

Humanizing Remote Learning

Introduction

The entire backdrop of higher education has been changed since the pandemic hit the world in 2020. Currently, virtual classroom and distance learning are playing a critical role in higher education as they are the best solutions for the industry to adapt and continue business as usual in periods of national and international social restrictions. However, there are few challenges faced by the students during online learning. These challenges include staying motivated, understanding course expectations, lack of in-person interaction, and uncertainty about the future, mainly related to the absence of the "human" element in online learning (Friedman, 2020). Thus, humanizing online learning can solve the listed challenges resulting in an impactful and meaningful learning experience (Schmidt, 2017). Furthermore, it is undeniable that human connection is the antidote for the emotional disruption that prevents many students from performing to their full potential and in online courses, creating that connection which is even more critical to tackle the distance learning challenges (Pacansky-Brock, 2020).

Humanizing Remote Learning

The heart of humanizing is the relationship between educators and students that serve as the connective tissue between students, engagement, and rigour. Humanizing offers clear, practical teaching strategies for virtual classrooms that cultivate an inclusive online course climate that is more likely to support the cognitive and affective differences that co-exist within a university course (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2019). Humanizing is a practice to create a learning environment in which everyone is welcomed, supported, and recognized as capable of achieving their full potential, intentionally. The principles of the humanized

virtual classroom, as listed by Pacansky-Brock (2020), are as follows:

1. *Trust*
Educators are responsible to intentionally cultivate students' trust by practising "selective vulnerability" in the virtual classroom. The practice is applied where educators share some of their life experiences with the class, portraying themselves as a real people (e.g., the personal struggle of the educator).
2. *Presence*
Educators' presence is the symbol of intentional efforts to construct their authentic selves through brief, imperfect videos to ensure students feel that the educators are in the same learning journey. Verbal and nonverbal cues add context to the communication and interaction within the class, which is essential to support culturally diverse students.
3. *Awareness*
Educators should be aware of their students, which can be achieved by learning about the students and how they can be supported.
4. *Empathy*
Empathy among educators is essential as it allows them to see through the students' points of view with flexibility, without judgment, and indirectly support them towards their goals.

The Need for Effective Communication

Therefore, effective communication is required during the teaching period to build the educator-students' relationship based on the humanizing principles. Effective communication is highly

significant in virtual classrooms as educators are limited to using text and/or images to help get their point across without body language while communicating. According to Robinson et al. (2015), "Effective communication is a two-way street. It is not only how you convey a message, but it is also how you listen to gain the full meaning of what is being said to make the other person feel heard and understood." Below is the guideline to communicate effectively in the backdrop of a virtual classroom by Mitchell-Holder (2016):

1. *Know the audience*

The students may be ethnically diverse and of varying ages where it might be the factors affecting how they perceive the educator's communication. A short, brief, and concise message will do, and it is important to go easy with the punctuations.

2. *Make the communication personal*

Personalizing the communications will help the educators connect with students and build a positive relationship. Personal communication means the educators can show respect towards the students, and the communication they have is valuable for them. The educators can use an introduction assignment as a fun way to introduce everyone in the classroom, and the assignment should include the educator, so the students get the sense that the educator is a part of the class and a real person.

3. *Have a communication plan in advance*

Planning how, when and why in advance is a great way to ensure that the educators can provide the students with meaningful, timely and consistent communication. The plan should be written out and kept handy for future use so that educators will know the correct plan for different situations.

Conclusion

Humanizing remote learning creates a learning environment that amplifies humanity by focusing on a virtual classroom's social, informal, affective aspects. The human element is essential for remote learning compared with a face-to-face environment due to the absence of social and

emotional nurturing. In an online environment, one needs to intentionally design such spaces, craft out time for them, and invest time in making them warm and welcoming. Hence, creating meaningful and impactful teaching and learning experiences for educators and students.

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