Reimagining Higher Education as Response to Ongoing Crises:
Lived and Learned Experiences by College Students and Professors Surrounding COVID–19

Tamar Davis Larsen
University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

College students and professors have experienced dramatic change in how they are able to attend and participate in classes, convey information, interact with one another, and teach in a meaningful, dynamic way. This chapter explores what worked and what did not work during this shift to online teaching as universities in the United States closed down for almost all in-person classes. Research includes narrative identity, with data derived from collecting stories of the lived experience during COVID-19. Topics explored are issues of how higher education relates to the traditional U.S. college experience, ethics, leadership, money, equitable technology, and mental health. Suggestions will be presented in terms of what can be learned from this particular crisis that can be enacted in framing better practices in higher education as future domestic and global crises emerge.

INTRODUCTION

As the Covid-19 pandemic erases and disrupts traditional educational experiences, how can global educators become more adept at teaching during times of crisis? While acknowledging the limitations and advantages technology plays in this shift, there is space to explore the intangible additional elements of academic wonder, rigor in learning and creative exchange of ideas in the classroom. These are the topics which will be explored in this chapter, including perspectives that frame this question that come from fields including critical hermeneutics, cultural anthropology, the lived college experience, and the current shifting state of higher education in the U.S.

Educators must be able to pivot as never before- and not just as a response to this specific Covid-19 pandemic. While this specific pandemic is being experienced around the world in ways that profoundly disrupt lives and interrupt learning, there have been (and will continue to be) dramatic events that interfere with higher education. In learning techniques that aid in adapting to crises in general, this can be applied to ongoing issues that will disrupt higher education in future- disrupting events related to climate change (such as lack of air conditioning to facilitate safe learning when temperatures are too high), related to disruption of internet access (addressing here issues connected to money, class and allocated educational resources), relating to adjusting expectations to facilitate some learning over optimal learning. By exploring these issues, educators can better understand how much learning will need to change in response to crises, how to do it effectively, and when it's appropriate to do so.

BACKGROUND

Weaving together critical theory, participatory narratives of professors in the field trying to teach during crisis, and responses from college students in the U.S. struggling to learn, there will be an exploration of how to change as reaction to crisis. And how to do so in a way that has meaning, facilitates effective learning and creates a sense of joy and wonder in the context of the college learning experience. In looking at theory from critical hermeneutics there is room to recontextualize the role of culture in framing educational experiences, expectations and demands. In this way, the role of narrative identity allows for greater understanding of how teachers and students react best to these changing expectations of how to teach, when to teach, and what modality to use to teach. Constantly emerging technology provides additional virtual modalities of teaching, but also leads to inequities: inequities in the space, privacy and availability that students each have (relating to issues of poverty, financial struggle of some students- to be further addressed in this chapter) as well as to the fact that some professors are far more adept at utilizing this new technology than

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