

Chapter #5

A HUMANISING PEDAGOGY: BEING A CONSCIOUS PRESENCE IN THE WORLD¹

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ABSTRACT

Many consider education an arena designed to eliminate structures of oppression, by equipping learners with the necessary abilities to change repressive structures that exist in society. This is significant in the context of South Africa given its history of segregation and apartheid. Also in the context of South Africa's linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, it is inevitable that teaching and learning from a social justice perspective be prioritised to address injustices and inequities. This chapter draws on conversations with teachers, in which their understandings of a humanising pedagogy, and what this requires of us in the context of teaching and learning environments, are explored. The chapter concludes that a humanizing pedagogy is crucial for both teacher and student success and critical for the academic and social resilience of students. The work emanates from a project between universities in South Africa and Brazil.

Keywords: social justice, humanizing pedagogy, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

A humanizing education is the path through which men and women become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others (Freire, Betto & Kotscho, 1985, pp. 14-15).

Many consider education an arena that is designed to eliminate structures of oppression, by equipping learners with the necessary abilities to change repressive structures that exist in society. This is significant in the context of South Africa given its ubiquitous history of segregation and apartheid. Given too, the nature of South Africa's linguistically and culturally diverse society and classrooms, in particular, it is inevitable that teaching and learning from a social justice perspective be prioritised to address forms of injustice and inequity. The South African School's Act (SASA) (no 37 of 1996) which materialised from the Bill of Rights as well as the South African Constitution (1996), assumes a pivotal role in desegregation. This makes it important to continue prioritising and adopting practice to redress historical injustices in the education system of South Africa.

While narrowly perceived to be 'just good teaching', it becomes crucial to unpack meanings of social justice. Essentially, social justice refers to fair and just relations between individuals and society; it involves breaking barriers for social mobility; breaking the cycles of oppression; and examining systems of power and privilege. Defined by Bell (1997, pp. 3-4) as "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs....the process of social justice should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively

to create change.” Inclusivity, participation, and equity are foregrounded as core concepts. Nieto (2006: 2) adds that social justice “challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes”. To address injustice, we have to challenge and disrupt. Yet despite attempts to transition to a more inclusive, socially just order, legacies of disempowerment and dehumanisation continue to persist in society worldwide (Delport, 2016). And as Zinn and Rogers (2012, p. 76) say, “the educational arena remains a battlefield, in which the struggle to build voice, agency and community continues.” One way of addressing these concerns is through a humanizing pedagogy.

In this chapter, I examine the role of a humanising pedagogy as a key concept underpinned by social justice. I adopt a qualitative case study to examine teachers’ shared understandings of a humanising pedagogy, and what this means in their teaching-learning contexts.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Humanising pedagogy

Humanising pedagogy grew out of Freire’s (1970) popular education (as referred to in Latin America), or critical pedagogy (as referred to in America), and may be considered a pedagogy that “ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of students themselves” (Freire, 1970, p. 51). “A humanizing education is the path through which men and women become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others” (Freire, Betto & Kotscho, 1985, pp. 14-15). Freire argued further that humanizing teachers engage in a quest for mutual humanization, where students are co-investigators in dialogue with teachers. A dialogic approach develops critical consciousness, and teachers who engage in humanizing pedagogy engage in praxis, reflection, and action upon the world to transform it. Freire laments the state of dehumanization in education by asserting that the only effective instrument in the process of re-humanization is humanizing pedagogy. For Freire (1970), a liberatory education could never be conceived without a profound commitment to humanity. For Bartolomé (1994) a humanizing pedagogy promotes respect, trusting relationships between teachers and students, academic rigor and learning contexts where power is shared by teachers and students. Macedo and Bartolomé (2000) add that the pedagogy values students’ background knowledge, language, culture, and life experiences.

Bartolomé (1994) argues for a humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses reality, history and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice. He argues that teachers who work with subordinated students in particular have a responsibility to assist them in appropriating knowledge bases and discourse styles seen as desirable in society. This process must be additive. A humanizing pedagogy is crucial for both teacher and student success and critical for the academic and social resiliency of students, given that educational policy is dominated by standardized and technical approaches to schooling that dehumanize students, especially those of colour (Del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Freire’s (1970) conceptualization of “humanization,” “pedagogy,” and “humanizing pedagogy” is therefore seen as a counter-practice to dehumanization in education.

In Huerta’s (2011: 49) work with Latino children, she explains that teachers who employ a humanizing pedagogy in the classroom understand that learning is an act of linking new information to prior knowledge in and out of school, and that learning occurs in a social cultural context. We must understand that language is a tool for learning and through a

culturally bound, socially mediated process of language development, children construct mental frameworks (schema) for perceiving the world around them. Teachers who engage in a humanizing pedagogy engage in classroom practices that respect cultural differences and reflect care for students. They critically question their deficit views of subordinated students and recognize students as knowers and participants in their learning. They take action to create pedagogical structures that help to balance asymmetrical power relations in society. Geduld and Sathorar (2016, p. 46) encapsulate, in their work on humanizing curriculum, we must commit to pedagogy that:

- Is student-focused;
- Is embedded in dialogue and meaning-making;
- Focuses on the praxis that combines new knowledge and experiences of students;
- Recognizes knowledge diversity;
- Engages with tensions between local and global knowledge.

There are certainly overlaps between a humanizing pedagogy and a pedagogy of love. Bartlett (2005, pp. 345-347) also demonstrates this in her ethnographic fieldwork with adult education NGOs in Brazil to show how teachers interpreted and acted upon Freirian principles, in particular, a pedagogy of love. Bartlett's view is that the liberatory, dialogical pedagogical praxis that Freire advocated constituted an act of love. Dialogue cannot exist without love. Love demonstrates commitment to the cause of the oppressed and marginalized, and this commitment is dialogical, and love can only be restored where oppression has been abolished. As individuals, by fighting for the restoration of our humanity we will be attempting the restoration of true generosity, and this fight, because of its purpose, constitutes an act of love (Freire, 1970).

3. THE STUDY

This work emanates from collaboration between universities in Brazil and South Africa. The focus of the project is teacher engagement with education for social change, social justice, cohesion and peace in the two countries. This work serves to report on one aspect in the South African leg of the project. This study followed an interpretivist paradigm, designed as it is to present the reality of participants' views. In interpretivist research, the researcher is a co-creator of meaning, and knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values, reasons, self-understanding. The methodology tends towards the unstructured: observation, open interviewing, description, qualitative analysis. In this qualitative case study, graduate students involved in the project participated in an introductory seminar where key concepts were deconstructed. The participants were eight graduate students. All are English teachers, six females, and two males. All except for two are South African. The aim of the work was to examine their views on what a humanizing pedagogy might entail. The work presented in this chapter emanates from group discussions and interviews with the teachers. All participants also wrote narratives of (de)humanizing teaching-learning experiences that they may have encountered. This chapter reports on the group discussions and interviews, narratives are discussed in another paper.

4. DISCUSSION

I highlight extracts from the discussions, then proceed to discuss them in relation to teachers' understandings of what a humanising pedagogy embraces:

Jana: "It is about being human, what does it mean to be human...it is about free will... It is about justice. We are equal in all that we do, colour should not separate us, blood brings us together, humanises us. A humanising teacher treats everyone alike. We have the same blood. That's why Schweize Reneke is important, we cannot separate children, they must be taught together"

Ari: "We all have a story, some stories are better than others. We have a history.. We do not come from nowhere. Teachers must know who their students are. A humanising pedagogy acknowledges everyone's story. This is important in the South African context, given our history and our diversity. Be the revolution, get to the heart of the learner"

Marina: "Everyone speaks a different language. In our case (SA) we have 11 languages. I speak English, but as a teacher I have students who speak at least five different languages. A HP acknowledges the child's language, mother tongue. Yet English is the medium of instruction. I can speak about three languages, so I cannot speak to the learners in their languages, I use English which is our policy at school, at most schools. A humanising pedagogy will respect all languages. Yet how do we focus on this?"

Tsepo: "For me it is about culture. What is a person's culture? It is not race or religion, it is about values and beliefs. In my culture I am allowed multiple wives, but it is a patriarchal culture, this I will not support. Yet as a teacher I will respect all my learners' culture. It is their beliefs and how they were brought up. In school today cultural day is about dressing up in your traditional clothing...this is only a small aspect of culture, it is not what makes you, you...inside"

Vina: "A humanising pedagogy is like social justice, it would include bringing up discussions of a critical nature. We need to talk about SAs history, apartheid.. And privilege. We have black and white kids in class. Yet white kids say they are not responsible for apartheid, their ancestors were. Yet they are privileged because of apartheid. We need to have these conversations at all levels."

India: "I spoke Afrikaans as a child, I still do. Many coloureds (mixed race) do. Yet now Afrikaans is stigmatised. It is called the boer language, and we must not speak it.. I feel guilty now, yet I believe a humanising pedagogy recognises my Afrikaans heritage as it does other languages. I was not responsible for apartheid, I am a child of it. I am black, I speak Afrikaans. If this is not acknowledged it is dehumanising".

South Africa is a country riddled with past and present inequities. As a fairly new 25 year old democracy, South Africa's past is tragically reflected in several decades of apartheid during which time black people did not have rights over where they lived, whom they married, or where and how they were educated. Black South Africans lived under complete white domination. Decisions were made for us on the basis of skin colour and the texture of our hair. Since democracy, and given the nature of the country's linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, it is inevitable that teaching and learning from a social justice perspective be prioritised to address injustices and inequities. The data was coded and analysed according to themes that emerged. Three major themes emerged from the teacher group discussions, regarding their views on what a humanising pedagogy entails: justice, background stories and the value of language.

4.1. Justice

All the teachers referred to a sense of justice as being core to a humanising pedagogy. For Jana, skin colour is superficial, she considers blood a uniting force for human beings. For her a humanising pedagogy means that all learners must be treated the same. Jana makes an interesting reference to Schweize Reneke. Schweize Reneke is a little town in the North West of South Africa. The incident referred to occurred in January this year (2019), when a Grade 1 teacher separated children into two language groups: one that spoke English and one that did not. These groups happened to consist of separate race groups as well, one black and one white. Her understanding was that the children would feel more comfortable among those who spoke their language. The incident went viral very rapidly with much of the country referring to it as a racist act to divide children along linguistic grounds. The teacher later apologised, as her intentions, she claimed, were not racist. Vina too evokes social justice by calling for what he refers to as “discussions of a critical nature”. Zembylas (2015), Zembylas and McGlynn (2012), Zembylas and Papatmichael (2017) refer to these conversations as discomfiting or troubling conversations, which tend towards raising issues that give rise to feelings of discomfort. Being able to raise these issues in the classroom gives space to open conversation, but has equal potential to trouble. Vina’s view that white children absolve themselves from apartheid is also troubling. He feels that a humanising pedagogy would involve us engaging in discomfiting dialogues, where we get opportunities to acknowledge our privilege and entitlement, rather than engaging with ‘apartheid denial’.

4.2. Background stories

Ari understands a humanising pedagogy as acknowledging learners’ backgrounds. Given the nature of diversity of learners’ backgrounds, it is crucial that we listen to learners’ stories or narratives. Storytelling lies at the heart of our experiences, they engage us at a spiritual level, and are the voice of change. Ari reminds us of this: stories give voice to children. He also evokes us to “be the revolution”. This is reminiscent of Freire’s (1970) reference to revolutionary teachers. Freire uses the term in opposition to “reactionary” teachers. For Freire (1970) revolutionary teachers establish a permanent relationship with students from subordinated cultures and languages. Revolutionary teachers practice a humanizing pedagogy where the method of instruction is not an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, because it expresses students’ consciousness (p. 51). Bartolomé (1994) too argues that a humanizing pedagogy values students’ background knowledge, culture and life experiences, and creates learning contexts where students and teachers share power (p. 248).

4.3. Considering the value of language

Schools need to do more than just teach students English. They must also strengthen cultural awareness and identity. Marina’s focus on language and Tsepo’s focus on culture foreground this. Marina’s questioning of how to address language discrepancies in the classroom is a concern in South Africa. Given the linguistic and cultural diversity of South Africa (SA has 11 official languages), it is near impossible for teachers to speak all the children’s languages. However, it is important to acknowledge them. Too often, have children who speak languages other than English been considered marginal or deficit. Language must be highlighted as a vital element to humanisation. Childs (2016) explores the (potential) dehumanising nature of language use in many South African classrooms by highlighting the regular disconnect between the dominant language of the classroom and the home language of the learner. In contexts where English is hegemonic as the language of

teaching and learning, exploring the possibilities of translanguaging can bring about humanising experiences for learners as well as teachers. Childs (2016) says that translanguaging practices are inherently humanising, affording teachers and learners opportunities to participate as social, thinking, transforming individuals. Marina and India evoke these points. India's point however, refers to Afrikaans, originally emanating from Dutch colonisers, and spoken by Afrikaners and SA's coloured, or mixed race people (apartheid nomenclature used for research purposes). Her view is that as a black person she should not feel guilty about speaking the language of the apartheid rulers, she has a right to the language.

Historical realities of dehumanizing in South African education have been well documented by researchers such as Alexander (2002), Chisholm (2004), Jansen (2009), and Soudien (2012). Zinn and Rogers (2012) add that the legacy of dehumanization has been wittingly and unwittingly absorbed into educational arenas that depict hierarchies of power, compliance, fear, suppression and loss of voice. Restoring voice and agency is a key characteristic of what it means to be human. Given our oral tradition, in the south, voice and storytelling are pertinent, storytelling, must be seen as a social and cultural activity. Loss of voice is one aspect of dehumanization; restoring voices equates with agency, which has implications for social justice and human pedagogies.

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING

An important contribution of this work is undeniably, to teaching and learning. No contribution to work on education and development can ignore this impact. A humanising pedagogy holds substantial implications for teaching and learning, and must be considered a commitment to opening paths to equity among linguistically and culturally diverse students, such as those prolific in South Africa. I address this on two levels: language and pre-service teacher education programmes. With regard to language in particular, greater focus must be placed on home and additional languages (Del Carmen Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008). Bilingualism, biculturalism, multilingualism and multiculturalism are assets that should be supported, as should linguistic and cultural identities, which is particularly appropriate given SA's diverse linguistic background and apartheid legacies. A particular focus with regard to language can also be placed on translanguaging, is also valuable in relation to discrepancies between the dominant language/s of the home and school. Childs (2016) says that translanguaging practices are inherently humanising, affording teachers and learners opportunities to participate as social, thinking, transforming individuals.

South Africa also bears witness to the dire need to address and confront issues of race, identity and diversity in the classroom, as well as in teacher education programmes en route to establishing a more socially cohesive society (Sayed, 2016). It is imperative that pre-service teachers engaged with issues of race, identity and diversity in their teacher education programmes. To do so means deconstructing their own issues round race, identity and diversity. This must be grounded in transformative social justice.

6. CONCLUSION

For us to commit to increasing equity and excellence in education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, we must teach against the grain of dehumanizing practices (Del Carmen Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008). Relegating learners to the fringes of society through dehumanising policies and practices that reproduce social and academic inequities is undesirable. For Huerta (2011) research in teacher education has placed emphasis on teacher

knowledge and instruction, not enough on attitudes and perspectives that can contribute significantly to pedagogy. Teachers who embrace a humanizing pedagogy recognize the socio-historical and political context of their own lives and students' lives, including the influence of societal power, racial, ethnic identities and cultural values (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970; Del Carmen Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008). These teachers believe that marginalized students (due to race, economic class, culture) experience difference in how they learn, not in their ability to learn. As individuals, or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of (our) humanity (we) will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. And this fight, because of the purpose given it, will actually constitute an act of love (Paulo Freire, 1970).

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L. Kajee

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