Letter From the Editors

WALDEN UNIVERSITY

Special Issue

Education Technologies and COVID-19: Experiences and Lessons Learned

Experiences and Lessons Learned From the COVID-19 Pandemic

We are pleased to publish our second special issue (Volume 12, Issue 0) of *Higher Learning Research Communications (HLRC)* related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first special issue (Volume 11, Issue 0), authors examined the experiences of the transition to emergency remote teaching by institutions of higher education globally. In the current special issue, authors examine, from the perspectives of different countries, the continued impact of the pandemic. Each article provides some indications of how the pandemic can impact higher education as it transitions back to models that include face-to-face learning.

There is substantial evidence that changes in how education is delivered will likely be long-lasting. Marinoni et al. (2020), in an International Association of Universities report, found that about two-thirds of the respondents reported that their institutions had shifted to distance teaching and learning and that there are opportunities to explore more flexible learning models post-COVID-19. Most also reported that the pandemic impacted community engagement initiatives; however, only one-third reported that the impact was negative, suggesting further evidence of ways the pandemic can foster positive change in higher education.

Scholars continue to speculate as to how the pandemic can ultimately transform higher education. It is likely that the pandemic will lead to increased demand for distance learning, blended learning models incorporating connective technologies, more personalized learning models, and the training to accomplish these (Agasisti & Soncin, 2021; Kahn, 2021; Jena, 2020; Stukalo & Simakhova, 2020; Toquero, 2020; Zawacki-Richter, 2021). While acknowledging the likelihood of a boost in digital education, Zawachi-Richter questions the extent to which the changes due to the pandemic will fundamentally transform teaching and learning.

The total impact of the pandemic on higher education in the long term will likely not be clear for some time. The authors of the papers in this issue provide clues for what that future might be. For example, Vlachopoulos argues that increased use of technology in education and blended learning will be one of the likely outcomes. Cancino and Towle demonstrate the importance of computer self-efficacy in satisfaction with the learning experience; this points to the need to enhance digital proficiencies of learners (and teachers, as Hebert, Wood, Jeon, and Reena emphasize in their study) to meet new educational demands. Students' voices will become increasingly important in ensuring their educational needs are being met (see the Kuntz and Manokore study of students during the transition to remote teaching and learning), and understanding how students react psychologically to these new demands will be increasingly important (see the van der Ross, Olckers, and Schaap study). Trotter, Huang, and Czerniewicz describe the case of a teaching and learning center and how it responded to the transition; it is likely that the role of such centers, and the university academic administration, will take central roles in assuring students and teachers are ready for the upcoming changes. Finally, Garvin and Lewis describe how teachers involved with community engagement responded and allude to the increasingly important role of community engagement in pedagogy post-pandemic. What is clear from

the emerging literature, and from the voices of the scholars represented in this issue, is that digital technologies are going to become a clearer focus for higher education in the future.

The present issue provides an excellent example of how we strive to publish research on higher education happening around the globe. It contains articles regarding research based in Chile, South Africa, Netherlands, Canada, and the United States, reflecting a variety of concerns relevant to tertiary education. The focus of the HLRC is on digital teaching and learning, higher education and the public good, and the preparation of students in key 21st-century employability skills. The present issue reflects each of these focus areas.

Essays

- Dimitrios Vlachopoulos, in his essay *How the "Lessons Learned" From Emergency Remote Teaching Can Enrich European Higher Education in the Post-COVID-19 Era*, reflects on how universities, governments, and policy makers can re-imagine higher education in the post-COVID-19 era. It envisions universities as inclusive, student-centered, and accessible organizations capable of meeting diverse learning needs through technology-enhanced high-quality academic programs. This can be achieved through wide-scale uptake of blended learning in higher education; capacity building for stakeholders on online/blended learning; consideration of the unique needs of its stakeholders; and a holistic quality assurance framework.

Research Articles

- Marco Cancino and Kylie Towle, in their article *Relationships Among Higher Education EFL Student Perceptions Toward Fully Online Language Learning and Computer Self-Efficacy, Age, Gender, and Proficiency Level in Emergency Remote Teaching Settings*, explored the perceptions of Chilean students enrolled in English as a foreign language courses regarding their fully online learning experience and their computer self-efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that participants were positive overall toward fully online language learning components but had negative views toward online participation. The authors also found significant relationships between computer self-efficacy and perceptions toward fully online language learning components. Teachers can nurture a sense of community in the online classroom by facilitating dialogue, providing timely feedback, moderating student discussions, and building social networks around learners. They contend it is also important to promote healthy levels of computer self-efficacy that positively influence perceptions toward group work and learning strategies.

- Edward Hebert, Ralph Wood, Kwonchan Jeon, and Ismatara Reena, in their article *Faculty Making the Emergency Online Transition During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Effects of Prior Online Teaching Experience and Strategies Used to Learn to Teach Online*, examined strategies used by faculty in U.S. universities to learn how to teach online during the emergency remote teaching semester, perceptions of change in online teaching ability and the pandemic's impact on teaching effectiveness, and interest in future online teaching opportunities. They found that perceived online teaching skills, the impact of the pandemic on teaching effectiveness, and interest in future online teaching were significantly related to prior online teaching experience and training sought. Both mentoring and training enhanced perceived teaching skills, lowered the negative impact of the pandemic on teaching effectiveness, and promoted a positive attitude about future online teaching.

- Jeff Kuntz and Viola Manokore, in their article *"I Did Not Sign Up for This": Student Experiences of the Rapid Shift From In-Person to Emergency Virtual Remote Learning During the COVID Pandemic*, explored Canadian student experiences of the emergency virtual remote teaching implemented because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings support Anderson's six factors in online teaching, including (a) independent study; (b) peer, family, and professional support; (c) structured

learning resources; (d) community of inquiry; (e) communication; and (f) paced, collaborative learning; and revealed challenges and opportunities students faced during their transition. The voices of the students yielded a wealth of specific suggestions for engaging students, promoting accountability, and supporting collaborative learning.

- Melissa Reynell van der Ross, Chantal Olckers, and Pieter Schaap, in their article *Student Engagement and Learning Approaches During COVID-19: The Role of Study Resources, Burnout Risk, and Student Leader–Member Exchange as Psychological Conditions*, explored how various psychological conditions influenced engagement among university students in South Africa. Results showed that study resources, burnout risk, and student–leader–member exchange influenced student engagement. Study demands were positively associated with student engagement, and study resources and student engagement were associated with a deep approach to learning. The findings showed that Kahn's theory carried implications beyond the workplace and held true in a student learning environment. The authors contend that higher education leaders should be encouraged to focus not only on ensuring that students receive adequate support in terms of structures and physical resources during periods of uncertainty, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, but to adopt a holistic approach that includes considering all psychological conditions that encourage and promote student engagement.

- Henry Trotter, Cheng-Wen Huang, and Laura Czerniewicz, in their article *Seeking Equity, Agility, and Sustainability in the Provision of Emergency Remote Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Center for Teaching and Learning Takes an Expanded Role*, examined the experiences of the staff of a center for teaching and learning at one South African university during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic when it switched from face-to-face teaching to emergency remote teaching (ERT). They explored practical, operational, ethical, cultural, and emotional issues as they supported the transition to ERT. They found that several contradictions and tensions emerged during this period—concerning exacerbated inequities, pedagogical compromises, cultural anxieties, and psychological pressures—that could not be fully resolved but only managed. The authors concluded that understanding the pandemic experience can offer insights into how other centers for teaching and learning can adjust to what will likely remain an unstable future in higher education.

Research Briefs

- Melissa Garvin and Emily Acosta Lewis, in their research brief *Reasons Faculty Teach, or Do Not Teach, Service-Learning Courses in a Pandemic: The Role of Faculty Investment and Clues for the Future of Service-Learning*, examined the barriers to offering service-learning courses in the California State University system and offered solutions to implementation. Most participants continued to teach service-learning courses during the pandemic. Those who had more experience teaching SLCs were more likely to continue. The most significant barrier mentioned was the difficulty of transitioning service-learning projects to a remote environment. Participants expressed the continued value of service-learning to student education as the primary motivator to continuing to teach courses during challenging times. It is important to continue making SLCs accessible to students and solutions accessible to faculty who want to engage students in this very important, high-impact practice. Such experiences benefit students and the institution and the communities they serve.

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