

## Chapter 3

# Strategies and Reflections on Teaching Diversity in Digital Learning Space(s)

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to introduce readers to critical theoretical orientations necessary for online pedagogues, including feminist pedagogies, praxis pedagogy, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, and embodied practices. These critical theoretical orientations undergird a critical digital pedagogy in an online master's course, Diverse College Students. Critical digital pedagogical strategies employed by the authors, such as high context communication, community and relationship building, and visual and audio pedagogies, are discussed. The authors conclude the chapter by engaging in a self-reflexive activity, opening space for insights about the role of current political events, personal student successes, and an engaged community beyond the classroom. Recommendations for faculty wishing to engage a critical digital pedagogy are offered, as are recommendations for future research.*

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions have increased the use of online learning spaces, now offering students fully-online undergraduate and graduate degree programs, first-year experience courses, and developmental education courses (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Increasing numbers of students are engaging part or all of their education through online learning management systems and with digital tools. Despite this trend, faculty often are underprepared for the challenges and possibilities of online teaching and learning. Many older faculty have never engaged or completed an online course; and even younger faculty

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who may have engaged with some level of online learning, or who grew up with digital tools, may be ill equipped to understand the pedagogical possibilities of online learning (Jaschik & Lederman, 2017).

In this chapter, the authors center one type of course that presents a unique set of possibilities for online instructors: those focused on diversity, equity, multiculturalism, and diversity. Such courses present possibilities for thinking through a critically engaged digital pedagogy. The authors argue that all online faculty should engage critical theoretical orientations *prior* to developing course content or teaching courses online. Critical theories, such as feminist pedagogy, culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy, and embodied theory, are vital gateways for faculty in all courses. The authors utilize these critical theoretical orientations as foundation to the structuring of a master's level course entitled *Diverse College Students*. The entangling of these theoretical orientations with digital pedagogical strategies is examined, as are individual reflexive accounts of the ways critical digital pedagogies influence each author's ongoing becoming as teachers and humans.

This chapter aims to introduce readers to critical theoretical orientations necessary for online pedagogues; outline strategies currently employed by the authors for an engaged, critical digital pedagogy; and begin a larger conversation about the role of critical digital pedagogy toward ends of creating a more caring, just, equitable, democratic, humanistic, and healing educative practice.

## **BACKGROUND**

How might faculty, pedagogues, and scholars engage in creating critical, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining online learning environments? The authors agree with Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014) assertion that "our pedagogical practice has to be buttressed with significant theoretical grounding" (p. 83). Such theoretical grounding follows bell hooks' (1994) conceptualization of theory as liberatory practice. Online pedagogues cannot simply transfer traditional pedagogical strategies into online environments without thinking about how the medium of educational engagement or delivery shifts possibilities. Nor can online pedagogues emphasize solely skills-based, technological, and technocratic approaches to online teaching and learning. In the digital age, we must also account for technocultures (Luppici, 2012), hardware and software, and begin critically examining the role of digital technologies in the complicated relationships that undergird social and educational (in)equality (Gin, Martínez-Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon, & Hall, 2017; Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012; Noble, 2018). As the authors have argued previously (Montelongo & Eaton, Under Review), online education, particularly when focused on the multiplicity (Hames-García, 2011) and heterogeneity of people's identities, cultures, and histories, necessarily needs to account for even more complex pedagogical strategies, critical reflection, and personal commitment. As the authors aim to build an anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000), the use of a wide range of critical theoretical perspectives humbles us to account for social structures, personal positionality (or standpoint), history, politics, sociopolitical realities, and a willingness to admit that, sometimes we just do not know (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The authors begin by presenting several key theoretical orientations with which to think about a critical digital pedagogy (Morris, 2017). Critical digital pedagogy extends the traditions of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and other critical standpoint theorists to deconstruct power dynamics in online learning spaces, center relational and dialogic praxis, and importantly, avoid over-reliance on the restrictions of digital technologies in erasing human connectivity, networks, and relationships. Put more simply: critical digital pedagogy seeks to center humanistic practices. The authors subscribe to

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