Embracing Classroom Diversity in the Third Space

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Abstract

Third space refers to the co-created hybrid spaces that bring people together, similar to how Coronavirus-related disruption has brought people 'together apart'. In the education context, it can be described as the 'in-between' space attempting to integrate binaries and open-up new possibilities for re-articulation of identity, learning and knowledge. This article provides a perspective on embracing classroom diversity by crossing the boundaries and intersection between the teacher/learner role, theoretical/practical knowledge, on-campus/online learning and STEM/humanities discipline. Strategies for creating third space are inclusive of teaching and learning, such as the student agency, students as partners, inquiry as stance, HyFlex model, curriculum integration, which are briefly discussed. Third spaces in teaching and learning also serve as a bridge, navigational and transformational space which can transform a linear classroom lesson into a more vibrant environment for effective learning.

Keywords: third space, diversity, inclusive pedagogy, teaching and learning

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Introduction

The coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19) pandemic has altered the lives of people worldwide and has recorded the largest movement of restrictions with over one-third of humanity under some form of lockdown leading to school closures that have affected over 1.5 billion learners in 192 countries, or 90.1% of total enrolled learners in mid-April 2020 (UNESCO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is more than a global health crisis; it is an unprecedented human, economic and social crisis. Some sources have even claimed that these large-scale lockdowns and quarantines have arguably become the largest psychological experiment in history resulting in a secondary or flow-on epidemic of mental disorders and burnout in the second half of this year (World Economic Forum, 2020). The virus continues to attack societies at their core and has severely disrupted the lives, livelihood, and communities worldwide. Factually, no one is immune from COVID-19.

During this unprecedented and uncertain time of fear and disruption, this pandemic has unquestionably affected the education sector as well, driving the journey and adoption of online learning. Despite the already growing global interest and investment in education technology (ed-tech) before COVID-19, this epidemic has driven educators and institutions that were earlier reluctant to adopt edtech to shift to online teaching-learning quickly.

With the rising demand and upsurge of edtech on a global scale, technology advocates may perceive online teaching as the future of education and part of the world's 'new norm' given its proven effectiveness and flexibility. Even though online learning has taken centre stage and served as a panacea in this time of crisis, there are several heated debates regarding its application in education such as its accessibility, affordability, privacy concerns, interactivity, quality and one of the most fundamental concerns, teaching pedagogy.

Replicating an online class to what was previously, a physical classroom is not a practical strategy. The sudden transition from an offline to an online mode of teaching-learning is more than merely a shift of space brings with it changes in expectations, execution, and the environment. Even though the education system is attempting to keep things 'normal', faculties are exploring what online teaching means to them in reality, the ways to facilitate and strengthen the teacher-learner relationship and pedagogical approach that engages, questions, and explores the content with students in this new environment.