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Introduction to the Special Issue

Emergency Remote Teaching, Online Instruction, and the Community: Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis in Language Education

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis took all of us by surprise. Universities and schools, in unprecedented fashion, quickly began to move instruction online. In some universities, the switch to online instruction coincided with spring breaks, allowing instructors a brief period for hurried preparation, whereas other colleagues had only a few hours' warning. In any case, few educators had previous experience with online instruction, so most were suddenly asked to teach in a completely new way. Despite these new challenges and the isolation necessitated by COVID-19, the language teaching community, in addition to adapting or creating courses for online delivery, was quick to share tips and best practices, publish case studies of ways programs navigated the move online, and conduct research that studied aspects of the pandemic's impact on our field.

During this intensive introduction to online instruction, as a profession we learned a great deal about teaching and our priorities as teachers. This special volume of *Russian Language Journal* seeks to capture the spirit and lessons of the COVID-19 crisis. While most of its articles concern the teaching of Russian, the challenges faced by instructors and students during COVID-19 have affected the entire language teaching community. We hope therefore that the lessons learned will be useful to instructors of all languages. This special volume takes an early step in reflection and discussion of the developments that have affected all of us during this time.

At the time of publication of this volume, most institutions of higher education in the United States intend to return to face-to-face instruction in Fall 2021. Even if we are able to meet in our physical classrooms, we

certainly will not return to the teaching of Russian as it was done before the pandemic began. Like colleagues in other disciplines, during the pandemic Russian instructors used new technologies, learned new approaches, and reassessed priorities. COVID-19 has permanently changed the teaching of Russian, but exactly how remains to be seen. Has the pandemic drawn lasting attention to questions of access and inclusion? Will we see more online and hybrid Russian courses after the pandemic? What tools will remain after we return to face-to-face teaching? What was the student and instructor experience of COVID-19 and will those attitudes change as the pandemic fades from memory? Will universities spend resources on preparing for another pandemic?

To establish a broader context for the discussion of these important questions, this introductory article attempts to outline what its authors believe are some of the most impactful takeaways of the COVID-19 pandemic for education in general and foreign language teaching in particular, and to identify critical themes for further discussion and research moving forward.

2. The Impact of the Pandemic on Higher Education

There is no doubt that COVID-19 will continue to impact all areas of education. Educators are well aware of a “summer slide,” the loss of a certain percentage of educational gains during long summer breaks. In early 2020, specialists were already speaking of a “COVID slide” that potentially could be far more significant than the annual “summer slide,” and these concerns were first expressed well before much of the world spent an entire academic year (or significant parts of it) learning online (GoGuardian Team 2020). The loss of previous educational gains, or of gains that under normal circumstances would have been made but under COVID-19 were not, has the potential to ripple through education for years to come. In higher education, this concern is relevant for any major (such as languages) in which courses are sequenced to build on one another.

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on enrollments; 2020 and early 2021 saw significantly fewer students enrolled in higher education. Spring 2021 enrollments were 5.9% lower than a year earlier, and the largest drop (-7.2%) was among students aged 18-20 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center).¹ More than a few universities reacted by freezing or cutting programs, many of which were in the

¹ This decrease in enrollments may have affected men more than women, worsening an already-existing gender gap (Field 2021).

liberal arts (Dennon 2021). While at this point the pandemic's impact on language programs is unclear, even before 2020 headlines such as "Study Finds Sharp Decline in Foreign Language Enrollments" (Jaschik 2018) and "Colleges Lose a 'Stunning' 651 Foreign Language Programs in Three Years" (Johnson 2019) were already familiar to language instructors and administrators. The pre-COVID-19 numbers for Russian were a cause for concern but also contained some encouraging signs (Kraemer, Merrill, and Prestel 2020).

Concerns about the human element in emergency remote teaching were raised immediately (Lederman 2020a). The overall impact on faculty was palpable. In an international survey of over 600 language instructors, most reported significant amounts of stress during 2020, and the authors of the survey call the stress "enormous" (Jin et al. 2021, 19). Sources of stress were professional (lack of familiarity with technology and no time to learn it properly, isolation from colleagues and students) and personal (financial concerns, family responsibilities, health factors) (Marshall, Shannon, and Love 2020). Those instructors with online teaching experience were inundated with urgent emergency requests for participating in, leading, and creating webinars to help their colleagues switch to emergency remote teaching, adding to the workload and stress levels of all involved. Faculty reported various strategies (with varying success) for addressing this greater-than-usual stress (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020).

Not all faculty members experienced the pandemic the same way. It likely affected women and caregivers more than others (Skinner, Betancourt, and Wolff-Eisenberg 2021). The pandemic quite possibly exacerbated the existing divide between non-tenure-system and tenure-system faculty. It is well known that the percentage of non-tenure-stream positions in US universities has been increasing, and today more than half of faculty positions are part-time and over 70% are contingent (AAUP). Well before 2020, the fact that most online instruction was done by non-tenure-system faculty was documented and studied (Chapman 2011; Mueller, Mandernach, and Sanderson 2013, 342; the latter found that online courses were more "effective" when taught by full-time [not necessarily tenured] faculty [345]). Yet the pandemic, to which many institutions responded with budget cuts, almost immediately showed "how fragile the situations of contingent faculty members actually are" (Executive Committee), which only added to the immense stress felt by this large group. On the other hand, the pandemic seems to have "spawned a dramatic increase in the number of submissions to academic journals" (Richards 2020, 334); assuming that most of these submissions were from tenure-system faculty

whose responsibilities include publishing, many of them have been able to continue this portion of their job mostly uninhibited by the pandemic.

Scholars have already begun to study the negative impact of the pandemic on students' mental health (Belenkova 2020; Wang et al. 2020). Like their instructors, students felt increased amounts of stress, which manifested itself in various ways (Charles et al. 2021). Much of this anxiety was related to non-academic questions such as personal and family health, economic well-being, and the overall unpredictability of the virus. It also was caused by disruptions to academic plans and missed opportunities such as canceled study abroad programs (Vovk and Mommadova 2020). Researchers have already begun studying student stress during the pandemic in the larger context of stress studies, including coping strategies students adopted, mostly under lockdown orders (Baloran 2020; Russell 2020). It was fortunate that during these stressful times, instructors shared among themselves assignments and classroom strategies that helped keep isolated and vulnerable students motivated (Fuentes Hernández and Flórez 2020).

Of great importance for the future will be an understanding of students' academic experience during COVID-19, revealed through surveys of their online experiences and preferences regarding mode of delivery (for examples, see Erickson 2020; Lederman 2020b; Novikov 2020). Surveys of various groups mostly show similar results: students appreciate the flexibility and control of asynchronous learning but miss the personal contact of synchronous learning, online and especially face-to-face (Erickson 2020; Lin and Li 2020; Rozhkova and Rozhkova 2020; Berardi 2021). The recognition that both modes have advantages may explain the popularity among students (over online delivery) of the HyFlex model according to one study (Kohnke and Moorhouse 2021).

Colleagues from around the world shared their experiences of shifting to online delivery in various contexts (see, for example, Akhmetzyanova, Smolentseva, and Moskaleva 2020 [Turkmenistan]; Bao 2020 [Beijing University]; De Santis 2020 [Defense Language Institute]; Ross and DiSalvo 2020 [Harvard Language Center]; and Drucker and Fleischhauer 2021 [Germany]). Several colleagues at Russian universities have written about the transition to online learning at their institutions (Almazova et al. 2020; Dvorakova and Kulachinskaya 2020; Goncharova and Zaitseva 2020). Regardless of their location, these programs faced similar challenges: little previous experience and very little time to learn new technologies; providing instructors with opportunities to learn new technologies in a short time; uneven and inconsistent access to quality

internet and appropriate technology; and efforts to ensure that educational standards and goals are maintained during online delivery.

Due to COVID-19, almost all language instructors have had to use some online delivery of their subjects or are at least far more aware of online instruction than they were previously. Another question will be about the lasting impact, if any, on our profession. On the basis of survey responses, Superville (2020) argues that remote learning “will keep a strong foothold even after the pandemic.” Jin et al. discovered that, during the pandemic, language faculty attitudes toward teaching online in the future were to a great degree determined by their attitudes toward student readiness, their own level of confidence, the training and support they received from their institutions, and their own levels of stress, even if they understood that emergency remote teaching is not the same as well-planned online teaching (2021, 9). Nevertheless, these same language faculty acknowledge that online language instruction is a trend “they must take seriously” (17). Jin et al. also found that “Among all the factors investigated in the study, only three—perceived values, self-confidence, and stress—had significant positive effects on participants’ intention to adopt online language teaching in the future” (17). Regardless of their stance regarding online instruction, the “vast majority” of language faculty report being willing to integrate more technology into their face-to-face teaching in the future (Jin et al. 2021 19). Colleagues in Russia make similar predictions; for example, Strelchuk (2021) argues, based on survey results, that, as online teaching methods improve, the teaching of Russian as a FL in Russia will likely move toward a more hybrid format, despite the presence of some who are “totally against online teaching” (105). Regardless of future outcomes, the pandemic quickly raised awareness of online instruction at a speed and to an extent that would not otherwise have taken place.

3. Digital Equity, Inclusivity, and Access to Learning

Online curricular development is not new to our field (e.g., Meskill and Anthony 2005; Spasova and Welsh 2020). Prior to COVID-19, some Slavic language programs across the country had offered language courses in blended and fully online learning environments (e.g., Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy 2017; Klimova this issue). The technologies and practices, however, have been implemented unevenly. Online and hybrid language classes were often blended with in-person on-campus instructional modules and out-of-class conversation practice, and students had some degree of flexibility in choosing the medium of instruction that worked best with their schedule and preferences.

The COVID-19-instigated shift to almost exclusively online delivery of language instruction for most students has revealed economic and social disparities in the student population, disrupting students' regular learning routines and exposing inequalities in teaching and learning ("Taking Colleges Online," Inside Higher Ed Special Report 2020). While opening a new space for expansive thinking and bold innovation in language education, this shift has also amplified the necessity to create swift and effective approaches to ensure digital equity in online language learning opportunities.

Many academic programs across the country were forced to confront the issues of digital accessibility that extended far beyond previous efforts narrowly focused on the supply side of technology (the question of whether a student has access to a device). Contrary to the well-established belief that most young people these days have uninterrupted access to the internet, broadband access in some residential areas is still very limited (Bauer 2020). Even in the most wired metropolitan areas, wi-fi access can be porous and unstable, especially in the wake of the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Some families had to forego internet and educational opportunities altogether because medical bills and unexpected loss of income drained their family budgets (Sharp 2020). A national survey conducted by Digital Promise published in July 2020 found that more than 20% of undergraduate students had technical difficulties with internet connection, software and hardware that significantly impeded their learning progress during the pandemic ("Suddenly Online").

During the pandemic, successful learning depended not only on a student's access to a stable high-speed internet connection and devices with videoconferencing capabilities, but also on time, dedicated study space, financial stability, the health of relatives and friends, and academic, financial, and emotional support. A lack of one or more of these factors put students at risk by restricting their engagement with online learning opportunities. For example, without critical campus resources such as libraries and wi-fi, many lower-income students were forced to abandon plans to continue with classwork or even withdraw from their academic programs ("Bridging the Digital Divide: Lessons From COVID-19"). On-campus support networks and resources help level the playing field for students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Digital equity has proved to be very complex in its connections with other institutional and societal systems and deserves further study.

The increased attention paid to digital inequities was not limited to the abrupt transition to virtual teaching and service provision. The

pandemic coincided with the rise of anti-racist movements in response to the killing of George Floyd and other non-white Americans as well as increased hate crimes directed against Asian Americans. Numerous protests and demonstrations across the country ignited national conversations about inequality and systemic racism in all spheres of public life, including education. These conversations added another layer of complexity and urgency to the question of inclusivity and diversity and the impact of virtual teaching on various student populations. National organizations, such as AATSEEL, ACTR, and ASEEEES, have reacted to these social changes, publishing strong position statements calling on scholars in Russian and Slavic Studies to advocate for greater diversity and inclusion among students and faculty, and for the implementation of innovative teaching strategies with a particular focus on increasing the success of underserved and marginalized students from low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+ students, first-generation students, and students of color (e.g., “SEEJ Forum: Working towards equity in Slavic language and literature programs,” Winter 2020).

Many of the articles in this special edition of *Russian Language Journal* address various aspects of inclusivity and access to learning during the pandemic. Since March 2020, instructors have been grappling with issues associated with the creation of inclusive learning environments that can accommodate different learning styles and socio-economic statuses (Garza this issue), be responsive to varied student attitudes and perceptions about the effectiveness of online language learning (e.g., Klimanova and Vinokurova this issue; Sivachenko and Nedashkivska this issue), but also offer integrated mental health and moral support systems (e.g., Kolesnikova this issue; Evans-Romaine et al. this issue; Vinokurova this issue). In addition to the question of access, emergency remote teaching has prompted language professionals to reevaluate established practices in online language education in light of emerging socio-economic and humanistic considerations, including the rigid structure of courses and fixed homework due dates (“OLC Continuity Planning and Emergency Preparedness”), use of texting tools and video cameras (Borup, West, and Gram 2012; Kaplan-Rakowski 2021), screen fatigue and the balance of synchronous and asynchronous instruction (Bowers-Abbott and Hourchard 2021) and formative and summative assessments (Gunn this issue).

4. Impact on Language Assessment and Testing

Language assessment and testing also have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Many high-stakes language assessments, such as national

and global language proficiency tests and certificates (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, TRFL), could not be delivered in person, which created obstacles for those seeking educational opportunities and employment. Traditional in-house language placement tests had to be replaced by alternative evaluative procedures or cancelled altogether in some universities (Ockey 2021). In response, programs adapted by using scores from a different test or an online version of an existing test (Isbell and Kremmel 2021). To meet the community's needs, testing companies began to offer alternative formats of high-stakes language examinations and to adapt proctoring protocols in order to comply with national and state regulations for remote delivery of instruction and social distancing in accordance with the public health measures taken in response to COVID-19. This unprecedented support of public health measures resulted in a "watershed moment" in language teaching (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020) and in language testing practices (Chappell 2021).

In the United States, some language tests used for awarding college credit for high school coursework, such as the National Examinations in World Languages and Advanced Placement Exams, have partially transitioned to at-home administration, or the organizations administering them have offered shortened versions of their regular language tests (Isbell and Kremmel 2021). In March 2020, Language Testing International (LTI), a US-based language testing agency responsible for administering, among other languages, Russian proficiency examinations in collaboration with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), began to offer revised Out of School testing options for the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) and the ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment (ALIRA) ("K-12 COVID-19 Response"). Similarly, the TRFL (Тест по русскому языку как иностранному, ТРКИ) testing centers in many countries introduced asynchronous online testing options in which test takers are allowed to take the Russian language examination from home ("В Польше впервые прошло тестирование по русскому языку в формате онлайн," 2020). This new format of distance Russian language certification may become a new norm and would allow testing centers to accommodate test users in need of language proficiency certificates who are unable to come to a testing facility due to restricted mobility or other circumstances. Accepting results from distance language tests for high-stakes decisions raised a number of concerns about examination security and validity of scores and pushed national testing agencies to consider alternatives to standard practices and start thinking about at-home testing as a potentially permanent and viable

alternative to proctored tests administered in a classroom or in a language testing facility (Isbell and Kremmel 2021).

At the institutional level, a sudden transition to at-home language testing and assessment was named one of the biggest challenges of emergency remote language teaching during the pandemic (e.g., Gunn this issue). Many paper-based assessment instruments originally designed for in-person language instruction were not suitable for fully online delivery (Oh 2020) and required substantial modifications (Goertler and Gacs 2018; Goertler 2019; Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020). Transitioning paper-based tests and in-person oral assessments to online platforms raised many questions about validity of test results, access, and security.

Instructors strived to accommodate learners' varied technology skills and to ensure the provision of uninterrupted access to online testing platforms for all remote students. In addition, instructors needed to take into account issues of student privacy and intellectual property, and to accommodate learners with disabilities in fully online language-learning contexts. The situation with language assessment was aggravated by the fact that third-party remote proctoring companies, such as *Examity* and *LogMeIn*, suspended their services almost immediately after the transition to remote online delivery (Wan 2020); moreover, it became virtually impossible to provide remote proctors in larger language programs. This complication posed a threat to the validity of course exam scores due to possible academic misconduct, such as the use of textbook and reference materials, requests for help during an exam, and security of testing materials. While the consequences of academic misconduct on in-class examinations may not be as grave as for high-stakes tests (after all, instructors can always create a new set of evaluation materials), the fairness of an exam or evaluation procedure can be compromised, sowing doubt and causing frustration for students taking an exam in good faith. To add to the complexity of classroom language assessment during the pandemic, the mental health and well-being of students, instructors, and their families, as well as anxiety associated with online instructional delivery, had to be taken into consideration when alternative forms of assessment were proposed (e.g., MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020).

Student anxiety may also be associated with the lack of agency in the selection of instructional delivery mode (Russell 2020), including the format of assessment. If online instruction is not a good fit for every language learner (Russell and Murphy-Judy 2020), neither is online language assessment, particularly one that is completed in an uncontrolled, technologically unfamiliar environment. The pandemic renewed interest

in a “humanizing” approach to in-class language assessment along with other forms of humanistic teaching (Stevick 1990) and ways of creating a relaxed, accepting, and non-threatening online learning atmosphere for language learners. To reduce student stress and anxiety, some language instructors implemented the “chunking” method in which larger summative assessments were chunked and spread out over a period of time. A greater emphasis was placed on formative assessments administered frequently via learning management systems and other online platforms, and assessments that prompted learners’ content choice in performance-oriented tasks (as opposed to achievement-based assessments) (Doludenko this issue; Gunn this issue). Such humanistic assessment allows for greater flexibility, learner self-actualization, and attendance to students’ individual learning needs.

5. Teacher Preparedness for Emergency Remote Online Teaching and Instructional Technology Leadership

As the pandemic disrupted the usual ways of teaching for large numbers of instructors, many felt unprepared for the switch to teaching online (Jin et al. 2021). This is true for the field of Russian language learning and teaching as well. In a pre-pandemic survey about technology and Russian language teaching conducted by Shannon Donnally Spasova and Jason Merrill (with help from Meghan Birch),² almost half of respondents reported that no online courses were offered at their institutions, only about 8% of first-year Russian courses were taught online, and over 40% of those surveyed had never used videoconferencing in their teaching. More than a quarter felt they did not have the training to teach online and over half of the respondents wanted more training in technology. Despite numerous studies pointing out the benefits of technology in the classroom (Meskill and Anthony 2007; Liu and Chao 2017) and indicating that online and blended language teaching may be as effective as face-to-face teaching (Jin et al. 2021), in 2017 over 40% of respondents felt that online courses were not as effective as face-to-face courses.

Experts in the field of online language teaching and technology in language pedagogy have long called for additional training in technology for instructors (Jin et al. 2021). In our survey of the Russian field, over

² The survey was conducted in Fall of 2017. It included demographic questions and questions about the following topics: types of technology used, attitudes toward technology, formats of technology-enhanced courses, reasons and goals for using technology, training and comfort in using technology, perceptions of student attitudes toward technology, and the perceived value of technology in teaching by institutions. Seventy-two participants completed the survey.

80% of respondents said that they had learned about using technology in teaching on their own, and only 13% had taken any formal coursework in the use of technology in teaching. Younger faculty and current graduate students (those with 0-5 years teaching experience) reported the lowest rate of training in the use of technology (18.2%) and a rate of formal technology coursework (9.1%) that was significantly lower than colleagues with 6-20 years' experience (28.6% and 21.4%). This result does not align with the fact that open faculty positions in Russian often list experience and proficiency with learning technology as a desired qualification for the preferred candidate. The twenty listings posted between September 29, 2017 and September 12, 2018 on the "Employment Opportunities" section of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages website mention as desired or required qualifications: "strong computer literacy," "a critical and creative attitude to instructional technology," "background in online education and pedagogy," "teaching with technology," "expertise in language pedagogy, language-learning in digitally mediated environments, technology-enhanced (TE) language course design," "digital literacy in SL education," and other less specific qualifications that likely include technology such as "innovative pedagogy" (<https://www.aatseel.org/joblist>). Those who had been teaching from 6 to 20 years were more likely to have taken formal coursework in technology, which could indicate that they sought it after they had finished graduate school and had begun a faculty position. Although our survey did not ask Russian instructors if their current institutions offer training on the use of technology, the responses pointed to a potential disconnect in training opportunities; over a third (35.3%) stated that the use of technology was expected in their teaching, yet over 80% said that they learned how to use technology without institutional support. These numbers suggest that institutions that expect instructors to use technology need to provide more opportunities for in-house training in the use of technology. Because institutions were forced to offer more training to accommodate the move to emergency teaching, the need for systemized training opportunities has become apparent. Additionally, many of the programs offered by universities to help instructors move online during the pandemic were not sufficiently focused on the teaching of language specifically (Jin et al. 2021). The desire for candidates to have real expertise in instructional technology, beyond the scramble to move to online teaching in 2020, is only likely to grow in the post-COVID environment. Teacher education in using technology in language teaching needs to become a regular part of graduate curricula, and work by relevant organizations such as the

International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) and the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO) needs to be promoted to graduate students and new teachers.

Technology use has not been traditionally prioritized as part of the reward systems prevalent in academic institutions. Non-tenure-system positions have a heavier course load than tenure-line positions, often including more language courses that come with expectations that their instructors will be leaders in the use of technology. In our pre-COVID survey, only 4% of tenured faculty said they use technology because administrators prefer it, but 23.5% of non-tenure-system faculty cited administrator preference as a reason they use technology, likely because of the lack of stability inherent in their positions and their perception that they need to align their teaching more closely with administrative priorities. The percentage of tenured (45.5%) and tenure-track (25%) faculty who reported being very comfortable using technology is significantly lower than those of non-tenure-track (70.6%) and part-time (60%) faculty. This result is also not surprising, as the use of technology is more common in lower-level language courses (Goertler 2019, 65), which tend to be taught by non-tenure-system faculty and, as Galanek, Gierdowski, and Brooks (2018) and Goertler (2019) show, the more instructors are exposed to technology, the more positive their attitude toward it becomes. Non-tenure-system faculty members, while carrying a heavy course load, also have to teach themselves how to use constantly changing technologies, investing extra time to attend workshops and seminars (and in cases where institutional support does not exist, they must spend the time to find and evaluate existing opportunities). Non-tenure-system faculty were more likely to reply that they would like more training (61%, versus 33% of tenured faculty). Tenured faculty were much more likely to say they would not use more technology if they had more training (25% versus 0% of pre-tenure faculty and 11% of non-tenure-system faculty). Researchers should look more deeply into the divisions between tenure-system and non-tenure-system faculty in the areas of attitudes toward and use of technology in language teaching. Many non-tenure-system faculty are enthusiastic and heavy users of educational technology, and, though they may have significant expertise and experience with technology, they are often not empowered to influence institution-wide decisions about technology and curricula. This disconnect should be examined more closely as the numbers of non-tenure-system faculty continue to rise.

Following the pandemic, more faculty are likely to be open to teaching online or to integrating more technologies into their teaching

(Jin et al. 2021). However, the fact that the majority of instructors began teaching online in a crisis situation rather than in the context of planned online language education (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020) suggests that more online training and support is needed for faculty to be successful (Brinkley-Etzkorn 2019; Moser, Wei, and Brenner 2020). In addition, the fact that experienced online teachers are often not decisionmakers in educational institutions needs to be acknowledged as a side effect of the deepening divide between tenured and contingent faculty.

6. Predicting Change: Russian Language Teaching in the Post-Pandemic Era

As traumatic as the transition to emergency remote language teaching has been for many of us, it may help bring about more positive attitudes toward the value of online language teaching as a viable complement or alternative to face-to-face instruction. This “unprecedented immersion with technology” (Jin et al. 2021, 19) may lead to greater willingness to continue to explore online delivery. The number of hybrid and online Russian courses may increase, and more face-to-face courses will likely incorporate more technologies, as many instructors have experienced for the first time some of their clear advantages. Familiarity with videoconferencing could introduce more flexibility in teaching for a variety of purposes (such as office hours and advising) and reasons (e.g., illness, weather, conference and other professional travel).

The pandemic forced instructors to consider new methods of assessment. Both high- and low-stakes assessments will likely be reevaluated, with emphasis on access while maintaining quality and validity. In-class assessments may be increasingly moved online, providing flexibility and access.

COVID-19 drew attention to the need for more training in technology and online teaching. Graduate programs should include teaching with technology as a required part of the curriculum and offer practice in online and hybrid language teaching as they have in face-to-face teaching for decades.³ Some of this work can be done by familiarizing graduate students with organizations that focus on technology in language teaching. Institutions should offer support to those using technology in their teaching and continue to develop more discipline-specific offerings.

³ In 2017, Kessler and Hubbard reported that “many language teachers are still graduating without having received sufficient formal preparation and there continues to be a general lack of autonomy among teachers when using technology” (2017, 285).

We recommend that institutional leaders recognize the importance of expertise in technology and adjust promotion and annual review procedures to prompt faculty to prioritize this expertise, as well as increase the numbers of faculty in leadership positions who have experience teaching online or with technology. More research should be conducted on best practices in online and hybrid language teaching so that we can continue to leverage those features that most benefit students in their learning of Russian.

The language teaching community would benefit greatly from the continuation of the spirit of cooperation that existed during the pandemic, through webinars, conferences, and the sharing of experiences, advice, and resources. Groups and communities that emerged to provide support in response to an urgent need in the spring of 2020 can continue to serve as hubs for information and community. Institutions can cooperate using our newly learned common language of virtual communication by pooling resources and hosting events open to the larger community.

Ideally, institutions and faculty will continue to focus attention on and propose solutions to the myriad barriers to access that face instructors and students. The pandemic exposed the reality of the digital divide in higher education, which hampered learners who already experienced socioeconomic barriers to completing educational programs (McKenzie 2021). Although technology has highlighted some of these barriers to access, there are many ways that it can also be used to overcome them. We hope that conversations about the digital divide in education and inclusive teaching practices that were started during the pandemic will continue to raise questions about equity and access in teaching and learning and will offer solutions that lead us to our common goal of equal access to learning resources for students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

7. This Volume

To capture a variety of experiences with emergency remote language teaching during the pandemic, this volume contains four types of articles by program administrators, practitioners, and researchers that address aspects of the effect of the pandemic on the teaching of Russian. First come **administrative reports**, in which representatives of Russian programs describe ways in which they adjusted to the pandemic and lessons learned for the future. Next are traditional **research articles** that analyze data gained from pandemic teaching to further our knowledge of online instruction. The third section contains papers describing online **pedagogical innovations**

developed during the pandemic. The volume ends with **reflective essays** (“**think pieces**”) that look ahead to the teaching of Russian after the pandemic. The volume concludes with an afterword (Martin, this issue) that summarizes a number of recurrent themes that appear in this special volume and offers some predictions for the post-pandemic future of our profession.

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