



## **Becoming Humanizing Educators During Inhumane Times: Valuing Compassion and Care above Productivity and Performance**

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**Abstract:** This qualitative inquiry presents a duoethnographic reflection by a pre-service teacher and teacher educator on their individual and collective experiences navigating teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emails of gratitude exchanged between both authors serve as the beginning of their inquiry and analysis. Their narratives reveal the ways in which they experienced humanizing pedagogies, received compassion and care, and engaged in culturally sustaining pedagogies within their teacher preparation program. Implications for reimagining teacher preparation embedded in humanizing pedagogies are explored.

**Keywords:** *teacher education, humanizing pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogies, pandemic*

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<p>June 13, 2020</p> <p>Dear Dr. Blum,</p> <p>I apologize for not responding to your check-in email earlier. This quarter has been overwhelming, and even writing an email seemed like a task on a never-ending list of things to do. My mom is home and healthy, thank you for asking. She received the treatment she needed that was originally being denied because of a ban on</p>	<p>June 16, 2020</p> <p>Dear Leah,</p> <p>Over the last few days, I have read your email over and over again. In fact, I have it printed out and posted on my wall so I can gaze over to it while I work. What a kind, generous gift you have given me through these words. I cried when I first read it... and to be honest, I needed these words. I have second-guessed some of my instructional</p>
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elective surgeries in WA. I am also happy to share that my 90-year-old abuelita has fully recovered from COVID even though she has an underlying health condition. Incredible news!

I want to thank you personally for your support this quarter. You are the only professor of the five total professors I had this quarter that I believe responded appropriately to courses post-COVID. By removing the textbook from being a required purchase, to making assignments complete/incomplete, to accepting late work without penalty. This all made a huge difference, not only for me, but all in my cohort who are TESL minors. When I and others reached out to our other professors, our suggestions and requests were deemed not possible, and my cohort was told that we would do well to distract ourselves from COVID by focusing on our studies and better managing our schedules. I found this statement inappropriate and offensive, and I found the minimal "support" that other professors provided to be greatly lacking. The other professors provided "support" on a case-by-case basis, only if they deemed our individual trauma was worth supporting, instead of considering the unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety, and economic instability we are all facing post COVID. Among my cohort are several students with children home full-time, an essential worker putting in 12-hour shifts, two students diagnosed with COVID, one classmate with four family members who have passed away, one student with unreliable access to WIFI, and several classmates who were laid off/furloughed. This was all before protests began in the streets.

You are the only professor who said the names Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. Know that I noticed this, and that I also noticed that my other four professors remained silent. You are the only professor of the five who showed solidarity with ASCWU's resolution to make finals optional. When I read these two announcements back-to-back, mentioning their names, and your decision to show solidarity, I cried. Out of relief, but mostly to know that at least one professor was modeling what they teach us to do as teacher candidates, provide education that is rooted in equity and compassion. Thank

decisions this quarter as some of my colleagues have made differing choices... but your email was such an encouragement to me and an affirmation that I need to continue to pursue humanizing pedagogies in my work and attempt to model that to my own students. I haven't always gotten it right, but I'm vowing to do better. Be better.

I really can't say enough about what your kind words meant to me. Truly, your email is one of the greatest gifts I've received in my time at Normal State University.

Many thanks,  
Grace

you. Know that making your final optional lifted a weight off of those in my cohort in TESL. Dr. X contacted us to let us know our final was mandatory, and after I emailed them both asking if they'd support the resolution, Dr. Y and Dr. Z both refused. After the hardest quarter of our student careers, and after some of the hardest months many of us have ever faced, this was disappointing to say the least. Despite choosing not to complete your final, know that I learned so much from your class, and I will continue to learn more about SIOP. I'm also passing on what we learned in your class to others in my cohort who are not TESL minors.

Today I marched in the Seattle Children's March, inspired by the 1963 Children's March in Birmingham, AL. Walking alongside these children, their families, their teachers, and their neighbors as we chanted, "No justice, no peace," I was reminded why I decided to become a teacher. Know that because of professors like you, I think about what is possible, not what is impossible. Know that I think about the American education system critically, that I analyze my place within it, and that I will decide not to sit idly by like too many of our professors did this quarter. Instead, like you, I will use the power I have to provide an education that is rooted in equity and compassion.

Thank you for being an example of the kind of teacher I hope to be.

Kindest regards,  
Leah

### **Introduction**

Shortly before the start of the spring academic quarter of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly throughout the United States, our university along with higher education institutions across the world, swiftly decided to shift all instruction to virtual, online settings. With only a few weeks to prepare, faculty across campus moved quickly to pivot and redesign their courses to be delivered in a virtual environment. Both faculty and students made significant adjustments in terms of procedures, plans, and pedagogical approaches.

In addition to the challenges of teaching and learning amid a global pandemic, we were simultaneously dealing with the "racial reckoning" that communities were experiencing as a result of the public killings of Black citizens including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. The collective trauma, stress, and unrest that we both experienced as a student and faculty during this time were unlike anything we had previously experienced in our years at our institution.

Although initially unwarranted, the challenges of this quarter catalyzed a time of deep reflection upon our shared pedagogical approaches and experiences that I (Grace) had established through my years of work as a teacher educator. As I privately wrestled with coming to terms with my own pedagogical tensions and contradictions, I received an unexpected email from Leah, a teacher candidate enrolled in one of my courses, *Sheltered Instruction for Linguistically Diverse Students*. Uncertain as to whether any of the pedagogical decisions I had made in spring quarter were of any significance to my students, Leah's email spoke directly to the impact of the accommodations I had made for the students during this challenging quarter (Blum & Flores, 2021).

In the correspondence and conversations to follow, we began to engage in dialogic introspection (Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018) of our respective experiences as teacher educator and student navigating the challenges of the pandemic. Our informal discussions evolved into a duoethnographic conversation in which we collectively examined our teaching and learning practices, pedagogies, and praxis (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Drawing upon the theoretical lens of critical humanizing pedagogies in teacher education (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970; Salazar, 2013), a set of structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000) were developed. We responded independently in written reflection to each structured question. This qualitative inquiry describes several emerging themes that surfaced from our collective reflections upon this letter and the subsequent narratives and conversations.

We organize the paper as follows: first, we provide the theoretical framework of humanizing pedagogies that inform our findings; next we describe the emerging themes in the form of a dialogic reflection to consider the ways in which certain pedagogical moves, from the perspective of the teacher educator and teacher candidate provide insight into humanizing practices that allow for meaningful teaching and learning opportunities for both students and faculty. Our paper culminates with several implications for further examination considering the emergent themes of this paper and an invitation for educators to critically examine their own pedagogies and practices.

### **Theoretical Background**

Originating in Freire's (1970) conceptualization of *humanization* and *pedagogy*, *humanizing pedagogy* counters dehumanization in education (Salazar, 2013). *Humanization* is defined as "the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in the world." (Salazar, 2013, p. 126) In order to become more fully human, individuals become increasingly conscious of their presence in the world as a means to both individually and collectively reimagine their social world (Freire; 1970; Salazar, 2013). Freire's framing of pedagogy as inherently political requires a radical reconstruction of teaching and learning experiences where all pedagogy must be meaningful and connected to social change so that students can engage in the world to transform it (Giroux, 1988). Humanizing pedagogy, therefore, is a revolutionary approach to instruction that "ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (Freire, 1970, p.518; also see Osorio, 2018). Central to humanizing pedagogy is the development of "conscientização" or critical consciousness which is "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17). To enact humanizing pedagogy, educators must work towards "mutual humanization" with their students through dialogue and problem posing education that leads to action (Freire, 1970, p. 56).

In her comprehensive review of the literature centered on humanizing pedagogy in education, Salazar (2013) identifies five core tenets of humanizing pedagogy:

- 1) the full development of the person is essential for humanization;
- 2) to deny someone else's humanization is also to deny one's own;
- 3) the journey for humanization is both an individual and collective endeavor toward critical consciousness;
- 4) critical reflection and action can transform structures that impede our own and others' humanness, thus facilitating liberation for all; and
- 5) educators are responsible for promoting a more fully human world through their pedagogical principles and practices. (p.128)

Bartolomé (1994) further clarifies the Freirean definition of humanizing pedagogy beyond a technical methods-focused approach towards instructional programs and strategies considering the "reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice" (p. 173). A humanizing pedagogy "values the students' background knowledge, culture, and life experiences, and creates learning contexts where power is shared by students and teachers" (Bartolomé, 1994, p. 190).

Specific to humanizing pedagogy for teacher education, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) call for social justice-oriented teacher education programs to commit to "critical self-reflection, truth-telling, radical honesty, resisting binaries, demonstrating activism, and enacting ontological and epistemological plurality" in program structure, curricular alignment, and instructional practice (p. 24). The authors describe how humanizing pedagogy is a process of *becoming* for both teacher educators and their students- in that becoming is an ongoing process where we can never be fully culturally competent or fully human (p. 6). Carter Andrews and Castillo (2016) describe the teacher educator who enacts humanizing practices as one who continually works towards facilitating preservice teachers to create and cultivate learning environments in which the needs of the whole student are considered and addressed. They posit that the enactment of humanizing pedagogy in teacher education is a project of humanization for both the teacher educator and the students. Further, Carter Andrews, Bartell, and Richmond (2016) state "if the teacher educator does not possess a humanizing pedagogy, it is difficult to cultivate this pedagogical stance with pre- and in-service educators" (p.171).

Camarotta and Romero (2006) extend the scholarship on humanizing pedagogies in education by bringing together three interrelated ideas: critical consciousness, authentic caring and the enactment of social justice curriculum. They call for *critically compassionate intellectualism* to guide educators in attending to students' overall well-being, to demonstrate compassion for the dehumanizing experience students of color encounter and situating learning and social issues that are relevant to the experiences of marginalized communities. Adding to the literature on humanizing pedagogies, Camarotta and Romero (2006) weave together the scholarship on *authentic care* (Valenzuela, 1999) as a critical element of the critically compassionate approach to education. The social justice curriculum component of the critically compassionate curriculum can be found in approaches towards culturally responsive (Gay, 2018), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) pedagogies.

Building on important asset-pedagogies including culturally relevant/responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally sustaining pedagogies offers a "2.0" version of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogies "seek to

perpetuate and foster-to sustain-linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.1). It exists to *sustain* the communities who have historically been and continue to be damaged and erased through formal learning environments (Paris & Alim, 2017).

### **Methodology**

Duoethnography is a collaborative methodological approach in which “two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). Duoethnography is a qualitative methodology that allows for two or more individuals to bring together different lived experiences, ways of knowing and being, and perspectives to shared phenomena (Norris, 2017). In our case, our shared experience as faculty and student in our teacher preparation program, and more specifically, in our experience participating in our class during the spring of 2020 at the height of the global pandemic. As duoethnography is a relatively new, evolving form of inquiry, researchers are reluctant to provide a prescriptive procedure to this form (Breault, 2016). Nonetheless, Norris (2017) outlines four central tenets critical to the implementation of a duoethnographic study: 1) the dialogic nature of the research where the narratives of the researchers are juxtaposed to each other; 2) the examination of past experiences and stories; 3) differences are crucial to exploring a larger shared experience; and 4) the methodology must be open and flexible, not restrictive in terms of procedure. The duoethnography allows individuals to re-examine their narratives and challenge the perspectives in which they viewed their previous experiences. It is a collaborative methodology that allows for researchers to share their histories in both oral and in written form to make sense of experience, generate reflection, and deepen understanding (Norris & Sawyer, 2012).

In our approach to duoethnography, we initially began with an informal phone conversation regarding the emails sent to one another in June. What began as an informal chat, quickly morphed into a series of more structured conversations around our shared yet divergent experiences around the events of spring quarter, both in and out of our classroom. As we began to discuss the themes that emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) from our initial emails to one another, we developed a series of structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000) to further extend our reflections. Our data includes our email correspondence, excerpts of written transcriptions of our phone conversations, and our written narrative reflections on the structured question prompts (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Our data analysis was collaborative, participatory, and iterative (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Duoethnography provides the opportunity for critical, dialogic reflection, but it also allows for opportunities for transformative action (Monzó & Soohoo, 2014). In sharing our juxtaposed narratives, we aim to not only revisit our histories, but reflect on the ways in which we can work towards a more humanizing approach towards teaching and learning within the context of a teacher preparation program.

### **Positionality**

Grace is a Korean American woman working as a tenure-track teacher educator within three programs at her university: early childhood education, elementary education, and bilingual/ Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). She is the daughter of Korean immigrants and mother to two biracial school-aged children. Prior to her work as a teacher educator, she was an elementary school teacher having worked in both bilingual and mainstream classrooms in public

schools in the greater Chicagoland and Los Angeles areas. Her primary role at the university is teaching pre-service teachers at the university satellite centers.

Leah is a Mexican American woman from a bicultural family. She recently graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in elementary education with a minor in TESL. She brings experience from her work in primary and secondary public schools in the Czech Republic and Spain, as well as American preschools. She credits Paulo Freire and John Dewey as the primary influences on her pedagogical ideology. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in instructional design.

### **Context**

We work and study at a satellite campus of Normal State University (pseudonym), a large public institution proudly acclaimed as preparing the largest number of educators in the state. Students majoring in elementary education are enrolled in a 7-quarter program. At the university centers, students enter the teaching program having received their associate degrees at local community colleges. University center students are largely considered “non-traditional” (Hussar et al., 2020) in that they often work full-time, and have family caregiving responsibilities while attending to a full academic course load.

During the spring quarter of 2020, all courses were abruptly shifted to a virtual online environment. Some courses met asynchronously in a traditional online format where students accessed their course at their convenience, while other courses met synchronously via various platforms such as Zoom and Blackboard Ultra. The *Sheltered Instruction for Linguistically Diverse Students* course met asynchronously and was designed with a variety of instructional activities that students could engage with on their own schedules. Synchronous class meetings were scheduled for students that wanted to meet in “real-time”, but they were entirely optional for students. There were 27 students enrolled in the class spring quarter.

### **Findings**

In attending to the tenets of duoethnographic research, our inquiry centers on both authors using ourselves as the research site via dialogic introspection. Our inquiry examines our lived experiences as a teacher candidate (Leah) and teacher educator (Grace) navigating the pandemic. In the following section we present the themes that emerged from analytic discourse of our correspondence to one another, and our subsequent conversations.

### **Humanizing Pedagogies in Practice**

To deny someone else’s humanization is also to deny one’s own.  
(Roberts, 2003, p. 178)

#### ***Leah***

In January 2020, our state reported the first confirmed case of COVID-19 within the United States. Case numbers quickly rose, resulting in the decision for all K-12 schools to close and move to remote learning. Likewise, our university took swift action to transition all subsequent courses to an online format. By late March, our governor issued a state-wide stay at home order. In early April, an unprecedented spring quarter commenced. Repeatedly, teacher candidates were asked to be patient, told that information was developing in real time, while knowledge of the virus itself was also developing in real time. No one knew precisely how the virus spread, how dangerous it was, or all the symptoms one could expect if infected. Our state’s economy was at a standstill, with all non-essential workers unable to transition to remote work

laid off or furloughed. Within my own cohort of 14 teacher candidates, four were laid off and left scrambling to apply for unemployment benefits in an already overwhelmed system. Four candidates, students themselves, now doubled as teachers aiding in their children's at-home learning as statewide K-12 teachers transitioned into first of its kind remote instruction. One classmate, categorized as an essential worker, began working 12 hour shifts while also attending classes full-time, taking on the burden of a community that was terrified and lashing out. It was not long before two teacher candidates and members of their households were diagnosed with COVID-19. Our cohort was also not spared from the death of loved ones to the virus.

It is in this backdrop, that our university's courses resumed. We received many, "I hope this email finds you well," acknowledgments, but little to no questions about how we could best be supported by our professors, the educators aiming to produce the future's educators. The university decided to provide students with the option to receive an emergency pass/fail grade for most courses to avoid effects on students' overall GPA. This decision provided professors with a choice. They could be inspired by the changes made by the university and support students by making changes within their own classes, or not. Regrettably, most professors instructing my cohort chose the latter. As the quarter continued, it became clear that we would be expected to function as if our entire world had not just dramatically shifted.

Our cohort of 14 consists of a diverse group of teacher candidates. Ages range from 19 to 40 with multiple races, ethnicities, languages, and religious affiliations represented. The majority of candidates work part-time, full-time, and on occasion 60 hours per week while being enrolled in courses full-time. Four candidates have young children living within their household for which they are primary caregivers. As a relatively small campus, many elementary education courses are taught by the same group of professors. This provides the opportunity for professors and candidates to learn about each other over the course of the seven-quarter teacher preparation program. Regarding spring quarter, four of the five professors had taught our cohort in the past, and as such knew many of the details of our lives outside of the university. For this reason, it is particularly disappointing that, in my opinion, of the five courses I was enrolled in only one professor appropriately catered to the needs of teacher candidates post COVID-19.

Grace's response to the university's transition to remote learning provided insight into the many actions that are within a professor's power to adapt within their own classrooms. Premeditated adaptations adopted by Grace were comprehensive. She began with the distribution of an online survey before the start of the quarter to assess candidates' access to internet, devices, and software. Candidates were asked to describe their learning environment, availability for office hours and meetings, and to rate their level of confidence with technological platforms. Additionally, space was provided to communicate pronouns, pronunciation of names, and to inform the professor of any information of a personal nature they wished to share. Prior to the course start, she sent an email informing candidates that the previously required textbook had been removed and would be replaced with open access sources. Further accommodations made to the course included switching to a complete/incomplete grading system, acceptance of late assignments without penalty, and no mandatory meeting requirements. Learning modules were concise and accompanied by purposeful assignments that could be completed within a short amount of time. All of Grace's office hours were recorded to allow for future viewing by students needing extra support without requiring a set appointment. After receiving a resolution from the university's student government requesting all professors make their final exams optional in support of an unprecedented academic quarter, Grace chose to show solidarity with the resolution. It is in this professor's example that I began to understand the power that

professors have within their institutions to alter their courses to better support students. It also then became glaringly clear that the other professors with this same power chose not to use it.

In an email, Grace stated, “Whatever path our learning takes this quarter, we will move forward in centering your health and wholeness during this time.” This statement was proven true by all the actions taken to modify her course. It was clear from the beginning that she understood the totality of our experiences as university students in the middle of a pandemic, and through all the actions taken she succeeded in centering our health and wholeness. This served as a rare example of a professor’s adoption of humanizing pedagogy within the teacher preparation program.

A more common response was the lack of any truly impactful modification or adaptation to curricula. On several occasions, I and other teacher candidates advocated for a reduction in what we perceived to be repetitive assignments that functioned only to keep us busy for several hours while in no way enriching our learning. Mandatory meetings were extremely difficult for teacher candidates with young children at home, and for those without access to consistent internet. Feedback was encouraged or even required by professors, yet requests for changes were rarely acknowledged, discussed, or considered possible. Grace’s decision to make the final exam optional prompted me to request that two other professors show solidarity with the university’s student government resolution. Both professors declined while another preemptively informed us that the final was mandatory after news of the resolution began to spread. Meaningful accommodations, a willingness to sincerely consider candidates’ suggestions for improvement, and a show of solidarity with student government’s resolution would have communicated to teacher candidates an understanding of, and compassion for the unprecedented levels of stress we were enduring all quarter. Yet only one professor chose to acknowledge our humanity and take seriously the grave realities affecting us all. That examples of humanizing pedagogy are rare leads me to question the metrics by which our university counts itself a successful preparer of future educators.

### *Grace*

All the “unprecedented challenges” that we were experiencing afforded me the opportunity to reflect on my own pedagogical practices and consider the ways in which my courses reflected my commitment towards implementing a humanizing pedagogical approach towards teacher education. During the spring quarter, I was teaching four courses across three different programs: early childhood education, elementary education, and the TESL/Bilingual Education program. Even prior to the pandemic, I was already feeling uneasy preparing for four very different courses in terms of content and delivery, one of which I had never taught previously. While I would have liked to think that even during normal times that my pedagogical decisions were driven by my own vision of humanizing education, the pandemic and its implications, made visible the many ways in which some of my policies and practices were in conflict with my own moral and ethical commitment to preparing educators in humanizing ways.

During the first days of course preparation, I scrambled to find resources to redesign my courses. I quickly joined several professional social networks that were created to support faculty online. I found a varying set of resources, voices, and differing perspectives on how to engage learners during this time. These spaces became places where ideological lines were clearly drawn. One position in these online communities held that faculty should operate “business as usual” with policies and practices mirroring those of pre-pandemic times. The rationale here being that providing students with stability and consistency was what students would most need.

The counter-perspective erred towards extending compassion and care to students during these “unprecedented times” and to adjust classroom policies and practices accordingly.

As I reflected on my own practice, I found that my pedagogical convictions aligned most closely with scholars who publicly charged their communities to express generosity and care in pedagogical decision-making. I was heartened and encouraged by the public messages on Twitter by Drs. Django Paris (2020) and Pedro Noguera (2020). Dr. Betina Hsieh’s (2020) TEDxTalk during the pandemic, which centered on the possibilities of humanizing approaches to teacher education, resonated so deeply within me. While I largely felt disconnected and disjointed from colleagues at my own institution, I found mentorship and wise counsel in the public voices of scholars whom I deeply admired. In many ways, these public declarations affirmed and eloquently articulated what I knew to be true. In many ways, the voices of scholars, of whom I deeply respect, gave me permission to shift and pivot in both small and significant pedagogical moves to align the work I was engaging in towards more humanizing ways. I chose to pare down learning tasks and assignments to only what I considered essential to the learning outcomes and consider the ways in which I could foreground issues of access and equity.

In reviewing assignments and expectations, norms, and policies, I realized the many ways in which I had “inherited” policies and practices that I felt were arbitrary and unnecessary and to a great extent, dehumanizing. Being a junior faculty member, given pre-developed courses, I had adopted previously established course assignments and practices, without applying a critical lens towards whether these facilitated a deeper sense of critical consciousness among my students. My syllabi revealed the many ways in which I had not modeled humanizing pedagogies in my own instructional practices and policies.

One policy, for example, that I re-examined and in turn, did away with, was my policy on “late work”. Prior to the pandemic, I had a policy in most of my courses where students were penalized a certain percentage of their grade for failure to submit work by a certain deadline. In light of the pandemic, and the challenges of access and equity, penalizing students for failure to meet arbitrary deadlines seemed no longer comprehensible. Deadlines were reimaged as targets and students were no longer penalized for submitting work “late”. This is a practice that I have continued to implement in my subsequent courses.

### **Compassion and Care**

Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love... because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others. (Freire, 2000, p. 89)

#### ***Leah:***

Compassion and care were largely absent. Despite the existence of multiple concurrent nationwide crises including COVID-19, economic instability, and racial violence, we were expected to perform in the same manner as quarters passed. This was by no stretch of the imagination a typical quarter. The president of the university released a statement in acknowledgment of the unprecedented times we found ourselves in, and students received communication alerting of mental health services available at any time of the day or night. It was unquestionably understood by the university that what we were experiencing was deeply traumatic. Yet our productivity was expected to remain at the same level as quarters pre-COVID, or in some cases to increase. Worse still, it was one professor’s opinion that our studies should serve as a distraction from the grave events taking place and that we were more than capable of

committing several hours each day to our learning and “growth”. Yet a brief consideration of events would have shown that returning to “business as usual” was impossible. We were expected to carry on as if we were not isolated in our homes in a state-mandated shutdown, afraid to even touch produce at the local grocery store because modes of transmission were still unknown. We were expected to carry on as if the lines at food banks that some of our families relied on were not growing in size and decreasing in provisions, or as if we were not concerned with how to pay rent after being abruptly laid off. We were asked to perform as if we had been provided sufficient time to grieve family members killed by COVID-19, whose bedsides and funerals we were not permitted to attend, thereby postponing the natural grieving process. These expectations, lacking in empathy and compassion and far removed from reality only served to further dehumanize us at a time when we needed compassion and care more than ever.

Personally, I was struggling through the worst cases of anxiety and depression I have ever experienced. There were days when I did not have the strength to brush my hair, let alone attend to my studies. I would often find myself sitting in front of my laptop for hours, blankly staring at deadlines that I could not physically complete, accompanied by feelings of extreme guilt and shame at my lack of productivity. I was not alone in this experience. Several classmates privately confided in me about their struggle with anxiety and depression during this time. I chose not to inform any of my professors of my struggle with depression because I did not believe that I should be forced to. To what extent must we require students to perform their trauma before they are granted support? I reached out for support many times and was largely denied while others were granted support only after providing specific details about the event(s) that were occurring in their personal lives warranting additional support. Why was no premeditated plan for support in place, motivated by an interest in prioritizing empathy and compassion for the students those professors claim to care about? Verbal expressions of care without action are meaningless.

The lack of compassion displayed by professors was hypocritical. Repeatedly we are reminded of the importance of fostering personal relationships between teachers and students. We are shown data lending to evidence of the relationship between positive teacher-student relationships and high academic achievement. We know that building relationships is the most valuable tool a teacher can wield, that care must come before content, and compassion should never be compromised. Professors were provided with an opportunity to model that which they teach holds precedence above all else and failed to do so.

Of my five professors, Grace is the only one that repeatedly displayed compassion through action. As mentioned earlier, through both premeditated and real time responses to unfolding events, she drastically modified her course to reflect our new reality. The field of education requires constant reflection and modification, yet too often the status quo is upheld within institutions of higher education without justification. Whether out of fear of not meeting syllabus requirements, or out of an attitude of apathy towards change, the resulting negative effect on students is the same. Alternatively, it is because of all the modifications that Grace made that I was capable of being successful in her course. By focusing on the most important content material, not establishing arbitrary requirements (e.g., page length minimums), and removing stress inducing deadlines, she ensured that I was able to perform at a capacity that was suitable to my current reality. By being aware of her students’ realities, she not only proved her compassion through action, she also raised the likelihood for our academic success.

### **Grace**

As a tenure-track faculty member, mother-scholar, I found that navigating my own personal and professional challenges of adjusting to the pandemic to be at times overwhelming. Caring for my two school-aged children, grieving over the death of a close family member, all the while trying to maintain my teaching and scholarship agenda was incredibly difficult. At the start of the pandemic, faculty received various generic emails from university administrators expressing concern for our overall well-being. These were not personal or individualized in any way. Often, these emails focused solely on faculty resources for online instruction. While this display of concern was more than anything offered *before* the pandemic, it still felt short of an adequate response. The only practical demonstration of it came in the form of an offer to extend the tenure promotion timeline. During this critical time, I realized the ways in which my own experience working for this large institution over the years had been de-humanizing. Concurrently, while I felt the need to experience care, I felt the tension and responsibility to extend compassion and care to my own students.

The shifting of the instruction online, being invited into students' homes, in many ways removed this pre-existing invisible barrier of work and home and in our case, school and home. An unintended result of this made the teaching and learning experience much more personal and intimate. In turn, this expanded the ways in which I chose to engage my students and overall, I felt the education was a more holistic, humanizing experience. This became clearer as I learned of the challenges students were experiencing. As I learned of specific challenges that my students had been experiencing because of the pandemic including increased caregiving responsibilities, illness, grief over COVID-related deaths, coupled with the collective trauma that all of us were experiencing, it seemed unimaginable to prioritize as Valenzuela (1999) describes, *aesthetic care over authentic care*. Where aesthetic care is largely characterized by concern in academic achievement as narrowly experienced in the formalized schooling environment, authentic care considers students' whole being (Valenzuela, 1999). Where the home/school divide was no longer, their overall well-being was of greater importance.

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

CSP [Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies] seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change. (Paris & Alim, 2017)

### **Leah**

Throughout the teacher preparation program, culturally sustaining pedagogies are frequently referred to, but rarely modeled at the university level. Candidates are rarely asked to share their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the same information that we are taught should always inform our own curricula so that is based on a deep knowledge of our future students. Our individual cultures, countries of origin, linguistic diversity, and socioeconomic statuses inform not only our learning styles, but also our developing pedagogical ideologies. As a small campus with candidates organized into cohorts, and with professors teaching multiple courses to the same cohort, the opportunity to know us is well within reach. Literature on the topic of culturally sustaining pedagogies is required reading throughout the preparation program yet candidates see few concrete examples of this modeled by their professors. Candidates are expected to have a deep knowledge of their future students yet are largely unknown themselves.

Additionally, the space and time provided for creation of these practices, scaffolded by professors, is absent. A prime example of this during spring quarter 2020 was the rise in protests

across the country. The murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd posed an opportunity for a broader discussion on systemic racism, including its presence within the American education system. Mass protests were occurring every day in multiple cities within the counties neighboring the university. This was not distant news from a far-off city but occurring daily right in our own neighborhoods. In fact, myself and others within the cohort attended several of these protests and relied on each other as first contacts in case of an arrest. Those of us in attendance witnessed acts of violence by our own police department in the form of rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and beatings. It is no surprise then that conversations occurred frequently between teacher candidates during our personal time, reflecting our deep desire to engage in broader issues of racial violence and systemic racism. Even though nationwide Black Lives Matter protests had broken a record previously only held by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., no space was provided within the teacher preparation program to discuss this movement. In fact, only one of my five professors, Grace, even mentioned the events.

An opportunity to briefly pause normally scheduled curricula and engage future educators in a topic that will inform the rest of their careers was neglected. That it was not even mentioned in passing, by four of my five professors is astounding in its absurdity. Carter Andrews et al. (2019) argues that “Schooling ideologies and teacher practices have always been—and will continue to be—shaped by the continually changing sociopolitical and sociocultural landscape in a society, in addition to policies and practices that foreground particular types of oppression” (p. 4). As a racially, linguistically, and religiously diverse cohort, teacher candidates bring unique perspectives and lived experiences to the classroom. Providing the time and space for such discussions could have served as a powerful model for future educators in how to develop critical consciousness among their future students (Freire, 1970).

Witnessing repeated acts of racially and politically motivated violence both from afar and personally served to further trigger a group of university students already experiencing multiple crises linked to COVID-19 and the subsequent economic collapse. Being particularly traumatic for Black students within the cohort, professors should have made an effort to foster culturally sustaining pedagogies (as they have taught us, we must do) within their own classrooms by providing students with a safe space to communicate their collective trauma. By avoiding even a discussion of the sociopolitical events that were currently unfolding, professors in turn avoided acknowledging systems of oppression that students within the cohort themselves experience.

### *Grace*

Implementing CSP has been an ongoing epistemological tension that I have had in my work as a teacher educator. Driven by the imperative to prepare pre-service teachers to be social justice oriented, critically conscious educators, I have grappled with how to effectively implement culturally sustaining practices in my own pedagogical practices within a program designed not to support this. The paradox of preparing culturally sustaining educators in culturally dispiriting ways has been characteristic of our institutional approach towards teacher preparation. Students in our program take standalone courses in Culturally Responsive Teaching or Multicultural education, but rarely do they authentically experience culturally responsive teaching within their own teacher education programs. This is a common critique that I have heard from frustrated students and advisees throughout the last several years in our program.

As I mainly teach content-based methods courses as opposed to theoretical foundations courses, I have worked to intentionally approach these courses with an equity, asset-based framing of content-based instruction. I have tried to center students’ “funds of knowledge” (Moll

et al., 1992) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to inform instruction and co-create the curriculum in order to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and facilitate culturally sustaining experiences without directly teaching the subject matter of “Culturally Responsive Teaching” as course content.

As an Asian American teacher educator, I have often reflected on the many ways in which disrupting norms, speaking out, and going against the grain of the systems surrounding me has been extremely uncomfortable, and at times countercultural to my own patterns of cultural norms situated in conformity and assimilation. My entire life, I have worked towards assimilating and accommodating the dominant culture. Yet, while I had been conscientiously working through my own internal cultural tensions, I realized how my lack of speaking out could be perceived as indifference, especially in spaces, i.e., my classrooms, my home, in which I was uniquely situated with greater power and positionality. My silence in speaking out about inequities and injustices committed against minoritized communities was antithetical to my values and commitment to living and learning in culturally sustaining ways. I had to press through the discomfort, the fear of not stating things perfectly, and my own inner critique of being performative to break the silence around allowing students to grieve, mourn, process, and protest the killings and ongoing injustices committed primarily against the Black community and other minoritized communities of color. In the context of an online, asynchronous teaching environment, the silence was broken largely through email exchanges and discussion board conversations, which often felt impersonal and imperfect in many ways, but choosing to press into my own personal discomfort and choosing to speak out publicly was a small step into more authentically teaching and learning in culturally sustaining ways.

### **Discussion**

Several important themes emerged from our duoethnography that are important to consider in the work of humanizing teacher education. Freire (1970) describes the process of humanization as one of becoming. In the process of *becoming* an educator, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) describes the role of the teacher educator as “consistently and continually working to help PSTs [pre-service teachers] develop and maintain mindsets and practices that foster learning environments where the needs of whole students are considered and addressed” (p. 6). Both narratives reveal the ways in which the teacher educator, Grace, was working towards “becoming” more humanizing in her practice, and in turn, how Leah experienced a learning environment where her needs were considered and addressed.

Our narratives also reveal the ways in which we failed to experience humanizing pedagogies in our respective roles within the teacher education program. Experiences of authentic care during the pandemic were infrequent while performative actions of aesthetic care were abounding. Expressions of compassion were generally missing. Students were expected to function and perform in the same manner as previous quarters and encouraged by faculty to “use your studies as a distraction” which was not a viable option. Productivity was expected at a time when it was nearly impossible. The overall culture of compassion was absent, rather, students were shown compassion on a case-by-case basis. The requirement to “prove their trauma” provided individualized moments of caring, but the overall acceptance that these were unprecedented times did not inspire universal compassion that should have already been present. Whether that feeling was expressed in words, it was not expressed through action.

Lastly, spring quarter of 2020 revealed considerably the disconnect in our experiences of culturally sustaining pedagogies in teacher education. Teacher preparation programs aim to

instruct teacher candidates in the recognition and adoption of best teaching practices. Practices that are rooted in the creation and sustainment of an equitable classroom environment, and the use of diverse methods to reach diverse learners. The overarching goal of our teacher preparation program is to instruct teacher candidates in use of the *constructivist model*. It is explicitly stated on every syllabus for every course within the program. The aim is to empower our future students to be active participants in their own learning. The constructivist model requires teachers to acknowledge that students, however young, arrive in classrooms with prior knowledge and a variety of personal experiences that inform the way they learn. It is these best practices that teacher candidates study throughout the preparation program and are required to demonstrate evidence of in their own teaching in order to graduate. What happens then, when the classroom that prepares future educators, is not itself modeling best practices? When the personal experiences, prior knowledge, and diverse identities that teacher candidates bring to the university are ignored, or worse, silenced? How can future educators be expected to create and maintain classroom practices that are humanizing, when their own experience has been dehumanizing? These are the questions that arose through our experiences in a teacher preparation program during spring quarter of 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

### Conclusion

The pandemic revealed the ways in which, and to what extent we, individually and collectively, experienced humanizing practices in teacher education. Our duoethnography contributes to the growing body of research focused on humanizing teacher education and the emerging scholarship on the impact of the pandemic on education. While we have yet to see what the full implications of this pandemic will be on institutions of higher education and teacher education programs, we hope that these “unprecedented times” can lead towards a re-imagining of humanizing teacher education spaces where both teacher candidates and teacher educators are engaged in humanizing practices, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and critically compassionate intellectualism with and among one another.

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