International Professional Development Association
Supporting professional learning since 1969

Reflecting on what COVID-19 means for my research as a doctoral student

JULY 3, 2020

This blog post has been contributed by Ryan Williams.

The global spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns have resulted in schools being shut all around the world. It is estimated that 1.2 billion students have been affected due to the measures taken by affected countries to stem the outbreak (UNESCO 2020). From early years to doctoral candidates, learners have been forced to stay at home amid the pandemic; consequently, changing education in a dramatic manner. Amongst the chaos, the education technology and online learning sector have been presented with the biggest opportunity with the rise of e-learning; whereby classes are conducted remotely and online. Some schools and educational institutes have managed to adapt, some have not.

Notwithstanding the social, political and economic factors that influence the use of 'EdTech', some technologies have played a crucial role in ensuring that learning providers (schools, colleges, and universities) deliver learning through means that resonate across generations. When I first began my doctoral research exploring how social networking sites can be implemented into pedagogy successfully, it was still an interesting yet undesired form of pedagogy for many educators. However, since COVID-19, remote learning has become the new normal for students and teachers with many of the widely-known challenges being dilated. To ensure minimum disruption to education programmes, institutes recognised the importance of unlocking the potential of technology for effective remote learning. In other words, the pandemic has brought online learning to the forefront of conversations in education and in the commercial world.

Discussions around remote learning are pertinent in my experience of using social media in education. Many news outlets have even held institutions to account for their lack of contact with students during the lockdown with communication and mental health being key themes generated in this discourse (see Weale 2020; Winnie-Zhou 2020). I argue that social media plays a vital role in people's lives, even more so during the lockdown due to the potential connectivity that is generated. There is evidence to suggest that social media can improve confidence, social wellbeing and creativity in learners (Lewis 2017). 21st century learning sceptics have often cited cyberbullying and online abuse on social media platforms as issues which must be addressed before any serious discussions around social media in pedagogy can be held. However, during this period of enhanced remote learning terms such as 'TEL', 'EdTech' and 'e-learning' have appeared at the forefront of an education agenda, and social media abuse appears to be reducing (see Jardine 2020). Furthermore, Jardine (2020) argues that the crisis is helping educators to realise the positive benefits of using social media for pedagogy.

As part of my research, I sent a survey out to UK educators in January 2020 and so far I have collected almost 350 responses. However, since the lockdown it has become increasingly difficult to engage in interaction with teachers in my research. Upon reflection, I decided to revise my survey email and include details about how my research fits in with the current agenda of remote learning and COVID-19. Since I revised my email, my response rates have improved significantly. At times, having the ability to be both proactive and reactive in research is important and I look forward to how I can further develop as a researcher throughout this journey. Microsoft have assisted schools in the UK in establishing remote learning to help the students continue to learn while at home. In the UK, around 27,000 schools are using Office 365, Skype in the Classroom, Minecraft: Education Edition and Microsoft Teams. Teams enable lessons to be run remotely by connecting students and teachers over video-enabled remote classrooms. They also provide a host of collaborative and interactive tools which help digitally proficient students experience and modify the curriculum accordingly. Since the lockdown, Teams usage has surpassed Zoom in the video conferencing industry, thus, cementing their place as a market leader and superior platform (see O'Halloran 2020). All of this provides a fascinating opportunity for professional development and it will be interesting to see whether or not this experience of professional development is transformative for the educators and the students. I would like to be able to write about the successful forms of professional development in this aspect of education, however, I will have to wait and see if this is the case in the next phase of my research journey.

References

- Jardine, C. 2020. Social media abuse seems to be falling in the lockdown – Christine Jardine. [online] www.scotsman.com. Available at: https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/social-media-abuse-seems-be-falling-lockdown-christine-jardine-2862686
- Lewis, T. L. 2017. Social media and student engagement in anatomy education. Anatomical sciences education, 10 (5), 508–508.
- O'Halloran, J. 2020. Microsoft Teams usage growth surpasses Zoom. [online] ComputerWeekly.com. Available at: https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252485100/Microsoft-Teams-usage-growth-surpasses-Zoom
- UNESCO. 2020. COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response. [online] UNESCO. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse
- Weale, S. 2020. Four in 10 pupils have had little contact with teachers during lockdown. [online] The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/15/2m-children-in-uk-have-done-almost-no-school-work-in-lockdown
- Winni-Zhou, B. 2020. In post-lockdown China, student mental health in focus amid reported jump in suicides. Reuters. [online] 11 Jun. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-mental-healt/in-post-lockdown-china-student-mental-health-in-focus-amid-reported-jump-in-suicides-idUSKBN23H3J3

f   Share on Facebook   ▼   Tweet

SHARE THIS PAGE WITH YOUR NETWORKS