

Chapter 23

Equity Pedagogies for Inclusive Online Classrooms in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Online learning continues to grow and is increasing including more diverse students. Diverse students with various backgrounds and experiences challenge educators to implement pedagogies to achieve equitable learning experiences and outcomes. This chapter aims to discuss four equity pedagogies commonly referred to in the literature that can contribute to democratic and inclusive learning experiences for all students. The chapter's four strategies include pedagogic voice, universal design for learning, equitable assessment, and collaborative learning. Although these strategies were discussed separately, the universal design for learning framework can incorporate both the pedagogic voice, equitable assessments, and collaborative learning while considering their unique perspectives. If well-designed and implemented, these strategies can help all students to receive fair education and prepare them to succeed in a changing world and become agents for social change. The chapter includes recommendations for practice and future research.

INTRODUCTION

Online learning and the number of students enrolled in online courses continue to expand in higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Bates, 2020a; Kumi-Yeboah, 2018). According to Bates (2020a, para.7), this pattern will continue due to the global pandemic. He said that “there will be an up-

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tick overall in the number of fully online courses and enrolments in these courses. Courses successfully moved online during COVID-19 are likely to stay online if there is sufficient demand from students.”

Bates (2020a) predicts a rapid growth in blended learning where it combines face-to-face and online learning. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2020) concluded that blended learning modes of learning seem more viable options for course delivery for the foreseeable future. Online learning can maximize learning opportunities, increase enrollment (Yang, 2017), and broaden access to courses and programs for many students who cannot participate in face-to-face classes (Willems et al., 2019). However, some challenges are to be resolved, one of which is equal access to educational resources, materials, digital technologies, and connectivity (Li & Lalani, 2020; Willems et al., 2019). Improved technological infrastructure and emerging technologies help decrease the digital divide across the globe (Willems et al., 2019). However, unequal access to education still exists, making online learning challenging for many; therefore, it requires instructors and institutions to consider the limitations when developing and delivering online courses (Harris et al., 2020) to avoid widening digital gaps (Dumford & Miller, 2018).

Furthermore, online learning environments increasingly include students with diverse experiences, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Lambert, 2019). Instructors are challenged to develop awareness and understanding of diversity in the online classroom to achieve equitable learning experiences for all students irrespective of their backgrounds and experiences (Kumi-Yeboah 2018; Stone & O’Shea, 2019). In this context, the concept of equity is concerned with what is just and is linked to social justice (Gipps & Stobart, 2009). Gipps and Stobart (2009, p. 106) further added that “Equity represents the judgment about whether equality, be it in the form of opportunity and/or of outcomes, achieves just (‘fair’) results.” In the same vein, equity invites us to critically reflect on existing structures in which some students may be more privileged than others (Sator & Williams, 2020). It should be noted that equity is a concept that needs to be considered alongside equal access to educational resources since both ideas contribute to enhance fairness and justice (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2021). More specifically, equal opportunities, although necessary, are not a sufficient step for educational equity to happen (van der Westhuizen, 2016). Thus, instructors and educational institutions must consider approaches to promote both equity and equal access to education (Harris et al., 2020; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2021). While acknowledging the importance of equal access to all students, this chapter focuses on innovative pedagogical approaches to promote teaching and learning equity. Of course, when planning and implementing these strategies, instructors must consider issues of access to technologies, materials, and digital literacy (Bates, 2020b).

Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter aims to review four main pedagogical strategies frequently discussed in the literature that can contribute to equitable learning outcomes. This review is a timely contribution as online learning is on the rise with increasing diversity (Bates, 2020a; Sator & Williams, 2020). As noted by Sator and Williams (2020, p.7), “an opportunity exists to create more online environments where diversity is addressed and respected more intentionally...but it can be done better.” Thus, instructors must implement pedagogies that are responsive to all students’ needs (van der Westhuizen, 2016) to develop skills, knowledge, and abilities to live and work in a constantly changing world (Herodotou et al., 2019). The chapter includes a review of the main concepts followed by a discussion of the pedagogical approaches. The last section contains a conclusion with recommendations to practice and future research. The authors of this chapter expect to advance the discussions further on equity pedagogies that help educators to develop more inclusive and democratic classrooms.

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