

Introduction to the Special Issue—How to Humanize Online Teaching and Learning: From Theory to Practice

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What can online educators do to humanize their courses? This is the main question that was posed to the authors of the articles included in this Special Issue on Humanizing Online Learning. Decades of research in the field of online education have highlighted the need for online educators to engage students through purposeful connections. These connections include students-to-students, students-to-instructors, and students-to-content (Abrami et al., 2011; Moore, 1989). As virtual learning spaces have become more diverse, many in online education have called for a further humanization of the virtual learning environment that takes into account the needs of all students and allows them to be seen by the instructor and each other (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020). Many conceptualizations of the boundaries of what it means to be a humanized online environment exist; however, Li et al. (2022) noted three common elements. These elements included (1) student agency, (2) instructor presence, and (3) peer presence. Li et al. (2022) suggested future research on humanizing the virtual learning environment should be more specific and practical.

The idea of humanization is directly grounded in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) where he grapples with topics of power and dehumanization in education. Even with this foundational grounding of humanization in critical pedagogy, some contemporary scholars criticize past ideas on humanization in virtual environments for being too neutral and not actively engaging with topics of power or ideology (Mehta & Aguilera, 2020).

It is with these topics in mind that this special issue compiles conceptual and pedagogical writing that engages with topics of humanizing online teaching and learning for all students. Some articles in this special issue give detailed examples of humanization in practice, others deliberate with topics of humanization through a more critical lens, and still others do both. We organized this special issue into the following three sections

1. Section 1 focuses on humanization at the program level,
2. Section 2 includes articles about humanization in course development, and
3. Section 3 provides articles examining how humanizing pedagogies connect with individual learning activities.

Section 1: Humanizing online programs:

This section contains articles that describe humanization at the macro-level. This includes articles focused on humanizing programs and calls to action for the field at large.

Section 2: Humanizing course development:

This section has articles that describe ways to humanize virtual courses. This includes articles highlighting specific structures and teacher facilitation techniques for the virtual environment and articles that ruminate on the possible benefits of technology in the future.

Section 3: Humanizing learning activities:

This section consists of articles that describe humanizing pedagogies with detailed examples of learning activities that illustrate these pedagogies in practice.

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