ASCILITE 2023

People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

What can we learn from University students' experiences of online learning during COVID?

Dianne Forbes[1], Dilani Gedera[2], Maggie Hartnett[3], Cheryl Brown[4], and Ashwini Datt[5]

[1]Waikato University, [2]Auckland University of Technology, [3]Massey University, [4]Canterbury University, [5]University of Auckland

This panel brings together a research team from five different universities in Aotearoa New Zealand who have collaborated since 2020 on a project exploring university students' experiences of online learning during COVID-19. The multiple method project has yielded several co-authored publications. The symposium, led by each member of the project team, draws on our research to engage the audience with key provocations. Sharing brief insights from the research project, paying particular attention to people, partnerships and pedagogies, we aim to generate discussion of key learning stemming from diverse student experiences, with consideration to how these may inform responsive and sustainable strategies for teaching and online learning for the future. It is anticipated that audience participants will reflect and contribute diverse perspectives giving rise to new understandings in relation to the experiences of diverse people, research partnerships, and the theory and practice of online learning.

Keywords: Student experience, online learning, COVID-19, sustainable strategies

Post/pandemic provocations

Our panel presentation will highlight key areas of focus from the various publications stemming from the SOLE project. These include:

People:
- Student voice and agency, diversity, equity and inclusion

Partnerships:
- Social connection, belonging, relatedness, whanaungatanga, collaboration

Pedagogies:
- Challenges and benefits of online learning, helpful teaching behaviours, long term approaches, responsive pedagogies, sustainable strategies

Theoretical frameworks underpinning aspects of our work include: Activity theory (Engestrom, 2001), Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), Sustainable learning (Ben-Eliyahu, 2021), Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002), Active learning, social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), Ngā Hau e Whā o Tawhirimātea (Ratima et al, 2021), Value creation framework (Wenger et al, 2011)

Panel Members, perspectives:

Forbes –initiating a collaborative project, sustainable strategies
Gedera – challenges students faced during the pandemic, via an activity theory framework, contradictions, implications
Hartnett – key quantitative patterns; the split between students with enhanced/diminished attitudes
Brown – multifaceted relationships and an ethic of care
Datt – value creation in collaborative research

Key questions as provocations:

- How did students experience online learning during COVID?
- How do we know what students experienced?
- What can we learn from students' experiences of learning during COVID?
- What sustainable strategies can we take forward into future initiatives?
- How do we involve students as active partners in learning without succumbing to a customer-orientation?

A provocation can take the form of a short quote from one of our articles to prompt discussion/debate, and sharing of perspectives from audience participants. Provocations will be distributed on cue-cards to get people

thinking and talking. This will provide a basis for the audience to discuss and share their own ideas and experiences. Example provocations include;

"Social learning, care, and connection are critical elements of learning. Students appreciated the human connection from staff who checked in on them, had coffee chats/drop in sessions, and were flexible about timeframes"

"Places and spaces (virtual and physical) of belonging need to account for diverse individual and cultural variation of learners

"The results show that university students had distinctly different changes in attitude during their time studying online because of the lockdowns. … students who experienced more internal control (autonomy) reported enhanced attitudes towards their online studies during the pandemic"

"Despite their disappointment, students communicated a sense of inevitability about missing out on practical components. Few could conceive of the possibility of conducting practical learning during the pandemic, and certainly not in an online environment regarded as the antithesis of practical learning"

"There are no grounds for limiting online learning to theory, lectures, and reading or assuming that all learning must occur online if campuses close. Instead, there is evidence that practical learning can and does occur across online and offline contexts, including homes and neighborhoods. When practice occurs in multiple settings, it is no less real, and real life is increasingly a hybrid of online/offline learning"

"A key suggestion from students was that there be a choice in relation to blended or hybrid learning so that those who prefer to attend and engage on campus could do so, while students can opt for online learning for components of their courses, or at times when they are unable to attend on campus"

References

Ben-Eliyahu, A. (2021). Sustainable learning in education. Sustainability, 13, (4250), 1-10.
Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. Journal of education and work, 14(1), 133–156.
Rātima, M., Smith, J., Macfarlane, A., Riki, N., Jones, K-L., & Davies, L. (Eds.). (2022). Ngā Hau e Whā o Tāwhirimātea: Culturally responsive teaching and learning for the Tertiary Sector. Canterbury University Press. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/103380
Rose, D.; Meyer, A. (2002). Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal design for learning. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA.
Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. (2017). Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.
Wenger, E., Trayner, B., & De Laat, M. (2011). Promoting and assessing value creation in communities and networks: A conceptual framework.