Repurposing the Purpose of Higher Education in the Post-Pandemic World

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The purpose of this study pertained to an exploration of a senior professor's experiences during the immediate shift from traditional classroom teaching to fully online teaching during the pandemic in 2020. A primary goal of this research involved a purposeful focus on the experiences of a senior faculty member from a phenomenological perspective. The implications of this study included several suggestions: (a) opportunities for applying the laws of learning acquisition associated with human resource development (HRD), (b) exploring the participant's experiences that occurred during the immediate change from traditional lecture halls to online teaching, and (c) the need for developing traditional professors in the practice and application of Knowles's theory of andragogy. This study incorporated the phenomenological method of research design and interpretation of the findings, and it used four additional methods of interpretation and analysis: (a) IPA, (b) case study method, (c) the laws of learning acquisition described by Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002), and (d) in vivo coding with an emphasis on personal narratives that emerged during the semi-structured interview. The findings included several insights for reflection and perspectives about the future of professorship in the post-pandemic world. In particular, the professor's statement about repurposing higher education in the post-pandemic world held considerable value for insight generation.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Online Teaching, post-pandemic, HRD, In Vivo

 The purpose of this study pertained to an exploration of a senior professor's experiences during the immediate shift from traditional classroom teaching to fully online teaching during the pandemic that impacted all colleges and universities in 2020. One of the significant reasons that this study occurred involved the realization that little research appeared in the journals on the subject of crisis-based transitions from lecture-based education to online teaching in the United States. According to Hodges et al (2020), this type of transition often failed during the beginning months of the pandemic because many professors lacked the knowledge and experience in effective online teaching and learning. The support systems for these traditional professors within their organizations seemed weak because "although campus support personnel and teams

are usually available to help faculty members learn about and implement online learning, these teams typically support a small pool of faculty interested in teaching online" (Hodges et al, 2020). Another reason for this study pertained to the fact that "the Covid-19 pandemic is still far from over, and there is no doubt that educational sciences will analyze this sudden global shift of teaching and learning online for many years to come" (Jandric et al., 2020, p. 1070). Therefore, a primary goal of this research involved a purposeful focus on the experiences of a senior faculty member from a phenomenological perspective. The implications of this study included several suggestions: (a) opportunities for applying the laws of learning acquisition associated with human resource development (HRD), (b) exploring the participant's experiences that occurred during the immediate change from traditional lecture halls to online teaching, and (c) the need for developing traditional professors in the practice and application of Knowles's theory of andragogy.

According to multiple studies, many institutions of higher education showed resistance to the adoption of online teaching (Dhawan, 2020). Brookfield and Preskill (2005) stated that their first reaction toward the idea of online education included significant doubt about its effectiveness in comparison to face-to-face lectures. In a study performed by Gratz and Looney (2020), 131 participants from a university faculty group provided data to indicate "whether a relationship exists between resistance to change and motivators or barriers to teaching online" (p. 1). The data showed that "participants reported such barriers as their discipline not being suited to online teaching, an absence of time for online course preparation, and a lack of skills or confidence in teaching online", particularly before the beginning of the pandemic period which began in December 2019 (Gratz & Looney, 2020, p. 1). In conclusion, the researchers showed that the "reported barriers were positively correlated with faculty's resistance to change, demonstrating that faculty who were reluctant to change their routines, had negative reactions to the presence of change, and saw short-term change as inconvenient were more likely to see barriers to teaching online" (Gratz & Looney, 2020, p. 1).

In another study, Schwartz (2010) used a "mixed-methods case study that consisted of a survey and interviews" to "concentrate on three health care fields that engaged very little, if at all, with distance education in their degree programs" (p. 21). The purpose of the study involved "determining the attitudes toward, and the feasibility of, online learning in degree, diploma, or certificate-granting educational programs in the fields of acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage therapy" (Schwartz, 2010, p. 20). The researcher chose the three particular fields of study because they involved a strong emphasis on physical touch with participants. The results indicated that "acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage therapy faculty lacked awareness of the capabilities of online education and the elements of good online learning" (Schwartz, 2010, p. 20). Furthermore, Schwartz (2010) stated the following conclusion:

The faculty held this perception despite the success of medical science and related health care fields in the online environment, and they did not seem to separate the

kinesthetic from the didactic. The present study indicated that faculty opinions about online instruction in this alternative type of education ranged from being willing to look at the potential of online education to outright dismissing it (p. 20).

A major reason for a significant push toward the adoption of, and adaptation to, online teaching and learning in higher education included the fear of reduced enrollment. According to Mitchell (2020), the practice of "actively ensuring ongoing student engagement" received a strong emphasis of importance from faculty members who believed that their active influence on students relied heavily on their universities' abilities to meet the technological needs of today's learners (p. 86). In a study by Toto and Limone (2021), their conclusions indicated that "teachers have a role of renewed authority because, now aware of their abilities and limitations, they exploit the digital resources available to build a strong educational process" (p. 7). In other words, higher educators required technological advancement in their learning systems so that they could meet and exceed the learning expectations of current students and potential candidates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Toto and Limone (2021) further argued that "scientific research must support the transition to this step not only by providing innovative teaching tools but also by taking care of the training of the teachers themselves and not neglecting their professional perceptions and visions" (p. 7).

Another major reason for resistance toward the adoption of online education involved the lack of exposure to and training in methods of online teaching. According to Moralista and Oducado (2020), the "research findings indicated that the majority of faculty had intermediate computer competency and had no training in online teaching with only a few having a very stable internet connection" (p. 4736). Another finding from this study indicated that the "faculty considered that online education will result in more academic dishonesty, will be impersonal and lack feeling compared to face-to-face classes, and will be difficult to manage in terms of technology" (Moralista & Oducado, 2020, p. 4736). For faculty members to feel comfortable with online teaching at the state college in the Philippines, the researchers stated that "faculty of Higher Education Institutions must be provided with continued support and training as they adapt into the new normal in the higher education landscape and as they embrace the instructional challenges brought by the Coronavirus disease 19 pandemic" (Moralista & Oducado, 2020, p. 4736). The emphasis on the "new normal" represented a theme that related to the participant's responses during the interview (Moralista & Oducado, 2020).

Method

The purpose of this study involved three goals: (a) a search for opportunities to apply the "laws of learning acquisition" associated with human resource development (HRD) in the post-pandemic world, and (b) exploring the participant's experiences during the immediate change from traditional lecture halls to online teaching, and (c) deriving implications about the need for developing traditional professors in the practice and application of andragogy theory in online communities better known as learning

management systems (LMS) (Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley, 2002, p. 321). During the 2020 crisis, many college and university faculty felt forced into performing their vocations in online formats with little to no training or experience with online delivery or designs. A primary goal of this research involved an intentional search for the participant's experiences as he or she lived them. Therefore, this study incorporated the phenomenological method of research design and interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, the researcher used four additional methods of interpretation and analysis to add rigor to the study: (a) IPA, (b) case study method, and (c) the laws of learning acquisition described by Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002), and (d) in vivo coding with an emphasis on personal narratives that emerged during the semi-structured interview.

Phenomenology and IPA

Van Manen (2009) stated that "phenomenology is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning" (p. 27). In other words, a phenomenological study involves an exploratory mindset to seek the meanings of a participant's lived experiences (Van Manen, 2009). This type of study also has usefulness for analyzing the experiences described by participants during a major crisis.

In a study performed in a Pakistan-based university, the researchers used the phenomenological method to "analyze the challenges faced by the university teachers during the transition towards purely online-based classes due to Covid-19 outbreak in Pakistan" (Said, Ali, & Javed, 2021, p. 260). The importance of their study underlined the fact that their work "was among the first studies in addressing the online learning challenges faced by university teachers in Pakistan during the Covid-19 outbreak" (Said, Ali, & Javed, 2021, p. 261). The sample population from that study included a similar type of teachers to the one described by the participant in this study: higher educators experienced in traditional teaching methods of pedagogy. The researchers used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method to write their research questions for the semi-structured interviews and to interpret the collected data. IPS can be defined as "an approach to qualitative, experiential, and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 11). In their analysis, Said, Ali, and Javed (2021) reported that "the insufficient training indicated a lack of resources and absence of policies to meet the unexpected crisis in the educational sector, in particular, among universities of Pakistan" (p. 267). The findings also showed the following details reported from the participants:

The shift to online learning during Covid-19 has pushed all walks of life to adopt new changes. In this scenario, the teachers also experience psychological issues while

shifting their responsibilities in the digital world. The participants shared psychological issues, including work pressure, imbalance in personal and professional life, and difficulties in the assessment of a student's performance (Said, Ali, & Javed, 2021, p. 268).

Another study supported the use of the phenomenological method for understanding the lived experiences of online students in response to the effects of COVID-based lockdowns. According to Raheim (2020), the "study aimed to explore and interpret the lived experience of Indonesian university students in emergency remote learning (ERL) during the COVID-19" (p. 1). The researcher collected data from "80 students from the Social Science Education Program at a public university in Jakarta" (Raheim, 2020, p. 1). The purpose for using the phenomenological approach pertained to the "attempt to provide a direct description of someone's experience as it is, without considering his or her psychological origin and the causal explanations that the scientist may be able to provide" (Raheim, 2020, p. 6). According to the results, the researcher discovered that "without preparation or training, lecturers designed and implemented remote learning programs. Similarly, students did not have the opportunity to be prepared for this transition in learning" (Raheim, 2020, p. 17). In other words, the students and faculty members experienced much turmoil due directly to having little or no exposure to online education; they simply reacted in response to a sudden change caused by a major health crisis. The phenomenological perspective influenced the interview discussions and data interpretations.

Case Study Method

This study involved the single case method to gather rich details about the participant's background, positional qualities that influenced the person's university, and the degree of impact that the participant experienced during the lockdown phase of the pandemic. Yin (2009) stated that the researcher must determine three conditions to validate the use of a case study design: (a) "the investigator has little control over the events", (b) "the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context", and (c) "'how' or 'why' questions are being posed" (p. 2). In this study, the senior professor represented the specific case for investigation. The researcher had no control over the past events, and the focus of the study pertained to the professor's real-life experiences within his or her daily work environment during the lockdown phase. Some inquiries included how-questions and why-questions, but these inquiries usually emerged during the open periods of the semi-structured interview. Due to the participant's preference, the researcher interviewed at a public bookstore and used handwritten notes without an audio-recording device. Therefore, the study involved no transcripts for second-cycle coding or further analysis.

The interview involved nine questions with both phenomenological and exploratory wording for the discussion questions:

1. What was the professor's experience like during the transition from lecture halls to virtual classrooms?
2. When the professor reflects on the transition period during 2020, what was it like to change immediately to online delivery as a primary method of education?
3. What specific challenges did the professor face during that period of immediate change?
4. What was it like to deal with a fear of the unknown while teaching virtually, if any?
5. What educational leadership methods, if any, were provided by the university for online learning & teaching?
6. What philosophies were emphasized in the virtual classroom for guiding principles and learning expectations?
7. Did the professor feel fully equipped, competent, and confident in teaching virtually regularly? Why or why not?
8. How does the professor see him/herself as an online educator in the future?
9. What does the professor foresee as the future of higher education in the post-pandemic world?

Laws of Learning Acquisition

From an interpretative perspective, this study incorporated various HRD laws on learning acquisition. According to Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002), the laws of "learning acquisition" involved "laws as final as the physical laws of growing organizations" (p. 320). These laws represented requirements for successful acquisitions of learning through "communication of experience" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 320). The first two laws related to factors of perspective: "a learning philosophy and a learning climate" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 320). A learning philosophy defines one's "preferences, orientations, and perceptions of how adults learn" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 321). The learning climate pertained to careful design of the learning environment so that learners feel safe and non-threatened, and they can openly share their insights, opinions, discoveries, and experiences in a democratic classroom. The third and fourth laws referred to proper conditions for learning agents, the fifth and sixth laws pertained to common "mediums of communication", and the remaining laws centered on "four functional acts or processes" that determine the effectiveness of performance evaluation (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 320).

In Vivo and Narrative Coding

Saldana (2013) wrote that "in Vivo's root meaning is 'in that which is alive, and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record", in other words, "the terms used by participants themselves" (p. 91). In vivo phrases support the phenomenological emphasis on lived experiences by capturing the participant's specific words that reveal key moments in the participant's life during a

major event. The primary purpose for using the in vivo method of analysis involved the intention to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldana, 2013, p. 91).

The use of narrative coding involved the "application of literary elements and analysis in the form of stories" (Saldana, 2013, p. 131). The purpose of this study's incorporation of narrative analysis pertained to specific parts of the participant's stories that illuminated interpersonal communication with key decision makers. Those stories may reveal latent factors that affected the participant's actions during the lockdown period.

Results

To conduct the analysis, the researcher gathered details about the professor. The case study approach allowed the researcher to create a foundation rooted in the specific context of the lived experiences which would emerge during the interview. Therefore, the study began with carefully collected details of the lockdown and the participant's lived experiences.

Case Study

The case study involved a senior professor of biological sciences at a large university with over 30,000 employees. The campus existed in the United States, and the science department interacted with global learners from multiple countries. The professor served the biology school for more than 20 years, and this faculty member published over 200 peer-reviewed articles and academic books during his tenure status. This professor holds multiple academic appointments and owns several patents. His teaching expertise primarily involved pedagogical, face-to-face methods used in lecture halls and traditional classrooms. The senior professor held a high rank in the large university and conducted communication with state and local members of government regarding risks to community health and biological threats.

Interview Responses

The professor experienced significant stress and overwhelming concerns due to the immediate change from traditional teaching to online or virtual delivery. According to his testimony, he received no literature or online training before the university lockdown which occurred in March 2020. Although much research existed before that year about online education, his university showed signs of resistance toward the idea of online programs.

Questions 1-2

In response to questions 1-2, the professor stated the following phrases:

> "Thrown into it!"

"Jumped into Zoom!"

"No body language to observe"

"Felt incompetent and immediate boredom"

"No adaptation period given or prior exposure provided to virtual classrooms"

"Immediate change from face-to-face interaction to machine-based delivery with mechanical components"

"How will I share my experiences as a professor with my students?

Question 3

The professor stated the following phrases:

"Fear of not knowing the degree of learner absorption"

"No students responding with questions"

"Loss of perceived body language"

"Lack of theoretical learning & applicability of student's knowledge in the external world"

"Inability to use physical demonstrations in biological contexts (labs)".

Questions 4-7

The professor answered "no" to all three inquiries. However, he stated that the online schools appeared much more equipped to deliver key information to significant audiences within rapid timeframes, much faster than his department could deliver. He mentioned schools such as the University of Phoenix and Ivy League universities that already adopted online designs for traditional programs in social work, biology, business, and nursing. The professor also mentioned that the political landscape of his department held great influence on the types of research to perform during the lockdown. For example, he stated that Governor Cuomo's authoritarian leadership style led to a major complaint against the professor's comments about vaping in connection to regulation claims stated in the press.

Questions 8-9

The professor stated the following responses:

"Must explore more material for online execution of education"

"Currently seeking knowledge for the adoption of online models"

"Need specific & adaptable models to biological disciplines"

"Need organizational infrastructure for online preparation"

"Need global connections that allow accessibility of higher learning to all who seek it at all given times" – the professor gave an example of a lecturer in Singapore delivering a lecture heard by Western audiences in various time zones.

"Need to provide lectures virtually that prepare exam-takers at local & national levels"

"New software that incorporates video clips, lectures, & university exploration"

"Accessibility to live teaching with the applicability of content to the students' everyday experiences with chosen disciplines and common activities"

"An emphasis on the focus on new 'purposes' of higher education teaching & learning – re-purposing the purpose of higher education teaching and learning in the post-pandemic world".

In Vivo and Personal Narrative Coding

The results revealed multiple implications based on the professor's responses to the nine questions. From the in vivo perspective, five responses showed an extraordinary amount of fear, anticipatory anxiety, a strong sense of uncertainty, a deeply felt pain associated with self-perceived incompetence, and a rushed experience connected to the feeling of being immediately "thrown into" online education without proper training or development. Other in vivo codes revealed significant despair associated with the inability to use pedagogical methods in virtual classrooms. This reaction conveyed the notion that the professor felt stuck because his prior knowledge in education appeared ineffective in virtual environments where self-directed, autonomous, and andragogical learning received request emphases. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) defined andragogy as the scientific theory of adult learning that stated that "adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy, that their orientation to learning is life-centered, that their learning needs require self-direction, and that adults' experiences provide the richest resource for learning" (p. 69). Unlike pedagogy which involved a method that requires a learner's attention on the teacher being the focus for learning, the method of andragogy requires a de-emphasis on the teacher's role of influence and an emphasis on the learner's actual experiences for reflective learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). This aspect of andragogy holds an important value in online teaching because "in pedagogy, readiness to learn is completely determined by the teacher whereas, in andragogy, adults become ready to learn when they need certain knowledge to cope effectively with real-life situations"

(Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009, p. 142). In other words, online learners require a focus on discussions about their experiences and how those experiences connect to the course content. The majority of interactions center on the learners' existent knowledge rather than the teacher's insights for reflection and insight creation. In the professor's context, knowledge of these various meanings, concepts, and theories did not exist before the lockdown occurred, nor was this knowledge presented or used.

From a narrative perspective, the professor gave three specific statements that revealed symbolic meanings useful for insights into the futuristic perspectives of the professorship. The first narrative described a repurposing of higher education teaching and learning in the post-pandemic world. Based on the interviewee's open discussion during the interview, a vision emerged that described a future that involved a constant flux of changes in the purposes of higher education. These changes may evolve due to constant revisions of a college or university's mission statement, its marketing mix for advertising to new populations, or its current degree offerings in response to constant changes in demands for skilled tradesmen and specific certifications. From a global perspective, changes in demand for certain degrees may shift in response to new executive positions created by different needs for knowledge. Therefore, professors may require a design in their departments that allows openness to relationship development with new populations without executive consent. In the professor's current university, the political landscape limits his ability to act entrepreneurially, thus discouraging him from experimenting with new learning and teaching designs that would positively affect his competencies in teaching online.

Laws of Learning Acquisition

Based on the law definitions written by Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002), four of them had applicability to this case study. According to the law of "learning philosophy", the learning agent or educator guides the "dissemination" and "facilitation" of information worthy of being learned by the online learners (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 323). In the professor's context, the use of pedagogy may have distracted his focus because his emphasis on voicing his opinions and facts underlined the pedagogical orientation toward teaching. Rather than an insistence on pedagogy, the professor may benefit by adopting the role of a facilitator: a higher educator who emphasizes the "experiences of the learners" for "knowledge crystallization" or "meaningful application" of the content (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 325).

The second law involved the concept of the "program design" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 339). According to this law, "all learning activities should be based on an identified set of learning objectives" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 339). In the professor's context, the university presented no knowledge of online learning designs that the professor could use or implement in his department. Therefore, his ability to create effective, complete learning objectives that aligned with virtual delivery may have had significant limitations.

In addition to the law of program designs, the law of learners perhaps received negligence due to a lack of knowledge of learning styles for online students. According to the law of program design, all learners required attention to three domains of learning: (a) cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) psychomotor (Sowell, 2005). In the professor's context, he may have experienced frustration regarding how to apply learning objectives according to the three domains when teaching in a virtual format. His inability to face students physically disallowed him from visually analyzing each student's facial and body language, a major aspect of in-person instruction.

The fourth law pertained to the "instructional process" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 343). According to this law, the pedagogy-based assumption exists that "learning cannot take place without a teacher or learning agent" (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002, p. 343). However, Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002) wrote the following statement:

People can learn without a teacher or learning agent. A true teaching is not teaching that 'gives knowledge', but teaching that stimulates learners to gain knowledge for themselves. In other words, one might say that those who teach best are those who teach least (p. 343).

In other words, the online educator seeks students' development through emphasis on the students' voices being heard and supported rather than on the teacher's voice being the primary voice. However, this aspect of online education may have been stunted due to a lack of theoretical understanding about adult learning in virtual classrooms.

Discussion

From an HRD perspective, the actual learning philosophy and its assumptions must be integrated into the online classroom design, its materials, and expressed by the educator and to the learners before the class's start date. The role of the educator must be stated and defined in the syllabus for a virtual class. The role could include a facilitator, learning agent, disseminator, instructor, or mentor. The andragogy style must be clearly understood by the online educator according to Knowles et al. (2011) theory of the model so that the educator fully understands the language, approaches, and strategies fit for andragogy-based education.

The professor's statement about repurposing higher education in the post-pandemic world holds considerable value for insight generation. For example, the combination of new office designs with an exclusive focus on better LMSs currently receives much research and experimentation. The professor's emphasis on new purposes referred to the idea that constant changes in the macro-economy will shift and re-shift the value of higher education according to the various occupational needs not met at random times. Therefore, the short-term and long-term purposes for seeking a college or university degree may frequently shift according to shifting demands in the local, national, and global economies. The professor's interview responses conveyed the notion that the

HRD laws of learning acquisition did not receive adequate consideration during the immediate transition to online teaching. Further research into other universities regarding how they managed the online shift for tenured professors during the lockdown should be conducted from a quantitative standpoint so that HRD projects can be implemented to prevent future crises regarding unpreparedness for sudden lockdowns that require an immediate transition to virtual education.

Limitations

The researcher recorded all data on notebook paper due to the professor's requirements. Therefore, the vocal dynamics, tonal changes, or emotional shifts could not be captured effectively. The voices could not be recorded for further second-cycle coding analysis. This study did not involve qualitative software for transcript development. Due to this study using the single case method, the results lacked generalizability to faculty experiences from other universities or colleges.

About the Author

Chad Newton, PhD-HRD, graduated from Regent University, where he studied organizational leadership and human resource development. For the last 15 years, he has been involved in multiple Roundtables, research projects, and the Autonomous Learning World Caucus held at the University of Oxford in 2015. Dr. Newton is published in peer-reviewed journals and academic textbooks including the SBL Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership, the Wiley Journal of Leadership Studies, and Palgrave MacMillan. He also teaches online students whose majors cover HRM, management, leadership theory, and organization theory in the School of Professional Studies at Bethel University.

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