Responding to COVID 19 with an Emotionally Intelligent Online Faculty

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Abstract

The focus of the present research is on the COVID-19 Pandemic and the response within the higher education community. COVID-19 is short for "coronavirus disease 2019," the official name given by the World Health Organization. COVID-19 continues to spread through communities and countries across the globe. As such, social distancing, putting space between people to slow the spread of the virus, is essential. The social distancing has created the urgent need for online learning within higher education. Many institutions have online platforms for distance learning, while others do not. This paper highlights key online instructional strategies with a focus on integrating the foundations of emotional intelligence as a means toward developing enhanced methods of teaching within the online learning environment. Various principles of effective online pedagogy are discussed in Pelz's 2010 work. One key principle is the importance of striving for presence within the online teaching environment. Such presence includes affective, interactive, and cohesive presence. Pelz further explains that the affective presence of the online instructor includes the expression of emotions, feelings, and moods. Drawing primarily from Daniel Goleman's 1995 work on emotional intelligence, the present research seeks to overlay theories of emotional intelligence with principals of online teaching. Specifically, Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence is an assortment of one's non-cognitive skills including self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional intelligence involves being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and prevent stress from swamping the ability to think. As a response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, each of these components are presented with the goal of providing the online instructor specific tools for success within the online teaching environment.

Key Words: COVID-19 Pandemic, Online Faculty, Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

COVID-19, short for "coronavirus disease 2019," is caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome. It has spread so rapidly and to so many countries that the World Health Organization has declared it a pandemic, a term indicating that it has affected a large population, region, country, or continent. At the time of the onset of the current research, the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun to surface. According to the World Health Organization, as of May 2020, over 216 countries have reported over 5 million cases and over 300,000 confirmed deaths worldwide. By the end of Summer 2020, the United States projects that there will be over 120,000 COVID-19 deaths. This has resulted in a devasting impact on the way in which people all over the world live, work, and learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused markets to collapse and worldwide health systems to become overwhelmed. Additionally, the impact that COVID-19 has on the higher education system is enormous.

The challenges of COVID-19 include, quite frankly, institutional survival.   Staff and faculty layoffs, sharp declines in enrollment, and ongoing fears of contracting the virus are only a few of the concerns facing faculty, administrators, and students within higher education.

According to an Axios/Ipsos Poll (2020) conducted in the United States, there is a high level of concern over the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 1,092 adults surveyed in March 2020, 78% of men and 82% of women expressed being either somewhat or extremely concerned about the virus outbreak.   The COVID-19 has resulted in school closures across the world. Globally, over 1.2 billion students are out of the classroom. As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. With the sudden shift away from the onsite classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market.

Even before COVID-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology. According to the Cathy Li, of The World Economic Forum (2020), global edtech investments within the United States reached $18.66 billion in 2019. Additionally, the overall market for online education is projected to be $350 billion by 2025.   The bulk of the investments related to online learning are technology based, including language applications, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, and online learning software. Missing, however are behavioral and process related investments within the higher education online learning community.

The uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic is causing a disjointed response to the disease among different institutions of higher education. University faculty and administrators note that that higher education institutions serve as an extended family to students. Colleges are a large part of their lives including fellow classmates, faculty, administrators, athletics, music, and community groups. How, then, might an emotionally intelligent faculty make a difference within the age of the COVID 19 pandemic?

The Emotionally Intelligent Online Faculty

The rapid growth of the Internet in the past decade has led to an explosion of web-based instruction in American higher education (Zhan, Garthwait, and Pratt, 2008.) An increasing number of faculty members are aware of the value and effectiveness of online education (Elaine and Seaman, 2006.) Additionally, online teaching is moving from an emphasis on web content to a more interactive structure that recognizes the importance of the social nature of learning. As such, the instructor must have more than technical competencies to be successful in the online environment. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgency for enhanced effectiveness of online faculty is increasingly more evident.

It should not be assumed that instructors automatically know how to communicate or behave online (Coghlan, 2001.) The majority of institutions require training sessions for online instructors; however, the bulk of the training focuses on the enhancement of teaching through technology. The importance of instructional social presence is clear, yet guidance in this area is often missing. De Cicco (2002) states that professional development activities, when preparing faculty for online teaching, need to incorporate activities that support the social and collaborative elements related to teaching. Online instructional strategies are discussed in the present research along with concepts of emotional intelligence as a method for providing tools for enhancement.

Various principles of effective online pedagogy are discussed in Pelz's 2010 work. One key principle is the importance of striving for presence within the online teaching environment. Such presence includes affective, interactive, and cohesive presence. Pelz further explains that the affective presence of the online teacher includes the expression of emotions, feelings, and moods. One way in which the faculty might fully realize his or her effectiveness in the age of online learning is to utilize emotional intelligence to aid in fulfilling course and program learning objectives. Utilizing Pelz's theory as a framework and drawing primarily from Goleman's 1995 work on emotional intelligence, faculty have additional solutions to enhance online teaching.   Specifically, Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence is an assortment of one's non-cognitive skills including self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional intelligence involves being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think. Faculty and administrators may achieve greater success with the added tools of emotional intelligence.

Effective online teaching should engage, guide, and motivate learners. Also important are processes that aid in providing a safe and conducive environment for learning and communication exchange for all learners (Kempe, 2001.) Clear guidelines for online teaching are provided by Pelz in his 2004 article "Three Principles for Effective Online Pedagogy." The first principle is *let the student do all the work.* The second principle is *interactivity is the heart and soul of effective asynchronized learning.* The third principle, and the foundation for the present paper, is *strive for presence.*

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) discuss various categories of presence including social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence is often missing and difficult to achieve in an online learning community. Pelz (2010) clarifies social presence by explaining that when participants in an online course help establish a community of learning by projecting their personal characteristics into the discussion – they present themselves as real people. There are at least three forms of social presence: Affective presence is the expression of emotion, feelings, and mood. Interactive presence includes evidence of reading, attending, understanding, and thinking about other's responses. Cohesive presence involves responses that build and sustain a sense of belongingness, group commitment, or common goals and objectives.

Further evidence of the importance of presence within the online classroom is presented by Cavanaugh (2005.) A case study was conducted to investigate time consuming issues that an experienced instructor faced while preparing and teaching a traditional course compared to the same course which was the first time presented in an online format. Cavanough found that the instructor spent 150% more time in the online environment compared to the on ground, traditional format. The longest amount of time spent teaching in an online format was the individualized communication and interaction that the instructor provided to each student. The added demands placed on the online instructor, including time spent in individualized communication and interaction, point to the need for specific tools for effectiveness.

Also known as one's non-cognitive skills, emotional intelligence is defined by Goleman (1995) as being able to rein in emotional impulse; to read another's innermost feelings; and to handle relationships smoothly. Each of these elements is critical for successful instruction within the online learning community. The five domains of emotional intelligence presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990) are directly applicable for online instructors seeking to enhance their communication skills, student interactions, and social presence.

Knowing One's Emotions: This is commonly referred to as self-awareness or recognizing a feeling as it happens. This, as Salovey and Mayer (1990) explain, is the keystone of emotional intelligence. They further explain that individuals with a higher level of self-awareness have greater insight and ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment. This is paramount for the online instructor.

Managing Oneself: Building on self-awareness is the appropriate handling of one's feelings. This includes shaking off rampant anxiety, gloom, or irritability. Salovey and Mayer (1990) assert that individuals who can excel in this area of emotional intelligence are able to bounce back far more quickly from life's setbacks and upsets. Given the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, instructor self-management is a must.

Motivating Oneself: Emotional self-control, delaying gratification, and stifling impulsiveness-underlies this component of emotional intelligence. Loving what we do fuels motivation, and this create a drive hard work resulting in higher quality. Online instructors who have this skill tend to be more highly productive and effective in whatever they undertake.

Recognizing Emotions of Others: Empathy is one of the most fundamental people skills and rests on a solid foundation of self-awareness. People who are empathic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want. This is a skill that will aid in the overall effectiveness of the online instructor in both synchronized and asynchronized modalities.

Handling Relationships: Managing the emotions of others is a pivotal component of instructional leadership and social competence. Instructors who can excel in these skills are more likely to be successful with all processes of social interaction within the online classroom. Specific behaviorally related action steps are detailed in tables 1 and 2 below. Table one (Hein, 2012) offers ten habits of highly effective people. Such habits, if adopted by the online instructor, may enhance effectiveness for the online delivery of education. Similarly, table two (Goldman, 1995) provides an overview of emotional intelligence guidelines for all educators, administrators, and students.

Table 1
The Ten Habits of Emotionally Intelligent People   (Hein, 2012)

1. Label their feelings, rather than labeling people or situations.	"I feel impatient." Vs "This is ridiculous." "I feel hurt and bitter". Vs. "You are insensitive." "I feel afraid." Vs. "You are doing crazy things."
2. Distinguish between thoughts and feelings.	Thoughts: I feel like...& I feel as if.... & I feel that Feelings: I feel: (feeling word)
3. Take responsibility for their feelings.	"I feel jealous." Vs. "You are making me jealous."
4. Use their feelings to help them make decisions.	"How will I feel if I do this?" "How will I feel if I don't"
5. Show respect for other people's feelings.	They ask, "How will you feel if I do this?" "How will you feel if I don't?"
6. Feel energized, not angry.	They use what others call "anger" to help them feel energized to take productive action.
7. Validate other people's feelings.	They show empathy, understanding, and acceptance of other people's feelings.
8. Practice getting a positive value from their negative emotions.	They ask themselves: "How do I feel?" and "What would help me feel better?" They ask others "How do you feel?" and "What would help you feel better?"
9. Do not advise, command, control, criticize, judge or lecture to others.	They realize it does not feel good to be on the receiving end of such behavior, so they avoid it.
10. Avoid people who invalidate them, or do not respect their feelings.	As much as possible, they choose to associate only with other people with high EQ.

Table 2
The Emotional Competence Framework (Goldman, 1995)

PERSONAL COMPETENCE	
SELF-AWARNESS	• **Emotional Awareness**: recognizing one's emotions and their effect • **Accurate Self-assessment**: knowing one's strengths and limits • **Self-confidence**: A strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities
SELF-REGULATION	• **Self-control:** Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check • **Trustworthiness**: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity • **Conscientiousness**: Taking responsibility for personal performance • **Adaptability**: Flexibility in handling change • **Innovation**: Being comfortable with novel ideas, approaches and new information
SELF-MOTIVATION	• **Achievement drive**: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence • **Commitment**: Aligning with the goals of the group or organization • **Initiative**: Readiness to act on opportunities • **Optimism**: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks
SOCIAL COMPETENCE	
EMPATHY	• **Understanding others**: sensing others' feelings and perspectives, taking an active interest in their concerns • **Developing others**: Sensing others development needs and bolstering their abilities • **Service orientation**: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs • **Leveraging diversity**: Cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people • **Political Awareness**: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships
SOCIAL SKILLS	• **Influence**: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion • **Communication**: Listening openly and sending convincing messages • **Conflict management**: Negotiating and resolving disagreements • **Leadership:** Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups • **Change Catalyst**: Initiating or managing change • **Building bonds**: Nurturing instrumental relationships • **Collaboration and cooperation**: Working with others toward shared goals

Conclusion

Applying each of the above components of emotional intelligence to instruction within the online classroom is the basic suggestion of the present paper. Online delivery methods include text chat, voice chat, web cameras, e-mails, threaded discussions, or various combinations of each. Regardless of the delivery method utilized, the actual presence and ability of the instructor to demonstrate awareness and control of self, along with empathy for others is essential. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of emotional intelligence concepts within the online classroom.

What has been made clear through the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of disseminating knowledge across borders, companies, and all parts of society. Online education is no longer an option but a necessity. It is essential for educators to sharpen not only their technology, methodology, and content related tools but their behavioral and emotional competency tools to remain competitive and effective with the delivery of quality education. Ultimately, social competence is the foundation of online presence for the online instructor within all forms of synchronized and asynchronized communication. The emotionally intelligent faculty can aid in creating and maintaining a sense of calm, empathy and hope for the continuation of quality learning within our institutions of higher education during the age of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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