

Humanistic Teaching During the Pandemic: Education Beyond the Lesson

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the COVID-19 crisis, teaching and learning activities were largely conducted online through open and distance learning (ODL). As a result, educators and students lacked the personal warmth and emotional support usually found in face-to-face classes, which affected the quality of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, what could educators do to facilitate the teaching and learning process during the pandemic? This chapter features narratives on humanistic practices in teaching that were carried out during the pandemic by five university lecturers. The narratives shed light on how they embedded humanistic elements in either one or several of these aspects of teaching: delivery, content, consultation, and assessment. Their pedagogical approaches indicate that education is not a rigid domain, but it can be extended beyond the four walls of the classroom and executed from the sincere heart.

INTRODUCTION

The recent global pandemic saw countries across the world take great strides in making education as accessible as possible to students during lockdowns. These include embracing change and managing expectations, involving all levels of education – from preschool to university.

Many universities, though familiar with online learning and may have already conducted some of their courses through blended learning, still faced huge challenges when they needed to go fully online. Besides grappling with the need to quickly upskill themselves in using online learning platforms and technology whilst working from home, educators also needed to be mindful of the challenges that their students were facing and how this new learning environment had impacted them as well. Learning during the pandemic meant that students missed out not only on face-to-face physical contact with their lecturers and peers, but more importantly, the emotional support that came with such personal interactions. Some students, too, faced financial constraints and health issues brought about by the pandemic, which further affected their academic performance.

Humanistic views on education recognize that students' motivation in learning is related to their emotional well-being and that educators should endeavor to create a caring and supportive classroom environment (Hanley, Winter & Burrell, 2019; Schneider, Pierson & Bugental, 2014; Khateb, Sarem & Hamidi, 2013). Supporting students emotionally should therefore be an important part of day-to-day teaching practice, what more in times of crisis as the pandemic. In view of this, educators had to seriously reflect on the desired student outcomes of their courses and manage their expectations of what could realistically be expected from their students. In the local context of Malaysia, online learning is often interchangeably referred to as Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Thus, how did ODL during the pandemic affect students' overall learning experience? And most importantly, how could educators responsibly facilitate students' learning and other educational processes during this time?

This chapter features narratives on humanistic practices in teaching that were carried out during the pandemic by five university lecturers. The narratives shed light on how they embedded this in either one or several of these aspects of teaching - delivery, content, consultation and assessment.

A narrative inquiry method was implemented in gathering these narratives for its nature in "revealing unique perspectives and deeper understanding of a situation" (Padgett, 2012). It is an effective method in disclosing the lived experiences and voice of the individuals involved. The authors then coded and grouped these lived experiences into several themes and subthemes which were done inductively based on the individual narratives. To ensure the trustworthiness of these narratives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), peer debriefing, thick descriptions and member checks were utilized.

HUMANISTIC LEARNING THEORY

Humanistic psychology, developed by Maslow around the 1950s and expanded later on by Rogers, as well as Bugental among others, emerged as a prominent theory in education towards the 1960s (Schneider et al., 2014). It, then, spread extensively in the 1970s (Untari, 2016). Unlike behaviorism and psychoanalysis, the two more prominent learning theories that directly preceded it, which tended to focus on only specific aspects of students as learners, humanistic learning theory regarded them as holistic learners or, in other words, as 'whole' human beings. Behaviorism reduced humans to organisms that 'learned' desired behaviors through shaping and conditioning by manipulation of their external environments.

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