ONLINE TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT: LESSONS IN AFFECTIVE EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted higher education classrooms and required faculty, across disciplines and irrespective of their skill or preference, to transition their pedagogical approaches to virtual/online formats. This transition appears permanent. For example, data collected in the United States found that distance education courses are on the rise, with 75% of undergraduate students in the US being enrolled in at least one distance education course in the fall of 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). Most certainly, online education creates unique challenges in the ways that professors address the various domains of learning. This switch from classroom teaching to virtual instruction is particularly salient in the fields that require significant affective education, instruction, and skill development. This is significant in the social sciences such as Human Services, Psychology, and Social Work, where intervention skills and affective change is equally as important as cognitive gains or shifts.

Bloom's taxonomy proposes three learning domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and kinetic/psychomotor (Bloom, 1956). While translating cognitive knowledge is rather simple, the bigger challenge is translating affective and kinetic learning from in-person experiences to those online. Affective learning involves students' attitudes, values, and emotional connection to the material and fellow classmates. In the social sciences, for example, this requires teachers to change how students understand, value, and intervene while working with a client in crisis.

In 2019, The Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance and Quality Matters group assembled a committee of experts (the National Standards for Quality team) which created "best practices" for on-line courses. Originally designed for K-12 settings, these standards are also applicable to higher education environments. These practices include six standards for the development of online courses (National Standards for Quality [NSQ], 2019). Two of the standards address instructional design and learner assessment, both of which ground this presentation.

In this session, we will share lessons learned and teaching tips from our transition from face-to-face skill-based classes to online formats (both synchronous and asynchronous). In particular, this session will explain how to facilitate meaningful online discussions and structure role plays so that each member of the triad (i.e., counselor, observer, client) have a meaningful experience. The workshop will also provide specific examples of how to translate emotional and kinetic learning experiences to an on-line environment. Finally, the session will also share assessment tools such as rubrics that clarify assignment expectations and promote student engagement and learning in a digital educational environment.

Keywords: Online teaching, affective teaching, learning.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted higher education classrooms and required faculty, across disciplines and irrespective of their skill or preference, to transition their pedagogical approaches to virtual/online formats. In fact, it was estimated that over 98% of worldwide learners (1.725 billion) from pre-school through higher education were impacted by July of 2020 (United Nations, 2020). With very little notice and no guidelines, parents, students, and teachers had to adjust to a new pedagogical experience with mixed results (Lemay, Bozelais, & Doleck, 2021). This transition appears permanent. For example, data collected in the United States found that distance education courses are on the rise, with 75% of undergraduate students in the US being enrolled in at least one distance education course in the fall of 2020 (NCES, 2022). Most certainly, online education creates unique challenges in the ways that professors address the various domains of learning. Not surprisingly, during the pandemic, students were prevented from developing natural, face-to-face connections with one another and noticed this lack of connection. For example, Lemay et al. (2021) reported that over 75% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed

with the statement "I interacted with my classmates." This switch from classroom teaching to virtual instruction is particularly salient in the fields that require significant affective education, instruction, and skill development. This is significant in the social sciences such as Human Services, Psychology, and Social Work, where intervention skills and affective change is equally as important as cognitive gains or shifts.

2. Discussion of frameworks

Bloom's taxonomy proposes three learning domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and kinetic/psychomotor (Bloom, 1956). While translating cognitive knowledge from in-person experiences to those online is rather simple, the bigger challenge is translating affective and kinetic learning for students. Affective learning involves students' attitudes, values, and emotional connection to the material and fellow classmates. In the Human Services classroom, this requires us, as professors, to change how students understand, value, and intervene while working with a variety of clients such as young children, the elderly, or those in the midst of a mental health crisis.

To further advance Blooms' original taxonomy, Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1956) created a five-level hierarchy for the affective domain. The first level, Receiving, involves the student's awareness and willingness to acknowledge the presence of emotional stimuli. Responding is the second level and refers to the student's motivation to engage with the material and respond to others in a satisfying manner. The third level, Valuing, is the ability to understand, accept, and express preference regarding one's values and beliefs. The fourth level, Organization, "…refers to the learner's internalization of values and beliefs involving (1) the conceptualization of values; and (2) the organization of a value system. As values or beliefs become internalized, the learner organizes them according to priority" (Krathwohl et al., 1956). The final level, Characterization, is the highest level of value integration. In this stage, students create a value set and can consistently practice from this frame or perspective. This classification system is helpful in "Setting the stage" as we offer our lessons learned in transitioning our in-person classroom activities to those online.

In 2019, The Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance and Quality Matters group assembled a committee of experts (the National Standards for Quality, or NSQ, team) which created "best practices" for on-line courses. Originally designed for K-12 settings, these standards are also applicable to higher education environments. These practices include six standards for the development of online courses (NSQ, 2019). Standard A focused on course overview and support which includes policies and procedures related to course expectations, grading, and the role of the syllabus. Standard B discusses the role of course content including issues related to accessibility and ensuring course materials are aligned with course objectives. Standard C involves instructional design issues. Key aspects of this standard involve creating activities and opportunities for students to engage with the material, each other, and the instructor. Standard D examines learner assessment and addresses the need for varied and flexible assessment strategies. Standard E focuses on accessibility and useability for all types of learners. The final standard (F) explores technological issues such as learning platforms and internet programs (NSQ, 2019). For our discussion, we used the principles and techniques that are most closely aligned with Standard C (Instructional Design) and Standard D (Assessment). Taken together, Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia's five-level hierarchy for the affective domain and the NSQ Standards around instructional design and assessment allowed us the most support in designing intentional, effective, assessment tools and instructional activities that were well-suited for the achievement of our online course objectives.

3. Examples of virtual classroom activities

3.1. Receiving level

The first level of the hierarchy is Receiving, and this level addresses the student's willingness to acknowledge the presence of emotional stimuli (Krathwohl et al., 1956). As instructors in a Human Services and Counseling Department, the Receiving level requires us to consider how, from the initial class meeting, we create an environment conducive to emotional learning which relates well to the NSQ's Instructional Design Standard. We take care to facilitate meaningful introductions between the class as a whole and within small groups, which is a format we frequently use to allow students the ability to create safe space to discuss emotionally laden material. We not only discuss rules and expectations of the course, but also how, in an online format, to adhere to appropriate virtual classroom etiquette standards and interaction expectations. We use the first-class meeting to create a sense of community within the classroom, develop student-led behavioral expectations, and discuss safety in topics often raised in our classrooms such as substance use, physical abuse, and suicide.

An additional strategy to prepare students for emotional learning is the use of guest speakers to role-model engaging in affect-laden material. Guest speakers are often used to present content as a replacement for or supplement to the professor's instruction. We suggest using guest speakers to demonstrate how to connect with emotional topics. For example, a guest speaker will share their personal

journey as a helping professional. They will discuss how they manage complicated issues like countertransference and vicarious trauma. The guest speakers demonstrate what we expect students to do later in the course- develop a self-reflective practice that explores the meaning behind the work, not just the work itself.

3.2. Responding level

The Responding level refers to the student's motivation to engage with the material and respond to others (Krathwohl et al., 1956). An excellent example of Responding activities and Standard C (Instructional Design) is the use of creative and intentional discussion boards. Certainly, discussions (pre-pandemic) in the classroom needed to continue despite the transition to online platforms. However, we observed that the prior tendencies that occurred in face-to-face classrooms (e.g., several students doing most of the contributing, introverted students allowing others to answer most of the open-ended questions posed by the instructor, etc.) were only amplified by the online platforms of Zoom or Teams. Therefore, from an instructional design perspective, we adapted our use of discussions to include both synchronous and asynchronous courses and provided more structure for students in both settings. For example, when we hold online, synchronous class meetings, students are provided with the discussion prompt using the chat feature in addition to the verbal directions. Typically, the instructor provides context and information first, and then leads the class in a large (or small) group discussion. Regardless of the type, students are given expectations ahead of time such as "we will take our first break after everyone in the course has made at least one contribution" or "students with opinion A must pair themselves in a group with at least one student holding opinion B." That way, despite the distance, students feel obliged to contribute. Sometimes students are also given the choice to contribute one of two ways: "off-mute" (verbally) or in the chat (non-verbally). It is encouraging to note that multiple students who remain introverted during synchronous class verbal discussions have slowly taken over a large presence in the chat feature of a discussion held virtually.

In asynchronous course modules, students receive even more instruction and structure around discussion expectations from the professor. For example, after watching several video clips, students will be required during an asynchronous class to contribute to a discussion thread. In each discussion, students are required to make two contributions: an initial post and an interaction post. They are told in the initial post to include things like which video they have selected to summarize and why (e.g., most helpful, generated the most questions, made them think of a related topic previously discussed, etc.). They often summarize the key points or takeaways and offer the most relevant or helpful information to those students who chose a different video. Then, in the second part, their interaction post*s* usually include questions to classmates. They are often asked to select one person with whom they agree and one with which they disagree. In many instances, we have observed that this format can generate more balanced, rich discussion than when compared to in-person interactions between students.

Related to the idea of Responding to material is the process of receiving feedback from the professor. An important component of NSQ Standard D (Learner Assessment) is the need for varied and flexible assessment strategies (NSQ, 2019). Some important lessons from our transition to on-line modalities included the need to transition from heavily weighted assignments that were due at the end of the semester to projects that were broken down into smaller parts with due dates spread throughout the semester. This approach also allowed for frequent faculty feedback on various project components (e.g., outline, presentation topics, presentation delivery strategies) instead of one-time feedback at the conclusion of the project. Students were also given more flexibility regarding the construction of assignments. For example, students could present their group project either live, or as a pre-recorded video. In addition, several instructors changed their examinations procedures from everyone completing the exam on a specific day/time to a model in which the exam is available for a period of time (e.g., 5 days). Exams are still timed (e.g., no more than 90 minutes) and students have only one attempt, but they can choose the day/time that is best for them.

3.3. Valuing level

Valuing is the ability to understand, accept and express preference regarding one's values and beliefs (Krathwohl et al., 1956). A good example of Valuing activities is the use of role-plays and peer-to-peer feedback. In Human Services, many courses in our curriculum are skill-based and hands-on such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Small Group Dynamics, and Counseling the Substance Abuser. Embedded in these courses is the frequent use of peer feedback. Since the courses involve the development of important counseling skills, the habit of engaging in clinical supervision is also part of the learning. The courses include significant amount of class time for role-playing and skills practice. Since it is impossible for the instructor to be present at every practice session, students need to learn how to give honest, supportive, and helpful feedback. They also need to develop the skills needed to engage effectively in supervision; these skills are grounded in the experience of accepting constructive feedback and incorporating that feedback into their practice. For many activities, students are divided into triads:

counselor, client, coach. Each student in the triad will have the opportunity to play each role. The coaching role is vital and offers students the opportunity to give feedback to the "counselor" in the triad. A common expectation of the "coach" is to offer one area of strength and one of needed improvement.

Considering the importance of assessment (NSQ Standard D), students are asked to understand and express their values and beliefs as they move through our sequence of coursework. In our Introduction to Human Services class, student complete a self-assessment instrument exploring their strengths and weaknesses on certain counselor traits like empathy, acceptance, and genuineness. In an essay, they discuss their findings and design a plan for areas they wish to improve. In our classes that require group work, students often use a rubric that they complete midway and then again after the final presentation is submitted. Students rate themselves and their group members on criteria such as Listening Skills, Preparation, Leadership, and Openness to Others' Ideas (Altman, 2009). We have found that these tools aid in clarifying assignment expectations and promote students' ability to self-assess and monitor their progress throughout the semester. Finally, students express their values and beliefs through a number of writing assignments as they work in internships. For example, students conduct a cultural competence assessment as well as an ethics assessment in which they use their observations of their placement to compare and contrast what they have learned in their coursework. Expressing their preferences for their values and beliefs is especially important when what they observe as interns in the field contradicts what they learned in the classroom. The subsequent discussions with their supervisor about these discrepancies are often rich and productive conversations that students report as being novel and often very impactful.

3.4. Organization level

Organization refers to the student's ..."internalization of values and beliefs involving (1) the conceptualization of values; and (2) the organization of a value system. As values or beliefs become internalized, the learner organizes them according to priority" (Krathwohl et al., 1956). During and after the pandemic, faculty have had success with several online activities, rituals, and behaviors that promote students' learning (both emotional and kinetic) at the Organization level.

Regardless of delivery mode (online, face-to-face, hybrid), we believe that the most meaningful work on the Organizational level of the hierarchy occurs in our field experience courses where students work in the field for 15, 20, or 30 hours per week under the supervision of a Master's-level professional and then attend a seminar-style class on campus with faculty to promote additional reflection and education. Predictably, they face many practical and developmental challenges that test their belief systems such as the maintenance of professional boundaries and the on-going need for self-care. During each virtual class meeting, students engage in the topic of boundaries and self-care through small, breakout discussions, student-led facilitations of the entire group, and through their reported "check-in" about how their experience on the job is going. The rich discussion that follows often helps to reinforce their emerging abilities to problem-solve and highlights the nuances involved in the shift from student to professional.

Moving to an online teaching modality created challenges in the ways that students were able to bring their successes and vulnerabilities into the seminar course. It was important for us as faculty to cultivate a classroom culture in which sharing, albeit on the computer screen, remained a central focus of the curriculum. The organization or internalization of values and beliefs happens as students experience their field placements and interact with clients. This internalization is bolstered by our efforts as faculty to get them talking about the meaningful takeaways of their placement and the way this learning has either reinforced what they learned in the classroom or challenged what they have been taught. As instructors, we send out prompts for this week's topic, related events in the media that may spark additional interest from the group, and directions about any additional assignments or activities that they should anticipate.

In terms of assessment, we have shifted significantly how a student earns their grade in the field course; that is, participation, engagement, and professionalism during class is more heavily weighted to incentivize students to anticipate their contributions and plan for their time as the contributor of our classroom content. It seems that as we expect students to organize their experiences and beliefs and subsequently prioritize them, we too should place a priority on their ability to communicate those beliefs as and reward them accordingly.

3.5. Characterization level

Characterization is the highest level of value integration. In this stage, students create a value set and can consistently practice from this frame or perspective (Krathwohl et al., 1956). Similar to the Organization level, the Characterization level is best exemplified in our students as they are completing their Senior Experience as an intern in the field of Human Services and Counseling.

As virtual students, the seniors in this course are more comfortable with the structure of online course delivery, and this makes it easier as an instructor to ask them for additional input during class meeting times. They often report being offered jobs from their internship placements towards the end of the semester, and we create discussions for students to offer advice to one another about not only

job-seeking, but also the refusal of job offers, networking with colleagues, and the pursuit of higher education (as a Master's degree in Counseling has become more necessary in our field). The peer-to-peer feedback is an important concept in the senior-level course as it allows for students to show their value set and then explore, through their peer relationships, how to articulate, adjust, and benefit from that clarity of perspective.

A second example of Characterization is students using an ethical decision-making model to examine an ethical dilemma they have encountered in the field. In the Senior Internship class, students present an example of a situation that they have faced since joining the field of Human Services as a Practicum student. Typically, the selected example represents one that generated a significant emotional response from the student, as it might include an unexpected response from a supervisor or an agency's position on an issue that a student only recently learned about in the classroom. The discussion in the classroom informs the student's subsequent paper on the topic. Students report this exercise is particularly meaningful as the support received in the classroom often allows for a better response or behavioral shift in the workplace. It is only through the Characterization level that a student is able to consistently practice using their values developed over the course of the formal and informal education on campus and in the workplace.

Finally, our virtual students are engaging more and more with telehealth principles and practices. One shift since moving to an online format occurred in a senior-level counseling class that addresses trauma in clients. Often, the students are role-playing counseling skills with one another in addition to completing modules organized by various course topics. At the end of the semester, the student can choose to write a letter to their future, clinical supervisor introducing themselves or they can choose to make an introductory video. It has been very gratifying to watch the group of students over the last few semesters transition from the comfort of the letter writing to the relative ease that they create dynamic, interesting, and personal videos aimed at introducing themselves to a future supervisor. In the video, they talk about their needs in (and out) of supervision, their areas of strength and vulnerability, and their emerging theoretical orientation. As instructors, it is very exciting to see our students become adept at technological advances, so much so that they eagerly embrace online platforms in mental health treatment. This particular assignment represents well how our students are able to fully integrate and practice from a set of values by the completion of their senior internship course.

4. Conclusion

Like virtually every other industry, higher education was significantly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The transition from face-to-face course meetings to virtual class meetings, both synchronous and asynchronous, appears to be an enduring shift for college students and faculty. Using Bloom's taxonomy and the National Standards for Quality best practices for on-line courses, the authors offered strategies for engaging students in the online classroom. In particular, the promotion of affective learning was emphasized using the Krathwohl et al. (1956) hierarchy for the affective domain. From the first class meeting in which affective engagement begins, to the ways in which assessment is conducted, the authors offer ideas and tools for engagement in the affective domain of a student's development.

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