. This, in and of itself, seems like an accomplishment. The teaching team (and honorary teaching team member Andreas Broscheid) would like to take this opportunity, in this final Teaching Toolbox, to offer some individual reflections, in the hopes of encouraging you to do the same, on your own or in your various communities. You might ask yourselves, as we did:

- How am I doing?
- What have I/we learned from the pandemic?
- How will we transition back, thinking about summer and fall?
- What challenges and opportunities exist in this transition?
- What do I/we need to move forward?
- What lessons do I want to carry with me?

Joshua: As we left for Spring Break 2020, I was developing a new non-verbal play for 3-5-year-olds. This Theatre for the Very Young piece, called *Lost and Found*, features two characters, North and West, and is about maps, directions, and adventures (wherever they may be found). Sadly, I was never able to complete the project due to the national shutdown (the suspension of performing and live arts that use close physical contact). This whole academic year (2020-2021), I have symbolically returned to the objects within the play—a map, a pair of binoculars, a compass. This school year has been a journey—how I find my way in the dark of night, how I trust and rely on others to point me in the right direction, how looking closer can provide perspective, and how I might need to reorient and chart a new course. I never imagined how hard the year would be as I personally and professionally navigated the pandemic, worked within a historically White institution during a moment of extreme racial tension and unrest, and grieved the loss of a few former teachers/mentors and my dog. However, I am inspired to see how the world around me has shifted, even in this somewhat frozen moment of time. This year, I was [called in](#) by my BIPOC colleagues, witnessed folx move from [“allies” to “co-conspirators,”](#) engaged in [brave conversations](#), and inhabited [caring spaces](#). As we move out of this past year and into new territory, I will take the lessons learned, cherish the stories heard, and acknowledge the miles traveled. I am forever changed, “back again, only different than before” ([Sondheim](#)). I safely tuck the map, binoculars, and compass in my backpack, knowing right where they are in case I need them again. I'm ready for the next adventure.

Andreas: Since you're asking—I'm doing OK. I have a well-paid job; I live in a spacious house; I can get out to forests and parks; I can work from home (saving on my commute made me more productive); and I am now vaccinated. But underneath all of this is a sense that things are falling apart. I am worried about the colleagues, friends, and family who got sick. A portion of the population is unwilling, for ideological and ego reasons, to bear even minor costs to protect others. Prominent politicians and media personalities fuel such destructive, selfish behavior. And on top there are constant news of police shootings, racist attacks, and mass shootings. Our society seems broken. But then I remember that probably it just appears to me, a White middle class guy, that society used to be overall whole, things were good. For Black people, for example, America has been broken from the beginning ([N.K. Jemisin's](#)

[Broken Earth metaphor](#) is quite fitting). Where do we go from here? I look forward to interacting with people “in the flesh” again, though I think we’ll be more distanced for some time. We’ve added tools to our teaching that we’ll keep using. But I hope we will learn more deeply from our long pandemic year: That education can’t just be about knowledge, but requires moral formation. That teaching includes leaving a society to the next generation that is more just, caring, and sustainable. That the individualist, competitive model that we’ve followed for centuries has met a point of failure requiring foundational rethinking of what we are doing, and how. That true [innovation](#) is not the result of more gizmos, but consists of strategies to build a better society and become better humans.

Emily: I’ve been sick. Since November. Doctors can’t figure out what’s wrong with me. The latest guess is that I have “long-haul COVID,” though, since I never tested positive, nobody can say for sure. Many days, I have trouble breathing, ragged and gulping for air. Chest pain. Fatigue. Brain fog. Memory lapses. Heavy limbs. Raging headaches. Should I call 911? I have asked myself this question more over the past five months than any person should. Obviously, I’m one of the lucky ones: my daughter is healthy, I still have a job, I can ride my bike for a few miles around town when the weather is nice, Kline’s hasn’t closed. (This last one is very important to me.) But sometimes it’s really hard just to show up, just to do the basics of my jobs, just to put a smile on my face. Sometimes it’s really hard not to buckle under the weight of the difficulty, of the unknown. When will my chest alien (whom Andreas has dubbed “Ludmilla”) go away? Is this a life sentence? When will I feel like myself again? We may be back in person in the fall—which I would love; I so miss being with my students, and with my colleagues, in this way—but I am slowly coming to terms with the fact that the effects of this pandemic year won’t just magically disappear, for me or for any of us, any time soon.

Kyle: As I look forward to the end of this academic year, I have yet to fully process the events that have occurred, that are still occurring, and may yet to occur. I pause at moments to realize that we are living through a triple pandemic where humans pass a deadly virus one to another resulting in a slowdown in economic production, which in turn allows our only ecosystem to begin to heal itself. I acknowledge that during this time of health and financial despair, the veil of unawareness has been lifted for some to reveal a socially constructed system that was devised, implemented, and continues to be maintained in order to disinherit and disenfranchise human beings based on misconceptions, fallacies, and greed. I accept the many points of those who wish to go back to life like it was, but how could you clamor for such a future when the present continues to produce its own version of strange fruit in our streets? I also accept that I know the all-important distinction between being valuable (something that meets a performative metric that typically results in very little positive change for those that are being affected) and being valued (someone or something considered to be important, cherished in manner where their uniqueness is appreciated and whose contributions are held in high esteem). Through it all, I am grateful for grace, being given what is not asked for nor deserved, and mercy, not receiving what is deserved. So, as we recline in the warmth of summer, I hope that our responses are simple, that we all find spaces and allow others to find their spaces to rest, recover, and rejuvenate.

Daisy: When I wrote the Toolbox [“It Hurts to the Love Right Now”](#) in the fall, I was writing about the pain of the moment. But, oh, I had no idea what was ahead: the tragic and still unimaginable loss of a dear colleague and friend, Terry Beitzel; deeper injustices; more division and violence; more loss, and change, and instability. So many earthquakes. The year became a matter of reluctant survival, a trudging ahead. Trying [to support students](#) through their tragedies and losses, some of which they shared with me, some of which [showed up](#) in the ways they were, or weren’t, showing up. Trying [to support colleagues](#) and friends through the awfulness, too. Trying to celebrate the wins—and there were wins. It was just hard to find meaning in them, or anything. And, yet, life’s inherent beauty just keeps asserting itself, which I

was able to appreciate thanks to the support of people around me, including this fabulous CFI teaching team. I am deeply grateful. Staying open to love and goodness, through the pain, is hard, costly, and excruciating, but also worth it. We learn so much more through pain than joy—though, seriously, joy, I’m ready for a little of you these days. Somehow, the authenticity, the [vulnerability](#), and the love that emerge from pain have to mean something. We have to make sure the losses weren’t for nothing. Moments of great loss and change are also opportunities [to reimagine better possibilities](#). The question that was most important to Terry in his work, and life, was [“who is responsible to do what and for whom?”](#) We share the responsibilities of this moment: to center [access and equity](#); to keep working toward creating caring, and [care-full](#), spaces; and to take [collective accountability](#), as we all face the uncertainties of a possible transition out of (this phase of) the pandemic, into a future that *must, must, must* be something better.

Finally, in drawing this year to a close, the CFI teaching area wishes to bid farewell to our beloved team member, Joshua Rashon Streeter (College of Visual and Performing Arts), who has accepted a position at Emerson College in Boston and will not be returning to JMU next year. We have been so fortunate to work alongside Josh, in a variety of ways, over the years. Josh brings an energy, an enthusiasm, and a spirit of collaboration to everything he does. He is an expert facilitator, a critical pedagogue, a gifted director, a courageous colleague, and an all-around fine human being. We have all learned a great deal from him. Goodbyes are never easy, but it heartens us to know Josh will be happy and valued in his new position. Thank you, Josh, for everything you are and everything you have done for us and for JMU.

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To offer feedback about this Toolbox or any others, feel free to use [this anonymous Google form](#) or contact Emily Gravett ([graveteo@jmu.edu](mailto:graveteo@jmu.edu)) directly. For additional information about the CFI’s Teaching Toolboxes, including PDFs of past emails, please visit: <https://www.jmu.edu/cfi/teaching/other/teaching-toolbox.shtml>.