Editorial. A pedagogy of care: Critical humanizing approaches to teaching and learning with technology

Editoriale. Una pedagogia della cura: approcci critici umanizzanti all'insegnamento e all'apprendimento con la tecnologia

Benjamin Gleason[A]* and Rohit Mehta[B]

A) Educational Technology Department, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, USA, bgleason@iastate.edu
B) Kremen School of Education & Human Development, California State University, Fresno, CA, USA, mehta@csufresno.edu

* corresponding author

HOW TO CITE Gleason, B., & Mehta, R. (2022). Editorial. A pedagogy of care: Critical humanizing approaches to teaching and learning with technology. *Italian Journal of Educational Technology, 30*(1), 4-17. doi: 10.17471/2499-4324/1278

"Sometimes, the most valuable thing we can offer our students is genuine care for them, their well-being, their happiness. Not just their grades. Not just their learning. But their whole selves" (Maha Bali).

1. INTRODUCTION

In this introduction to the special issue on "A pedagogy of care", we, the special issue editors, share our own critical approaches to humanizing teaching with technology in the past few years – going back to before the pandemic – that led to the special issue. As the world "*pivoted online*", and technology was taken for granted as essential in education, we, along with critical scholars, pushed back against dominant assertions about how central technology would be in teaching and learning contexts. Identifying the need to address care in a time when neoliberalism has normalized the involvement of big tech in education, reflecting on the pandemic, this issue includes seven articles (including this introduction) covering a range of national and international perspectives on care, including critiques of digital technology; recognition of emotional labor; connecting/curating resources for teachers; the importance of cultivating a sense of purpose; moving past binary thinking; and linking care and equity. Across all seven articles, we focus on the act of caring–imagining education as a process of love, community, and attention.

1.1. *Need for critical approaches*

A global pandemic necessitated stay-at-home orders across the world, where digital and internet-based technology is now required in order to sustain learning. Much research and scholarship are available on the advantages of technology integration in the classroom. Discourses around educational technology, how-

ever, tend to favor an uncritical embrace of neoliberal policies and practices that have penetrated educational systems, globally. In this special issue, we are interested in thinking about the ways that educational technology promotes and reinforces harmful educational practices (among them standardization, myths of efficiency, inequality of access) - in short, flattening, shrinking, and reducing education to dehumanizing forms. We aim to explicitly challenge the current state of educational technology (theories/practice) by decentering technology and prioritizing a pedagogy of care which, for Rolón-Dow (2005), involves the concerted *"examination of power, social location, culture, and access to resources in any relational context, to minimize inequity and maximize the extent to which relationships are reciprocal and justice-oriented"* (Zygmunt et al., 2018, p. 129) (see also Beck & Newman, 1996; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

While attempting to examine the impact and implications of technology integration for teaching and learning, the field of educational technology has prioritized the business of technology at the expense of care and humanizing practices. This has led to reducing the broad field of educational technology - which we argue includes the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which technology is produced, mobilized, and repurposed - in favor of a focus on the "effectiveness" of a particular technology to promote productivity, enhance student engagement and performance, increase students' disciplinary knowledge, or ameliorate instructional practices (Shelton, Aguilera, Gleason, & Mehta, 2020).

Models that center technology promote a neutral, decontextualized view of educational technology that reduces the complexity of learning in favor of narrowly defined learning outcomes. In this view, technology is framed as a neutral tool that can be "applied" universally to promote a prescriptive brand of measurable, often disciplinary, tasks - the emphasis here is on finding the most efficient ways to organize, implement, and assess instruction. In removing context, this perspective implies a broad universality to technology, which can lead to reductive statements about the "innovative", "transformative" or "revolutionary" nature of technology.

In popular EdTech discourses lies an assumption that it is possible to leverage the current digital technologies and tools for meaningful and justice-oriented change in the current system, when in reality the involvement of big businesses and neoliberal profiteering bars authentic change. In this special issue, we challenge these assumptions, arguing that the discipline of educational technology–with reductive, prescriptive attention to efficient uses of technology to achieve technical ends–obstruct humanizing practices. We cannot overlay critical theory into pre-existing models and conceptions of educational technology. Rather, it is necessary to develop a broader theoretical framework, what we have called critical humanizing pedagogies in our work (Mehta & Aguilera, 2020; Shelton et al., 2020), that are explicitly grounded in critical theory and care.

1.2. *Kindling care*

Noddings (2013) described ethics of care as central to teaching and learning, identifying it in terms of *"engrossment"* and *"motivational displacement"* (Rose & Adams, 2014, p.6). Engrossment here means openness to being attentive to the needs of others, being present to *"really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey"*. Motivational displacement is *"the sense that our motive energy is flowing toward others…"* responding *"in a way that furthers other's purpose or project"* (Noddings, 2005, p.15-16). By design, online contexts present a particular challenge to the pedagogy of care, complicating community-building and mindful presence. There is little to no way to ground and share *"motive energy"* in authentic ways with students when what they see is a shell of a course website, reading and video content, and a set of Brady Bunch style boxes in Zoom with videos and audios mostly turned off. In synchronous meetings, communication is partial, restricted to bobbing heads and speech.

Likewise, bell hooks (2003) included care as an essential element in successful teaching and learning sit-

uations, along with trust, respect, commitment, and knowledge. hooks suggested that in an environment where students, instructors, and others often feel dehumanized by a range of social, cultural, political factors, radical change needs to occur. For hooks, one political strategy was to identify *love a*s comprised of the above elements (i.e., trust, respect, commitment, knowledge, and care) as the central core that would allow them to repair the unhealthy dynamics often in place in education. For many, and often in schools with Black and Brown students, education is based in part on dehumanizing, authoritarian, dominating traditions and practices in which learner agency, philosophy, and interests are stripped in favor of Eurocentric curricula, dress codes, surveillance, and the threat of carceral punishment hanging overhead.

The dehumanizing context of school, according to Kirsten Olson (2009), produces a number of wounds, for students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others. For example, these wounds include attacks on creativity, emphasizing compliance, embracing perfectionism, and yet settling for standardized, unpleasant education that is heavily controlling, joyless, and isolating. In this mode, educational scholar and activist Bettina Love emphasized the importance of recognizing that schools are *"spaces of Whiteness, White rage, and disempowerment"* (Olson, 2009, p. 40), where the antecedent is not education, but racism. For the sake of humanizing teaching and learning, part of addressing justice and equity in education is acknowledging the need to move away from dominant neoliberal axiology to a pedagogy of care.

In the next section, we, the guest editors, reflect on how our struggles with enacting care in paternalistic and neoliberal academic institutions framed the context for this special issue. As two cishetero men in academia, we share how explicitly weaving care in our pedagogical approaches has been difficult without addressing systemic assumptions about the purpose of education – especially challenging normativity that favors white western masculine paradigms. Through our dialog, we agreed that a move away from paternalistic and neoliberal axiology is empowered by our own relationships with our students, colleagues, and communities of practice. Through our experiences, we situate a need for more critical approaches to humanizing pedagogy and care.

2. BEN'S WORKING DEFINITION OF CARE

Writing this introduction has been a challenge for me, in the way that I have wanted to enlarge my perspective, and my rhetorical voice, to include a bit more of my personal story. For example, as I type this, I am sitting at a table, talking with Rohit. It is after 11 am my time, and after 9 am for Rohit. I feel the pressure of writing on a topic that I perceive outside of my expertise – *I have never published on theories of care, and I certainly did not study this in graduate school* – and feel that my life experience, and classroom-based knowledge, is somehow inadequate preparation for this job. As a white, cisgender, heterosexual man, I know that my cultural background, history, and perceived skills, attitude, and behavior are more well-aligned than others in academia–that my expertise is often not questioned in my professional world. What helps me is to acknowledge that my experience is enough, and that I demonstrate my expertise through thoughtful collaboration and guidance with the scholars in this issue – spending time taking their ideas and words seriously. Through this process of collaboration, I am developing expertise in the practice of caring through a praxis that centers building trust and community through relationships.

2.1. *Making time for relationships*

With Rohit, like a few other trusted friends and collaborators, I always have time, in part because we have shared history. In addition to attending graduate school together at Michigan State, Rohit and I were joined by our bi-monthly drive from Ames, Iowa to East Lansing, Michigan to visit our families – in this case my school-age daughters, and Rohit's wife, Swati. I remember the flux between movement and stillness of that

time, the rush to leave campus so that we could start the leg-deadening 8-hour drive to Michigan, the car at a fast clip and our bodies in rest–the heightened anticipation of a thrilling weekend with loved ones, and the eventual sadness on the drive home. The drive was the epitome of caring – obviously headed back to our families, before the disappointing return trip–but also because the drive allowed us to care for each other. I listened as Rohit shared stories of bristling against traditional career options in India (i.e., medicine, law, and engineering), and developing a love for film while studying engineering at the University of Florida. In Ames, he tried to nurture a creative spirit, one of playful curiosity, from his engineering students. I told him about the design of a new undergraduate course for pre-service teachers, built around a desire to build a learning community in a large lecture class. We talked about important themes in a new graduate course on social media in education that I was proposing. Often, we spoke about the challenges of juggling family responsibilities, personal interests, and relationships in a profession driven by professional drive and sacrifices.

On these long drives through corn and soy, when we worried about the dangers of driving in snow and ice during the long Midwestern winter, we were building something together–through routine stops at Culvers in Indiana after four hours on the road and through the mindless boredom of highway driving. In the years since those drives, Rohit has been a consistent friend and collaborator, as we discussed challenges we face as assistant professors, including low morale and disengagement among faculty and staff; tension between articulated support for innovation, and the reality of entrenched tradition; incidents of bias and harassment against students of color; unprecedented demands on instructors, students, and communities alike as a result of covid-19. McClure and Fryar (2022) noted high levels of disengagement among faculty around the country, noting that the term *"the Great Resignation"* we see in other labor fields has not really been seen in higher education. But I wonder if this term, the great resignation, quite accurately captures the feeling of educators right now. Perpetually asked to do more, with less (for less!), we resign ourselves to the reality of the world. We put our head down and trudge through. We face serious challenges to build community among students, faculty, staff, and administrators–a low-grade rumble that interferes with pressing pedagogical matters, such as building relationships with students, developing new (revenue-generating) programs, and supporting faculty and staff. The way to build community, it seems, is to facilitate and nurture relationships between people, ideally in ways that progress beyond shared intellectual connections. Community may be built on a foundation of "Midwestern nice", (a euphemism for plain-faced good-will, at the expense of much left unsaid), but it also requires the fortitude to develop strong relationships built on honesty, authenticity, and unyielding support, if not love, for others. Recently, I was told, *"authenticity is more interesting",* and I think I have to agree with the sentiment that openness about ourselves is an important ingredient in solid relationships, and that deceit or untruth, based on perceived expectations of the other, is a limiting factor in the continued growth and deepening of relationships.

2.2. *Community through relationships*

In my own courses at Iowa State, I have prioritized community as a foundational condition for any learning to occur. In my graduate courses, students present identity artifacts that demonstrate both personal histories and individual taste as well as shared cultural affinities – a favorite coffee shop on Main Street is recognized by others for their cool art and perfect roasts. Graduate students, often with more life experience under their belts, seem to understand the necessity for community, and are often eager to meet new acquaintances within, and across, disciplines in a friendly environment. In class last week, I expressed joy and gratitude when a student helped another solve a technical problem–I saw that community is created not just through providing support to each other, but in asking for help, in expressing vulnerability through opening yourself up as a person who needs others, against the prevailing myth of the *"roaming autodidact"* (McMillan Cottom, 2016).

In my large undergraduate lecture course, where students congregate from multiple different majors, community building is a designed feature of the course. Every class, students organize and lead a 5–10-minute community building activity during our 50-minute synchronous meeting. This past week, students were asked in groups to identify 2-3 songs for a class playlist. Students quickly learned that their musical preferences expressed their individuality as well as their collective spirit. Of course, becoming informed of classmates' musical taste is not the only outcome, but that learning comes through collaborative work. After this activity, another group of students created an online discussion, linked through a QR code on our Google Slides, about the affordances and constraints of augmented reality and virtual reality. Undergraduates are responsible for the organization and design of class activities – in addition to the two already mentioned, students moderate our Zoom Chat, curate a list of resources on the week's topic (i.e., AR/VR; game-based learning; social media) and write reflection questions for their peers.

The pacing of this class is quick – we bounce from one task into the next, generating momentum through student-led activities. The class has, I think, feels different than others I've taught – maybe it is the quick pace, maybe it is how much *air time* students have (i.e., talking just as much, if not more, than I do in class), maybe it is a combination of all of that. It feels like we are building trust each time we meet, as if students are beginning to believe that fluid, open-ended conditions can lead to a supportive, caring environment.

There is something to be said for the role of trust in building relationships and community in class. Trust is not always something that can be taken for granted, especially in a world that seems to live in full-on crisis mode, when those who put forth trust in institutions, laws, and justice are continually reminded of how long the moral arc, in fact, is. Trust has to be continually reaffirmed through interaction, co-presence, and hopefully moments of joy, even during global challenges of covid-19, the climate crisis, police violence, rising authoritarianism, state-sanctioned book (and history) bans, and the like. In education, trust is built through meaningful connections and powerful learning opportunities. During the global pandemic, there was a brief moment where it seemed like we, as a society, might take the opportunity to consider the foundational assumptions and values we place on education "*what is the purpose of education, especially right now?"*, *"Can we use this time of dynamic change* (i.e., the speed at which we learn about the disease, vaccines, and how to mitigate consequences for the public) *as a synecdoche for education as a whole?"*, *"What kind of learning might be generated if we harnessed our curiosity and sense of wonderment at the way that we are both changed explicitly by this crisis, as well as how quickly things revert to traditional ways of doing things?"*, *"How can we recognize new opportunities for us as educators to acknowledge our role not as expert, since the complexity of the coronavirus and the relative ignorance of the majority of the populace on this particular topic, but as a co-learner who is both developing knowledge on a rapidly changing topic, and also is responding as an emotional human being?"*.

2.3. *The Challenge of caring in (higher) education*

Two years ago, during the initial spring of covid-19, educators reacted almost as first responders to a pressing emergency – we eliminated work, made classes optional, offered our expertise where it was useful, and generally acted in a caring, supportive manner. I quickly moved to assure students to center their own health and safety during a challenging time – if they wanted to attend class, and didn't have other obligations (i.e., family, work, or health-related), they could. Even though I'd been teaching online for almost a decade at that point, much of that was with graduate students. Teaching undergraduate students online felt different, because their lives were different. While some students were still living in the dorms, many others returned to live with their parents, family, or friends. Some students suddenly couldn't attend class because they were picking up shifts at their job; some were busy babysitting or helping the family out with caring for the little ones. Being able to observe the way that these changes affected students seemed to deepen our

relationship – it was as if the students had opened the aperture of the Zoom lens a bit wider, to let light into the complexity and richness of their lives. I was grateful for these moments and hoped that they would be the harbinger of more substantial transformations to education itself.

The spring of 2020 felt like a whirlwind of many competing emotions – intense anxiety and uncertainty about the nature of the virus; concern about how universities would protect students, faculty, staff, and communities; feelings of agency as the slowdown or shutdown of ritualized practices of daily life beget new possibilities; happiness, joy, and boredom of life at home with my two school-aged children. It was, unironically, quite a time to be alive, at a moment when so many of us weren't educators from all over the US died, family members got sick and died, our students got sick. For a while, instructors were informed about illness and excused absences, and then we were not.

Author Arundhati Roy (2020) called this moment *"a rupture"*, noting that it offers us *"a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves"*. Instead of continuing to live, and teach, as if nothing in the world had changed, Roy encouraged us to view the global pandemic as a "portal" between the traditional way of life and new, emergent models. What is the role of care, community, relationships, and trust in higher education today? How might technology work to deepen, threaten, or generally transform current practices, structures, and modes of learning? How do we re-energize care in a setting where students are seen as customers, faculty and staff are imminently replaceable, and policies and practices are often set by those (i.e., senior administrators, legal counsel, and trustees/regents) who are often far removed from learning spaces?

I know that care, like wellness, is conceptualized as individual practice rather than systematic integration of policies, practices, and purpose. For example, during a time of covid, faculty and staff were only allowed to teach online if they were doing so before the pandemic; it was as if the university was saying, we refuse to make any changes in light of a global pandemic in how we think about what education is and how we can make it work for instructors, students, their families, friends, and professional networks. I was lucky, as my teaching was either blended or fully online; but I know faculty were forced to return to face-to-face teaching in spite of legitimate concerns for their health and that of their students, families, and communities. In addition, the lack of a mask mandate on campus seemed only to emphasize the fragility of public health in favor of a full-throttle push to "return to campus", with all connotations of a return to normalcy in spite of the novelty of the moment. As a result, some faculty and staff retired rather than face the latest gambit in a decades-long attack on our professional authority, legitimacy, and practical judgment of all things curricular. It is bleak out there.

Lack of care is not limited to higher education, as I found out recently during a situation with my eighth grade daughter's math teacher. My daughter, a responsible, thoughtful, and kind person, was caught copying homework that another student had posted on their Instagram account. While I understood the severity of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, I was also concerned about teacher surveillance of student speech and activity on social media. When the teacher phoned home to tell me that my daughter had detention, by having her read a prepared script about the seriousness of her mistake, I interrupted and asked to schedule a meeting with the teacher, because I had concerns about the potential dangers of teacher monitoring of student social media accounts. When the teacher told me that we could meet with the entire 8th grade math team, and the 8th grade administrator, I envisioned us having a productive conversation about the challenges, and rewards, of social media for teaching and learning, my area of expertise.

Entering the conference room for the meeting, I felt a distinct lack of care in the room. Only my daughter's teacher and I were wearing masks, and their bodies were positioned as opposed to my own – across a table that soon felt like an ocean of difference. I tried to make small talk about the upcoming vacation and then began the meeting by apologizing for my knee-jerk reaction. After I acknowledged the seriousness of

plagiarism, the teacher thanked me for sending my daughter to detention. When I tried to initiate a conversation about how we might use social media as a way to make connections with students and families, the administrator brusquely asked me if I was trying to *"sell something"*. I blinked so hard that I thought tears might come out. I swallowed and tried to smile, but the feeling in the room was hard, distant, and unmoving. I thought that we might be able to approach this as a teachable moment, as a chance to be curious about how to meet students where they are, but the school was more interested in preserving its authority and maintaining the status quo. At that moment, feeling completely ignored and shut down, I came up against the uncaring machine of public education.

How do we turn this around? My primary response is through caring interactions with students, staff, and the communities in which I work. One of the joys of my work is mentoring graduate students through acculturation into scholarly practices. Often this means teaching students how to conduct research - how to design research studies, how to interpret findings (i.e., data analysis is my happy place!), and how to submit work for publication. This is a core function of academia - the drive to follow one's inquiry, build knowledge, and share it with the world. Yet, I also reiterate the importance of behavioral health (i.e., physical and mental health) for our community of co-learners. I recognize the drive implicit in higher education, but I am also learning the importance of reassuring students that our health is equally important. Care means reminding students that my class is just a class, and it should not take priority over health.

There is an uneasy tension between being a person interested in developing caring relationships through community and the demonstrated challenges of doing this work in an institution of higher education operating in a neoliberal context. The global pandemic highlighted the precarity of human factors – relationships, trust, community, and belonging were pushed to the brink. Institutions, even those with a mission to serve the community, understood the rupture of covid-19 not as an opportunity to "*rethink the doomsday machine*", to quote Arundhati Roy (2020), but as an impetus to return to traditional educational practices– return to face-to-face teaching and football games on a campus that looked remarkably similar to the before times. The tensions between centering care in our daily pedagogical practices, and doing this in an environment in which we are seen as expendable, weighs heavy on my mind, on my heart. And yet, amidst these forces of power lie the possibility of momentary openings, of opportunities to form humanizing relations between people, things, the environment, and our speculative futures. Now, I think about meeting Rohit at Michigan State University, a place where sexual abuse and trauma in the athletic department cast a grim shadow – in such a space, how are caring relationships facilitated, trust rebuilt, and communities developed? Acknowledging that *"caring carries risk"* (Thiele, Górska, & Türer, 2021, p. 55) by making ourselves vulnerable to powerful institutional forces, we walk a tightrope between suggesting the beauty born of these relationships and the uncaring ways that vulnerable people are put in their place by those in power. I understand the privilege that comes from being able to say this, and I understand the consequence of being able to say this - there are many things (big things!) that I am unable to write in an essay about care. I have strong feelings about how little cared for many of us feel right now, and how easy it is to perceive that the university does not care if we stay or go – blanketed under neoliberal fantasies of *"self-care"* and *"wellness"* (Michaeli, 2017) is a hope that my job will care about me – will want to support not only my own professional growth, but will understand that my personal development is tied to it as well. That in order to produce professionally as a scholar, I need to be supported – my own needs to support my family, to be in place where I can raise my children during a global pandemic, where I can bring my whole humanity to the job – these are things that I am not assured of right now. I am confident that higher education wants to celebrate the resilience and grit of employees without providing the tools, resources, and job flexibility that would enable us to do our job (i.e., work remotely, protect employees through meaningful health and safety policies, offer our opinions on anti-democratic state laws about the kind of history we can teach in classes).

Many of us are gritting our teeth and trying to bear it through pandemic-teaching, unsure what the latest legislative session will bring. This is a struggle, and this is all that I can say, because to put myself out there even more, to risk being vulnerable about the things that I care endangers my professional security and puts me and my family at risk – and I care too much about them to do that. So now, I stay quiet and care carefully.

3. ROHIT: AUTHENTICITY IN CARE

A few years ago, when a colleague and friend was diagnosed with a chronic illness, my default state was to gather what I had learned from my grandparents about the role of food as medicine (in my familial and cultural practice of East Indian Ayurveda). *"You are made of what you eat"*, I remembered the words of my grandfather, discouraging me from eating processed foods and sugary beverages. He used to teach me how our organs, tissues, and bones are all made of what we eat. If we eat a naturally healthy and nutritious diet, our body knows how to heal itself. Food is medicine. When I found a friend ailing, I passed on the advice. What I thought was a practice of care, when shared unsolicited, the suggestion of eating healthier impacted my colleague as a paternalistic fixing of their broken body, implying blame and responsibility on them for not eating properly and causing their own chronic illness. I tried to "fix" my colleague without listening; not even considering the problem was not mine to fix; not realizing that my colleague may not even define it as a "problem". My unsolicited paternalistic care had made an impact that not only hurt my colleague but also our relationship.

It took me a year of therapy, reflection, and meditation to realize how I had internalized patriarchal saviorism through years of conditioning as a cisgender male. I feel the urge to fix things for my students, too; teaching them my way to solve problems in the classroom. Through years of training in the neoliberal education systems in the West and the East, a goal I had internalized is to help my students become competent. I realized that I did this through the use of words like *effectiveness*, *problem-solving*, *excellence*, and of course, *competence*. When I offer unsolicited help to students and colleagues, I run the risk of implying incompetence and blame, and with it, I also imply normativity – a proper socially accepted mainstream way of being competent. This is additionally problematic in my context where the teacher candidates I teach are predominantly Latinx – most of whom identify as women. In the context of the classroom, a paternalistic approach can go unchecked when students, too, have been conditioned to think of their professor as a knowledgeable authority – a sage on the stage. My struggle is to move from this paternalistic space to the one where I can be, perhaps, a guide on the side.

In my understanding, the road from paternalistic care to genuine care goes through reflexive authenticity. With authenticity, intention is superfluous. Authenticity is love. Authenticity is practicing love in real time. I practice this by genuinely, first, getting to know my students. As hooks (2003) described, *"The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing is an act of love"* (p. 132). Authenticity is my pedagogy of care (Rabin, 2013).

A pedagogy of care is counter to the neoliberal systems in which we find ourselves immersed. In neoliberal educational systems, fast-paced productive lifestyles are considered efficient. Administrators and policy-makers decide the pace and content of teaching, which Rabin (2013) called *"uncaring mandates"*. Stakes are high for teachers to produce future labor for the "free" market. STEM education gets the lion share of the funding so technology does not run out of profit-producing labor. "21st century skills" and buzzwords like creativity, innovation, and problem-solving are utilized as tools to disguise market-driven agenda as individual agency (Mehta, Creely, & Henriksen, 2020). Market-driven policies and practices are shrouded in the performative rhetoric of individualism and freedom. The dehumanization of students and teachers is at the forefront of neoliberal policies and practices, which can be seen reflected in increasing

mental health and burnout issues (Mehta, Henriksen, & Mishra, 2020).

Authenticity is not driven by external neoliberal pressures like testing, performance, or efficiency. Pedagogy of care is an act of humanizing – actualization of humanity and humane needs of the people involved. It calls for a need to slow down and nurture the self, relationships with other people, non-human beings and nature, and most importantly nurture the planet. This comes through reflexive authenticity–getting to know one's self in relation with the world (Rabin, 2013), with transparency and connected oneness. Authentic care shifts the goals and purposes of education from profit in the market to creative expression, self-exploration, and collective well-being. Thus, it requires consistent and thorough critiques of systems of power and oppression that work in plain sight.

Once a doctoral student in educational psychology, I had seen less acknowledgement of the culture and humanity of students and more neoliberal patriarchal systems of control and conformity. I have heard explicit and implicit pedagogical strategies to maintain control in the classroom where psychology is a tool to exercise control: using behavioral conditioning to manage students and keep them on track with the expected pace and syllabi; rewarding students with stars, digital badges, and stickers to keep them motivated to perform as per the systemic expectations; punishing them by taking away what they desire to suppress "unwanted" behavior; using cognitive theories to inject students' brains with the state-sanctioned content, even when it does not apply to their lived experience. Even in the name of including socially situated practices, the best of practices circumvents issues of race, sexism and ableism, using learning theories to create something "fun" that is "engaging" (when does Zuckerberg release the next Oculus so I can do 3D immersive tours of Mars with my students?). More importantly, if I could figure out a way to quantify learning and assess how well students conform with the system, I could get rewarded, too, for doing my job well. These are moves away from authenticity.

As a professor, now teaching educational psychology, I see an opportunity to do critical work through authenticity in care. One of my goals is to move beyond the neoliberal white Eurocentric approaches to the psychology of teaching and learning. I want the students in my course to think of themselves as already fully competent and capable of creating learning environments where students can bring their ways of being, knowing, and doing into the classroom with the awareness of the risk of being whitewashed into normativity. Students have their own inquiries and desires that they can turn into constructive projects if they were not restricted by externally set agendas and content with which they do not necessarily feel authentic connections. Another goal is to help my students find their sense of agency in respect to the agency of the people they work with to foster caring and nurturing relationships and learning environments where creativity thrives. This cannot be done without questioning the foundational white Eurocentric assumptions within educational psychology: the cognitive empire where mind rules the body. My pedagogy of care is, hence, also a move away from cognitivism into embodied posthumanism: grounding the mind as intertwined and inseparable from the body, human inseparable from nature and the planet, acknowledging and including the mind and agency of non-human beings.

3.1. *The Role of Attention*

My journey away from paternalism goes through reconnection with my own body, emotions and feelings, an intentional dissolving of the mind into the body – away from the Cartesian dualism that favors mind as an authority over the body. My pedagogy of care, I root in my feminism and maternalism--in the knowledge of my mother and grandmothers, and many Black, Chicanx and Indigenous feminist scholars (hooks, Anzaldúa, and Tuck), who teach me to identify the inherent paternalistic and white Eurocentric hegemony in our educational systems, globally, enacted through an insurmountable neoliberal capitalistic force in which all *"developing and developed"* nation-states have to partake. One of the most blatant impacts of

global neoliberal capitalism has been on our attention. Social and news media are designed to keep our attention–monetize, compete for, and profit off it (Feng et al, 2015). In growing influencer culture, attention is designed to be on our disembodied digital selves, where creating and maintaining a social media presence is directly connected with livelihood (people making money as influencers, people losing jobs over saying things on social media, etc.) Attention shapes our reality and digital media and technologies have been taking advantage of this by intentionally designing fragmented spaces for us to live in physically disconnected realms with a pretense of connection.

As a teacher educator teaching educational psychology, I find myself in a key position to help my students critique the impact of digital technologies on attention and, consequently, on teaching and learning. Thus, I center my course on attention. Focusing on attention as a topic has many relevant advantages for my students (consisting of teachers, counselors, parents, therapists). Attention as a topic allows us to experience first-hand how the learning theories are enacted in the mind and body. In the course, we start with a module on attention - the neuroscience behind how it shapes experience and reality, its nature and properties, its limitations and power. The impact of social media makes frequent unavoidable cameos in the readings and discussions on attention - how social media apps are designed to keep attention and condition us to anticipate rewards through notifications. Our conversations in the course not only address how social media is designed to attract and keep attention, but what impact it has on students' sense of self-identity, self-efficacy and self-worth. By the time we are done with modules on neuroscience, behaviorist and cognitive theories, the students have a general concern and sense of care for their and their students' mind-body well-being. We discuss the impact on mental health and well-being, but students and I keep returning to attention. Whether it be engagement with the content, the world, or one's self (body, mind or both), attention seems like the foundational condition; if there is no attention, there is no learning. If there is no attention on the toll that the body has been taking being on Zoom, hours at length, there is no care. If there is no attention on where the mind spends its time all day, there is no consciousness.

We live in a time where attention, too, has been commodified. Attention is money. The more time we spend on social media, our attention bounces from one decontextualized piece of information to another - completely detached from our physical and lived reality. Distractions are covered by the myth of multitasking, even when research shows how multitasking is not a productive or constructive strategy (Rosen, 2008). Even in rare situations when we are not working with internet-based devices or social media, our minds and bodies have been conditioned to expect the next new thing with a sense of urgency. Time, thus, becomes even more valuable because time and attention are inseparable. Where we spend our attention fills our time. In a Zoom meeting, I see people's eyes glazing over their screen, scuttling from box to box, swiping back and forth between multiple screens. A colleague shares that they are in 3 meetings at the same time. *"Where is the attention though?"*, I ask with genuine concern.

In my understanding, threats to authenticity and care are the same as the threats to attention and well-being. To exercise a pedagogy of care, then, is to continually question and dismantle neoliberal, paternalistic and colonial onto-epistemological and methodological hegemony in education.

3.2. *Reclaiming Attention*

Connecting the theory of attention with practice is more nuanced. With the aim of slowing down and nurturing care, awareness of our attention is at the center of the entire process–even the course project.

In an online synchronous graduate course on educational psychology, students (consisting of teachers, counselors, parents, therapists) ask what my intention is with the final project. I am immediately reminded of the irrelevance of my intention and instead focus on authenticity. What are my students' needs? What are their students' needs? What are the community's needs? I frame the final project as a "problem" of practice-

-an inquiry where students can define problems relevant to their work contexts, reflect on their students' need (who can be as young as infants and toddlers and as old as undergraduate students), gather parent and administrator feedback, and use a gamut of learning theories with a sense of awareness of social inequities to create a working artifact. This artifact can be a video presentation, a podcast, a paper, a short film, or a number of multimodal works they co-create. The purpose of the artifacts is to offer some resolutions to the problems of practice. We discuss how 'problem' may not always be the right term; sometimes we face *challenges* or *dilemmas*. Thus, we focus on resolutions not solutions. The final course project is designed in a way that students have opportunities to lead their own inquiries, decide what will be an appropriate artifact to build to tackle their problem of practice.

Not all students enjoy the open-endedness and uncertainty of this design. The sense of agency this design comes with does not sit well with a lot of students. The nature of their questions about the project reveals their discomfort to me. In a system that seeks to control, freedom to exercise agency can feel overwhelming. When they have been trained to disconnect from their own attention and bodies, being told what to do seems normal. Even in a synchronous zoom meeting, I can sense the discomfort in a group of students made of a mix of socio-political, cultural, racial, and gender identities. Anticipating the many discomforts, I give them work time in each class to collaborate with their project groups in a breakout room. This way, I am present and accessible as they brainstorm and collaborate. I assume the role of the guide on the side who steers attention.

In the breakout rooms, the questions come alive. I keep getting notifications from students requesting me to join their breakout room. Usually, they have questions about the project; sometimes the nature of the questions is logistical or procedural. Other times, the questions involve deep reflections on their own biases. However, most of the time, the questions are framed to understand my expectations and vision: *"Dr. Mehta, do you want us to make a video for our presentation or just present in class?"* My responses are getting pretty boilerplate after having taught six iterations of this course: *"what do you want?"*. My question is always followed by a pause and a perplexed look. From the way they frame their questions, it seems they want me to tell them the *"correct answer"*. They ask me to make their design choices for them, decide for them what exactly to do so they do not get any points docked. This is where I remind them that *"I do not care about their grades"*. As long as they show the process of genuine deliberation and creation of their approaches to tackling complicated real-world challenges, their grades in the course are irrelevant. I remind them that my job is not to evaluate their artifacts but to help them create their own artifacts in a way that serves their purposes. My job is not to put obstacles in their way to see if they can achieve their goals but to help them identify social and systemic obstacles. My goal with the project is to foster creativity, which I tell them repeatedly in the course. I tell them to take this opportunity to try something new (learn a new topic, use a new tool, build a new artifact), get comfortable with failure and use it as feedback to revise their project ideas, and, most importantly, to slow down and nurture. They understand the first two, but the latter is a challenge. My students do not know how to slow down just like they struggle with not having a teacher telling them what to do. Developing nurture and agency are the biggest challenges I face in my courses in an attempt to share the value of authenticity in care. This is where attention needs to be more than a topic and become an exercise.

To tackle the challenge of developing a practice of nurture and care with a sense of shared agency, I lean on the course content – particularly attention. By the time we reach the projects, students have had three-quarters of a semester to ponder how technology shapes our (and our students') attention. In the first module itself, I remind them that their competition, as teachers, parents and counselors, is with social media, streaming content, gaming services, and the many engaging spaces that are designed by professionals to keep attention. This, I find, is discouraging and overwhelming for my students as they often feel defeated.

My work to shift to authenticity and care starts from this place of defeat.

Throughout the semester, I integrate the many learning theories with attention and mindfulness exercises. Starting all classes with mindfulness practices helps students see, over the course of the semester, how their attention behaves–distracted by the many tasks, the many notifications on their electronic devices, and the numerous tasks expected of them. For instance, in the module on cognitivism, we meditate on our thoughts – realizing how we have a choice not to board the train of thoughts and to just observe. We practice mindfulness of our bodies by moving our attention up-down our body, focusing on the different movements and sensations and learning from them. We use self-dialog to remind ourselves that we are safe, loved, and have creative agency to express ourselves. I give my students tasks after each meeting that help them practice mindfulness during work. More students come back to me about how they caught anxiety in the moment and breathed through it – reminding themselves that this too shall pass. While the road to authentic care may be long, in our shared works, my students and I find ourselves in a space where we have found the key to unlocking care: attention.

In the course projects, my intentional centering on attention has not only changed the nature of inquiries my students conduct but also how they see themselves. Their projects tend to now focus more on mental health issues, teacher burnouts, impact of social media, neoliberal influences on policy and practice, big tech, among others. I find that they tend to talk about themselves as agential definers and solvers of challenges thrown at them – and often lean on each other for advice and collaboration. The most impactful change that I see through my own practice is a shift away from individualism to collectivism – an awareness of a sense of community. Now I have room for love and authenticity.

4. IN THIS ISSUE

Our myriad experiences and struggles with enacting care in our own pedagogy led us to define a need for critical approaches to humanizing pedagogy in teaching with technology. In our conversations with our edtech scholar-colleagues, we heard similar concerns. Thus, we offer this special issue with six unique articles from a range of perspectives. In an attempt to address a range of possible acts of care in educational settings, we include six articles from national and international scholars, presenting a nuanced critique of the role of technology in supporting a pedagogy of care. In *"Care amid ambiguity or, more appropriately, a plea to go old school with the new tools"* Becky L. Noël Smith shares with us her reflections on the ambiguity of constructing a pedagogy of care in a virtual two-dimensional environment. Grounding in the shared experience of navigating online teaching with her students, Smith offers careful considerations for all educators as they evaluate what we lose and gain when teaching with technology.

In *"You make yourself entirely available": Emotional labour in a caring approach to online teaching",* Eileen Kennedy, Martin Oliver and Allison Littlejohn share results of a study of university teachers and their struggles in moving to fully online instruction. They demonstrate how online instruction created new forms of emotional labor and challenges of providing care to students and self.

In *"Connecting vocabularies: the Cleveland teaching collaborative and a humanizing approach to resource curation",* Mary Francis Buckley-Marudas and Shelley Rose share how they tackled the challenges of providing care in online learning by creating a referatory centered around humanizing pedagogies and collective knowledge generation. They demonstrate how "technology does not necessarily hinder a culture of care" and, with the mindful application, "can be a tool for curation, care, and change".

In *"A framework for cultivating purpose as a pedagogy of care"*, Gitama Sharma and Mariya A. Yukhymenko-Lescroart offer a framework to guide educators interested in cultivating a sense of purpose among students as a pedagogy of care. They argue that cultivating a sense of purpose can lead to the *"advancement*

of a positive social change by inspiring students to engage in committed actions that align with their life's passions and the causes they care about".

In *"A conceptual model for pedagogies of care in online learning environments"*, Danah Henriksen, Edwin Creely, and Natalie Gruber also offer a conceptual model to help identify potential tensions in creating a pedagogy of care in online settings. Recommending ways to move past binary ways of thinking, they offer practical implications for educators and researchers towards a human-centered pedagogy of care for online learning that points to technological futures.

Finally, in *"The Equity-Care Matrix: Theory and practice"*, Maha Bali and Mia Zamora offer a tool to understand the relationship between care and equity. Through an Equity-Care Matrix, they provide a visual field to position and critique policy and practice of care in terms of its authenticity.

Together, the authors in this special issue provide perspectives into the role of educational technology in higher education–from specific practices that can build community and develop relationships in and beyond online settings, to new models of care that center equity, and the need for more critical approaches that resist techno-utopianism through nuanced critique, analysis, and interpretation (Krutka, Heath, & Mason, 2020). This works suggests a powerful way forward, as we work to challenge the centrality of technology in education through a humanizing effort that centers care, attention, and community.

5. REFERENCES

Beck, L. G., & Newman, R. L. (1996). Caring in one urban high school: Thoughts on the interplay among race, class, and gen- der. In D. Eaker-Rich & J. V. Galen (Eds.), *Caring in an unjust world: Negotiating borders and barriers in schools* (pp. 171- 198). New York, NY, US: State University of New York Press.

Feng, L., Hu, Y., Li, B., Stanley, H. E., Havlin, S., & Braunstein, L. A. (2015). Competing for attention in social media under information overload conditions. *PLOS ONE*, *10*(7).
doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0126090

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope* (Vol. 36). London, UK: Routledge.

Krutka, D. G., Heath, M. K., & Mason, L. E. (2020). Technology won't save us–A call for technoskepticism in social studies. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *20*(1), 108-120.

By Kevin R. McClure, K. R., & Fryar, A. H. (2022). The Great Faculty Disengagement. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 19, 2022.
Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-great-faculty-disengagement

McMillan Cottom, T. (2016). Black Cyberfeminism: Intersectionality, Institutions and Digital Sociology. *SRPN: Information Technology (Topic)*.

Mehta, R., & Aguilera, E. (2020). A critical approach to humanizing pedagogies in online teaching and learning. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, *37*(3), 109-120.

Mehta, R., Creely, E., & Henriksen, D. (2020). A profitable education: Countering neoliberalism in 21st century skills discourses. In Keengwe J. & Onchwari G. (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Literacy and Digital Technology Integration in Teacher Education* (pp. 359-381). Hershey, PA, US: IGI Global.

Mehta, R., Henriksen, D., & Mishra, P. (2020). "Let children play!": Connecting evolutionary psychology

and creativity with Peter Gray. *TechTrends*, *64*(5), 684-689.

Michaeli, I. (2017). Self-Care: An act of political warfare or a neoliberal trap? *Development, 60*, 50–56.

Nakkula, M. J., & Ravitch, S. M. (1998). *Matters of interpretation: Reciprocal transformation in therapeutic and developmental relationships with youth*. San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.

Noddings, N. (2005). What does it mean to educate the whole child? *Educational leadership*, *63*(1), 8-13.

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA, US: University of California Press.

Olson, K. (2009). *Wounded by School: Recapturing the Joy in Learning and Standing Up to Old School Culture*. New York, NY, US: Teachers College Press.

Rabin, C. (2013). Care through authenticity: Teacher preparation for an ethic of care in an age of accountability. *The Educational Forum, 77*(3), 242-255.

Rolón-Dow, R. (2005). Critical care: A color(full) analysis of care narratives in the schooling experiences of Puerto Rican girls. *American Educational Research Journal*, *42*(1), 77-111.

Rose, E., & Adams, C. A. (2014). "Will I ever connect with the students?". Online teaching and the pedagogy of care. *Phenomenology & Practice*, *7*(2), 5-16.

Rosen, C. (2008). The myth of multitasking. *The New Atlantis*, *20*, 105-110.

Roy, A. (2020, April 3). The pandemic is a portal. *Financial Times*.
Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca

Shelton, C., Aguilera, E., Gleason, B., & Mehta, R. (2020). Resisting dehumanizing assessments: Enacting critical humanizing pedagogies in online teacher education. In R.E. Ferdig, E. Baumgartner, R. Hartshorne, R. Kaplan-Rakowski, & C. Mouza (Eds.), *Teaching, technology, and teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: Stories from the field* (pp.125-128). AACE-Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Thiele, K., Górska, M., & Türer, P. (2020). Relation(al) matters: Vulnerable pedagogies, care and carriance as (c) air-ful (l) ness in higher education. In V. Bozalek, M. Zembylas, & J. C. Tronto (Eds.), *Posthuman and Political Care Ethics for Reconfiguring Higher Education Pedagogies* (pp. 51-64). London, UK: Routledge.

Zygmunt, E., Cipollone, K., Tancock, S., Clausen, J., Clark, P., & Mucherah, W. (2018). Loving out loud: community mentors, teacher candidates, and transformational learning through a pedagogy of care and connection. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *69*(2), 127–139. doi: 10.1177/0022487117751640