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Book Review: Handbook of Research on Lessons Learned from Transitioning to Virtual Classrooms During a Pandemic

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Book Review: Handbook of Research on Lessons Learned from Transitioning to Virtual Classrooms During a Pandemic

Abstract

This book review on the Handbook of Research on Lessons Learned from Transitioning to Virtual Classrooms During a Pandemic by editors Amy W. Thornburg, Robert J. Ceglie, and Dixie F. Abernathy, aims to highlight reflections on the aftermath of the shift to online learning as told by K-20 teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators in the wake of the nascent spread of COVID-19 around the world. This review summary[s]es and assesses the book with the intention of offering readership a selection that promises effective educational learning tools, strategies, recommendations, and policies that might prove beneficial for all students going forward. Based on first-person narratives from classroom teachers, college professors, and community leaders around the world, who were on the front lines of moving to online teaching platforms, this book review may prove worthwhile to their global counterparts, who are searching for a primer on how educators might help students recover learning losses after the pandemic. In addition, the faculty editors, who are based at Queens University of Charlotte in North Carolina, present real-life accounts of the supplementary challenges the pandemic presented to students and teachers, including food insecurity, emergency remote teaching, and student motivation, primarily in North Carolina and such countries as Italy, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Thornburg et al.'s book is noteworthy to the global educational community as it presents stories from a compelling array of contributors whose captivating lived experiences will sound familiar to the audience; moreover, the authors validate their findings and unabashedly acknowledge their shortcomings.

Practitioner Notes

1. Provide ample opportunities to achieve relational humanity in student-teacher interactions for all modalities of instruction.
2. Explore ways to enhance higher education writing instruction for student success.
3. Offer student teachers intentional coursework to address social emotional learning related to online instruction.
4. Proactively explore strategies on how schools can better prepare families and students from low socio-economic backgrounds for future success.
5. Modify or expand student services to support food-insecure students to ensure they achieve their academic goals.

Keywords

Online Learning, Remote Learning, Research, Higher Education (HE)

Book Review: Handbook of Research on Lessons Learned from Transitioning to Virtual Classrooms During a Pandemic

Amy W. Thornburg, Robert J. Ceglie and Dixie F. Abernathy (eds.) (2021)

The straightforward title alone of Thornburg et al.'s 457-page edited volume, *Handbook of Research on Lessons Learned from Transitioning to Virtual Classrooms During a Pandemic* (2021), might inspire angst-filled flashbacks among some readers – namely, the K-20 teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators, who were forced to confront the spread of COVID-19. Suddenly, U.S. and other school leaders in March 2020 closed schools and, in many instances, moved in-person teaching online to help mitigate the impacts of the deadly pandemic. It was an alarming and unknown academic epoch, when officials would keep many classrooms around the country closed for more than one year. Where previously there had been scant blueprints for attempting such abrupt, sustained, and hopefully, successful, learning transitions, there are now numerous virtual and in-person opportunities touting helpful approaches to “effective online learning” and promising pathways to “successful student engagement.”

You would be forgiven if you assumed Thornburg et al.'s treatise simply offers more of the same “best” online teaching practices; while the three faculty researchers, who are based at Queens University of Charlotte (N.C.), do advance much broader praxes that bring to light pathways to successes in online teaching and learning, they aspire to much loftier intentions than merely steering readers toward the newest preeminent virtual learning implements for students in Kindergarten through to graduate school:

We aim to arm our readers with tools, strategies, and recommendations that can be brought into your own classrooms. In addition, we explore the needs of our students and wider policy changes that could improve learning for all of our students (Thornburg et al., 2021).

The editors qualify their discussions, which are centered on the past years' disruptive period for K-20 teaching and learning, with 21 chapters, strategically divided into four major sections: (a) K-12 Educator Perspectives on Lessons Learned, (b) School and Home Connections During Virtual Learning, (c) Virtual Learning Resources for Higher Education Educators, and (d) Course Design for Optimal Student Engagement. Featured are first-person narratives from those classroom teachers, college professors, and community leaders on the front lines in the United States and abroad, “who share the wisdom gained moving to online teaching platforms” (Thornburg et al., 2021) and represent a global perspective on similar worldwide issues. The editors describe the toll that such challenges as food insecurity, emergency remote teaching, and student motivation had on students and school leaders, primarily in North Carolina and such countries as Italy, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. After reading enthralling narratives from such diverse countries, it was a bit disheartening for N.C. to be the only U.S. state prominently featured, given the other myriad challenges nationwide.

“Kairos,” the Ancient Greek rhetorical appeal that defines an opportune time for decision or action, is prominent in this handbook, part of The Advances in Mobile and Distance Learning (AMDLE) Book Series; as some of the lowest-performing U.S. students saw the largest declines in achievement, perhaps at no other time in history has an inventory of the effectiveness of online education been so vital (“School Turnaround,” 2022). Popular media headlines critique online

education at all levels, (a) bemoaning what has been hailed as an historic documented learning loss by many U.S. students who suffered through so-called “Zoom schools;” (b) deeming the closing of schools as failed policy; (c) exposing the issue of educator burnout; (d) disparaging the automation of student learning; and (e) questioning the “lack of concern” for university teaching outcomes.

“Unfortunately, there is some truth to many of these headlines as reports from teachers, students, and parents do suggest that online learning has not been a success for many students,” the researcher-editors posit (Thornburg, 2021).

Other analyses echo the book’s compelling approach, which offers candid assessments of the “big pivot” online:

Many teachers and students have benefited from online learning, and many have not. . . No longer are institutions able to offer a one size fits all system because teaching and learning now depend on learning management systems, teachers’ learning growth on how to teach online, and students managing their motivations and engagement in learning (Ringler, 2021).

The editors have compiled a compelling array of authors whose findings are backed by research data, whose shortcomings are unabashedly acknowledged, and whose lived experiences are authenticated. Consequently, the effective strategies they offer other classroom teachers, college professors, and educational leaders might enable educators to help students recover somewhat after pandemic learning losses.

Conflict of Interest

The author discloses that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The author discloses that they have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective university.

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