TEACHER NARRATIVES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF (DE)HUMANISING PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

A pre-requisite to teaching and learning for humanisation, is the acknowledgement of our situated selves. Situated selves are positioned in our previous, current, and future experiences. The words we use refer to realities and views of the world (Roux and Becker 2016). For Freire (1993, 68) "to speak a true word is to transform the world". Education plays a crucial role in transforming people's worlds, their mindsets, and social relations, that is, in how we name and rename our world. Teachers, therefore, are key mediators of transformative change as agents of social justice, and in the facilitation of learning as transformative specialists (Giroux 1983). Education is therefore a space that would reap the benefits of humanisation. The case study draws on teacher narratives and interviews to explore how teachers understand and reflect on a humanising pedagogy. I conclude that drawing on a humanising pedagogy is a priority for student accomplishment and significant for academic and social resilience.

Keywords: social justice, humanising pedagogy, situated selves, teacher understandings, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

> "Human existence cannot be Silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection." (Freire 1970).

The role of education in transforming people's mindsets and reforming social relations, in the reconstruction of post-conflict countries like post-apartheid South Africa, that is, in naming and renaming our world, is crucial. Teachers, therefore, are key agents in bringing about transformative change, as agents of justice, and in the facilitation of learning as transformative intellectuals (Giroux 1983; Freire 1970). Thus, the importance of teachers creating opportunities for students to be involved in learning through problematising knowledge and

contributing to a better world cannot be sufficiently emphasised. This is a cognisant educational goal.

South Africa is a country that bears legacies of past and present inequities. Given the nature of the country's disparate classrooms, teaching, and learning from a social justice perspective need prominence in addressing discrimination (Kajee 2019). Yet one may question why this is still cause for concern, given that social justice resonates with the very purpose of education. Deconstructions of justice, while narrowly perceived as "just good teaching" (Bell 1997, 3) become crucial. Fundamentally, social justice refers to "fair and just relations between people and society; it involves flouting obstacles for social progress; disrupting cycles of oppression; and analysing systems of power and privilege". Further defined by Bell (1997, 3–4) as "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs ... the process of social justice should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change". Democracy, inclusivity, participation, and equity are highlighted as core concepts. Social justice "challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and other social and human differences" (Nieto 2006, 461). To address these structural inequities, we must challenge and disrupt, all of which can be embraced through education. However, none of this is straightforward or unproblematic, or, for Zinn and Rogers (2012, 76) who state, "the educational arena remains a battlefront, in which the struggle to build voice, agency and community continues". Fairness, equal participation, inclusivity, agency, and challenging the status quo are inherent uncontested concerns. A potential means of confronting these fundamental challenges is through a humanising pedagogy. Yet, despite attempts to shift to a more socially just order, the disempowering, dehumanising legacies persist (Delport 2016). Education is therefore a space in desperate need of humanisation.

This article examines the role of a humanising pedagogy, by unpacking teachers' views gleaned from interviews and narratives. I also examine consequences this might have for education. Core concerns that motivate the study are "How do teachers understand and reflect on a humanising pedagogy, and what does this require of teachers in the context of teaching and learning?"

THEORETICAL LENS: HUMANISING PEDAGOGY

In framing a humanising pedagogy, I draw essentially on the work of Freire (1970) and Bartolemé (1994). I argue that students from marginalized backgrounds are often not seen through a humanising lens. Students might be labelled different, at risk, disadvantaged, and

corrective methodologies are offered as solutions to their difference. The view that methods guarantee success of students who have been historically mistreated by schools is erroneous (Bartolomé 1994). To equate difference with deficit is a misnomer and highly problematic. Terms such as linguistically handicapped, culturally and linguistically deprived, semi-lingual, and at-risk are injudiciously tossed around, but essentially indicate deficit. When students have been historically oppressed, it is hugely challenging to find the right methods to improve their academic performance (Bartolomé 1994, 173). Given the emphasis placed in schools on deliverables and outcomes, standardization and testing, the situation is exacerbated. Often the poor performance of those who have been oppressed masks the reasons for their performance, such as society's asymmetrical power relations that are replicated in schools. Power inequities, together with deficit views of minority students inflate the challenge. Bartolomé (1994, 173) therefore argues for a humanising pedagogy that "respects and uses reality, history and student perspectives as inherent to education".

Teachers who work with students who are marginalized are responsible to assist them appropriate knowledge foundations society deems desirable. Freire (1970) lamented dehumanisation in education and said that the only process conducive to re-humanisation is humanising pedagogy. He regarded humanising pedagogy as core to student success, and scholarly and societal resilience. Freire's conceptualisations of "humanization," "pedagogy," and "humanising pedagogy" are therefore responses to dehumanisation in education. For Bartolomé (1994, 174) a humanising pedagogy promotes trusting relationships between teachers and students, "academic consistency and learning situations where power sharing is enabled among teachers and students". Macedo and Bartolomé (2000) add that the pedagogy enables respect for students' personal histories and stories. Freire continues that humanising teachers engage in pursuit of mutual humanisation, where students and teachers may engage dialogically. A dialogical approach develops critical consciousness and is described by Freire as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (1970, 17). Teachers who engage in humanising pedagogy can partake in praxis and reflection upon the world with the aim of transformation.

Dehumanising practices marginalise students by ascribing academic difficulties to linguistic and cultural differences (Nieto and Bode 2007). For Nieto and Bode, to focus on cultural assimilation deprives students of their funds of knowledge. This perpetuates "cultural eradication and linguicism" (Del Carmen Salazar 2008, 343). To define culture through artifacts and isolated traditions is the status quo in many schools worldwide (Nieto and Bode 2007). Banks (2005) adds that focusing on food and festivals in the name of cultural engagement is one dimensional, we must move to a broader range of student experiences, and dismantle

dehumanising policies and practices.

To address dehumanising practices, we may consider the role of the revolutionary teacher (Freire 1970; Franquiz and Salazar 2004). Freire's (1970, 51) revolutionary teachers (rather than reactionary teachers), establish solid relationships with students from marginalised groups. Teachers who are revolutionary practice a humanising pedagogy without manipulation, rather through engaging with student consciousness. The role of the school surpasses teaching students, schools are responsible for strengthening cultural awareness and identity. The empirical work of Franquiz and Salazar (2004) was designed to show if, and how teachers oriented to a humanising pedagogy in high school classrooms with majority Chicana/o students. The study revealed how students respond to teachers' pedagogies. The data was used to conceptualise a model for the development and sustainability of academic resilience, and reveals that, despite unfavorable conditions, how students may achieve good academic outcomes.

For Huerta (2011, 38) teachers' prior knowledge and life experiences strongly influence the way they comprehend the nature of learning and their students. Teachers who embrace a humanising pedagogy recognize the socio-political contexts of their own and students' lives (for instance, power, racial, cultural and ethnic identities and values) (Bartolomé 1994; Freire 1970; Salazar and Fránquiz 2008). These teachers believe that marginalized students experience difference, not in their ability to learn, but in how they learn.

THE STUDY

In this case study I examine how eight postgraduate students, who are teachers, understand humanising pedagogy, and narrate moments they felt dehumanised as teachers or learners. I am also interested in some of the consequences this may have for teaching and learning. The context of this study is a project between universities in South Africa and Brazil, titled "Education for social change: teaching social justice, cohesion and peace through literacy". The project aims to examine how social change in education is negotiated through relatively intangible understandings of social justice, cohesion, and peace, and related constructs, and if they are put into practice (or not) in teacher education and teaching. This study focuses on a South African component of the project.

Case studies are designed to acquire thorough knowledge of situations for those involved. They are detailed, descriptive pieces of research that focus on bounded occurrences (Yin 1994; Knobel and Lankshear 1999). What matters is the process rather than outcomes, in discovery rather than confirmation. Using Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, 3) notion that qualitative researchers deploy an array of interconnected methods, expecting to get a better understanding

of the subject, interviews with participants and participant narratives served as methods utilised within the case. Interviewing is a valuable source of accessing participants' views. In this study, group interviews were conducted, because of the tendency to encourage participant interaction. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. To elicit personal reflections from the participants, they presented narratives. According to Clough (2002, 8) the narrative is useful because it reveals to its audiences a more profound view of life under everyday conditions. Clough (2002, 8) believes that stories are a means of uncovering truths, providing an element of anonymity without stripping away "the rawness of real happenings". Johnstone (2004) uses the work of Labov and Waletzsky (1967) and Labov (1972) in personal experience narrative (PEN), to confirm how when people tell stories about themselves, these are embedded in an interactional context. Rosen (1988) (in Johnstone 2004) says we make sense of ourselves as individuals and as members of groups through personal narratives. To exist in the social world an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story (Linde 1993, in Johnstone 2004, 644). Shared stories make groups coherent. Johnstone (2004, 640) continues that storytelling is not only a way of creating community, but also a resource for solidarity, resistance, and conflict. This is how we create language and society. In this case study, participants were probed to narrate (de)humanising experiences as teachers and/or learners.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants are eight postgraduate (6 Masters and 2 PhD) students who are English teachers. All participants attended an introductory seminar where key concepts were deconstructed. Of the participants, six are female, and two male, and all except for two are South African. The age group ranged between 25–45. The aim of the work was to examine their thoughts on what a humanising pedagogy might entail. All participants presented narratives of (de)humanising teaching-learning experiences that they encountered, as teachers or learners.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed using a content analysis technique. I read through the transcripts, and made notes as I went along, with both the interview and the narrative transcripts. Items were categorized, and linked to minor or major categories or themes, and patterns identified which supported or refuted the research questions and key issues.

ETHICS

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study, according to ethical standards

stipulated by the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg Ethics Committee (Ethics clearance number: 2019–048). Participants were provided with letters of consent and pseudonyms were used when referring to them.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION: UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMANISING PEDAGOGY

Extracts from the participant interviews are highlighted, then discussed in relation to teachers' understandings of what a humanising pedagogy embraces. Thereafter I draw on their personal narratives of dehumanising experiences.

Data set 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Analysis

Jana associates humanisation with free will and justice, and denounces any form of racism. Thus, she makes the point that humanising teachers should treat all learners alike. She draws on an incident that occurred at the beginning of 2019 in the little town of Schweizer-Reneke in the North-West province of South Africa. In this case a Foundation phase teacher separated learners into linguistic groups (which were also racial groups), her reason for doing so was that she felt they could communicate more effectively with classmates who spoke the same language on the first day of school. A photograph of the separated classroom was taken, and soon went viral, and the teacher was accused of being racist https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/laerskool-schweizer-reneke-incident-memories-two-similar-school-racism-sagas/ (Sisetsha 2019). Such enforced separation of children into racial or linguistic groups, for Jana, is dehumanising. Vina too, associates a humanising pedagogy with social justice. She verbalises the need to engage in dialogue about South Africa's apartheid past. Her notion that white learners in her class do not feel responsible for apartheid calls for dialogue on power and privilege. These are discomforting, troubling conversations to have in a classroom. However, the role of dialogue as humanising praxis, according to Roux and Becker (2016) has been highlighted first, as the acknowledgement of "situated selves", and second, "the need for, and right, to voice" (2016, 133–134). Roux and Becker (2016) revert to Paulo Freire's (1993) core proposition: that humanisation is a fundamental aim of education. Freire (1993, 135) argued that "words not constituted by reflection and action are empty". They are words that are meaningless and without action. For education to be grounded in teaching and learning for freedom and humanisation, we must recognise our situated selves (Freire 1993, 136). Situated selves are positioned in our previous, current and forthcoming experiences, and "dialogue cannot occur ... between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (Freire 1993, 69). Students and teachers have the right to be vocal. It is only by asserting our right to voice that historic injustices can be disrupted and new communities constituted.

Marina and India use language in their focus on a humanising pedagogy. For Marina, all languages should be respected, yet she cites challenges in doing so in the classroom. India's focus on Afrikaans as a *boer* (meaning "farmer" in Afrikaans) language draws on days when Afrikaans was considered the language of white Afrikaners, who assumed power during apartheid. As a coloured[1] female, India speaks Afrikaans as her first language. Her view as a person of mixed race who speaks Afrikaans, is that the language should also be recognised as a language spoken by black South Africans, not just white Afrikaners. With regard to Marina's

point on students' home language, Childs' (2016) exploration of the (potential) dehumanising nature of language use in many South African classrooms is valid. Child highlights the disjuncture between the dominant language of the classroom and the home language of the learner. In her work, she interrogates her own observations in multilingual classroom contexts, and explores the potential of translanguaging to elicit humanising experiences for learners and teachers. Translanguaging is the process where multilingual speakers consciously use their own languages through which to communicate. Childs concludes that translanguaging is essentially humanising, and affords teachers and learners opportunities to participate as transformative individuals. Teachers need to reach beyond the hegemony of English and the constraints of institutional cultures to achieve transformation in diverse classrooms.

Ari's focus is our histories and stories. He says "We do not come from nowhere. Teachers must know who their students are. A humanising pedagogy acknowledges everyone's story". A humanising pedagogy acknowledges our voices and stories. For Zinn and Rogers (2012) the legacy of dehumanisation has been consciously and unconsciously absorbed into educational arenas that depict power hierarchies, compliance, fear, repression, and loss of voice. The authors say that core to being human is re-centering and restoring voice. They regard humanising pedagogy "as deliberative action, with a particular focus on re-storying voice and owning the knowledge that comes with that restoration" (Zinn and Rogers 2012, 78). The need to focus on our stories is also reminiscent of Freire's cultural circles. Freire focussed on the need for us as teachers to respect learners' histories, and called for teachers to be revolutionary. The basis for Freire's dialogical system of education is the cultural circle, in which students and teacher discuss themes significant to students' lives. Tsepo's call on culture is therefore significant. His reference to the ineffectiveness of cultural days at school is reminiscent of the views of Nieto and Bode (2007) and Banks (2005), presented in an earlier section of this article.

Cumulatively, the data elicited from the participants draw on justice, language, culture, and a knowledge of who our learners are, as well as allowing them opportunities to tell their stories, which are empowering. Not doing so is dehumanising.

Data set 2: Narratives: Dehumanising experiences

Narrative extract 1: Vina

> "In 2007 when I just moved to South Africa, I had a job as an administrative clerk/after-care teacher, in the then Willow School in Johannesburg. This was a special needs school for children with disabilities, the population of the school was predominantly white."

> "Mrs Edwards was a parent to a learner in that school who suffered from Attention Deficient Disorder. On one hand, this child was disruptive at school because he would not listen to anybody, on the other hand Mrs Edward was a difficult parent to deal with as she was quite arrogant. Teachers in that school avoided her and were probably scared of her because she had the power to intimidate people. She also worked as a prosecutor in court. There was one incident which I consider dehumanising. I stumbled on a letter Mrs Edward wrote to another teacher in school instructing her to prepare noodles for her son before aftercare period, as she did not want '(participant) to do the noodles for her child because she is from Africa and will not know how to do it'."
>
> "Her language was dehumanising and derogatory to me, because she belittled and undermined me to a colleague as incapable of preparing noodles, which is very basic. Furthermore she referred to me as coming from Africa that left me wondering if South Africa is not Africa."

Narrative extract 2: Tsepo

> "In 2012 while a student teacher at the University, I went on teaching practice in a government primary school in Florida, Johannesburg, I met a school principal who smacked learners privately in his office. Whenever a learner misbehaved in class that learner was sent to the principal's office to be disciplined, after a question-and-answer session, the principal took out his rod and gave the learner a good beating. This method of discipline, I was told had been unanimously agreed on with the parents of that community and the school as the right thing to do when a learner misbehaves. Corporal punishment is dehumanising as it inflicts pain and torture on human beings."

Narrative extract 3: Jana

> "At school we would have civvies days. This was when we could wear normal clothing instead of uniforms. At that time my mother worked as a domestic. My father was not around since I was a child. She could not afford the clothes like some other girls wore ... the brands. I wore basics that her boss gave her. Off course I could feel eyes on me when I went to school in these clothes. No one really laughed at me, because lots of us were in the same boat. After a while I wore my uniform to civvies days. I wonder over the years why schools still do this?"

I did not require participants to engage in narratives until we were firmly established as a group, and had spent some time together, so that participants were comfortable narrating events that were meaningful to them. The focus of the narratives was instances when they felt dehumanised, as teachers or learners. The rationale here was to engage participants in self-reflection, and to provide them with an opportunity to share their stories. In this section I report on three narrative extracts.

Vina is from Malawi, and has permanent residence in South Africa. The extract of her narrative provides an encounter with a South African early in her immigration to the country. Mrs Edwards is constructed as a woman with power, who intimidated teachers at the school. The incident when Mrs Edwards felt Vina was incapable of preparing lunch for her child

because she is "from Africa" is evidence of the dehumanisation Vina felt. Given that she was considered capable of looking after Mrs Edwards child, yet incapable of preparing lunch for him, was humiliating. Tsepo's discussion of dehumanisation involves a school principal administering corporal punishment to learners. This with the agreement of parents and the community. The use of corporal punishment is not allowed in schools, however this principal used slaps as a form of discipline and was fully supported by the parents who most likely could not discipline their children. For Tsepo, a pre-service teacher at the time, this was disconcerting and dehumanising. Jana's narrative involved a popular custom in South African schools, Civvies Day. Civvies Day occurs when learners are allowed to attend school in everyday clothing, instead of school uniform. Each learner is expected to pay a nominal amount for the "privilege" and the funds are later utilized by the school. Jana's discomfort at wearing hand-me-downs is evident, yet several other learners were in the same boat. She decries such events at schools that isolate and marginalise children.

Narrative evidence of dehumanising experiences encourages participant voice and agency, when they are comfortable to tell their stories. Giving voice to these episodes enabled participants to focus on reflexivity and have the potential to help transform teaching and learning experiences. In their work, however, Zinn et al. (2016, 89) found that while extending shared understandings of a humanising pedagogy through a process of reflexivity and transformative learning can be a "mechanism to facilitate (re)humanisation in the South African education context", there are still a range of perspectives related to the concept.

To this end Zinn et al. (2016, 75) cite Mezirow (2000, 22) who says that when we engage narratively we should do the following:

- identify a disorienting dilemma;
- examine feelings of fear, anger, guilt;
- critically evaluate our assumptions;
- recognise that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
- explore new roles, relationships and actions;
- formulate a course of action;
- acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
- try on new roles;
- build competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
- reintegrate into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective.

The model is valuable in assisting to provide focus to narratives, as well as to alleviate discomfort participants might encounter during narration.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

A humanising pedagogy unquestionably has valuable inferences for teaching and learning and must be seen with a view of enhancing educational equity among linguistically and culturally diverse students. It is essential therefore that teachers participate in ongoing professional development to maintain standards. It is equally important to strengthen relationships between teachers and parents. About language in particular, Del Carmen Salazar (2008) recommends that more focus be placed on home and additional languages: bilingualism, biculturalism, multilingualism, multiculturalism, as well as linguistic and cultural identities must be supported.

Fránquiz and Salazar's (2004, 49) framework of academic resilience for Chicana/o students, based on their work on humanising pedagogy, is a valuable example of praxis that may be endorsed. The framework identifies four elements for fostering student resilience: respect (*respeto*), mutual trust (*confianza*), verbal teachings (*consejos*), and exemplary model (*buen ejemplo*). Such a model is derived from students own funds of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005, in Salazar del Carmen and Fránquiz 2008). *Buen ejemplo* (exemplary model) includes relationships with caring adults. Students succeed when they are given opportunities to learn and practice exemplary ways. Mutual trust develops when classroom interactions make students feel valued and comfortable. Similarly, verbal teachings influence attitudes and behavior, as respect builds trust and potential for transformation.

CONCLUSION

Teacher development programs must foster teachers who are prepared to adopt a critical stance to support the children we teach. Such a critical stance advocates transformational approaches to uplift the lives of culturally and linguistically disparate students. The role of educational institutions in maintaining equity must constantly be challenged. The implementation of curriculum, teaching and assessment practices to foster equity, access and social justice are non-negotiable. As teachers we must engage in praxis and critical reflection to nurture critical conversations among teachers, learners, parents (Del Carmen Salazar 2008, 352).

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NOTE

1. Mixed race, note the use of apartheid nomenclature that persists in South Africa

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