

# "Humanizing" Pedagogies In Online Learning And Teaching- A Necessity In The Wake Of The Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

With the transition to e-learning that has resulted from COVID-19, teacher educators risk being engulfed in a "web of competency" that might dehumanize the learning experience for both educators and students. In this study, three teacher educators describe how they employ modern technology to execute crucial humanizing pedagogies. This entails going beyond solely cognitive techniques, addressing questions of power, access, and representation reflexively, and considering systemic concerns of power and privilege that create and restrict pedagogical options with a focus on respecting students' voices. We emphasize meaning-making, relating to social realities, and embracing multimodality in our discussion of the online assessment. The study also highlights the issues of power, privilege, and ideology concerns often disregarded in online educational environments, particularly at the institutional, instructional design, and support levels. The reflections denoted that we learnt more about our students by applying critical humanizing assessment in online teaching. It took time for students to realize the importance of ongoing, continuous learning, and "success" looked different for each student. Finally, it was also gathered that we as teacher educators needed to embody crucial qualities, the 5C's, namely creativity, commitment, compassion, consistency, and character, to inculcate the 'human touch' in our online learning and teaching processes for maximum outcomes.

**Keywords:** assessment, critical pedagogy, critical humanizing pedagogy, humanizing, online course (re)construct, online assessments, online teacher education

## Introduction

As educators, we have witnessed, in most cases, the substitution of the connectivity and physical dimension of relationships that had existed before the advent of the pandemic in a classroom situation or during instructional delivery in our schools, especially in Fiji. Teachers' humane disposition and physical contact were mainly eroded by devices and gadgets intermediaries. Nevertheless, we understand from experience that inculcating a 'human touch' in educational pedagogy would result in striving to meet students where they are, on their terms, as

learners and human beings, as opposed to a standardized curriculum offered to all students everywhere without respect for individual variables such as cultural background, student choices, and their socio-economic status. With this focus, "Humanizing Pedagogy" is the development and implementation of educational techniques that are aligned with learner's experiences and views and recognize and honour their culture, home languages, and lived experiences, with the greater purpose of furthering equality and social justice via day-to-day classroom interactions (Fránquiz & Salazar,

2004, Reyes, 2007). With remote learning and teaching becoming the norm for educational institutions during the second phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in Fiji, like most countries, it has also been observed that this sudden leap into online learning posed significant challenges for teachers, students, and their families as they had to quickly adopt and adapt to the new roles and expectations for learning to be continued (Adams & Todd, 2020; Garbe et al., 2020a, 2020b; Hamilton et al., 2020). With this abrupt transition to online learning and teaching, teacher educators risk being engulfed in the misguided "web of competency" and "cult of efficiency" (Callahan, 1964), unwittingly creating online courses with a mere focus on swift assessment of student performance and success. This 'hurried' transition; in many cases, led to the construction of single-answer assessment tasks which did not account for students' lived experiences and demanded students to provide unimaginative responses which did not address the socio-cultural, embodied, relational, and affective nature of teaching and learning (Andrews et al., 2019; Bartolomé, 1994; del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Such shallow techniques dehumanize learning for everyone, particularly for Pacific students who learn by emphasizing creative, holistic, circular, and people-focused thinking (Thaman, 2009). It has been argued that the usual mode of learning, in its current "independent" form, is insufficient for addressing many of the societal legacies of oppression that pervade formal educational environments (Mehta & Aguilera, 2020). This reflective paper explores how humanizing digital pedagogies might encourage the design and implementation of more inclusive learning environments across online contexts. It also explores how three teacher educators from the Fiji National University have attempted to implement critical humanizing pedagogies in the context of online assessments in the various courses that they taught during the 'new normal' which resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic, with the intention that this would prompt educators to deliberate, rethink, (re)design, revitalize, analyze, and evaluate

online assessments to humanize students' course experience.

### **'Humanizing' Pedagogy: A conceptualization**

Researchers and scholars such as Giroux (2001), Lipman (2011), and McLaren (2003) have consistently challenged the mechanical and dehumanizing character of curriculum, assessment, and instruction that has become entrenched in our educational system. According to Freire and Betto (1995), a 'humanizing' education "is the way through which men and women might become conscious of their existence in the world." Freire (2005) further elaborated that humanizing pedagogy as an approach "where the teacher is a revolutionary leader in establishing a permanent relationship of dialogue with her/his students to build confidence in students who may be alienated or feel alienated from teaching and learning". Hence, when education is humanized, it must be centred around students, should be highly contextualized, be relevant and must be socially oriented. However, the pedagogical focus on generic materials, delivery methods and assessment deny students a humanizing education (Giroux, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2012). The Covid-19 pandemic made the possibility of upending this situation more challenging as educators had to move to virtual learning in haste.

Since the inception of 'humanizing' pedagogies into the educational discourse, numerous scholars have used it to investigate its implications across a wide range of teaching and learning environments (Darder, 2003). One such conceptualization of humanizing pedagogy has been proposed by Bartolomé (1994), which roots its beliefs on the theory that education needs to consider students' socio-cultural, socio-economic status, social inequality, and historical and contextual realities. Bartolomé (1994) further reiterated that strategic teaching and assessment procedures must incorporate the relationship educators build with their students through knowledge sharing and co-creation. As a result, humanizing pedagogy strengthens students'

intellectual and social resilience. (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Freire, 1970).

Within the context of teacher education, Huerta (2011), used a humanistic approach towards finding out the effectiveness of teachers who went out on professional practice. This study concluded that pre-service teachers were successful because the teacher educators had used the values of respect, mutual trust, and verbal teaching and were good role models. In addition, del Carmen Salazar (2013) posited that if pedagogies are not humanized, then socio-political histories, access and equity and social realities significantly impact students' success in higher education. Despite infusing digital technology to support learning in higher education, the humanizing aspect of online learning, teaching, and assessment has always been missing. Hence, technologies may not 'just be a tool' but may be perfused with opposing perspectives, biases and with intentions. As we proceed towards a blended and online mode of lesson delivery and assessment during this pandemic, we may unknowingly risk replicating the educational inequalities and inequity existing in our society.

### **'Humanizing' pedagogy: A paradigm shift in teacher education**

The continuous shift in a society's socio-political and socio-cultural ideologies has drastically affected the education system in the Pacific. A humanistic aspect of learning and teaching is jeopardized when one-size-fits-all approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment are used (Freire, 1970; Lipman, 2004; McLaren, 2006). 'Humanizing' teacher education focuses on embedding human values such as humility, tolerance, patience, decisiveness, courage, creativity, commitment, compassion, consistency, and character. These crucial abilities "develop an educator's critical and emotional capacity to enter into effective learning-teaching relationships with their students" (Darder 1998). Freire (2005) further alluded that when humanizing pedagogy, a teacher needs to use continuous dialogue with the students to instil

confidence in students who may be estranged or feel marginalized from learning and teaching. Teacher educators usually attribute pre-service teachers' limited understanding of societal and educational disparities to how their families, schools, and communities have groomed them to comprehend culture, power, and diversity. Many aspiring teachers have had limited opportunities through formal schooling to examine how their social identities have been affected regarding access and equity, power and privilege (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). Hence, in our teacher education classrooms, we need to strive to "model 'humanizing' pedagogy for our students, understanding that through this process, we all become more fully human" (Freire, 1970). This would empower the pre-service teachers to embody and enact 'humanizing' pedagogies and practices in their future classrooms, which may overcome the inequities that are present through access and equity, socio-economic status, marginalization, exploitation, and by geographical disparity. It would also assist pre-service teachers in developing and maintaining attitudes and practices that would build learning environments in which the needs of all their future students would be acknowledged and addressed (Carter Andrews & Castillo, 2016). Furthermore, by modelling humanizing pedagogy with pre-service teachers, we may assist in interrupting, reversing, and rejecting the adverse impacts of the inequality present in our society.

When teacher educators inculcate humanistic pedagogy in the learning and teaching process, it assists in developing critical self-reflection and critical consciousness on the part of the pre-service teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Humanizing pedagogy allows the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers to assess their own perspectives and question their own beliefs that they feel are 'normal' in their society. This may present an opportunity to pre-service teachers to unlearn many of the firmly rooted biases, stereotypes, and assumptions they harbour that prohibit them (Carter Andrews & Castillo, 2016). To effectively counter the challenges in

today's educational settings, which are large class sizes, and diverse students in terms of ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, and ability; pre-service teachers need to inculcate a 'human touch' in their learning and teaching (Nieto 2005).

### **Access and equity theory in education**

Equity theory was initially formulated for workers who desired to be treated equally. Unlike need-based theories, equity theory considers the relationship of one worker to another. Early approaches to equity theory focused on salary and its relationship to a worker's motivation and attitude toward work (Adam 1965). Educational equality, commonly known as "equity in education," is a contentious concept. It is ostensibly a measure of educational attainment, fairness, and opportunity. Many academic researchers (Bottani & Benadusi, 2006; Giancola, 2009) believe that the question of equality is a critical topic for the analysis of educational systems. Castelli, Ragazzi, & Crescentini (2012) have highlighted two significant variables influencing educational equity: fairness and inclusion. Fairness in the education system suggests that issues particular to one's circumstances should not interfere with academic achievement potential. At the same time, inclusion is a complete norm that applies to all students in a specific educational system. The 2030 Agenda further strengthen the concept of equity in education for Sustainable Development Goal 4, which recognizes the importance of educational equity (UN, 2015). The rising relevance of educational fairness is founded on the assumption that a person's level of education strongly connects to the future quality of life. As a result, an academic system that promotes educational fairness provides a solid basis for a just and healthy society. Hence, equity in education should not only be viewed as compensation or readjustment of shared goods to ease initial limits but should also go beyond this by attempting to guarantee that this equity is manifested in crucial areas such as equitable access to studies regardless of gender, socio-economic origin, or ethnic origin. It also aims to guarantee that this fairness is reflected in

academic performance and quality, allowing students to pursue further education and closing the inequality gap.

Educational reforms enacted during Covid-19 worsened pre-existing challenges in marginalized areas, such as a lack of access to costly technology and extra time to adjust to new learning techniques. Students may live in "digital deserts" where there is a lack of access to gadgets and dependable internet, or they may lack adequate digital literacy to interact successfully with new technology. Socio-economic status, financial resources, geographical location and isolation, and parental support are some factors that play an essential part in shaping academic success. Students in the Pacific are affected by these factors. Hence, for these students to succeed, pedagogy needs to be humanized so that they get an equal chance of achieving academic success. The seemingly mis-match between pedagogical delivery and students' learning processes that resulted from the teacher's inhumanness in the classroom situation was heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the authors figured that a conscious implementation of a humanized pedagogy would go a long way to mitigate this abnormality.

### **The discourse of the pedagogy**

The authors have shared experiences of the sudden transition from the conventional face-to-face mode to the online learning platform during the pandemic in teaching their common education courses to their departmental students undertaking a degree in Primary education at the Fiji National University. This change resulted in an increased number of meetings held via zoom sessions, Viber chat groups, Facebook Messenger chat groups and unconventional contact with students during and after school hours. Also, the administrative demands on the authors increased tremendously as reports regarding students' accessibility to gadgets, connectivity, assessments, performance, completion rates and attrition were continuously demanded by the University's management.

The following themes were the synchronized reflections of these authors:

### **Giving meaning to assessment and assessing for meaning**

We tried to promote active learning amongst our pre-service students when designing assessment tasks. Wherever possible, rather than identifying students' flaws, we gave credit to insightful, meaningful and thoughtful ideas raised by students in their assignments. This encouraged students to develop new ideas and move forward with their learning. We used assessments such as Forum Discussions, Reflections, Online Presentations, and E-Portfolios. These forms of assessment allowed students to be more creative in how they presented their ideas and think critically and construct their own knowledge. Assessment is part of humanizing pedagogy when it is dynamic, of a variety, and relevant to our students. We, the teacher educators, used rubrics "to communicate and enact high expectations for student outputs (Morrison et al., 2008) which allowed students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways (Hillard, 2009). Continuous meaningful feedback on the assignments was also provided to the students to evaluate their progress and identify opportunities for self-improvement. We noticed that by providing meaningful feedback promptly, there was a significant impact on the performance of the students. We were able to maintain the engagement of students despite their geographical locations. Along with improving oral feedback, this technique encouraged us to be better at scaffolding our students' learning. It also moves students' perspectives away from competitive ego involvement towards task involvement (Dweck, 2000), allowing them to focus on their learning.

### **Providing equitable opportunities**

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on educational access. It gave a "wake-up call," which has transformed the intersections of

equity, inclusion, online teaching and learning, and, eventually, how educators had to respond to the impact of this pandemic on education (Czerniewicz et al., 2020). While certain teaching and learning activities, like forum discussions, online quizzes, weekly reflections, video presentations and webinar sessions, were carried out using digital technology (Zhang et al., 2020), students' progress was hampered by inadequate internet connectivity and coverage, a lack of ICT skills, a weakened institutional system structure, and a lack of content growth that takes into account the peculiarities of the student's experience and context (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh & Althunibat, 2020). Furthermore, difficulties such as physical detachment from the conventional learning environment, insufficient opportunities to reach out and connect with colleagues, teachers and the generic learning environment, and emotional distress worsened existing hurdles to teaching and learning (Huber & Helm, 2020). Uncertainties resulting from incessant virtual meetings via zoom, online forum discussions, online lectures, tutorials and workshop sessions were imposed on students in the remote geographical setting. Looking across the number of students that we are teaching, with a good number of them from poor socio-economic backgrounds and remote rural locations, we found out that these students appeared to be complete without technological devices or were sharing these devices with other family members, and others had internet connectivity issues. This has led to our students going through virtual overload, burnout, and mental and physical stress. To address these issues, we started to give our students flexible deadlines and reduced or removed penalties for late submission of assessment tasks, allowing them to participate in online quizzes when the connectivity was best for them (Mehta & Mehta, 2020; Shelton et al. 2020), and in cases where students had no laptops to type their assignments, we accepted photos of assignments which were handwritten and emailed to us. Hence, we provided equitable opportunities for all our students while trying to consider their social realities and contexts.

Nevertheless, some studies have revealed contrary findings, such as the study on flexible learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in the US; Cortes (2020) demonstrated that learners were thrilled with the notion of flexible learning. Students supported the programme because the activities they participated in allowed for real learning, active learning, and learner autonomy. In a similar study in Indonesia, students were optimistic that if teachers encouraged flexible and egalitarian learning environments, they would be able to readily adjust to new learning techniques (Amir et al., 2020).

### **Utilizing multimodal learning**

The pandemic has advanced the virtual education revolution's future by a decade. Experts consider multimodal learning (MML) as one of the best ways to lay the foundation for innovative learning experiences so that more affluent, more profound, and broader education is provided in the long run. Modern multimodal instruction may be delivered remotely or in person, and it engages students by utilizing several platforms, technologies, and modes of communication. Multimodal technology solutions can meet the different demands of huge student populations by combining visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinaesthetic aspects to immerse students in interactive learning settings where they feel linked to one another and the instructional material (Qusheh, Christopoulos, Oyelere, Ogata, & Laakso, 2021). We provided a multimodal platform for our students to engage in learning. These included creating small study groups on social media, such as using Viber, Messenger, and WhatsApp. This allowed us to participate in continuous dialogue with our students, clarified issues as and when required by the students and let them interact with their peers so that they could assist each other. The social contexts of our students vary. Hence, using various platforms allows flexibility and diversity in how they learn.

When using MML with our students, the three teacher educators noticed the emergence of some

positive attributes amongst the students. We noticed that effective learning was taking place via their active engagements in instructional processes, submission of assignments, and general improvement in performances. Students were more at ease and found it simpler to study when several modalities were available. Many children learn more thoroughly when exposed to various representations (text, video, audio, and pictures) rather than just words (Picciano, 2019). Student engagement was also boosted as it was seen that they wanted to connect with the subject and submit assessment tasks whether they attended classes in person or online. The teacher educators realized that when using MML, they could reach out to a diverse population of students as they had accessed a variety of tools which assisted in providing more options for tailoring learning and assessment.

### **Conclusion**

Educators worldwide needed to transit to online and remote learning in response to the new challenges brought about by Covid-19. Looking at the social realities brought to the surface during this pandemic, humanizing pedagogy could be one way to minimize the catastrophic effects of such a crisis. As illustrated, educators can use a humanized approach by becoming more aware of the challenges their students experience and implementing a more inclusive and sensitive to learner needs pedagogy. Teacher educators must address and deconstruct the 'web of competency and' cult of efficiency' that has infected our education system. Correspondingly, to create an online environment of care, educators could employ practices such as "flexibility with course requirements, promptness, clarity of communication, multiple points of contact, personal connections, reciprocity of caring, and students centred design and teaching practices" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

Finally, in our attempt to "humanize" pedagogies, teacher educators need to embody crucial qualities which could be referred to as 5C's. These 5C's include creativity, commitment, compassion, consistency, and character. These

qualities inculcate "the human touch" in our online learning and teaching processes for maximum outcomes. New educational models must be flexible enough to provide opportunities for students to tap into and use their creative side—using their ever-expanding technological tools at home and school. The pedagogies should incorporate critical thinking processes and pathways that allow students to develop independent judgments about curricula contents. This creative dimension increases realism, engages students and directly enhances learning. Such learning and teaching patterns elicit thoughtful eagerness and excitement in the whole process toward goal-driven outcomes. Teachers, post-Covid 19, must imbibe a new zeal of commitment and incredible compassion to keep up with the online instructional delivery and demands of contemporary classrooms. There is no time in history that the consistency and character of the teacher are put to the outright test like in recent times. The pandemic and swift transition to a fully online mode of teaching and learning have stretched every teacher's character tenacity and latitude of consistency.

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