Sharing Session Summary: “From Classroom to Zoom and Back:

Emotional Well-being and the Chaos of COVID”

At the outset, of this session, participants were asked to respond to the following prompt:

“Please share one “well-being tip” that you learned while teaching online during the pandemic by typing it into Chat.”

Participants’ responses are provided below:

* Mindfulness activities
* Giving students frequent positive reinforcement.
* Take a one-minute break to stretch or do ten pushups while students are in breakout room...for my sanity!
* Stand up and stretch a little from time to time
* How important it is to just step away from everyone and everything and meditate in silence.
* Making sure every student has a chance to be heard, strangely enough.
* Stepping away from the computer when necessary
* A well-being tip I learned while teaching online was to remember to give myself a break and take time away from my computer.
* I do "mental check-ins" with my students at the start of each class.
* When I give any quiz, I have students have their cameras on.
* Go with the pace of the students and stretch
* Check on students’ wellbeing
* Chirping smoke detectors, week after week, really tried my patience!
* Sirens, crying babies, and the Zoom feedback loop scream from students studying in the same small apartment. None of these are the students’ fault, but I sometimes felt like I was going mad.
* I hate the car one. [Moderator’s note: this comment is in reference to students linking to the class while driving.] I was just like "go home, then class! Please don't die from distracted driving in an attempt to learn the present perfect!" :(
* I thank Montgomery College for paying for Zoom accounts. My other job made us teach 2.5-hour classes in 40-minute increments because they didn't want to shell out! :)
* I have a list of Netiquette Rules that I review at the start of class.

Since there were about 15 people in the group, the Panel Moderator decided to conduct the discussion as a whole-group exercise rather than using Breakout Rooms. The discussion focused on three sets of questions, the first focusing on teacher well-being at the time of the transfer of classes to Zoom and the time period that followed. The second question set addressed student well-being over that same period of time. The third set addressed teachers’ well-being concerns about the transition to teaching in person.

First Set of Questions:

How did the abrupt transition from classroom to remote instruction, and the reasons for it, affect you emotionally?

--Did it affect your attitude toward teaching or the way you looked at yourself as a teacher?

--Did it affect the way in which you taught?

--Did never meeting students face to face make you feel differently about them?

--Do you feel you were able to develop a sense of community in the remote classroom?

--What do you wish someone had told you at the pandemic’s outset and the transition to remote learning?

*Discussion Summary*:

* Some teachers discussed their anxiety about the disease itself, including the emotional toll of knowing family members and friends who were sick with or lost to COVID-19.
* Many teachers described their anxieties and frustrations in the sudden transition to Zoom and a feeling of helplessness in manipulating the technology while still teaching classes.
* A number of teachers expressed gratitude to AELG management and staff, as well as their fellow teachers, in helping them master Zoom commands and techniques.
* Some teachers openly acknowledged their technical difficulties to students and were, in turn, patient with students as they learned to operate Zoom efficiently.
* A number of teachers dedicated the class time needed to make their students feel comfortable with using the features of Zoom.
* Most teachers indicated that they made special efforts to praise their students, not only for their improving Zoom abilities, but for giving correct answers to lesson exercises during the class period.
* Some teachers indicated that they felt that were able to develop a sense of community in the Zoom classroom, particularly through the use of conversations in Breakout Rooms.

Second Set of Questions:

What changes did you see in your students after the transition to Zoom occurred? How did you address them?

--Did you see changes in their demeanor, behavior, willingness to participate?

--Did you see changes in attendance patterns, attention span, classroom etiquette?

--How did the presence of children and other household interruptions affect classroom dynamics?

-- When you return to in-person teaching, what are you expecting from your students in terms of their level of engagement, classroom behavior, etc.?

*Discussion Summary*:

--Teachers found the need to establish “netiquette” rules for the conduct of class at the outset of each term to cut down on the background noise coming from students’ households and students interrupting or correcting each other.

--Most teachers established these rules during the first class of each term.

--One teacher used a hand signal to remind students to wait to be called on before providing their classroom input.

--Many teachers expressed a strong preference for their students to have their cameras on and frustration with calling on students with their camera off and not getting a response.

--As noted above, many teachers spent a fair amount of class time to instruct students in the use of Zoom’s features.

--Most teachers found that as students became accustomed to Zoom classes, they were able to moderated their classroom behavior accordingly.

Third Set of Questions:

How do you feel about returning to in-person teaching?

--Do you anticipate a return to “business as usual” or do you think that the dynamics of the in-person classroom will be different?

--Will having taught on Zoom change the way you will teach in person?

--How, if at all, are you preparing yourself emotionally for this return, including the need to commute, transport teaching materials, etc.?

--What should the AELG Program be doing to facilitate your return? Would you like to have check-in meetings led by site mentors and/or teachers who have already begun in-person classes?

Discussion Summary (note: time constraints made this part of the Sharing Session fairly brief)

--Many teachers said that they were looking forward to returning to the classroom, but a number of them said that they planned to continue to teach on Zoom as long as they were allowed to.

--Of those who favored staying on Zoom, some expressed lingering COVID-19 exposure concerns and others preferred the convenience of teaching from home.

--Several teachers were in favor of group teacher check-ins with site mentors (just each other) to talk about their feelings about returning to in-person teaching as well as any issues they encountered.

--Those who commented seem to feel that the transition to in-person teaching would be “business as usual,” without any significant changes from the pre-pandemic classroom.