NAME Supports Educators with Resources

From early March 2020 until now the new coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, has had the United States in lockdown. The virus first surfaced late in 2019 in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread throughout the planet with more than 3.65 million confirmed cases and 256,000 deaths by May 5, according to Johns Hopkins University & Medicine. In the United States, more than 1.2 million Americans have been infected by the pandemic and more than 70,000 have died. To put the death toll in perspective, the coronavirus in less than three months has killed more Americans than the Vietnam War did in a decade.

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) supports all social distancing, sheltering in place and quarantine efforts throughout the United States and the world to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For public safety, particularly among older people or those with compromised health conditions in homes, that includes states taking the unprecedented step of suspending classes for the rest of the school year in favor of distance learning. However, NAME understands that these drastic measures have created many new challenges for educators who had no training or lesson plans for teaching in their homes via such technology as ZOOM. Many of their students also lacked either the devices or reliable Internet connections in their homes to access the ongoing, nontraditional lessons so they can keep up with their better-connected peers. In addition, some students also don’t have parents or guardians who have the time or ability to insist that students take online learning seriously. Nor do they have cultural, political or economic capital to navigate online learning.

NAME knows that education is supposed to be the great equalizer in the United States, but COVID-19 threatens to widen pre-existing disparities between suburban white students in wealthier, better connected and informed families versus students of color as well as those in rural areas in poor communities with fewer resources. NAME agrees with the statement from Rethinking Schools: “Now is not the time to pull away from social justice education activism, but to find new ways to express it. As schools go on to the internet (at least for older students) — or into hibernation — we need to make sure this happens in a way that does not promote greater inequality.” Rethinking Schools provides great ideas to keep students motivated to learn during this pandemic, including the arts. The We Are Teachers’ website provides more resources, including teachers providing teens with mental health support through the pandemic.

In addition, NAME applauds Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. They are partnering with NAME for the NAME 30th Anniversary International Conference, October 7-11, in Montgomery, Alabama. On March 19, 2020, Teaching Tolerance published “Teaching Through Coronavirus: What Educators Need Right Now.” Teaching Tolerance surveyed nearly 2,000 educators, asking what they needed in this pandemic. Emotional support and best practices in distance learning were among the responses. What Teaching Tolerance shared included its Student Text Library, which “has more than 500 texts (including readings, read-alouds, images and videos), filtered by grade level, subject and social justice topic.” The organization shared its film kits, which include student-oriented documentaries, as well as discussion guides. “For copyright reasons, some of these texts and films require an account to access — but anyone can create a free account, whether an educator or a caregiver.” There are also Teaching Tolerance’s 34 “Do Something” tasks, which are “designed to allow students to apply their knowledge to real-world issues.” They include an Oral History Project, Buddy Share, involving art or writing with an online classmate and Identity Artifacts Museum, in which students can create a display of items from home that represent aspects of their identities. In addition, Teaching Tolerance provides emotional support connections for educators who are being asked to complete herculean tasks of educating our children with limited resources and even less time to keep the crisis from causing students to fall behind in school. NAME is thankful that equity and social justice are among the topics covered in the Teaching Tolerance’s resources for educators and students. Additional resources include Facing History and Ourselves and Welcoming Schools.

Also important in this pandemic are NAME-Learn Resources, providing:
- An evidence-based framework for multicultural learning including dimensions where learning takes place as well as student learning outcomes.
- A list of frequently asked questions by teachers about multicultural education in their classroom.
- Resources for professional development that include activities and modules on multicultural learning.
- Teacher Spotlight Case Studies: videos of critical multicultural educators in their classrooms.

As many states take the risky step this month to re-open shuttered businesses and restart the hobbled U.S. economy, NAME hopes the health and best interests of everyone remains in the forefront and distant learning continues to develop as an anchor for the continuing education of students in this or any crisis.

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