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#Building New Bridges Together: Strengthening Ethics in Higher Education after Covid-19

Higher Education and Pedagogies in an Intercultural, Global Conversation

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Introduction

First of all, I would just like to say that one of the things that this current Covid-19 pandemic has shown us is that higher education could do more in terms of providing access to education and ensuring fairness to students and learners, not to mention lessening significantly the bureaucracy and red tape associated with higher learning, both for the students and especially for the faculties.

As we have seen in the past few months, *anyone* from *anywhere* can virtually learn *anything* and *everything* they desire to learn via readily-available technological platforms. Top-notch universities around the world are offering free courses to anyone with an Internet connection. Admittedly, there is still the problem of digital divide and the unequal development of the Internet infrastructure. Setting that aside, such payless and painless educational system *would* and *should* probably make us rethink about the relevance of our existing higher educational system.

Currently, I am fortunate to be a part of the Globethics initiative with the Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) to offer a new course on "Inter-Religious Cooperation for Peace", whereby learners with no or limited internet access, such as those in remote areas or in refugee camps, could still have access to learning opportunities. In ICRS, I am developing with colleagues MOOCs (Massive Open, Online Course) on "Indonesian Islam and Religious Pluralism" and "Faith and Urban Resilience" with experts from around the world.

New Learning Opportunities

I would like to focus my lightning talk on these new learning opportunities, and how we could connect our university pedagogies to the wider intercultural, global conversation. Two points need to be highlighted:

1) We need to democratize our university classrooms and make way for various innovative ways of interaction and engagements between students and teachers or faculty members. This should extend to lectures, student research, term papers, exams, seminars and conferences. It could also be extended—and we have seen this happening today during this pandemic—, where student examination and graduation take place virtually or online. In

other words, being physically present should no longer be a pre-requisite for learning, and accessing to knowledge, both for the students and faculty members.

Online pedagogical methods allow us to make our classrooms more accessible to people of different backgrounds and affiliations to teach. Faculty members could invite professors, scholars and researchers literally from anywhere in the world. I mean this used to be confined only to universities that could have the means to invite and facilitate Visiting Professors to have their Sabbatical or Leave of Absence from their universities.

With geography being a non-issue with online pedagogy, learning is increasingly being done "without walls". And as we are moving more toward the Internet of Things (IoTs), I am guessing that this would most probably be the new trend in teaching and learning.

With the new online pedagogies, we can literally invite professors, scholars, researchers from any institutions around the world to come and talk to our students, making learning more inclusive, global and intercultural. This will enable our students the opportunity to engage international professors, scholars and researchers from different kinds of nationality, race/ethnicity, religious affiliations and what have you. It also allows students to think beyond the textbooks and explore non-dominant (more often than not Western) theories and methods of knowing.

2) In the conventional university system, we argue and debate over a lot about "learning outcomes". But what do we really mean by learning outcome, if not the totality of the experience that students or learners get from the process of learning? Thus, I am arguing this point not just from the methodological viewpoint of teaching, but epistemologically speaking, such totality of inclusive learning experience would indeed bring about a more inclusive, responsive global citizenship that we all desire. After all, the human civilization expects people to contribute one way or the other to society or to human progress.

   You see, if you look at the world today, there is not one problem of humanity that could be resolved by any one discipline. You name it. Climate change, food security, energy security, virus pandemics. Thus, we have reached the "Age of Synthesis", where boundaries of disciplines, sciences and faculties are being redrawn, if not diminished slowly but surely.

   The new online pedagogy should therefore pave the way for greater acceptance to multi-, inter- and transdisiciplinary approaches to any discipline or field of study. Just like tradition, no discipline is self sufficient!

   If our students and learners were to be engaged globally from the outset, they would come to realize the complexity of the world problems and be able to celebrate diversity within the human civilization. This way, students and learners will be able to understand better the world they live in and

able to collaborate with people of different nationality, race/ethnicity, faith, political and sexual orientations.

In conclusion, I see a lot of opportunities out there, which we could exploit and explore further. The real challenge is really how we get our higher education institutions to change their ways of looking at the world, and how they could open the classrooms for a better total learning experience. I fear that if universities don't change, they will most likely become obsolete or at best irrelevant.[]

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