Pedagogy and the Pandemic

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Abstract

The first known case of the novel Coronavirus appeared on December 31, 2019 in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. The first reported death from Covid was also in Wuhan on January 9, 2020. The first death outside of China was in the Philippines on February 1, 2020 (WHO, 2020). While scientists are still in debate about whether the disease was manufactured in a lab or originated from bats, we can all agree that it has devastated people globally. There isn't a single region in the world that has not been affected by it. Covid-19 has singlehandedly changed the landscape of life abroad and here in Bermuda. The first confirmed Coronavirus case in Bermuda was reported on Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Hearing that it had breached our shores caused anxiety and fear. All schools, government and private, moved to a virtual platform. The virus was unique, unpredictable, and novel but, sadly for many educators, our pedagogy for years had been quite the opposite. In a matter of mere hours, educators were grappling to make adjustments in order to meet the crisis.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, pedagogy

Introduction

According to the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Distance Education emerged as a global movement in 1992 (AECT, 2001). Consequently, numerous educators all over the world have been designing curriculum and adjusting pedagogy in order to include scenarios in which the teacher and the learner are in different locations. A distance education committee at Bermuda College was established in 2008. Among other things, its goals were to encourage faculty to teach at least one online course, become online teaching certified, and utilize tools to accommodate different types of learning structures. What that committee had hoped to achieve for years was realized in only a matter of hours to the extent that nearly every course at Bermuda College was transformed into either a fully distance or hybrid course.

What is the specific goal of education during a time of crisis? What strategies are expendable, and which are indispensable? As it relates to pedagogy during the pandemic, this article will discuss involuntary change, technology literacy, networking, and future effects.
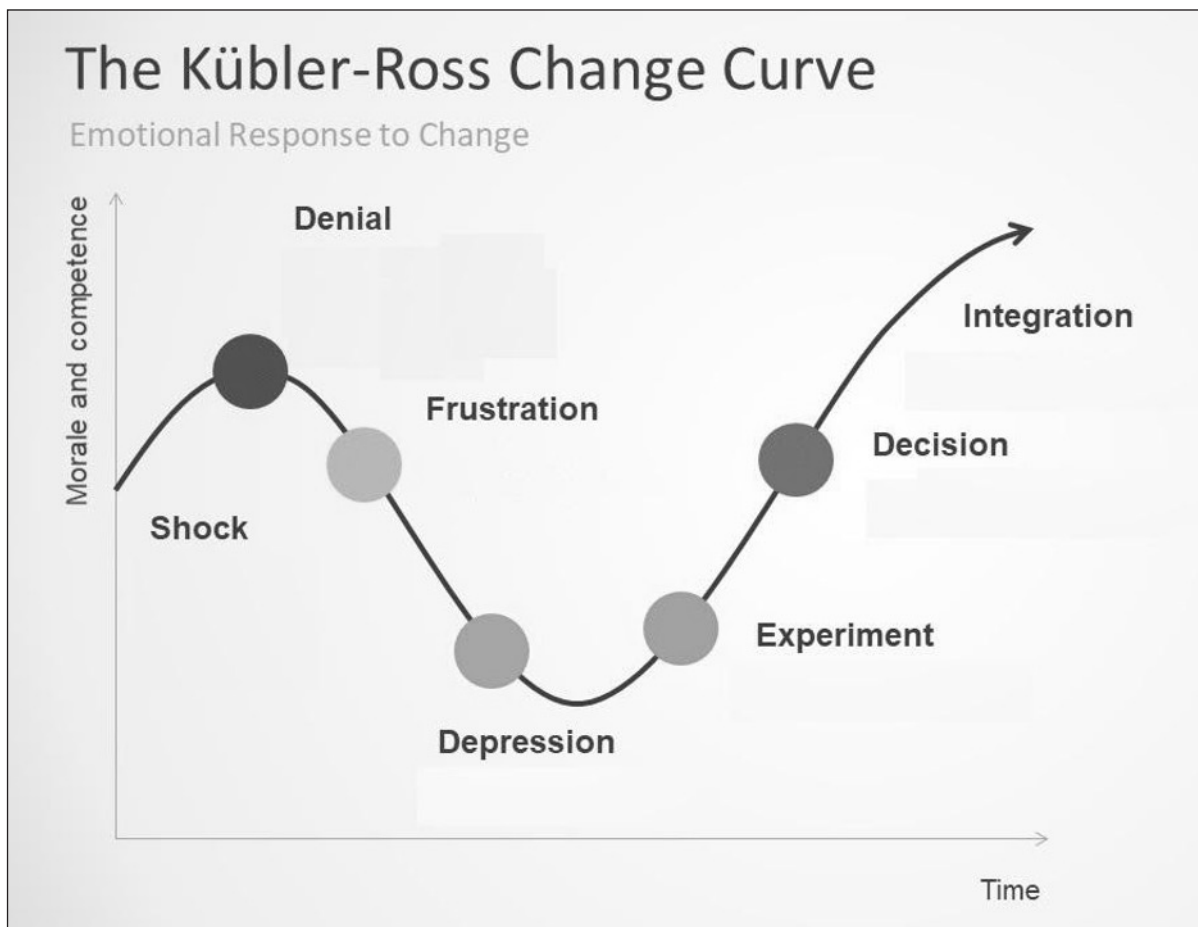
Involuntary Change

Cohen (2017) acknowledged that change is a constant companion in education, and educators must embrace the constancy of it. The pandemic certainly triggered a change to our current educational structure.

In 1969, psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross developed a curve based on the emotions that her patients experienced when facing death (Belyh, 2020). Most recently, variations of the Kubler-Ross model have been used by educators and others to highlight an individual's reaction to change in general. The model below is a true indicator of what many educators experienced and continue to encounter (Lovelace, 2020).

Figure 1

The Kübler-Ross Change Curve (1969)

The Kübler-Ross Change Curve
Emotional Response to Change

Morale and competence (y-axis)

Denial

Shock

Frustration

Depression

Experiment

Decision

Integration

Time (x-axis)

The Covid-19 pandemic caused some educators to experience the same symptoms as medical patients. The notification that all courses would be moved online was met with shock and denial among Bermuda College faculty. Everyone understood that safety should be the first priority; however, it was unthinkable that masks would be commonplace and that the entire island of Bermuda would be in lockdown. Frustration soon followed. Frustration for some was due to a lack of online preparedness. Current pedagogy for many educators was designed around face to face interactions. Developing an online course can be a daunting task. Add the shortness of available time dynamic; therefore, it is understandable why frustration was the result.

While some educators scrambled to find ways to engage students amidst the changing climate and unpredictable conditions, others looked for ways to remain the same. A smart board was merely replaced with a computer screen and a dry eraser with a stylus. Lesson plans remained flat and simply moved online.

With sites like *edx.org*, *Master Class*, and *Khan Academy* already online, what would be the draw for students to attend synchronous online courses? What information did each Bermuda College class have that uniquely set it apart, so that students could find value in attending class while having access to countless other resources?

Attempting to answer that question led educators to reconsider their pedagogical approaches. They saw the benefit of contextualization in teaching because all of the students were at home. Bedrooms were converted into classrooms,

so it was beneficial to connect course content to the 'real world.' After the experimentation stage, educators slowly began to find things that worked for them and their students. The *new normal* did not seem as new anymore.

The Kubler-Ross change model ends with acceptance and integration. Once educators realized that moving beyond the pandemic would take longer than expected, they began to adjust to the change out of a necessity to still be productive in the virtual classroom. Newly learned strategies such as flipped classrooms and virtual field trips were integrated into the pedagogy, and ingenuity was awakened.

Technology Literacy

One question that arose from the pandemic was how much technology literacy is required or necessary for a 21st century educator? When courses are being taught online, pedagogy is understandably influenced by the technology literacy of the educator. During Covid-19, technology provided educators with the medium to meet the students where they were. Technologically proficient educators had multiple ways to connect with students. In addition, not all students could receive the data in one way due to their varying resources at home. Consequently, differentiated instruction and assessment during the pandemic often hinged on the relationship between the technology literacy of the educator, the students, and the availability of technological resources. One author wrote, "It takes time, even for master teachers, to get to be good at teaching with technology. At first, teachers tend to use new technologies to extend existing practices. Only with time, practice, experimentation and support do they move on to more novel applications" (Reich et al., 2021, p. 23). While the use of novel applications was ideal during the pandemic, time was in short supply.

Educators soon discovered, however, that the majority of what they needed to do could be achieved with the right digital resource. Blogs and breakout rooms were used, and YouTube videos were created. Technology provided answers for how to vary assessments and foster collaboration. If educators were unaware of the existence of resources, then their methods for delivering content were limited. Covid-19 caused educators to recognize and acknowledge their limitations.

The emergence of the virus prompted a closer look at pedagogy which is often defined as an approach which is more effective if the focus is on who is being approached. If pandemic pedagogy was to be learner focused, it certainly required adjustments. According to an educator, effective online teaching requires educators to possess various multifaceted skills which require continual fine-tuning (Hardy, 2017). The pandemic provided the perfect backdrop to fine-tune online teaching.

For those educators who have had the privilege of teaching in both the 20th and 21st centuries, it is clear that the pedagogy for one set of learners needed to be adjusted for the next set. The world is changing, but education was lagging behind. It took the pandemic to expose the need for change, adaptation, facilitation, and better evaluation.

Today, traditional students have been classified as digital natives. The Oxford dictionary defines a digital native as a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology and therefore familiar with computers and the internet from an early age (Oxford, n.d.). However, growing up with technology does not equate to being tech savvy and being comfortable with technology does not equate to productivity and learning in an online classroom. Millennials are technology dependent, but they are not necessarily tech savvy (Wesch, 2010). While they rely heavily on digital media to manage their daily lives and stave off boredom, fewer digital natives maintain blogs, or make use of RSS feeds, *wikispaces*, or other productivity enhancing tools (Wesch, 2010). Some educators faced learning a new skillset during the pandemic; students also required education on the proper use of technology for educational purposes.

Networking

The pandemic highlighted the need for educators to build stronger connections with other educators. Entities like banks and mortgage companies set up relief plans for those who needed help during the chaotic time. What about educators? They needed help but, for many, there wasn't a relief package, no *easy button*. There was no educational hub where one could enter his or her lesson plans and immediately be given strategies and tools for disseminating the information seamlessly in a virtual environment. Consequently, educators began to rely on each other, many for the first time. They shared pedagogical strategies and resources. It was through networking that tools like *Thinglink*, *Miro*, *Calendly*, and *Matterport* were discovered, giving educators an abundance of options.

What happens when the need to be innovative clashes with the time available? According to the UVA Centre for Teaching Excellence, "One of the critical components of designing and delivering an effective, engaging online course is to balance the workload for both students and yourself as the instructor. Strategies for reducing workload and saving time in face-to-face classes do not always work in online classes" (CTE Authors, 2020, p. 1). The issue of workload was often discussed between educators during networking sessions which provided educators with tools for managing the increased workload.

Future Ramifications

The effect of Covid-19 on students may be felt for years to come. Educators were not the only ones searching for pedagogical strategies. Many parents, some for the first time, were tasked with providing instruction to their children while the schools were closed. Whether or not they did a good job is yet to be seen. In the documentary *Disrupted – How Covid changed Education*, host Amna Nawaz said, "There's a lot of uncertainty about the long term effects of remote learning, social isolation, the loss of routine, and security and normalcy. We are just beginning to recon with the systemic inequities and opportunity gaps made even worse by the crisis" (Estrada, 2021, p. 1).

Unfortunately many institutions were clearly not able to effectively deliver content to students during the pandemic. Many variables had to fit together for the process to work smoothly. In some cases, children did not have computers at home or access to the internet. According to Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), even in many developing countries, economically disadvantaged children are unable to afford online learning devices; the online education also poses a risk of exposure to increased screen time for the learner. In addition, some schools did not even have robust learning management systems.

Pedagogy must be designed in a way to provide a window through which each student is able to first view and then live in a changing world. As the world evolves, pedagogy must also evolve in order to facilitate students' preparedness to function effectively and be productive citizens. Educators have a choice to either routinely change their pedagogy, or change will be forced upon them based on environmental uncertainties. For those lecturers who already had a solid online presence, who had familiarized themselves with the newest and most productive ways to present information, adjusting their teaching methods and practices to suit an online format was not a huge leap. For some others, the effect of the pandemic on pedagogy was earth shattering. Now that adjustments have been made, there is much left to consider in the future.

The pandemic will undoubtedly have a future effect on students as well. Educators had to make adjustments in order to teach lessons differently. Likewise, students may have realized for the first time the value they placed on socialization with their peers and how that impacted their learning: positively or negatively. Attending classes at home, with significant distractions, may have deprived students from receiving important information.

Hickling et al., (2021) posits that adapting to teaching during a pandemic: Pedagogical adjustments for the next semester of teaching during covid-19 and future online learn*i*ng suggests barriers to quality learning and teaching: limited peer support and interaction, limited access to educational technologists, and competing demands of academics in relation to family and life stresses.

As a result, students may exhibit learning deficiencies post the pandemic. They may also have to unlearn some bad habits that were developed during their learning experiences at home.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has had a negative impact on a plethora of things: restaurants, hotels, and businesses have closed and numerous people have died. Pedagogical approaches to teaching were severely impacted as a result of Covid-19. Experiencing this involuntary change led educators to experiment with new technologies to enhance teaching given the current conditions and make it possible for students and teachers to continue connecting in meaningful ways. Technology literacy was pivotal in determining the depth of adjustment each educator was able to make to his or her pedagogy.

Therefore, during the pandemic, networking between educators was either created or upgraded for teachers to share ideas and strategies. We may never fully understand or grasp the full ramifications of Covid-19 on pedagogy and education in general. Of a certainty, educators are resilient. If the pandemic could be classified as being good for anything, it certainly provided many educators with the tools needed for diversifying pedagogy.

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