

Zoom: A “New” and “Critical” Medium for Student Learning

In amidst of the global pandemic known as the coronavirus, the United States called for all citizens to self-quarantine as a safety measure towards reducing the spread of COVID-19. As a result, a majority of all American schools drew towards social-distance learning, with the video call program “Zoom” as a main predecessor for students to learn virtually. While remote learning contains substantial benefits and disadvantages in contrast to campus learning, the coronavirus has certainly introduced a trend for a creative, modernized, and soluble teaching tool for American schools to use in the post-pandemic era.

The infrastructure of the modern online education system has relied heavily on Zoom to adapt to an unprecedented surge of users. Having prior experience with universities and “higher education space” since 2011, the company quickly delivered. “So it was really about creating that content, creating that access, web environments, blog posts, videos, you name it, to ensure that they were up to speed and could really take advantage of everything the product had to offer” (qtd. in Wade and Swaminathan). In order to closely simulate a school classroom, Zoom has worked to provide updates for teachers and students alike (virtual seating chart, options for student-led group activities, etc.), and within almost a full year of social distancing for many American schools, online learning has proved to be efficient. Students now have increasingly more flexibility with a schedule that revolves around their school time, and additionally, attending school has become much more feasible for the majority of students. The online learning system has also become modernized to fit suitable personalizations of the classroom for both students and teachers. There are a variety of methods for students to most effectively learn; some learn through audio while others rely on visual perception, and similarly, some prefer to work in groups whereas others learn more without distractions (Gautam). Zoom is able to

provide users with numerous resources that assist in catering to the preferences of each student. With the ability to both attend class and communicate with peers and teachers alike in the comfort of a personal environment, remote learning allows students to efficiently participate in a virtual “classroom”.

On the contrary, there are limits as to what remote learning may be able to accomplish in comparison with that of campus learning. According to education technology promoter Priyanka Gautam, one of the students’ biggest issues of online learning is the inability to focus on a screen for long periods of time. Many students feel less engaged when learning through a virtual system, resulting in a greater chance that students will become distracted throughout lessons. Furthermore, using Zoom solely relies on having a stable internet connection. Without a consistent source of internet, students are faced with detrimental challenges while learning throughout the pandemic. Most severely, several students thrive from being surrounded by peers, both academically and socially; however, remote learning has entirely limited physical interactions and communications between students, leading to isolation and an increase in mental stigma. A Lancet mental health study reports that “nearly three in ten [parents] say their child is ‘already experiencing harm’ to their emotional or mental health because of social distancing and closures” (qtd. “National Alliance on Mental Illness”). Loneliness is a strong factor that heightens the severity of depression and is harmful to the mental wellbeing; and accordingly, online schooling may exacerbate loneliness among students with a lack of interaction between peers.

With knowledge of both pros and cons of remote learning, it is difficult to predict how Zoom will be used in the future. Will schools continue to operate with Zoom to host classes? How would strictly online learning overcome precedented obstacles of both the teachers and

students? With COVID-19, Zoom has provided a sufficient learning platform for thousands of schools and businesses to safely use. Nevertheless, in a post-pandemic world, the current disadvantages of online learning would most likely outweigh the current benefits. Though modern society has become dependent on a strong digital infrastructure with the normalization of electronically transmitted information, communication technologies such as Zoom are yet to be advanced enough to completely imitate a classroom environment, as proven within the numerous challenges both students and teachers face. Rather than transforming Zoom into the main source for learning, it can serve as a beneficial secondary medium. Group presentations, teacher/counselor meetings, or optional tutorials for students who are unable to attend class are all creative ways Zoom can be used as a necessity in difficult circumstances. As most schools would be intermediately experienced with operating Zoom, it can function as a creative tool for several other challenges outside that of the pandemic.

Remote learning has revolutionized the education system in the modern-day era. While serving as an efficient and helpful method for distance learning, Zoom from a technological and mental standpoint could also negatively affect a students' ability to learn. However, as such platforms continue to advance technologically, so will their effectiveness as a fundamental tool for not just schools but also the entire world to learn and use.

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