

Balancing Student and Teacher Expectations in a Post-Covid Environment

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Balancing Student and Teacher Expectations in a Post-Covid Environment Introduction, Need for LCT Strategy, and Connection to Literature

Student expectations have been an important component of learner-centered teaching. Navigating relationship-building and connections between students and instructors important to culturally responsive teaching (Bakerville, 2009). This can be challenging in a diverse environment because of differences in expectations students and instructors have of each other (Moore, et al., 2011). These differences were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bozkurt et al., 2020). The large-scale shut-down quarantine resulted in moving face-to-face instruction to a completely virtual learning environment with the stresses of the pandemic. Inclusive learner-centered instructors navigated the shift to a virtual learning environment with concerns about their students and how they were learning. This transition was abrupt and complicated with the trauma of shifting to online learning during a global pandemic. In doing so, instructors informed their strategies using social and emotional learning and Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

However, many instructors in higher education did not have the knowledge/training in learner-centered teaching, culturally responsive teaching, and trauma informed teaching and higher education has largely ignored the need for culturally responsive education, especially in online environments (Vincent-Layton, 2022). This was a new experience for the instructors who had some training, and likely overwhelming for instructors who had limited to no training to respond to the stresses the pandemic created.

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this abstract was to examine the change in expectations between students and instructors after the Covid-19 pandemic. This shift of expectations has led to tensions between students and teachers as educational institutions strive to return to pre-pandemic expectations. This collaborative discussion seeks to discover how students and instructors have found a balance between different and sometimes conflicting expectations.

Four institutions in higher education met and discussed the challenges they face regarding students' expectations, which have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Each instructor at different institutions was asked to examine the strategies they use to engage students in culturally relevant instruction and what have been the challenges and tensions between students and instructors because of the changes in expectations due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Instructors were asked to reflect on strategies they used to be learner-centered, be culturally responsive, navigate attendance and face-to-face engagement, and complete class assignments in a timely manner. Instructors were asked to share any tensions they have experienced through the transition of post-Covid-19 instruction and how they navigated these tensions and transitions.

Attendance: Students wanted flexible attendance options. Although instructors expected students to physically attend class, some students shared they wanted to attend virtually. Students shared they had other challenges in their lives that kept them from attending class (e.g., anxieties, work, car problems). Students expected instructors to accept (aka, approve) of these reasons for not attending class. Instructors communicated with students they expected a written explanation and medical excuse for missing class. Instructors reached out to students and expressed concern and interest in their success in the courses. Further, instructors made decisions regarding missed days of class and make-up work based on their written expectations in the syllabus.

Etiquette: Cameras on, etc. In some cases, departmental expectations of certain protocols regarding online attendance were established. Instructors communicated with students that when in attendance via video interaction, cameras were required to be on during the entire class time and students would be expected to be visible in their cameras. Unfortunately, lack of consistent strong internet signal resulted in poor transmission quality for both instructors and students. This led to instructors modifying the departmental rule on a situational basis in order to improve instructional quality.

Assignment Deadlines: Instructors made decisions regarding missed assignment deadlines make-up work based on their written expectations in the syllabus. Although the instructors could have not accepted any late work based on their policies, they did accept students' late work with some deducted points for lateness.

Face-to-Face Engagement: Although some students expected flexible options, some students appreciated courses being taught face-to-face with instructors using learner-centered teaching strategies for student engagement. Students shared they were not engaged in an online environment during Covid-19 and they appreciated instructors who made an effort to re-engage students to discuss class topics and do hands-on activities in a face-to-face environment.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Building relationships with students and showing empathy is important, especially when students experience uncertainties and changes. Students are asked to share discussion posts about their interests and hobbies. This helps cultivate student identities and discuss their common interests beyond the classroom. In post-COVID19, faculty intentionally acknowledge challenges students' face and provide spaces for students to talk about their challenges, both inside and outside the classroom. Discussion boards in Learning Management Systems (e.g., Bright Space), white board applications (e.g., Jamboard), and other digital workspaces (e.g., Mural) can be used inside and outside the classroom to promote students to share their personal interests, cultural assets, and life experiences. The goal is to facilitate personal connections among the students, instructor, and content.

Implication and Advice to Others

Communication strategies are important in establishing, maintaining and navigating student expectations. Clearly communicating written expectations in the syllabus is key because the syllabus serves as a formal contract with the instructor. Although the syllabus can be interpreted clearly, instructors should use discretion and empathy to understand students' challenges in navigating the post-pandemic environment. Flexibility and consistency in interpreting expectations are key concepts in choosing strategies to navigate post-pandemic challenges. Although students appreciated flexibility, students clearly expressed they appreciated the physical presence of the instructor. They appreciated being with other students in the classroom and being engaged in discussions about the course concepts and topics. Moreover, they appreciated the personal interaction with the professor and the opportunity to build relationships with other students and the instructor. Personal relationships are important in learner-centered teaching and culturally responsive teaching (Vavrus, 2008).

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