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My spring 2020 “community of learners” transitioned online with little struggle. By March, we had completed the theoretical components of the course. I adjusted the syllabus and encouraged students to care for themselves. Knowing I would not penalize them allowed them to be honest about their experiences and to be present for each other. One student, not wanting to disappoint us, showed up although they had no electricity at home and 10 percent power on their iPad. I shifted the order of presentations so they could go first.

Since January 2020, I have carefully curated my syllabus: intentional, with few but diverse texts, some suggested by the community. Last year, I invited students to document their experiences using our theoretical frameworks so that when others searched the archives they will find them and the language needed to tell the stories yet to be told. As a result, I and half the community submitted a joint journal to the IU Libraries Coronavirus Days archives. The other half created handmade gifts for seniors who would have no ceremonies, documentaries about their peers, and community healing plans. I want students to know that their lives have meaning and that they are part of history. I want them to have agency in interpreting and making meaning of their lives. I recently found out that students are teaching their parents what they are learning in the course. As a result, one student said, they have more compassion for their parent’s traumas and struggles.

At the beginning of every class, I invite students to inhale, exhale, reflect, and rejoice; to bring their attention to the weighty topics we discuss: memory, trauma, and healing in Black communities. After deep breaths, I share music or a short writing about imagining a better world. Afterwards, I invite them to share “what’s going on” in their worlds and what they are thinking about the world around them. Our 75-minutes in the classroom is an opportunity to think out loud and to dream new ways of being human together.

One year after the world shut down, millions of deaths later, my students and I are still breathing together. A student from spring 2020 recommended a fiction book for the syllabus. I said yes, and they accepted my invitation to teach it. In this way, students past and present are connected and model for each other what teaching and mentoring mean.

The first time I met Dr. Mumford, he refused to allow me to sit quietly, hidden, as my own work was performed at the Buskirk. He demanded that I be recognized. This was Baba Mumford’s gift: to see you for who you were and would become. I would like to think I pay this gift forward with every student I meet.