

# MAINTAINING EFFICIENCY AND HIGH STANDARDS IN A NEW WORK ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Since the COVID lockdown era, many faculty members have faced a change in a work situation, either changing working environments, changing modalities, or both. These changes can lead to stress and struggles with efficiency and maintaining high standards for students and self. This article describes research-based strategies I used throughout this experience to reduce stress and increase efficiency. I discovered these strategies through reflective practice and a literature review to support the ideas. Andragogy and the educational ergonomics model were used as theoretical foundations. These strategies included reflective practice, goal setting, creating a schedule, and staying connected with colleagues. This article describes how to implement these strategies to increase effectiveness and allow faculty members to focus their time on maintaining high standards for their students and their own work.*

**Keywords:** *Efficiency, Stress Management, Reflective Practice, Goal-Setting, COVID*

## MAINTAINING EFFICIENCY AND HIGH STANDARDS IN A NEW WORK ENVIRONMENT

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to discover new techniques for managing stress and maintaining high standards in the classroom. The theoretical framework for this study includes both andragogy and the educational ergonomics model. Andragogy focuses on understanding how adult students learn (El Amin, 2020), and the educational ergonomics model gives educators an understanding of the workplace and environment in which students learn (Benedyk et al., 2009). Both models provide relevance and support to the strategies discussed in this study.

### *Andragogy*

Andragogy was first developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1970 to distinguish adult learning from child learning. According to andragogy, there are many strategies that instructors should concentrate on with adult learners, such as explaining why an objective is important and focusing on being a facilitator rather than an instructor (El Amin,

2020). Andragogy also requires instructors to relate topics to personal experience and increase students' intrinsic motivation (Pew, 2007), for example, by maintaining high standards for students. Using andragogy as a lens, I focused my reflective practice on being able to maintain high standards for students in the classroom and thus searched for strategies to meet this need.

Andragogy can also be applied to instructor learning strategies for working in a new learning environment. Two elements of andragogy are that learning is cyclical and it requires the learner to think on a deeper level (El Amin, 2020). Andragogy puts the learner in control of their own learning (Pew, 2007), which aligns directly with reflective practice. Through reflective practice, I utilized andragogy to think deeply about the practices and how they could be replaced or improved.

### *Educational Ergonomics Model*

The educational ergonomics model supports the strategies in this paper. This model was first created by Henry Kao in 1976 for the purpose of

explaining and understanding how an environment affects learning. The original model shows how the worker, or in education, the teacher and/or student, is affected by their materials, environment, people around them, and so forth. More recently, the educational ergonomics model has been updated to fit education's changing environments and needs. One proposed update to the model is known as the Hexagon-Spindle model and considers new environments and factors that affect education, such as completing schoolwork remotely or asynchronously (Benedyk et al., 2009). This model separates the teacher and student as different types of workers and factors in new educational challenges, such as the learning environment changing throughout the day, workstation layouts, and other types of learning tasks that must be completed.

The educational ergonomics model, specifically the updated Hexagon-Spindle model (Benedyk et al., 2009), aligns with the strategies I used and reflected on through reflective practice. The model states that many factors affect a student's or teacher's ability to be productive, efficient, and engaged. These include social factors, teaching factors, learning environment infrastructure and management, available materials, and personal factors. A disruption to any of these factors directly impacts the other areas and the teacher's or student's ability to be effective (Benedyk et al., 2009). The problems I faced and the strategies created to solve the issues align directly with this theory.

## PROBLEM

Since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, many instructors have found themselves in a new situation of teaching nearly all of their courses virtually rather than in person. Instructors saw work settings move from in-person to remote. This transition meant not only a change of location but also a change in schedule, modality (for some), work-life balance, professional growth, and relationships with colleagues. Students and instructors had to adapt to a new learning and teaching style. This article will focus on strategies I used to maintain high standards and efficiency in this new remote situation to encourage less stress, more work-life balance, and continued high-quality instruction for students. The strategies in this article were dis-

covered through the research method of reflective practice, followed by a literature review.

## *Adjusting to a New Normal*

Before the COVID pandemic, I worked as a full-time faculty member in the College of Education at a university. I taught in the online modality but physically worked in-office and remote locations. This situation gave a specific structure to the workday and allowed for a clear separation of work life and home life. The situation also allowed me access to colleagues and peers to collaborate and communicate regularly.

At the beginning of the COVID pandemic, I began working remotely full-time. This led to challenges that previously did not exist. One challenge was efficiently completing required tasks due to having a less structured schedule and additional distractions at home. Another concern was maintaining high standards for student work and my own work. Often, I found myself straining to maintain minimum job requirements and thus struggled with elevating standards for student work. This led to my conviction to discover techniques to help lower stress and maintain a better work-home balance, allowing more focus on higher standards in the classroom.

## *The Impact on Students*

Not only did the COVID pandemic affect me personally, but I also noticed a change for the students. Many students were displaced from their jobs, had children who would now be home during the day, or had other new realities to face due to school and work closures. These students had similar challenges as mine, such as managing schedules, finding time for schoolwork, and the general stress of what many were calling "The New Normal."

The lockdown procedures for COVID had a major impact on students' mental health. According to Ul Hussna et al. (2021), being quarantined at home left students feeling isolated, depressed, and anxious. While educational needs were met to an extent with online learning platforms, students were suffering the loss of social interaction, encountering new family concerns (such as having to all be home at the same time and possibly sharing one computer or device), and still needing to keep up with schoolwork. Now that the lockdown era has mostly passed, students are reintegrating

into social situations that they may have missed out on for nearly two years.

### *Continuation of Problem Post Pandemic*

While this problem began during the 2020 lockdown era, many of these issues and stressors still occur today. Most higher education institutions continue to utilize distance learning to some extent (Bhagat & Kim, 2020), and many instructors, including me, continue to work from home for at least a portion of their work time. This means that problems of stress, work-life balance, and providing students with quality education continue to be a reality for many instructors.

Instructors are now faced with some of the same stress as students regarding the return to social interactions. Some workplaces now require people to return to work, whether occasionally or often. This is affecting work schedules and work-life balance. Personally, I am now required to return to work twice a month. While I enjoy the interaction, learning from others, and the general community feel, it does affect the weekly schedule I have created for myself. Many work tasks must be set aside to make time for meetings and collaboration, so the problem of finding a work-life balance and scheduling work tasks remains.

### **WORKING IDEAS**

Even before COVID, teaching in the online modality has been a challenge. In 2014, online educators reported feeling stress from increasing workloads, high student counts, and being available to students consistently (Bezuidenhout, 2014). Another study showed that the time required for online learning is greater than face-to-face instruction, with faculty spending approximately 38.81 hours per week answering student questions, participating in discussion forums, and grading papers (Mandernach et al., 2013). This leaves little time for creating new materials, providing additional higher-level thinking questions in forums, and professional development. It can also lead to higher stress levels and a lack of efficiency in completing one's job requirements.

Studies in more recent years have continued to confirm the stress on online educators. Hansen and Gray (2018) stated that the flexibility enjoyed by both online instructors and online students can be a stressor for educators because it eliminates the boundaries of time and location. Technology

that allows students to reach instructors easily also eliminates boundaries that normally lead to a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, instructors working from home have reported feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Online instructors, also known as distance educators, usually feel that their work responsibilities are equally important and therefore struggle to prioritize and set limits for themselves (Bezuidenhout, 2014). There is a need for online educators, especially those who are new to this modality or situation, to learn techniques for efficiency and work-life balance to help lower the daily stress load.

Another challenge for online education was the connection between instructors and students. Studies have shown that the biggest challenge for students during the lockdown era was the lack of community and teacher-student interactions (Leoste et al., 2021). Additionally, the study of chronemics shows that people associate time with communication (Döring & Pöschl, 2017). This means that instructor-student interactions are interpreted based on the response time, the length of messages rather than nonverbal cues, and interactions that occur with in-person learning. This can cause inadvertent and inaccurate feelings in either party. For example, a student might send a message at night and not receive a response from the instructor until the next afternoon; the student might interpret this as the instructor not caring about their message. These nonverbal miscommunications cause stress to both parties, so this is another challenge instructors must overcome in the distance learning modality.

### **REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE**

The strategies focused on here were derived from the methodologies of reflective practice and a literature review. Reflective practice is a form of action research in which the researcher reflects on their personal experience and searches for ways to grow, improve, and find new ways of completing activities (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Action research is continuous and intended to be updated and reflected upon, so reflective practice is an important type of action research (Osmanovic Zajic & Maksimovic, 2020). I had the opportunity to consider working remotely rather than in an office and reflect on ways this could be improved to maintain both efficiency in completing work tasks



and high standards in the classroom. I took notes on areas of work-life that were causing stress and inefficiency, and I researched strategies that might decrease the stress level and increase the efficiency of work completed. I also researched strategies that might help to create a work-life balance when working remotely.

### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice was the first approach used to evaluate the problems, ideas, and strategies. Reflective practice began by attempting to identify what was causing additional stress with the additional modality. Why was I suddenly having a difficult time completing job tasks that were previously quick and simple? Why was work-life balance suddenly disproportionate?

With these questions in mind, I began to ponder the issues throughout the day. With children being home, I often found time to reflect while rocking a baby to sleep for a nap or driving to an activity such as school or swim lessons. Next, I would make note of the ideas that arose from these reflective times. This would allow me to make connections between ideas and allow additional strategies to surface.

The notetaking process varied based on my location and time. If I was driving while reflecting, I often jotted down notes in a notetaking app on my phone while sitting at a red light or arriving at my destination. This was a quick way to ensure I did not forget any ideas I thought of. At home, I often took notes on a notepad kept near my work computer. This notepad doubled as a mousepad, so it was always nearby when I needed it. The beauty of completing reflective practice from home was that I could reflect while putting my baby down for a nap and then quickly get to my desk to record the notes on the notepad. This notepad was often where creative strategies emerged, such as creating a new, less conventional daily schedule. The notes showed me that I often had free time to work before breakfast or after the kids were in bed, so I could sketch out ideas on how to spend my time more creatively and then create a schedule from there.

Another step in the reflective practice process was communicating with others. I spoke to both professional peers and family members about the problems I was facing. Since part of the problem was work-life balance, it was essential to speak

to people who were involved both professionally and personally. Talking through the issues led to a deeper understanding of my feelings and concerns. Once the problems were identified, I shared solutions with others to shape and refine them.

One problem I spoke to colleagues about often was work-life balance. Working from home meant that I got to spend more time with my children, but having young children around while working does make it more challenging to focus on work tasks. My colleagues and I discussed the strategies we were using to create a balance, such as adjusting what times we worked throughout the day, choosing which tasks to do first in the day, and creating schedules that accommodated both our family needs and our professional needs.

Speaking to colleagues about the concerns and stressors also allowed me to consider my students' points of view. Colleagues shared that they were experiencing the same communications with students, which showed that they were also struggling with the changes brought forth by the Covid shutdown, such as work/life balance and finding time for schoolwork. I was then able to reflect through the lens of my students so that I could consider how new strategies might assist students.

### *Literature Review*

During the reflective practice process, a literature review was completed. The purpose of the literature review was to identify whether the research supported the strategies. The literature review involved locating scholarly, peer-reviewed publications to ensure that the strategies utilized were valid and reliable. The literature review was conducted to validate my concerns during reflective practice and the strategies utilized for maintaining efficiency and high standards. The literature review also identified theoretical frameworks connected to the study.

### EVALUATION OF IDEAS-LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review above echoed my concerns and struggles with working remotely full-time. While working from home was a blessing in many ways, such as not having to commute, more time with family, etc., the struggle of being able to focus on work tasks for long periods of time and finding a work-life balance was indeed present. Stress occurred in the form of feeling guilty when taking time for work or family, feeling as though

work quality had decreased, and feeling pressured to attend to students' needs even during family time.

My experiences were in line with the research found in the literature review. I found that the research of Hansen and Gray (2018) was very applicable to the situation of working full-time from home. Their findings that the work-life balance can be interrupted due to the elimination of physical boundaries were echoed in my experience. I often felt obligated or guilty if a student's question was left unanswered or an assignment was left ungraded, even during out-of-office time. This stress caused me to check my classes more often, leading to an imbalance of work and home life.

Other research that supported my experience was that of Bezuidenhout (2014) regarding feelings of isolation and setting priorities and limits. I found that no longer having colleagues to reach out to in person was stressful and led to higher anxiety levels. I also found that without the physical boundary of entering and exiting a work building, it was easy to feel that work time didn't have limits, which led to unnecessary guilt about whether work for the day was completed.

Since the end of the lockdown era, research has continued to show that my concerns and feelings were valid. Leoste et al. (2021) found that while most students and universities could easily adapt to distance learning through technology, the biggest challenge was decreased community and connection. This research showed that students felt disconnected from their instructors and vice versa. Instructors had fewer opportunities to engage with students via lectures and discussions, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnect. This research found that engagement tools can help bridge the gap between students and instructors. Leoste et al. (2021) also found that proper training is essential for quality distance learning through online platforms. Bhaget and Kim (2021) echoed this research, stating that engagement was the biggest issue reported by students. They suggest finding flexible solutions to connect with students. This research aligns with my strategy of staying connected to colleagues as this connection allows instructors to learn new strategies from each other, create new activities for students, and even train one another on new technologies and web tools.

Additional research can be found in chronemics, which is the study of the connection between

time and communication (Döring & Pöschl, 2017). In this study, the authors explain that people often interpret the amount of time it takes for a response with the sender's feelings. For example, an email responded to within 24 hours would trigger a feeling that the sender places high value on the recipient. Other factors of chronemics include the frequency and length of messages and responses. In the online education world, this applies heavily to instructor and student communication. Students may interpret short messages as uncaring or messages sent more than 24 hours later as unimportant to the instructor.

In this study, Döring and Pöschl (2017) also focused on the time-of-day messages were sent between supervisors and subordinates. Messages sent at night were seen as more intimate and less authoritative than those sent during the day. By this logic, students may also interpret the instructor's messages based on the time of day sent. From my experience, some students are often nervous about sending messages at night for fear of disturbing their instructor, while others get upset when instructors wait until "work hours" to respond to a message. Chronemics strongly impacts the relationships between students and between students and instructors.

Using the findings of andragogy (Knowles, 1970) and the educational ergonomics model (Kao, 1976), I began finding strategies to help focus my efforts on the online classroom and in my professional life that would be the most effective and would decrease stress levels. Andragogy helped me focus on what is important in my classroom, such as being a facilitator versus an instructor (El Amin, 2020) and relating class objectives to students' personal lives (Pew, 2007). Through reflective practice, I found strategies that would allow me to focus on creating more personalized CATS (classroom assessment techniques) to facilitate more meaningful conversations in the classroom discussion forums, therefore reducing the need for extraneous posting and leading to more time to focus on other activities. The educational ergonomics model allowed me to focus on the physical and emotional factors causing stress and inefficiency, as these are important components of the model (Benedyk et al., 2019). Understanding this model led to creating a specific schedule and incorporating time for reflective practice and goal setting.

The literature review allowed me to shape the strategies into workable solutions further. Based on the research of El Amin (2020) and Pew (2007), I focused my attention on creating strategies that would allow me to maintain high standards in my online classroom. In order to keep high standards for students and facilitate my courses effectively, I would need to create long-term and short-term goals, including creating more CATS and attending trainings to better myself as an instructor.

Another discovery in the literature review was the education ergonomics model created by Kao (1976) and updated by Benedyk et al. (2009). This model confirmed that environment is a contributing factor to learning and teaching. Reflecting on this model showed me that I needed an environment specifically designed for productive work and effective teaching. This led me to create a schedule where I would have quiet work times throughout the day in a specific space designated for work.

Finally, the theory of chronemics was very enlightening. Chronemics, as defined by Doring and Pöschl (2017), shows that the time-of-day messages are sent and the amount of time that has passed between messages makes a difference in how the receiver interprets them. This confirmed the importance of responding to students' questions, providing feedback, and participating in the discussion forums in a timely manner. This theory again confirmed the importance of work-life balance and creating a set schedule in my daily life. Based on the literature review and reflective practice, I was able to create four strategies that helped me maintain efficiency and high standards in my classroom.

## DECISION

### *Strategies for Maintaining Efficiency and High Standards*

In a new work environment and/or situation, it is easy to get overwhelmed or stressed from work. Using specific strategies can help relieve some of the stress and give more time for additional projects, such as creating new materials and professional growth and development (Hansen & Gray, 2018). These strategies can also relieve stress by providing a healthier work-life balance without feeling guilty that projects are left incomplete or students are left in need. Once an instructor has achieved less stress and a

healthy work-life balance, the focus can shift to maintaining high standards for students and self.

## STRATEGY 1: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

One struggle people have when faced with a new work setting is finding the positives in the situation. It is easy to think about how things used to be or how much easier accomplishing certain tasks was in the past. Focusing on the positive will increase efficiency and is also helpful for mental health (Chu, 2020). I found that keeping a journal or a notes page to reflect each day on positives and areas of improvement helped me focus on positives in the new, remote situation. When journaling, I thought about doing things that have changed and how to take advantage of some of the perks of the new situation. Research has shown that reflective practice is essential for educators as it helps identify things that are working well, areas that need to be improved, and if there is room for change to a situation or practice (Maksimovic & Osmanovic, 2018). I made sure to reflect on personal elements and things that were going well in my work life.

Reflection will lead to new perspectives and better use of time. For example, I previously faced a 1-hour commute each way to the office. Now working from home, those two hours can be used for other things, such as spending time with family or enjoying hobbies before and after work hours. This block of time may have been lost or absorbed had reflective practice not led to finding this positive in the new environment. This time can also be used to maintain high standards in the classroom. I used this time to develop new resources, try new technologies, and maintain a better teacher presence in the classroom. Reflective practice is also important for addressing some of the factors in the educational ergonomics model (Benedyk, 2009), as it can allow teachers to reflect on their personal environments that may be affecting their efficiency.

Providing students with reflective practice opportunities in the classroom is an excellent use of this time. According to andragogy, instructors should focus on facilitating and discussing topics on a deeper level (El Amin, 2020). Giving students opportunities to reflect on their progress is a wonderful strategy for maintaining higher standards for students.

## STRATEGY 2: SET NEW GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS



Once reflection has become part of the new routine, goal setting is the next step to efficiency and high standards. When feeling stressed or overwhelmed, it is easy to focus on urgent tasks and push aside long-term goals and projects. I found that many hours were being spent completing small, mundane tasks, such as responding to emails rather than deeper, more meaningful tasks, such as using new, creative technologies with students. Adding a goal-setting component to daily reflection time helped me focus more on these long-term items, such as professional development or creating new resources. Studies have shown that goal setting is directly related to effective teaching and professional growth (Camp, 2017). I created weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly goals. Be sure to share your goals with peers and even your supervisor, as this has been shown to increase goal commitment (Camp, 2017). Additionally, I set personal goals to help keep a good work-life balance.

A well-established system for goal setting is the SMART goals method. The SMART method stands for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. This is a good way to ensure that your goals are measurable and realistic (Carlson, 2018). Begin with a specific goal and ensure it is measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. For example, instead of stating, "Work on professional development," a goal might say, "Read one professional development article each week for one month." Having a SMART goal helped me track and reflect on my progress, and once my goal was achieved, I rewarded myself in some way. I kept the educational ergonomics model (Benedyk et al., 2009) in mind while creating my goals. The personal environment affects how someone works, and the environment created for students in the online classroom affects their work. It is important to set goals that will lead to an increasingly effective and motivating classroom environment for students, as well as goals for personal and professional growth.

Once goals were created, I built time in the weekly schedule to work on them. This meant taking a 30-minute block that is usually set aside for a specific task, such as checking email and replacing that with work time for my goal once or twice a week. I continued reflecting each week to modify my goals and ensure I had time to achieve them. I found that in only a short amount of time, more meaningful tasks were being achieved, such as

creating personal feedback videos for students and facilitating more meaningful conversations in the discussion forums.

### **STRATEGY 3: CREATE A NEW SCHEDULE AND ROUTINE**

After reflecting and setting goals, it is time for a change of schedule and routine. In the past, I would go to the office each morning, sit at a desk, and work on grading, answering student questions, and posting in the forums with little or no interruption. From home, I had less structure, a more flexible schedule, and additional distractions that made it challenging to sit down and work for extended periods. Other faculty members who are suddenly working remotely might face multiple interruptions, such as a spouse or child who is also at home, looming chores around the house, or even managing a child's online schooling. These changes can be overwhelming and can cause unnecessary stress. However, this stress can be managed by creating a schedule and routine. A recent study found that setting expectations and organization were among educators' most helpful time-management strategies (Oyarzun et al., 2020). The study also showed that scheduling time for organizing course materials and facilitating other clerical tasks were important time management strategies.

Though many people might claim to follow a daily schedule and routine, few have it written out to reference throughout the day or week. I created a schedule on paper and followed it precisely. Having a physical schedule made it easier for me to consult, stick to, and eliminate the stress of remembering my daily task list. In the schedule, I created smaller blocks of time, perhaps no more than 30 minutes to an hour, for answering student questions, posting, answering emails, etc. I gave each required task its own block of time. I color-coded required work tasks as one color and personal tasks as another color. This allowed me to recognize where I was spending the most time in my day and helped me prioritize the most important items. I included less urgent but highly important tasks in my schedule so I could maintain higher standards in my classroom.

After each time block, I built a break into the schedule. Breaks lasted between 15 minutes to an hour and included activities such as exercising, eating lunch, reading a story with children, or work-

ing on my hobbies. Other items on the schedule were chores or other necessary tasks, such as prepping dinner or doing laundry. I found that breaking tasks into individual sections and allowing for an active break made the tasks feel less daunting and provided a stronger work-life balance. Keeping a physical schedule can also help to ensure that valuable time is not lost (“With Proper,” 2020). Without realizing it, time that I had to use in the past but not now—for example, getting dressed and ready to go to the office—can easily be wasted on frivolous tasks. Keeping a schedule eliminates guesswork and shows how time will be utilized effectively.

A final thought on scheduling is to keep an open mind toward change. In a work-from-home situation, keeping your exact schedule every day may not be possible, and the schedule will certainly look different than it did in an office setting. I found that deciding to begin working on required tasks before work hours created time for more breaks throughout the day. Though this choice was not ideal initially, after trying it for a few weeks, I felt less stressed having those required tasks done early and could focus more on interacting with students and work-related SMART goals throughout the day. I also found that this led to a better work-life balance as I used small breaks throughout the day to focus on family- and home-related tasks.

#### **STRATEGY 4: STAY CONNECTED TO COLLEAGUES**

A final strategy for staying efficient and maintaining high standards for students and yourself is staying connected to colleagues. In the office, it is easy to communicate with those sitting near you or even to schedule a meeting. One can often feel isolated from home and struggle to connect with colleagues and peers. This can lead to high stress and depression. Staying connected to colleagues is important for sharing struggles and concerns and for seeking advice from people not in your field might. Connecting to colleagues can also allow you to share ideas, CATs (classroom assessment techniques), lesson plans, and other resources (Bosman & Voglewede, 2019). This leads to higher efficiency as group members can share tasks rather than each person creating items individually. Finally, connecting to colleagues is a way to participate in scholarship opportunities, such as continuing education opportunities, presenting at virtual conferences, or publishing in scholarly

journals. According to andragogy, having intrinsic motivation leads to more learning and growth (El Amin, 2020), and this intrinsic motivation for instructor growth can be nurtured by interacting with colleagues.

There are many strategies for connecting with colleagues from home. Classic strategies such as phone calls and email are simple and allow for one-on-one connection. I tried some newer technologies as well, such as Zoom conferencing or Microsoft Teams chat. Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)) can be used for meeting in large or small groups with video, allowing members to see each other and make a more personal connection. Remember that Zoom can be used for casual, social meetings. I participated in a weekly “Lunch Bunch” meeting with colleagues, which allowed for casual discussion once a week during the lunch hour. Connecting socially with colleagues, especially with a video component, helped me feel relief of stress and feel more connected to others, allowing for maintaining higher standards for students and myself.

Another tool I utilized was Microsoft Teams. Teams uses a thread approach to conversations so that they can be continuous and asynchronous. I joined a group of colleagues teaching the same content, and if anyone on the team had a question or concern, they could post it to the group thread, no matter the time of day. When other team members were available, they could reply at their convenience. This allowed for a strong connection between teammates and for each person’s voice to be heard. Concerns that might be stressful to tackle independently could be put to the group, thus leading to lower stress and higher efficiency for all members.

#### **REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE**

Overall, the reflective practice process was encouraging. At the beginning of the study, I felt stressed and fatigued from the new situation and circumstances I was working in. Taking the time to reflect on what was causing this stress was important. Simply taking the time to focus allowed me to identify some areas of my life that needed to be corrected, namely, work-life balance and efficiency. From there, I was able to brainstorm strategies that might help me solve these issues. The most challenging part of the process was the literature review. Since one of my stressors was time



management, finding extra time to research the strategies was difficult. However, I learned many new ideas that helped me mold the strategies listed in this paper. One thing I have learned about reflective practice is that it is continuous. Now that time has passed, I find that I can still grow and learn when I take the time to reflect each day.

During the pandemic, many faculty members found themselves in new work situations, often working from home and transitioning from in-person classes to online courses. Maintaining efficiency and high standards for students and self can be achieved by reducing the stress of this new environment using strategies that I found helpful in my own experience. The research-supported reflective practice strategies, goal setting, creating schedules, and maintaining connections with colleagues can reduce stress, increase efficiency, and allow faculty members to focus on instruction and student interaction.

Now that some time has passed since the pandemic, many faculty members face changes in their work lives again. Some faculty members are being called to return to physical classrooms, others are now using a hybrid approach, and others have become full-time distance instructors. I have found that the strategies discussed here still apply to these new situations and will allow instructors to navigate their new work situations without unnecessary stress.

Researchers who engage in the reflective practice process can also use many strategies in this paper. Time management and an organized workspace are very important in the reflective practice process. Researchers should set aside time in their daily or weekly schedules to think about their issues, jot down notes, and begin the literature review process. Connecting with colleagues is another helpful step in reflection. Researchers often find that others have similar feelings or concerns and having a joint experience will lead to richer ideas and solutions.

Future research should be completed on this topic. One area for future research might be analyzing one's workspace and how that area is affecting productivity and efficiency. The educational ergonomics model and the Hexagon-Spindle model (Benedyk et al., 2009) discuss how a workspace is one of many factors that can affect a teacher's or a student's ability to function effec-

tively. Doing a reflective practice study on the environment one chooses to work in could add to the strategies shown here and increase a teacher's ability to facilitate the online classroom effectively and efficiently.

Another area of future research would be from the student's point of view. Students could conduct reflective practice to see if these strategies reduce their stress and increase their effectiveness. Additionally, a study could be done to understand students' perspectives of instructors who are utilizing these strategies. Students could reflect on their perception of the instructor's effectiveness in discussion forums, their efficiency in grading, and their professionalism in personal communications.

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