Learning During Challenging Times: The Affective Impact of the Covid Pandemic on Educators and Students

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Abstract

Powerful new technologies, dedicated educators and resilient students are meeting the dramatic challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic head on with a determination to succeed and move beyond the standard methodologies and best practices of the classroom. These unique challenges that have altered the educational landscape globally are impacting individuals in a variety of ways and particular attention needs to be directed at the affective level. The affective domain coupled with cognitive learning has a significant impact on teaching and learning. The affective domain involves feelings, emotions and attitudes, and relates to interpersonal aspects of learning and the manner in which we deal with situations emotionally [1]. This study examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning from the affective perspective as it relates to students and educators. The five levels of the affective domain namely, receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and characterization, can be taught to some extent, yet multiple strategies are necessary to understand the dynamics more explicitly, particularly since so many classes have transitioned to online teaching [2]. Not only is it necessary for educators to comprehend and realize the ramifications of the affective domain, but to be able to address these interpersonal connections to teaching and learning. This study seeks to investigate the experiences of students and educators from the affective perspective to determine the complex impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning outcomes, and the proactive strategies required to move beyond traditional approaches to learning.

References

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1. Introduction

The past two years have presented a series of challenges for students, families, and educators. The seriousness of the Covid pandemic has altered education in numerous ways that could never have been predicted. Often, we hear about the seriousness of declining test scores or missed opportunities due to a lack of face-to-face collaboration in the classroom and interaction among teachers and students. But the reality of the situation goes much deeper than the tasks associated with gathering knowledge and engaging in educational experiences. Confronting the dynamics of learning and online education or virtual classroom settings extends far beyond this. The affective domain involves our feelings, emotions, and attitudes, and includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally (feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasm, motivations and attitudes) [3]. Certainly students, families and educators have been pushed to the limit by the challenges that the Covid pandemic has presented. Acknowledging these challenges and addressing them in appropriate ways is essential for understanding and internalizing the implications that accompany the affective domain. There are numerous examples of students at various grade levels attempting to grapple with the outcomes associated with the global pandemic and the ramifications of pursuing a quality education while balancing the ongoing issues associated with pursuing their educational goals.

2. The dynamics of the affective domain

As students and educators have been forced to transition to online teaching and embrace learning in virtual classrooms, numerous educational approaches are being developed that have not been in use previously. As educators devote their energy to designing an innovative curriculum that will address the educational needs of students and challenge them to high ideals, more than just teaching and learning comes into focus and meets the eye. The affective domain has a powerful influence on the dynamics within the virtual classroom. If both students and teachers don't feel comfortable in the online learning environment, then optimal learning is compromised, and students do

not encounter the best possible learning situation. Students, teachers, and families are being put to the test to embrace all of the changes in the educational environment that have been brought on by the Covid pandemic. When learning becomes more complex, the dynamics of affective states emerge. According to the model presented by D'Mello and Graesse, learners in a state of engagement will experience cognitive disequilibrium and confusion when they face contradictions, incongruities, anomalies and obstacles to goals [4]. To reverse this and revert to an engaged state, equilibrium is restored through thought, reflection, and problem solving [4]. This concept varies in the way that it is manifested depending on the age and grade level of the learner, but with the accelerated development of online teaching and learning, the classroom climate has a significant impact on students and teachers alike. Further insight is gained by delving into the role of both the student and the teacher in this web-based environment that is confronting our educational system.

3. The affective domain and impact on educators

Educators at all grade levels as well as the university were suddenly thrust into the transition of coursework to online and virtual platforms. Some were clearly more adept with technology than others. Access to web-based resources and lessons exists but accessing the materials is not always easy for educators who are not adept at online teaching and learning and often need additional guidance. Educators who are not tech savvy and have only basic technology skills are challenged by the software and requirements to teach online with little assistance or tech support when the technology malfunctions. Although various teaching tools exist, some teachers are struggling to embrace the expectations of transitioning their courses to a virtual classroom. Often, educators teaching young children were very frustrated, not only with the task of transitioning lessons to an online platform, but with the affective issues of trying to contact young children via the internet. In an interview with a first-grade teacher, it was explained that the responsibility for supervising the teaching and the technology falls on the parent. Classes in Zoom and Google Classroom are frustrating for the working parent or parents who are not familiar with the technology. This is even more of a problem when parents are traveling or for special needs students or English language learners who don't receive the level of services that they need. For example, one student's father drove a semi-truck and the student was trying to find an internet signal or use a hot spot while traveling across the country [5]. Educators are trying to learn computer skills and teach via cameras sharing screens with students. Teaching reading, writing and math to young children is especially difficult as they navigate the camera and keep any eye on the students to ensure that they remain involved. Teachers' confidence in facing the challenges of the online classroom and the effort to address a multiplicity of challenges often resulted in them becoming discouraged and frustrated with the situation. As the level of frustration increases, it has been pointed out that online platforms amplify vocal tones and facial expressions. Furthermore, technology frustration, hybrid learning and parental pressure leak into the online classroom and hurt teacher/student relationships [6]. On the other hand, concerned teachers are devoting hours of time above and beyond their regular workday and spending additional time and effort to prepare innovative lessons for the online platform. Dedicated educators are exhausted and willingly accepting a critical role in providing the best education for their students who are often disengaged or don't show up for the online meeting at all. In an interview with a university professor who teaches undergraduate biology courses, the level of frustration was clearly visible. She stated that, due to the complacency and lack of motivation on behalf of many students, the course assessments had to be changed to activities rather than written tests. If she had given the same tests that were assigned years back, the entire class would have failed them. Often, students are full of excuses for not completing work or participating as expected. At times, the Covid pandemic appears to be used as a reason to avoid completing coursework, and overall, biology students don't seem as capable or prepared as students in the past [7]. In the article "A stunning level of student disconnection," McMurtrie points out that record numbers of professors are reporting that students are checked out, stressed out and unsure of their future. She cites the situation at Doane University in the State of Nebraska where students can't answer basic questions and are not motivated to complete or submit assignments and readings [8]. Particular concern for educators is related to the students who are behind and need additional help, yet remote tutors are often unavailable. Educators still must grapple with their own emotional and physical health and many of them have become ill with Covid or need to care for family members who are ill. In the absence of face-to-face classroom teaching, the positive relationships and rapport that teachers enjoy is difficult to achieve. As much as they desire to connect with students, it is difficult to do so in a virtual classroom. All of these affective challenges impact the complex ramifications of teaching and learning.

4. The affective domain and impact on students

As we examine the affective domain as it relates to students, it is crucial to also consider the families who are impacted by the Covid pandemic and the role that family members assume in each child's education. While older children are fairly tech savvy and can assume responsibility for meeting the timelines and assignments associated with the virtual classroom, young students need assistance with the technology and don't always have the ability to grasp lesson components without assistance from parents or teachers. Some students of all ages are embarrassed because they do not have the means or bandwidth to access all the latest technology required for assignments and engaging in the online classroom. Students of all ages clearly need peer interaction and often feel isolated. They may be home alone and unsupervised while their parents are at work. On the other hand, older students may have to assume responsibility for younger siblings in a disorganized setting without parental involvement. As the tension builds, learning is impacted for everyone. At the university level, students are overcommitted, and there appears to be a lot of drama. Attendance, preparation, effort and submission of original work are impacting learning [7]. In a conversation with an exceptionally able high school student, he revealed that he was able to keep up with coursework and complete his classes in an online setting. He was even able to devote additional time to preparing for difficult advanced placement exams. Some teachers were more skilled than others at creating assignments at a higher level with more advanced technology. He further indicated that motivation was an issue for him and his fellow students. Some students became complacent and were not able to complete assignments on time, nor did they make the effort to do so. Once students realized that late work was acceptable, they did not feel motivated to tackle assignments in a timely manner [9].

5. Conclusion and future implications

Across the globe, education has been disrupted by the serious pandemic that we have all faced. The good news is that students and teachers are gradually transitioning back to the classroom, and the affective filters are being lowered through interaction and collaboration. As time moves on, further investigations will reveal the ramifications of the Covid pandemic. It is being suggested that students have lost considerable amounts of learning time and are falling behind. Future studies will reveal the accuracy of these predictions and the impact of this pandemic on educators and students from an affective perspective.

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