



(E-)Learning to Understand and Love Yourself: An Attempt to Teach Healthy Lifestyle in the Midst of Social Unrest

Amy Lee Wai Sum *

School of Education and Languages, The Open University of Hong Kong, Kowloon, China

In the 2012 curriculum reform, an extra year was added to the typical university degree programme in Hong Kong, and this became a good opportunity to provide more structured General Education to students in all major disciplines. Although the mode, units allocation, and actual course content of these GE courses in local universities differ, what they share is a comprehensive coverage across knowledge areas: the arts, the social and natural sciences, and skill sets that students can apply in personal and professional life. The author of this article taught in a Hong Kong university that offers a General Education programme with courses designed and delivered by individual academic departments and supported by relevant administrative units. This article is a reflection on teaching a General Education course in the category of Healthy Lifestyle, open to full-time students of all disciplines, during the fall semester of academic year 2019-2020. During most of the semester, daily life in Hong Kong had been disrupted to different extents, and the emotional landscape across different population groups had been rugged. University students were also affected physically and emotionally during this time, the teaching and learning environment was challenging, and teachers had to create an appropriate teaching and learning experience in view of the external environment and the students' internal emotional needs. This article shares some useful practices in employing e-learning during a time of unrest, to facilitate the teaching of healthy lifestyle to students. The learning outcomes achieved, as seen in some student work, encourage us to seek further ways to employ e-learning for more effective learning experience for new generations of students, especially in the area of affective learning.

OPEN ACCESS

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*Correspondence:

Amy Lee Wai Sum
awslee@ouhk.edu.hk

Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Digital Learning Innovations,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Education

Received: 31 October 2020

Accepted: 26 July 2021

Published: 04 August 2021

Citation:

Lee Wai Sum A (2021) (E-)Learning to Understand and Love Yourself: An Attempt to Teach Healthy Lifestyle in the Midst of Social Unrest. *Front. Educ.* 6:624370. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.624370

Keywords: healthy lifestyle, social unrest, general education, emotional engagement, e-learning platform

INTRODUCTION: EMOTIONAL EDUCATION IN GENERAL AND SPECIFIC TIMES

After more than 18 months of living with the Covid-19 pandemic, the global world is well aware of the significance of cultivating our resilience to face different life situations. While the medical profession is tasked with the job of creating a medical shield against diseases, we are all responsible for strengthening our emotional competence so that we can adapt to unexpected situations in life. The need for emotional education or training in the school curriculum is not new. Since Daniel Goleman's publicising Emotional Intelligence in his book in 1995, attention to this aspect of human capability has resulted in changes in school curriculum, professional training, and many studies about ways of enhancement as well as impact on the way we lead our lives. University education, for

many being the final step before young adults join the professions, has also been a site which seeks to benefit from incorporating such training to maximize the graduates' intellectual performance and employability. In the same year that Goleman published his *Emotional Intelligence*, McWhirter (1995) described his own psychoeducational groups for university students, to generally facilitate survival in the university, retention rate, and to enhance career exploration. He particularly organised special theme groups such as disabled students and students who suffered from loneliness. These psychoeducational groups contributed positively to students' well-being, and experiences such as these encouraged further exploration into how such training can become part of the regular curriculum.

In the 25 years since Goleman discussed this new intelligence and how to incorporate this in various educational and professional settings, the way of teaching and learning has also undergone huge changes, one of which is the increasing utilisation of e-Learning mechanisms across various levels. E-Learning is hardly a new thing today in most developed communities. Twenty years ago when I joined my university, the orientation programme already contained induction to e-Learning teaching techniques and tools available. During "normal" times, teaching in the university (and in primary and secondary school sectors) is conducted with varying involvement of e-Learning tools, depending on the nature of the disciplines, teachers' professional development, and availability of resources. The discussion about e-Learning is no longer whether it should be adapted, but how best to use it to maximize effectiveness in teaching and learning. Looking at the studies about e-Learning experiences, one issue which is key to the effectiveness of e-Learning immediately jumps out—the e-learners' emotional experience during the process of e-Learning. From a series of interviews with university students, O'Regan (2003) discovered that the perceived dichotomy between cognition and emotion during the learning process was not real, in fact, emotion was "central and essential to the teaching/learning process" (O'Regan 2003, 78). Sun's team did a survey in 2006 with 645 e-Learners in Taiwan, to identify the main factors affecting learner satisfaction in e-Learning experiences. The results showed that among the seven key factors, four had to do with learners' (and instructors') emotions (Sun et al., 2008, 1183).

Some studies about the e-Learning process revealed that learners' emotions in interacting with the mechanism could be a determining factor in the success of the entire learning experience. Two main emotions were identified as expressed by e-learners - pride and shame - in their "human-technology interaction processes" (Juutinen and Saariluoma 2010), therefore in order to increase effectiveness of learning, the e-Learning experience should be designed in a way to increase e-learners' emotion of pride in managing the interaction process. Technophobia was found to be generating "frustration and anxiety" (Juutinen et al., 2011, 104) which caused e-learners to stop or feel reluctant to repeat the experience. Saadé and Kira (2009) came to the same conclusion that emotional factors affected the e-Learning experience, and proposed a design of e-learning systems which featured a consideration of the

emotions of the learners. Shen et al. (2009) customised e-Learning material based on emotional responses from learners and found that emotionally aware learning experience had greatly improved learning performance, thus proposed an affective e-Learning model (Shen et al., 2009, 186). Other studies taking into consideration of e-learners' emotions in their interaction with the learning system came up with "emotion sensitive e-learning model" (Nitin et al., 2011, 260) of learning, and "an agent to imitate the human interaction" (Chatzara et al., 2012, 253) in the process of learning, both showing success in enhancing the effectiveness of e-Learning.

With reference to the global trend of attention to emotional well-being, as well as technological development for the education sector, the following is a very specific reflection on a teaching and learning experience set in Hong Kong higher education during a particularly challenging time. During the second half of 2019, Hong Kong experienced a period of social unrest which affected a wide range of daily life practices including teaching and learning activities across all levels. As a result of the social unrest and disruption of regular activities, many young people experienced a range of emotional challenges including shock, incomprehension, helplessness, and depression. The author of this article was teaching undergraduate courses at the time, and had created a very personal teaching and learning experience through a compulsory General Education course, to help student respond to the specific challenges at the time, and to establish a healthy lifestyle in general. This article is a reflective discussion of this teaching and learning experience, with the following aims: to describe university students' need for emotional education, to report how a General Education course can be used to teach self-care skills including emotional intelligence, and finally through the sharing of some students' feedback, to confirm the acute need for emotional well-being among learners in higher education (and beyond).

METHODOLOGY: GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE "HOW ARE YOU, MY FRIEND? UNDERSTANDING AND LOVING YOURSELF"

My university is a medium size liberal arts university which embraces the Whole Person Education ethos. Learning experiences besides the discipline-oriented have always been a core part of its curriculum, and the education reform which changed the university curriculum into 4 years in 2012 was only an additional push factor towards a more structured General Education Programme for all undergraduate students. Healthy Lifestyle is one of the compulsory categories of courses within this programme, containing a range of courses offered by different academic departments pertaining to relevant aspects of daily life. In the most recent call for new courses in Healthy Lifestyle, I proposed a course which provides common knowledge and practical tips about establishing a healthy way of living for young people. The proposal was approved and it was first offered to students in AY 2019-2020, with a quota of 40

places. The medium of instruction was English, there all teaching materials were in English, although students were given a choice to submit their assignments in Chinese if they felt that it would be a more effective way to convey the chosen content.

I gave this General Education course a rather unconventional title: “How Are You, My Friend? Understanding and Loving Yourself”. GE is a compulsory requirement for graduation in my university, and despite the many interesting and necessary topics of study available for choice, students’ enthusiasm for this group of courses was not always very high. In order to convey the practical orientation of the course, and my user-friendly approach, the title as well as the intended learning outcomes of the course are written in a simple and easy to understand non-academic language. The intended learning outcomes are the ability to:

- a. demonstrate self-knowledge in the form of an oral, written, or visual narrative;
- b. reflect on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle in relation to personal needs; and
- c. identify and use approaches and methods to manage personal problems in lifestyle.

Besides the 2 h × 13 weeks’ in-class interaction, students had to complete relevant assignments to complement their learning, as well as demonstrate the achievement of their learning outcomes. In line with the down-to-earth nature of the course, I designed the learning tasks to be practical and self-chosen as much as possible. Each student had to keep a weekly journal throughout the semester, noting any problem area, or inspirations for change in their own lifestyle. I believe that it was only through reviewing their own habits and pattern of behaviour that they could have a basis for initiating a plan for change. Besides, each student should belong to a group and make an oral presentation on one aspect of healthy lifestyle every week. I urged them to identify a common area of concern among the group, and do some research to find practical methods or aids to help everyone make an improvement in addressing one aspect of lifestyle.

The ultimate piece of assignment at the end of the semester was the Personal Resolution Plan (PRP), which included an analysis of their personal lifestyle to identify one area of modification, and a detailed plan to achieve the desired change. I encouraged each student to make this plan just to correct or acquire ONE personal lifestyle issue, and also suggest a way to measure the achievement. It was hoped that students could utilise the skills learned in class, and the information acquired during their group research, to formulate a self-help plan which had to be carried out and evaluated. Adaptation of healthy lifestyle depends on the right attitude, understanding, and approach, no matter what one’s career aspirations are. At the beginning of the semester, the rationale of the course and the reasons for the assignments were clearly explained to the students so that they could engage in the learning experience with the correct attitude and a positive mental state—a learning experience that is purely for one’s own good. After the first 2 weeks, words about the course were spread and five more students requested to

join. The final class size was 45. For a non-major course conducted in English, and with weekly assignments to be submitted, this positive response from students was a strong indication of their identification with the content.

The following reflective discussion is based on interaction with the 45 students of the course, including my observation of their in-class behaviour, and the written assignments submitted by the students via the e-Learning platform. Each student submitted one piece of journal writing (about 300 words) every week for 12 weeks, and finally a portfolio (i.e., Personal Resolution Plan) as a capstone assignment to showcase what they had learned in the semester, as well as to indicate one change desired in their lifestyle. In order to protect students’ privacy, no reference of any names or student identity is made in the following discussion, and direct quotations from student work will only be indicated by a “submission number” which was randomly assigned by the e-Learning platform at the point of submission. I have also made translations of student work which was written in Chinese for easy reference here. Since the purpose of this discussion is to show the emotional landscape and behaviour of some Hong Kong university students over the second half of 2019, the voices of these young people are important, and I try my best to refer to their own words.

DISRUPTION AND CONNECTION: E-LEARNING, INTIMACY, AND AFFECT

Unexpectedly, the social and political conditions of Hong Kong at the time of semester 1 (September to December 2019) of academic year 2019-2020 had enhanced the course’s relevance to the students’ needs than its original planning. Beginning from June 2019, Hong Kong had experienced a series of anti-extradition protests, and many young people including university students were emotionally and psychologically disturbed about the state of affairs. At the beginning of the semester in September 2019, many young people were experiencing stress due to conflicts with their family, anxiety due to disruption of daily routine, frustration about their own roles in the current situation, and a general sense of uncertainty about the future. Although the course was designed as a general education course that covers standard topics related to wellness, and was reviewed and approved well before the summer of 2019, the time of its offering incidentally matched the very specific needs of the students who were struggling to stay healthy both physically and mentally, given the external environment.

The semester started with an air of normality but also a tentative sense of expectation. While we conducted our teaching and learning activities as usual on campus, we were all very much alert to the volatile social situation and its impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of students. At that time, although classes went on as usual, teachers were already reminded to accommodate different student needs: those who did not feel emotionally well enough to attend classes, those who were otherwise engaged, and those who might have problems meeting deadlines for various reasons. Even at the beginning of the semester when face-to-face classes was the official mode of

interaction with students, many teachers had made audio recordings of the lectures and placed them on the e-Learning platform for students to access at their own time, on top of the normal practice of placing all teaching materials such as notes, reference materials and instructions for various learning tasks.

By the end of October 2019, the number of empty chairs in the lecture rooms were quite noticeable, and we spent more and more time communicating with students through email and other means of e-communication. The number of messages we posted on the e-Learning platform message board also significantly increased. Two weeks into November, the University announced suspension of face to face interaction and shifted all teaching and learning activities to the online mode. Immediately class materials had to be re-made to suit this alternative mode of teaching, and communication with the student groups became more frequent as by then non-local students had left the city and gone home, and local students were trying to get used to asking questions about the courses when they did not have the chance to meet with their classmates or the teacher. Accessing the course materials and “learning” when staying in their home was also a new challenge to them in terms of motivation and time management.

Looking back from today’s vantage point, after more than 18 months of online classes practiced in many parts of the world, the kind of e-Learning experience we provided in the second half of 2019 was relatively rudimentary. We used the institutionally subscribed e-Learning platform and placed audio-recordings of face-to-face lectures, lecture notes in PowerPoint files with audio clips, and added many other audio-visual materials from external sources to enrich the teaching and learning experience. At the same time, social media platforms were called into service to help us maintain communication with different students—whether they resided locally or had already retreated to their home town. As the disruption to daily life practices escalated, more and more effort was made on maintaining an open communication with students. Visual messages which were not about academic contents were made and posted on the e-Learning platform just to give students some encouragement and dispel the sense of isolation during the extended period of suspension of face-to-face teaching.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE? THE NEEDS OF HONG KONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (IN THEIR OWN VOICES)

In my class, there was a student who identified himself as “the biggest boy in class”, and had wanted to lose weight as well as improve general health. After I demonstrated a set of simple physical exercise (which involves arms swinging) in class, he entered this in his weekly journal on October 25, 2019:

First, I would want to tell you a good news, that my mom started to do the hand-shaking exercise with me. As my mom have to done [*sic*] a small surgery on her eyes, she got to stop all exercises for a month or two, so she is seeking for exercises to do even after the surgery.

Then, I tried to persuade my mom to start doing the hand-shaking exercise with me. At first, she thinks that the exercise is quite stupid, but after giving it a try, she found out that the exercise itself is not that easy and she turns out to be a fan of it. I hope both of us can keep up on this exercise and benefits from it. (submission number 1199587882)

This male student was fully aware of his need to lose weight, and was most grateful to have someone offering him advice. But most importantly, what he needed was emotional support—throughout his weekly journals, he reported on his progress, knowing that I cared. This emotional bond between myself as the trusted instructor of the course and individual students was seen in a number of the weekly journals submitted by different students. After discussions on the role of art in helping to maintain wellbeing and build resilience, I received the following entries on November 4, 2019 and November 16, 2019 respectively:

Art is quite an interesting topic to discuss in a lesson talking about personal health, especially our group presented music therapy afterwards. For psychologist, art and music are two special and important tools to connect themselves with the patients, especially their patients are not good at communicating with others or expressing their feelings. (submission number 1206603631)

This journal is supposed to be the reflection for week 9 meeting. However, who knows only after one week, Hong Kong changed a lot . . . the place we could study turns into a place I am not familiar with! Full of chaos, this term calls to an early end. . . Without the sharing from Amy and classmates, I’d say it’s less interesting viewing the PPT and materials on my own. However, the information provided for this week really suits my situation these days. The information of this week is about “Resilience” in personal and community levels. (submission number 1215024796)

Such direct expression of their needs was seen quite frequently in the journals. Besides the appreciation of art, and the engagement in making art to build resilience, practices such as mindfulness and meditation were also introduced and experienced in class. The intimate working relationship between myself and the students encouraged them to take our discussion seriously, and spend time to practice what was described in class. Feedback in general was very positive, as seen in this journal entry submitted on November 28, 2019:

However, the idea of meditating conflicts with my religion. Therefore, I would prefer to call it a relaxing exercise, which allows me to calm down and stop thinking about the worries I have for a moment. . . I am very glad that I had the opportunity to take this course. Unlike other healthy lifestyle courses, I think

that this one is really helpful since having a healthy lifestyles involves a lot more than physical exercising. After taking this course, I have really reflected on my current unhealthy lifestyle, and am motivated to start living more healthily by changing my bad habits such as sleeping late, eating unhealthy food, and having negative thoughts. (submission number 1223265287)

The above journal entry had pretty much summed up the common issues this group of university students shared: irregular sleeping hours, unhealthy diet, and emotionally stressed. Despite the fact that it was a mixed class, male and female students who majored in different disciplines had similarly unhealthy habits, and were not taking good care of themselves. They were thus receptive to the topics discussed in the course, and the learning atmosphere was very positive right from the beginning of the semester.

This emotional aspect of the e-Learning experience was impressed on me much more visibly in mid-November 2019 when the University announced an immediate suspension of face-to-face teaching and learning, and moved all teaching activities to the e-platform. Although most of us had been using e-Learning tools to different extents in our teaching for many years, this shift came to be an important turning point, not only because of the abruptness, but also because it was the first time when we were deprived of the kind of interaction that enables us to communicate emotions directly and in the same physical space when teaching. By then non-local students had returned to their hometown, local students stayed at home to access the lectures (if they did) which we conducted either at home or in our own private offices. While the technical tools were well in place, allowing audio-visual communication in real time, and sharing of documents and non-verbal materials, I still felt a reduced “intimacy” - a special and intangible element - in my classes which took away something of what I would like to convey in the class. As mentioned in submission number 1215024796, without “the sharing from Amy and classmates”, the viewing of PPT by students on their own was simply not as interesting.

When we went fully online, there were still 3 weeks of classes before the end of the semester. The final examination was cancelled, to be replaced by an alternative e-assessment. I had read 9 weeks of journal entries submitted by the 45 students, as well as having the benefit of meeting them face-to-face in the classroom for 9 weeks. I remember the faces and managed to match these faces with the content of their journal entries. In fact, the weekly journal, which was originally designed as a way for them to keep a record of their lifestyle habits, and possibly helping them to identify their own behavioural pattern, became a “call-for-help” window to reach out to me. These words on the page carried as much affect as if they were spoken by the students, perhaps even more so as the electronic distance had relieved some possible embarrassment. The journal entry below, submitted on November 18, 2019 was a good example of the extent that e-Learning platform can also convey intimate feelings:

Hong Kong was suffered in these months. I can't believe what was happened at Hong Kong Polytechnique

University last night. I felt very uneasy since our universities canceled all the face-to-face classes. I think online learning should be suspended as well. As Hong Kong is in the chaos, I believe there are other things much important than to complete the assignment at this time. I believe the student include me are hard to stay focus on our academics, cause we cannot turn a blind eye to our society and keep working with the assignments. (submission number 1215858002)

This entry represented what many students felt in general during those weeks. Despite the student's comment that there were other more important things to be done, he submitted the weekly journal on time. I believe that the writing, submitted electronically, allowed the student to express his personal feelings in a safe way. The electronic distance between him and myself made the communication both intimate and safe; moreover, we had spent 9 weeks to establish a mutually trusting relationship. Another student also chose to share his emotional experience through this weekly assignment on November 28, 2019:

Two weeks ago, I was awakened from a dream by my sister, she told me that great-grandmother passed away in the mid-night. I can't contain my tears and didn't know what to do. I was raised by my great-grandmother, me and her had a strong bond between me and her. When I arrived at the hospital, she was laying on the bed, and I knew that it was the last time I saw her face, I can't control my emotion, and felt my emotion became uncontrollable, and it has lasted by a few weeks. I felt heartbroken for not seeing her anymore and felt pretty frustrated for why all the bad things happened to me. At that time, I didn't even talk much to my relatives or friends, I felt like I want to lock myself away from the world. The most importantly, we knew that Hong Kong has been going through a very difficult time, and plus the death of my great-grandmother, I felt so disgusted about the world. (submission number 1223223714)

Personal situations together with what was happening in the wider society became a great weight on some students. The weekly journal was an outlet for them to unburden their emotional baggage, and for some this was also a site for them to record their own attempts to handle the situation. I was very thankful to read the following journal entry from a student who had declared in other journal entries that she had a history of depressive issues:

Due to the social turmoil of the Extradition Bill, the crisis has sparked various social conflicts, such as large-scale protest and daily riots. The violent scenes often create discomfort and emotions in us. Especially during these two weeks, there have been sieges in the Chinese University and Polytechnic University. As some of my primary and secondary classmates were stuck in there

and asked for my help, I was very anxious and overwhelmed. This has eventually led to my emotional burnouts. To deal with this emotional breakdown, I have tried to adopt the practice of meditation. During this week, I have been doing meditation for five to 10 min daily at home. ...After this week's experience of meditation, I have also understood that there are in fact ways to control my emotions, as I usually feel hopeless whenever I am not able to overcome the depression. Therefore, such experience indeed allows me to be more optimistic and less pessimistic about my illness, and I have more confidence that I can defeat negativity in the future. (submission number 1238867635)

The last three topics of my course were: meditative practices in “action”, self-care, and loving oneself. After discussing how to establish a healthy lifestyle by working on a number of aspects in the previous weeks, the final 3 weeks were more focused on practical activities that they can engage in to build a healthy lifestyle. I had planned in-class practice of mindfulness, meditation exercises, and writing therapy, unfortunately the class was to meet in the virtual space. Some students did not have stable enough internet connection at home to sustain an extended viewing, and many of them actually took the class in their sitting room where siblings might be working on their assignments or classes. I was aware of their need for these practices as well as the limitations of the virtual class conditions, therefore I made voice-recordings of the lectures and placed them on our e-Learning platform for students' later visit.

When the call to suspend face-to-face classes came, I was worried that communicating with the students entirely in the virtual space would discount our emotional connection. However, the journal submissions of these weeks more than compensated what I could not see or feel in the virtual classrooms. The written words carried each student's emotions, be they worry, frustration, anger, disappointment, sadness, or simply a calm reflection. The following is a journal entry submitted on November 27, 2019:

I didn't have a class on Monday, plus I was so worried that I hadn't closed my eyes the whole night, so I went out early in the morning. But my sense of powerlessness got heavier. I stayed out until midnight when mother urged me to come home, so I took the overnight minibus home. On the minibus, I received bad news, my good friend was arrested in Yaumatei. When I saw a picture of his being arrested, I was so scared that I could only cried on the minibus. But I recovered and quickly looked for a lawyer for him and informed his family. (*my own translation from Chinese*, submission number 1222836112)

This student had kept a very personal record in the journal entries throughout the semester, referring to her own weight problem, and also her feelings in relation to what was happening

in Hong Kong society then. Being the instructor of this course on healthy lifestyle, I was most grateful for her candidness, but also her attempt to use some of the methods discussed in class to help her handle the unexpected circumstances. Another student referred specifically to a topic discussed in class and her own daily life in her journal submitted on November 28, 2019:

In the power point, the importance and effectiveness of making art are emphasized. It is surprising that resilience is not only focusing on the personal side, but the one in the community is equally important. I am not good at making art other than writing, but I think appreciating can also be a good way to face ourselves. When I read good pieces, listen to songs and look at the lyrics that touch my soul, they speak so much of the feelings that I might not be able to express. (submission number 1222849585)

There are also students who did not make specific references to social incidents, and focused more on general practices in their daily life:

Knowing yourself is the root of everything. Because if you don't observe yourself, the so-called good habits above are really difficult to develop. In the simplest case, if you haven't observed your own meal, you will never be able to do what is called “eat only seven full meals” [note: she meant 70% full] and lose weight in all likelihood. And if you look at yourself from now on, instead of a year, you will become clearer and more aware of yourself. Many problems will be solved, the most important thing is that you will live more and more calmly and have unprecedented mastery of life. (submission number 1221310387)

PERSONAL RESOLUTIONS TO CHANGE: PLANS SUBMITTED BY THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The Personal Resolution Plan, the final assignment of the semester, was another precious window through which I could view the individual student's mental and emotional world. Each of them identified one particular habit or behaviour that they would like to change in the next few months, and drafted a complete plan to explain and describe the procedures. These self-analyses of their own lives were touching documents to read, especially when so many of them were struggling with the complex social situation and their studies at the same time. I remember two particular students reporting their plans to lose weight, employing the strategies discussed in class, and actually noting the progress since they started quite early in the semester when I talked about dieting and exercise. A number of these Personal Resolution Plans were actually a “final report” of what had been going on since quite early in the semester—a student mentioned her poor diet right after our lecture about diet in week 2—and the weekly journals were small episodes of that resolution

plan. Reading all the 45 PRP was like following the final episodes of these 45 mini-dramas.

The following PRP includes the typical range of concerns students had about their own lifestyle. Although my instruction was to focus on one, she named all the most common issues over daily habits:

I am going to tune my biological clock back to a healthy and normal condition. As the semester is forced to be finish, all of us do not need to have on-campus meeting again, which means I do not need to wake up so early in the more anymore in this period of time. . . .another factor causing sleep so late is because of the current situation in Hong Kong. Every moment from the news on that day will somehow appear in my mind before I sleep. I understand and feeling so unfortunate for the current situation in Hong Kong so I can only calm myself by listening to music and watching some relaxing video on the internet. (submission number 1230572485)

Diet, sleep and stress were some of the most frequently mentioned aspects that students would like to handle and improve. Some students went a step further, and decided to improve physical fitness:

In this semester, I have decided to run regularly on weekly basis. Actually, before the UCHL [note: UCHL was part of the course code] lesson. Keep a running habit is one of my dreams. And I had tried to make running a habit, however, there were somethings that pull back from the plan, such as laziness, weather or homework. Therefore, at this time, UCHL requires as to achieve something for writing the personal resolution plan, I think make running a habit can be my plan, and I hope this time I can continues the habit and will not give up easily this time. (submission number 1230716559)

When I described the PRP to the students, I asked them to include the reasons why they would like to make that change in their lifestyle, as well as ways to measure their success in making that change. I did not expect everyone to have made much progress in the course of just one semester—asking them to think about measuring success was simply a reminder that this should be an on-going exercise. Students' suggestions about how they would measure their success seemed to show that my aim was achieved:

To know the success of achieving my goal, the first thing is to have an improvement in my psychological situation. After doing the record of my daily emotion and obsession, it'll help to notices the factors of causing the unstable of my emotion, and there will have a chance for me to face it and take action to solve it. Second, it'll be the time for me to find and bring back the interest to the things I love. (submission number 1230498989)

It can be seen that the writer was aware of the function of noting down his/her emotional conditions—hoping to identify the “factors” causing these fluctuating emotions. The long-term plan was to address these factors rather than the resulting conditions, and, ultimately recall the interest to things loved. Similarly, the measurements suggested below also reflect an awareness of the long-term process of building up a healthy lifestyle:

While it comes to physical fitness, this would be considered a success if my weight has decreased by at least 34lbs after half a year of regular exercise. Also, the thickness of my waist should be narrowed down to 38 inches, which is the standard waist circumfix stated by the WHO. As for my sleep habit, the disappearing presence of black patches around my eyes should prove the improving of sleep quality. Since the measurement of success for mental health would be harder to be determined, the goal would be simpler, which is not signs of panic attack or unreasonable tantrums for the coming 6 months. (submission number 1230281922)

For many, the idea that they can and should actively build up a healthy lifestyle had not occurred to them before attending this course. What had been discussed in those few months, as well as the need to develop and personal resolution plan, were wake-up calls for this group of students. It was very encouraging to see that in some of the PRPs, even when students had not completed their plans, they showed positive acceptance of the importance of healthy lifestyle:

Although I do not finish the plan perfectly, and the result is not significant at all, I still believe it is a successful plan. In this plan, I start to develop a healthy lifestyle, start to change some bad habit, and the plan becomes my habit now. Being aware of a healthy lifestyle, which is the ultimate goal of this personal resolution plan achieves. (submission number 1230480274)

Pilates is for beginners, just like me. I can get a head start in my day with this. Also, I am the most productive I've ever been, and I get most of my work done in the morning now. I always thought that I was a night owl, but now I truly believe that I'm a morning person. I truly understand why my talented friend always wakes up early now after experiencing it. I hope that I can keep this habit in the future. (submission number 1230464827)

In conclusion, I take up courage to change my bad habit and mindset at the same time in order to improve my living standard, which increased my quality of life. Our daily routines are so deeply ingrained that it's sometimes not easy to tell what they even are. In an age of constant distraction, however, it's critical that we don't let our time slip away from us. Focusing on daily habits and what we can do to improve is critical to maintaining satisfaction in all aspects of our lives. (submission number 1223659041)

CONCLUSION: VIRTUAL CONTACT AND AFFECT

At the end of the semester, I received a number of students' emails thanking me for the intimate experience of the course, despite the disruptions outside and especially that of the final 3 weeks of class. They mentioned that the mindfulness exercise and meditation practices were particularly helpful, and even the writing therapy was welcomed. I was genuinely heartened by this experience not only because the disruptions had done little to discount the quality of teaching and learning, but also that it had been an exceptional experiment to highlight the importance of emotions in higher education. In this case, because of the need to rely completely on e-Learning in the last weeks of the semester, I and my students were made to be very much aware of the role emotions had played in our interaction *via* e-Learning tools. And, on top of that, as the content of this course was healthy lifestyle, emotion as an area of knowledge was in the forefront and a large proportion of the narratives produced and exchanged in the course was around emotions, emotional competence and emotional wellness.

The following journal entries are the best support for such claims. For me, these words demonstrated success in learning because the experience touched their hearts as well as their minds:

But frankly, after taking the Creative Writing courses, I did not pay so much attention to grades. In comparison, I am really more aware of the process and feelings in learning. So grateful to have the luck of taking this course, I gained much more than I imagined. The semester is over, but learning is not. If I have the chance, I will thank you in person. (*my own translation from Chinese*, submission number 1224932595)

Actually today I would like to thank you for providing these teaching activities and materials. To be frank, when I enrolled this course, I just wanted to have a replacement for my PE lessons as I know that the lessons in this course are taken in lecture halls. I just want to pass the PE credits. The reason is I hate doing exercises. Although I have taken one PE lesson last semester, I treated it as a burden, just like being forced to exercise. However, neither did I know, I have the motivation to improve my health better myself after taking this course. I find that changing my mindset like doing exercises is a burden. (submission number 1225025753)

Lastly, thank you so much for the help from Dr. Amy Lee, showing understanding and empathize, I hope everyone will be safe all the time. Looking forward to having meetings in the coming future again! (submission number 1223976777)

The last weekly journal of this semester ... Firstly, I really want to say I'm so grateful to take this course and meet a friendly and responsible lecturer like you. Even from every single weekly journal, we can see you want to

try best to have some connection with us students as well as desire to help us mentally and physically to understand our body and our heart. (submission number 1225055863)

Time flies, it is the last lecture notes we've studied. Through this semester, I am happy and enjoyable to have the lecture classes. We together learned a lot of things though sharing our own experience, and also to learn from the others. I love this lecture as it always gave me a comfortable zone to comfort and relax by learning how to self-care and understand myself. (submission number 1224873479)

In some studies about improving effectiveness in e-Learning, besides the recognition of user emotions as an essential factor influencing the outcome, other strategies had also been suggested. Paechter and his team discovered that "self-regulated and collaborative learning" (Paechter et al., 2010, 222) was one direction that worked well with e-Learning, while Robertson (2011) suggested that blogging activities could help students and teachers develop "a range of cognitive, social and self-directed learning skills" (Robertson 2011, 1628) which enhanced the overall learning effectiveness. In my unexpected shift to rely heavily on e-Learning to conclude a most unconventional semester, I found truth in these suggestions. The weekly journal and the final Personal Resolution Plan worked together to outline a self-regulated learning direction for each student, and their group presentation on their own chosen topic helped them to identify what was needed and crafted a coherent plan to approach a certain issue. The learning achievement was out of my expectations because this class was open to students of all disciplines, which meant that I had no clear knowledge of their academic training nor abilities when I started to work with them.

As an experience, this semester offered me the first opportunity to test whether e-Learning and its tools can help us maintain the kind of communication with students that inspires trust, confidence, and togetherness. In the last 3 weeks of the semester, when the social environment of our city was very unstable, and when the emotional landscape of young people was particularly challenged, the e-Learning platform and simple activities I conducted allowed me to maintain a reasonably intimate communication with a class of 45 students from different disciplines and years of study, and moreover to take their pulse concerning their emotional status. I believe this is a strong indication that with careful planning and a genuine intention to establish such a connection, affective education can well be conducted with the assistance of e-Learning.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Author Contributions section is mandatory for all articles, including articles by sole authors. If an appropriate statement is not provided on submission, a standard one will be inserted during the production process. The Author Contributions statement must describe the contributions of individual authors referred to by their initials and, in doing so, all authors agree to be accountable for the content of the work. Please see herefor full authorship criteria.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my thanks to all the students who were enrolled in my class during the first semester of 2019-2020. Their commitment to the course as well as their trust in me was highly appreciated. Their courage and determination to make a change in their lifestyle has also given me strength to improve the teaching and learning experience with other classes. My heartfelt gratitude to the Centre of Holistic Teaching and Learning of Hong Kong Baptist University too, for their generous support during a time when e-Learning had become the core of our connection with students.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The reviewer (LK) declared a shared affiliation, though no other collaboration, with the author (ALWS) to the handling Editor.

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