

**IMPROVING CLASSROOM  
ENGAGEMENT AND  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMS**

# INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

Series Editor: Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger,  
Mandla Makhanya

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INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND  
LEARNING VOLUME 27

**IMPROVING CLASSROOM  
ENGAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS:  
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON  
HUMANIZING HIGHER EDUCATION**

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# **SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION**

## **Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning**

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- (1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries;
- (2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices; and
- (3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes

represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

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# PART I

## BRIDGING THE EMOTIONAL CONNECT

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO IMPROVING CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMANIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and  
Mandla Makhanya

### ABSTRACT

*Educational pedagogy is concerned about student-centered learning that engages students and involves them in a meaningful manner to enhance critical thinking and creativity. Creative teaching and learning methods are a catalyst that can improve the learning experiences of students. Good teaching and the experience associated with it helps to connect students, faculty and the subject that is being taught to the students (Palmer, 2007). Many subjects till today are taught with a purely fact-based approach, and such traditional methods overlook the need to bring the subject to life and to make learning meaningful. Multi-dimensional methods are used to encourage students and convert them to successful learners with the ability to think creatively. The issue of student's disconnectedness is a matter of much academic pursuit and using non-traditional methods such as plays, narratives and even humor are on the rise and have gained popularity due to their success in classroom teaching (Dunn, 2000). This book will help to*

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*highlight various case studies and interventions that have used innovative ways to improve the teaching-learning methods and engage students in the classroom. Academicians, through the chapters in this volume, have argued that education does not only mean teaching, learning and research but also the emotional connection and commitment that involves a dialogical process between the faculty and students. It is the responsibility of the faculty members to ultimately create an environment that provides the students with tools that are socially engaging, interactive and meaningful (Dunn, 2000).*

**Keywords:** Pedagogy; curriculum; teaching and learning; environment; innovative; creative; critical thinking; multi-dimensional methods; fact-based; student's experience; narratives

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of improving classroom engagement through the humanization of education is multi-faceted and can be interpreted through a combination of treating students as humane and engaging them in classrooms that enhances the talent and uniqueness of every student. The concept is deeply rooted in humanist education theory and as Reardon (2001) states that at the core lies the ability of a teaching staff to offer student-centered learning. Students in this approach ought to be treated as a whole human being who is the subject to learning and not object of learning (Reardon, 2001).

Nwafor (2014) is of the same opinion that humanizing the classroom involves humanizing students and treating them as human beings who possess cognitive abilities, affective emotions and psychomotor aspects. Nwafor (2014) argued that the basic elements of humanizing the classroom are faculty members and students are both learners. The concept is not dependent on a school building, curriculum or the school infrastructure. It is rather dependent on the humane touch rendered by educated and dedicated faculty members who is capable of evoking a great passion for learning and a curiosity to seek knowledge. Bhatia (2000) talks about the importance of faculty who plays an active role in humanizing education. Faculty capable of engaging students in a humane manner are those who provide students with opportunities to think critically and creatively, while they are involved in the process of learning (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013; Okorie, 1986).

Blessinger, Sengupta, and Reshef (2019) advocates a redesigned learning space that promotes a culture of inclusion and a community that has been nurtured on democratic principles and based on human rights. A student-centered learning space helps in building positive mental health, psychological well-being and all-round development of students. Nwafor (2014) envisioned that a humanized classroom is one that has a belief system that values honor, respect, love, dignity and friendship. Kuntoro (2008) advocates two schools of thought in education, namely progressivism and existentialism. Principles of humanist education based on the school of progressivism have student-centered education with non-authoritarian faculty members with a keen eye toward student engagement

and activities. The idea of existentialism is based on treating students as unique individuals. The talent and uniqueness of students need to be treated differently as no student can be same. The faculty member should learn to incorporate differences and treat individuals with human values and rights (Kuntoro, 2008).

Similar thoughts have been echoed by Nwafor (2014) that faculty should pay attention to the unique personalities inherent in each student, and they should make constant effort to relate to the students with the term I–you rather than the relation of I–it. Faculty should treat them as active members in the classroom and not as passive listeners. Faculty should serve as facilitators who are meant to encourage enthusiasm and help students to be curious and seek knowledge, in a climate that is democratic and cooperative.

Mulkan (2002) believes that humanizing the classroom is another form of learning model which is based on humanity. The learning model is created with the understanding that every student is a part of the process of growth which undergoes a constant change in the environment, in this ever-changing environment faculty should look to establish self-identity by combining both the heart and the mind. Titus, Smith, and Nolan (1979) believe that humanizing classroom and involving students should be existential in nature that recognizes and respects the individuality in every student and helps them to grow.

Gibson and Tranter (1998) explain that the new teaching strategies are helpful in creating co-teaching opportunities, where educators can collaborate to creating a new learning environment. Wheeler (1971) had favored the new approach stating that humanizing teaching methods and student interaction can be directly linked to overall student success. The traditional teaching methods in a number of instances have proved to be ineffective, where faculty members have been unable to bridge the gap between concrete activities and abstract ideas taught in the classroom (Swan, Hofer, & Locascio, 2007).

Humanization of education and engaging students lean on “critical pedagogy” an approach route that includes dialogue, voice, empowering students and critical reflection of the subjects taught in the classroom (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013). This approach develops a tolerance toward socio-cultural differences that is inherent in a larger society. The students and faculty are meant to work as a team constructing and de-constructing ideas and believe and create solutions to end oppression and marginalization in society. The culture of humanizing pedagogy is not restricted in the classroom alone and is expected to be practiced both within and outside the classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term student engagement can be defined as “how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other” (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 38). The continuum of “student engagement” is wide and starts with grabbing the attention of students to deep and engaged learning. Higher education (HE) so far had only laid emphasis on the cognitive abilities of students and ignored the emotional domain, which led to decreased concentration and diminishing attention of the students.

[Kuntoro \(2008\)](#) suggested a list of considerations and activities that a faculty should understand and undertake, while creating a humanized education system in the context of the classroom:

1. Educational objectives and processes cannot be coerced but are led by children's own initiative. Therefore, the curriculum and educational objectives have to be designed in such a manner that it is in accordance with the current needs and interests of children.
2. The student is active subject and hence faculty should refrain from treating them as passive objects. Children are naturally enthusiastic in learning provided they are given adequate opportunity to learn in keeping their talent and interest and not under duress.
3. Faculty members are facilitators who are expected to advise, guide and work as mentors and not someone seen as a class monitor or ruler.
4. School can be viewed as a miniature form of society. Hence education should not be confined to the four walls of the classroom, but students should be taken out and made aware of social issues and other problems.
5. While learning to interact with the community, students should be able to identify and prioritize social issues and work toward offering a solution toward mitigating such issues. Students should be encouraged to use their knowledge in creating practical solutions and not a mere repository of knowledge.
6. Schools should offer a democratic and congenial atmosphere that supports the progression of humanistic knowledge, treating every individual with respect and equality.

The current teaching practices have seen a rise in the concept of student-centered learning that stemmed from Vygotsky's socialization theory, in which he argued that students learn best when they are given the opportunity to socialize either formally or informally with one another in a classroom setting or outside the classroom ([Chick, 2006](#)). Student-centered learning provides much needed motivation to students, where they enquire and engage in a particular topic and starts relating to the subject. It is the responsibility of the educator to facilitate this kind of learning by resorting to a variety of learning tools like usage of fiction, narrative tools and exposure to community issues. [Thomas \(2011\)](#) and [Blessinger and Carfora \(2014\)](#) advocate inquiry-based learning which gives freedom to students to investigate a topic.

Several interventions have been conducted by academicians to realize and utilize the benefits derived from humanistic education. [Dunn \(2000\)](#) had mentioned about a faculty member creating a special interest project where the students can choose their area of interest and work on the project throughout the year, where they are free to research and develop the topic from their own viewpoint and come up with innovative ideas and solutions. [Dunn \(2000\)](#) believed that the culmination of the study could only be possible, where instruction strategies help in creating an overall engagement with students.



Wright (1998) has suggested a different approach toward humanizing classroom engagement and has relied heavily on student collaboration as a bridge point to transfer and share various opinions among students. This route according to him will help in establishing an unbiased perception and critical ways of thinking. The critical skills will not only help students with one subject but will prove beneficial in a cross-curricular sense, where students will develop a natural sense of inquiry. Thomas (2011) however urges that the faculty should be adequately trained and have the right kind of knowledge before they engage in inquiry-based student-centered learning. A shift in the learning environment will help faculty identify the differences in learning abilities and help prepare lessons that cater to such differences. Faculty play a crucial role in the success of such an approach. Faculty members will have to work harder to establish trust and security in their classrooms and will find students who are willing to be engaged and willing to learn more about a particular subject (Nawrot, 1996).

The level of trust and comfort establishes the foundation of a free-flowing discussion among students and faculty members (Youngs, 2012) and helps to support various interpretations of texts and understanding. Faculty should be able to realize that the essence of education lies not only in imparting knowledge in a classroom context creating awareness of their surroundings, the challenges that can be associated with their society and the solutions that can be created by the students toward a healthy and fulfilling life (Sengupta, Blessinger, & Makhanya, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Academicians are working relentlessly in the pursuit of creating a humanized and liberating form of education. Through their academic research and writing, they have shown growing concern toward the de-humanizing nature of education (Giroux, 2001). Humanizing education is the best path toward progress and to move away from oppressive and conforming education system (Salazar, 2013). The contribution of student-centered learning, inquiry-based classrooms and faculty involvement are undeniable in creating a positive and rich learning environment. Being a part of a classroom community that engages students in asking questions, developing an investigative attitude and inference skills and critical thinking is beneficial for students both personally and academically. While there is a need to emotionally engage and entice students while delivering the curriculum, there lies a need to be creative and foster diversity among lessons created by faculty. Curriculum and teaching-learning methods are undergoing a radical shift in their approach and everywhere the need to humanize education and engage students in teaching methods is felt and is acted on.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

“Reflecting on Students’ Emotions in Undergraduate Research: Humanizing Higher Education Experiences” by Ana Batista speaks about HE teaching, learning and research that requires not only cognitive but also emotional commitment

from all who are involved in those dialogic processes: the academic and the student. The focus of this chapter is on unexplored territory: emotions at play within undergraduate research outside the classroom, specifically experienced by students who are engaged in these opportunities for the first time. After reflecting on the problem and bringing together theoretical approaches related to this theme, the authors present a case study, drawing on qualitative data collected in two institutional contexts – one in the UK and other in Portugal. The data analysis led them to create a framework that addresses their two research questions, concerning: the emotions that students experience when they are involved in an undergraduate research project, and the aspects of that experience the reported emotions relate to. This led them to suggest some recommendations at the end, so that they can move toward a more humanized HE experience. This chapter gives an original contribution to discussions on emotions in HE teaching, learning and research in general, and undergraduate research in particular.

“Adapting Paulo Freire in an Institutional Context: Developing Positive Relationships” by Carol Thompson and Michael Kleine present a case study of how two professors from different disciplines at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, managed to interweave dialogic components of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy into an institutional context full of requirements and demands that restrict pedagogical choices. Enacting Freire’s ideal of a liberatory epistemology, as Freire calls it, is extremely difficult because institutional constraints increase the psychological and emotional distance between the students and instructors. In spite of this, the instructors devised ways to create a classroom based on Freire’s dialogic approach to education. Using Martin Buber’s terminology, they worked to establish their students as “Thous” rather than as “Its.” Together with their students, they explored their texts, and generate free discussions based on the notion of co-constructing their classroom and co-constructing what knowledge is and means to them. Establishing this “open space” of inquiry and acceptance, involves practicing Freire’s strategies producing authentic dialogue. Here, instructors participate actively with students. They engage in classroom exercises and even write with the students. The atmosphere in the classroom is relational and inter-subjective. Instructors also enact behaviors explained in Julien Mirivel’s Positive Communication model that bridge the gulf of separateness that work to decipher the unknown.

“Enlightened in Loco Parentis: A Model for Addressing the College Student Mental Health Crisis” authored by Laura M. Harrison and Peter C. Mather talk college student mental health problems that have reached a tipping point in the United States as evidenced by unprecedented levels of demand for counseling services ([Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018](#)). Campus leaders have responded by increasing counseling center staffs, but many universities still struggle to provide care in a timely manner. In this chapter, the authors argue the time has come to examine the issue of college student mental health more holistically. Although campuses have allocated considerable human and financial resources to the treatment side of the issue, more attention needs to be paid to what is causing the mental distress in the first place. The authors propose that the current ethos of neoliberalism exacerbate mental health issues by positioning students as