Equitable teaching for cultural and linguistic diversity: exploring the possibilities for engaged pedagogy in post-COVID-19 higher education

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ABSTRACT

While the impacts of COVID-19 on higher education are still unfolding, it is clear that the disruption caused by the pandemic has provided a warrant to re-consider existing teaching and learning practices. We provide a reading on whether existing teaching and learning practices should be retained or whether new practices can and should emerge through the lens of culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and refugee (CALDMR) students. These students already experienced significant educational disadvantage before the pandemic moved teaching and learning online. Drawing on findings from an Australian study that explores the experiences of both university students and staff, we question whether these experiences offer hope for what bell hooks calls engaged pedagogy – as a form of university teaching and learning that is more caring, more student-centred and collaborative, and more exciting.

Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has brought significant chaos and tragedy to the lives of millions across the world. Although a global health crisis, its effects are broadly felt in social, economic and educational spheres of life across many societies. At the same time, opportunities have arisen for transformations and possibilities for "shattering" of the status quo, higher education included. In their Special Issue of *Higher Education Research & Development* on COVID-19 and higher education, Green et al. (2020) write that the collection of essays they curated,

expose the fault lines inherent in current HE systems that are over-commercialised, hyper-intensified, individualistic, careless, instrumentalist, corporatized and paralyzed by tradition, and it is necessary to reimagine forms of 'recovery', which are more equitable, inclusive, sustainable, communal, humanistic and resilient. (p. 1312)

In this article, we take up this call to reimagine the possibilities for higher education teaching and learning in the post-COVID world, looking at how the disruptions of COVID-19 have opened opportunities to develop what bell hooks calls "engaged pedagogy" – forms of teaching that are kinder, more culturally responsive and more inclusive than traditional approaches. We explore this through examining the experiences of a particularly disadvantaged cohort – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Migrant and/or Refugee (CALDMR) students – and teaching staff in Australian universities. While CALDMR students' access and participation in higher education have received increasing scholarly attention (Baker et al., 2018; Burke et al., 2020; Hartley et al., 2019; Molla, 2020; Sheikh et al., 2019), little is known about this cohort's experiences of online education in general, let alone the emergency online education enacted under pandemic conditions. This is a notable omission given increased focus on online learning as a mode of delivery for "equity"[1] students (for example, Stone, 2019). The moving of *enforced* teaching and supports online has thus caused critical challenges (Hodges et al., 2020), not just for CALDMR (and other equity) students but also university staff (Rapanta et al., 2020).

This article will therefore explore whether the ruptures to the "business as usual" of universities caused by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 have facilitated the potential for shifting towards more engaged forms of teaching and learning. Drawing on mixed-methods data from an Australian-wide study, we examine the possibilities for engaged approaches to teaching and learning through deliberate and careful consideration of multicultural and plurilingual cohorts and the specific needs of marginalised students.

Literature review

Post-pandemic teaching and learning: lessons from emergency remote delivery

The urgent move from in-person teaching to emergency remote delivery, as a result of the mandate to isolate and social distance, necessitated widespread engagement with online teaching and learning. In Australia, the higher education sector was "unevenly positioned to respond" to online teaching (Croucher & Locke, 2020, p. 2), with pre-COVID engagement with online teaching across universities and disciplines variable at best. This relative unfamiliarity with online tools and the principles of distance teaching created significant challenges for educators and students, confirmed by a 2020 report from the Australian regulatory agency for higher education – the Tertiary Education Qualifications and Standards Agency (TEQSA). In their analysis of public universities' Student Experience and "pulse" survey data, TEQSA found that a third of students reported "inadequate academic interaction" during 2020, with student feedback clearly suggesting a need for staff training and professional development with regard to emergency remote delivery (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA], 2020).

There are two stand-out messages from the post-COVID literature that speak to the teaching experience. Firstly, there is a significant difference between the urgent shift to emergency remote delivery and online teaching and learning, with the former

characterised by urgency, speed and a lack of preparation and resources, and the latter representing a long history of planned, research-informed distance teaching and learning that is facilitated partly or wholly through online tools. While it is tempting to conflate the two – given they are both offered using similar technology, and both characterised by similar spatial and temporal distinctions, compared with in-person teaching – the differences between them are stark. The relative unfamiliarity that many higher education educators previously had with teaching online created a situation where between one third and one half of Australian students indicated that they did not like emergency remote delivery and wanted to return to campus "as soon as possible" (TEQSA, 2020, p. 1). Similar findings are reported in the UK, with Barber (2021) reporting that up to a third of students surveyed reporting they had inadequate internet access and inadequate study space.

The second message is more hopeful. The shift to emergency remote delivery broke down seemingly intractable barriers to more flexible modes of delivery that had hitherto been considered unpalatable by universities and demonstrated that students and educators could adapt to online delivery, even if they did not particularly enjoy it. In many ways, the mandate to move to emergency remote delivery has helped to disrupt dominant ideas about online teaching and learning being "second class" (Stone & Springer, 2019) to in-person delivery (although it has arguably also confirmed this suspicion for many). The sudden and reasonably effective shift online has opened many possibilities. As Eringfield (2021) notes in her essay on the possibility of a campus-less university, the pandemic provides an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities of a post-COVID university[2] that is neither fully online or fully in-person. Neither end of the spectrum is desirable; instead, she contends that universities should adopt strategies that support more flexible and blended approaches to teaching and learning.

However, despite this optimism, scholars have noted the clear implications for equitable access and participation. In Australia, a recent focus on online teaching and learning in equity-focused higher education scholarship has highlighted challenges. In particular, Cathy Stone's work has informed the development of good practice principles for equitable online teaching and learning, based on the argument that the majority of online students are from equity cohorts, specifically mature-age, first-in-family (Stone & O'Shea, 2019). Stone's work identifies how, while widened access to higher education is a benefit of online teaching and learning, it is not enough to only provide access. Educators and institutions need to recognise that online students are likely to have different needs and experiences, such as needing to build confidence and gain experience in university environments (for example, Stone et al., 2016; Stone & Springer, 2019).

There is strong consensus in the online teaching and learning literature about the need to get to know students, including their personal circumstances (Dyment et al., 2019; Henry, 2020), to understand their technological competences (Henry, 2020; Scull et al., 2020) and their anxieties around using technology (Wilson et al., 2020); their need for connection with academics and peers (Henry, 2020; Stone, 2019; Stone & Springer, 2019); and issues relating to time and space (Dyment et al., 2019; Scull et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). Connections are particularly important for mature age students and students with care-giving responsibilities (Stone et al., 2016).

Equitable teaching and CALDMR students: pre-existing challenges and how they have been amplified by COVID-19

Online Teaching and Learning has long been a feature of the Australian higher education sector, albeit unevenly. While there has been strong growth in the attention paid – in terms of funding and published literature – to online teaching and learning and equity cohorts, limited attention has been paid to the experiences of CALD students, including Indigenous students, and nothing has explored the experiences of CALDMR students in higher education in settlement contexts. This is despite increasing research and advocacy interest in the access and participation of CALDMR students in higher education, with several accounts of the significant challenges the CALDMR students face, such as unfamiliarity with educational systems and practices (Stevenson & Baker, 2018), developing language and literacy proficiency (Naidoo & Adoniou, 2019) and scant financial and social resources (Hartley et al., 2019). Indeed, recent analysis of Australian higher education data from 2001–2017 suggests that 83% of refugee students from Africa paused/withdrew from their university studies (Molla, 2020), foregrounding the evident need for more support for CALDMR students.

There are two significant aspects of the COVID-necessitated shift to emergency remote delivery that are likely to impact CALDMR students significantly. Firstly, there is consensus in the literature that many CALDMR students prefer to access information and support from "hot" (friends/familiar) or "warm" (trusted, institutional) networks (Baker et al., 2018), rather than "cold" (institutional/unfamiliar) sources. The move to provide all forms of support via online modes is likely, therefore, to have impacted on students' uptake of these services. Secondly, the financial constraints that many CALDMR students live with is also likely to have impacted on their capacity to continue their studies, with COVID-19 also exposing a digital divide for many CALDMR school and university students (Good Things Foundation Australia, 2021). Moreover, as reported in Mupenzi et al. (2020), libraries being closed has impacted significantly on CALDMR students' ability to study, as many relied heavily on campus services, such as access to computers and the internet.

However, these issues are largely speculative and underexamined. There is, therefore, a clear need to explore the experiences of CALDMR students studying in such contexts, including examination of whether educators (academic teachers and educational developers) considered CALD-related issues in their shift to emergency remote delivery.

Conceptual frame: bell hooks' engaged pedagogy

This article will discursively explore the possibilities for what the famed critical feminist educator hooks (1994) calls "engaged pedagogy" – a transformative and emancipatory approach to offering meaningful education that involves (re)configuring not only structure and practice, but also self and spirit in the pursuit of relational respectful and caring teaching. As hooks (1994) declares,

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share

information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

The ideas behind hooks' notion of engaged pedagogy are drawn from Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, with "exciting education" intended as an antithesis to Freire's "banking model", where students are seen as "empty vessels" and powerless, with the omnipotent teacher "filling up" students with knowledge. The notion of excitement as counter to boredom is significant to hooks' work; she argues that "the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring" (p. 7). Working from a critical pedagogic view, in which students are seen as bringing valuable and teachable experience, meaning all participants – students and teachers – influence, learn and teach each other, engaged pedagogy requires that personal relevance sits at the heart of education to make it both meaningful and exciting.

The constitutive parts of hooks' engaged pedagogy are an interest in collectively creating exciting classes; an understanding that despite the relative power, the teacher is not all knowing and that power needs to be shared with students; a commitment to mutual vulnerability and developing trusting relationships; all underpinned by the understanding that education can be liberatory and transgressive.

Engaged pedagogy is also fluid – dependent on the individual teacher and what each cohort of students brings to the interaction. As Sevilla (2016) notes, this involves not only addressing *structural* constraints – such as offering flexibility, responsiveness to singularities, mutual responsibility, and mutual recognition, but also requires consideration of the *spiritual* in order for teaching to be healing. This requires an understanding of the wholeness of both student and teacher, and a concern for wellbeing – starting with the teacher's.

As an alternative approach to traditional, teacher-centred educational models, engaged pedagogy offers students an opportunity to take ownership of their learning by contributing with relative parity to the teacher. Such student-centred approaches that privilege relationships and connections to personal lifeworlds are more likely to encourage active participation, especially for those previously disengaged, (tacitly) excluded from or disadvantaged by dominant forms of education, such as CALDMR students.

Methodology

Overview of project

This article draws on the findings from a mixed-methods, comparative, interdisciplinary project which has drawn on the expertise of academics working in the fields of refugee education, psychology, sociology, educational design, and public health, working as a representative collective of the Refugee Education Special Interest Group[3]. This multi-partner study sought to examine the experiences of CALDMR students, and university educators from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, responding to this overarching research question:

What are the equity challenges and opportunities for CALDMR students and university staff navigating the post-Covid-19 remote learning context?

The broader project also included data collection from student-facing support staff, and educational designers but these data are not reported on in this article. Ethical approval was gained from each of the participating universities.

Data were collected through online surveys with each group, as well as follow-up interviews with educators and Photovoice interviews with students.

Participants

Students

Seventy CALDMR participants (32 male, 38 female) with an average age of 25.48 years completed our survey. The sample were studying a wide range of topics, and were proportionately spread between Australia's states and territories. Almost the entire sample were full-time students (83%), and around half were living with dependents or had other carer responsibilities (61%). Similarly, around half were living with family (61%), while the rest either lived alone (16%) or with friends (23%). Within the sample, there was a wide range of self-described cultures and countries of birth, although it is noteworthy that over half the sample had an East or South-East Asian background (59%), while the remainder of the sample had backgrounds from Europe (15%), Africa (3%), South America (6%), and Western Asia (15%). A minority of 16 individuals spoke English as their first language (23%, notably from European countries) and all participants except three were multi-lingual (96%). There was variety in the residency status as 43% were permanent residents, 48% were temporary visa holders (international), and 9% were humanitarian visa holders.

Photovoice interviews were also conducted with five participants, recruited through the survey (see Table 1). Photovoice is a visual research method that involves using participant-generated photographs to represent and explore participants' perspectives in relation to a given topic (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice is often used in research with disenfranchised groups of people. The precise process of Photovoice varies as a method across research, however it typically involves steps that include information provision about the process, taking photographs, choosing meaningful images, and finally discussing those images in one-on-one interviews (Due et al., 2016; Wang & Burris, 1997). In this study, the Photovoice process involved asking participants to take photographs which represented their experiences of learning during COVID-19. These were then sent to the

Table 1. Overview of Photovoice participants.

Pseudonym	Discipline	Level of Study	Background	Age	Identifies as
Zain	Medicine	Postgraduate	Pakistani	23	M
Omar	English as an Additional Language	Certificate 3 (studying in dual-sector university)	Iranian	24	M
Lily	Migration Studies	PhD	Chinese	33	W
Brene	Education	PhD	Indian	31	W
Jason	Social Work	Masters	Nepali	26	M

Table 2. An overview of the university educators who participated in semi-structured interviews.

Pseudonym	Gender	Discipline	Teaching Role
Steve	M	Career education	Tutor, Learning Designer
Liz	F	Education, Sociology, Anthropology	Tutor
Sarah	F	Development Studies Program	Sessional Lecturer
Julie	F	Education	Unit Coordinator, Tutor
Lucy	F	Creative Arts, Education	Lecturer
Tracy	F	Education	Lecturer
Ebony	F	Internet studies	Lecturer
Edwina	F	Science	Senior Lecturer, Faculty Coordinator

research team, and a photo-mediated interview was conducted whereby participants were asked to share details about the photos as well as respond to semi-structured interview questions.

University educators

In the survey cohort, 86% identified as female (n = 25) and 14% identified as male (n = 4) with the majority identifying as being Australian/Anglo-Australian (41%) or White/Caucasian (13%). Participants primarily lived with family (96%) and had no caring responsibilities or dependents (45%) or cared for children (34%). The majority were employed in a permanent position (65%), primarily in lecturer or senior lecturer roles (65%) and were teaching in Social Sciences (38%) or Arts and Humanities (31%). Just under half had been working as a university academic staff member responsible for teaching students for less than 10 years (48%), while 34% had been working between 10–19 years, and the remaining over 20 years (17%).

In addition to survey participation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight university educators. Seven identified as female and one as male, four held sessional contracts, while four were on full-time, ongoing contracts (see Table 2 for an overview). These educators worked at 11 universities across the Australian higher education sector.

Analysis

The data from the surveys were exported into SPSS where descriptive statistics were conducted to provide an overall summary of the data. The final open-ended question was analysed using thematic analysis whereby common themes were collated and interpreted. The interview data were similarly analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis, which is congruent with the critical, feminist roots of hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy as it explicitly acknowledges the knowledge and subjectivity that we brought to our analysis, requiring our "continual bending back on [ourselves] – questioning and querying the assumptions" that we made (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). As "stakeholders" in the topic of our inquiry, our reflexive engagement with the data is particularly necessary to ensure that we unpacked our biases before, while and after we undertook this analysis.

Findings

Drawing on a reflective thematic analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data sets, we developed three themes as key findings of the study: complex challenges, structural opportunities, and tactful engagement. In what follows, we discuss these themes in turn.

Complex challenges

Turning first to the survey results, there was a clear indication from all of the CALDMR student-respondents that their learning and educational experiences had been disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked to consider their own learning experiences during COVID-19 compared to how they perceived their Australia-born peers experienced learning of the same content, they reported being less engaged with course materials, feeling less confident in their abilities to study, and being under-prepared to learn during COVID-19 relative to their peers (paired-sample t-tests: $-3.96 < ts > -2.48$, ps < .017). When asked to consider their learning experiences during COVID-19 compared to their previous face-to-face learning experiences, they reported finding it harder to understand (or confirm their understanding) of concepts, to identify relevant material, and to understand requirements of assessment during COVID-19, (paired-sample t-tests: $-4.40 < ts > -3.41$, ps < .001). In addition, they reported feeling more excluded by classmates, less able to actively engage with teaching staff, and that feedback (both in class and in response to assessment) was less available compared to previous learning periods ($-2.62 < ts > -2.18$, ps < .034).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students in the Photovoice component discussed inequities in relation to technology which were brought about by the shift to online learning resulting from COVID-19. For example, Omad, an Iranian student on a bridging visa discussed how hard it was to complete group assignments when he and other students did not have good access to the equipment needed to use Zoom, as well as difficulty understanding his lecturer when lectures were delivered online because she spoke quickly. Zain, a medical student from Pakistan, also discussed practical difficulties with online study, taking a photograph of faulty equipment to demonstrate this (see Figure 1).

Likewise, the qualitative data collected with university educators in the surveys and interviews offered more nuanced insights into the perceived challenges and benefits of remote emergency learning with the CALDMR cohort. The educator survey offered frequent mention of perceived negative impacts of emergency remote delivery on student learning. Respondents spoke about the fact that most CALDMR students prefer having face-to-face contact with university staff, because it allows them to discuss the nuances of their lives and educational needs. Participants also felt that online teaching had a negative impact on the capacity of students to engage with their lecturer and peers. Some also felt that CALDMR students would struggle building relationships with their peers and educators, especially given the impact this lack of face-to-face contact has on building trust with students. Other participants observed that CALDMR students often lack confidence communicating in an online environment. This includes being reluctant to talk in an online group setting, which is evidenced by students muting themselves and turning off their camera, although we recognise that such practices could also result from
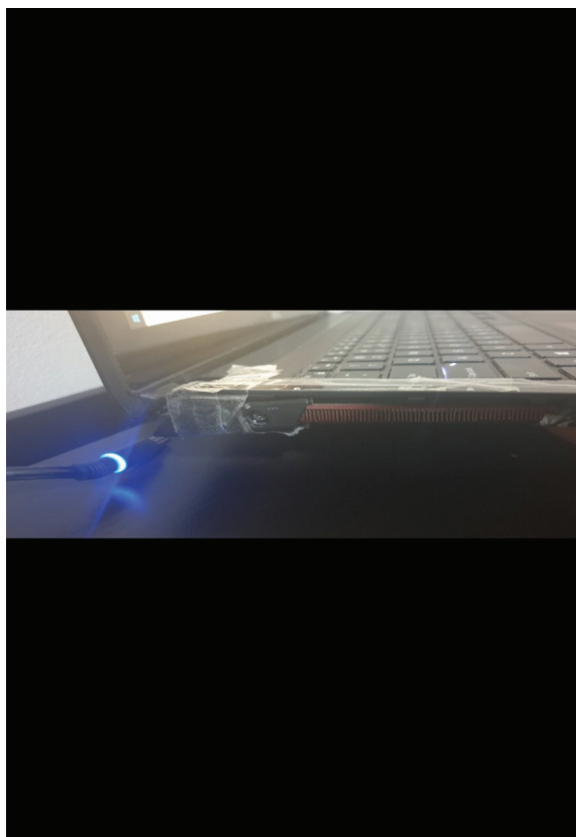
Figure 1. Electronic equipment taped up.

uneven internet access or being in a shared space. One teaching issue raised in the survey was the difficulty in monitoring student engagement due to the ease with which students can turn off their cameras and be "invisible" online. This made it harder for lecturers and tutors to provide support and monitor progress, especially picking up on visual signs that indicate a student might need additional information or support. Similar concerns were echoed in the individual interviews. Educators expressed anxiety about "*things falling through the cracks*" (Lucy) and reported feeling alienated from engaging with students due to the demands imposed by their respective institutions so that it was "*not online learning but rushed learning*" (Julie).

Educator survey respondents described the impact of the induced move to online teaching on student support, with comments made about how the move online made it harder for students to feel supported because online teaching is perceived as more distant, echoing the findings in the TEQSA (2020) report. Educators also commented on the lack of access to additional support services such as language services, which can affect student learning outcomes. Some educators identified additional factors that impacted their learning experiences such as their limited technological skills, and the

extra time need to transition to online teaching. Six participants (24%) said that the support provided was semi-adequate or not adequate at all. The majority of comments related to difficulties with IT and tech support and assistance.

Educators mentioned numerous personal challenges faced by CALDMR students as a result of the move to online learning, including some students having domestic pressures, such as feeling pressured to help with home duties and family responsibilities, cramped living situations and shared space that hindered comfortable learning and studying environments. Participants also expressed awareness of uneven access to resources such as internet and laptops, and the impact of financial pressures on students' ability to learn; for example, Steve expressed concern about the plight of international students who "*are going broke because their jobs have dried up . . . they don't have access or JobSeeker or JobKeeper*". Moreover, participants noted how students appeared to be disconnected, and technological issues were reported as impeding some students' ability to concentrate (as reported also by the student participants). For example, Steve explained that some students had to "*reconnect four or five times in a seminar which tells me they're having internet issues*". Educators also reported that students with caring responsibilities were less able to focus on learning during the lockdown period; as Edwina explained, there were "*a lot of students who are juggling work, study, caring, all sorts of things*". Regardless of background, it was felt that "*women were always disproportionately juggling home-schooling and parenting compared to fathers*" (Liz).

Structural opportunities for engaged pedagogies

While COVID-19 has undoubtedly ruptured the higher education sector and created significant challenges for universities and students, we follow arguments that COVID-19 also offers opportunities to disrupt assumptions, strategies and approaches to teaching and learning (Eringfield, 2021; Green et al., 2020). In particular, we contend that post-COVID disruptions in the sector have created the conditions for exploring opportunities to enact the engaged pedagogy for which hooks (1994) advocates, based on erosion of the structural and spiritual barriers as identified by Sevilla (2016).

Accounts of the students and the educators suggests that the disruption has brought new opportunities. In response to questions about benefits, Omar responded that online learning "*made him feel more patient*", by "*thinking about the ways to do and learn new things*", such as engaging with students regularly using online methods, thereby potentially forming new relationships. As such, the Photovoice process identified several new ways of learning, and interacting with teaching staff and other students, which reflected some of the principles of engaged pedagogy. In general, the interviewed students felt that while online learning could be challenging, repetitive, and, for some, hard to access, they reported perceiving times when the power dynamics between educators and students were reduced, and that academic staff became more accessible.

While educator participants' reflections on their experiences with remote delivery were largely positive, their accounts offer critical insights into opportunities for providing more responsive and socially inclusive learning, particularly for CALDMR background students. The majority of the respondents to the university educator survey identified their university as providing support for the use of digital technologies for online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (86%), with 72% stating that this support

was adequate. Participants believed that there would be several positive outcomes as a result of the move to online teaching. Additionally, there were several comments about how with additional time and resources online teaching could be improved for CALDMR students, and that the shift would prompt more thoughts around the prioritisation of accessibility and inclusion. Comments were also made about the positive impacts on teaching being dependent on the confidence of educators, their freedom to make experience-based changes to online education, as well as the proportion of CALDMR students in the class.

Other components that represent structural opportunities relate to the enhanced potential for more mutual responsibility and mutual recognition. At the level of educator-student, our data illustrate how the shift to emergency remote delivery has helped to shift power dynamics and relationships between the two groups. As reported by students in the Photovoice interviews, the fact that everyone experienced the unplanned shift online together helped to develop a greater sense of the challenges that both groups were facing, and opened up a necessary space for educators to share more of themselves, in part because of the affordances of the technologies – such as showing the often unseen (messy) "backroom" spaces that educators and students work in, or using emojis to communicate – but also in the deliberate and creative creation of community in the absence of in-person interactions, such as creating fancy dress themes for online classes. This connects strongly with the need to explicitly share personal aspect of our lives to the teaching interaction, which Scull et al. (2020) described as, "the COVID-19 pandemic provid[ing] a licence to personalise their teaching and make a number of the tacit pedagogical practices from their face to face teaching more explicit when teaching online" (p. 501). This chimes with hooks' description of the importance of both teachers and students practising sharing to create trust, and – consequently – the conditions for more emancipatory education. However, our student-participants clearly lamented the loss of connection with peers or even a sense of exclusion, making peer-to-peer sharing difficult. This points to more careful consideration with regard to how to design teaching and learning experiences that better facilitate peer-to-peer connection, particularly given the CALDMR cohort might feel more socially isolated than their non-CALDMR peers.

Tactful engagement

Tactful engagement rests on morally intuitive and mindful practices. In *The Tact of Teaching*, Van Manen (1991) posits: "To exercise tact means to *see* a situation calling for sensitivity, to *understand* the meaning of what is seen, to *sense* the significance of this situation, to *know how and what to do*, and to actually *do* something right" (p.146, emphasis in original). In other words, tactful pedagogy – like hooks' engaged pedagogy – is underpinned by a caring orientation, a disposition to being attuned to each other's concerns and aspirations. It aims at safeguarding "what is vulnerable". Our analysis has captured some aspects of tactful engagement of both students and educators.

Students discussed new ways of engaging with their lecturers or supervisors. For example, students discussed new ways of interacting with academic staff as a result of online learning – primarily through more accessible methods of accessing their educators (e.g. feeling as though emailing staff was more acceptable). As an example of this, Zain discussed how their lecturer tried to demonstrate practical skills such as

venepuncture through Zoom, including increasing the number of Zoom tutorials that were available so that she became more accessible to students. Zain said that at times *"online lectures were a blessing"*, primarily because he could save on time and travel costs, which was important as he juggled multiple commitments without much income. However, Zain also indicated that he developed a new appreciation for face-to-face learning and the collaborative opportunities that were presented when you could interact with people in person – including the incidental encounters that came about when everyone was simply present on campus. In addition, relationships with their educators sometimes presented lifelines to students who were otherwise isolated during the pandemic. For example, Omar, said his teachers actually gave students their personal mobile numbers so that they could *"call us every week"* to check in and give them details of the course online, highlighting the important role lecturers can play in the lives of students both in relation to academic education as well as broadening social connections. However, we do not want to advocate for unbounded communications between educators and students; the establishment of acceptable timings and frequencies is an element of self-care, and needs to be negotiated according to individual circumstances.

Similarly, many of the educators' interviews referred to the possibility to develop more interactive teaching approaches. When discussing their teaching philosophy, most educators in this project mentioned the belief that everyone should be active participants in the learning process. This included viewing students as "partners", that is "*know who you're teaching, put yourself in their shoes*" (Edwina). To facilitate an interactive teaching approach, educators explained the "*importance of . . . trying to understand where people come from themselves*" (Sarah); "*to help guide them in that journey*" (Steve) and develop "*a relationship . . ., where they feel comfortable enough to ask the awkward questions . . ., regardless of their background*" (Liz). When the classroom is understood as a communal place where everyone contributes and influences the classroom dynamics, hooks (1994) contends that it is more likely that this collective effort will result in exciting learning.

Rather than merely sharing information, educators also referred to informal opportunities that helped to break down feelings of disconnection between students and educators in the online learning environment in a way that "respects and cares for the souls of our students" (hooks, 1994, p. 13). For example: "*I picked up my cat and the students saw my cat . . . The things that make you human, just bringing those in*" (Tracy); at the end of the online seminar many students "*would stay back and just want a chat, they want to show you their pets*" (Sarah). Other examples, such "*as wearing fancy dress on Zoom"* (Liz), were perceived as bringing in the "human" element as well as fun to online teaching (hooks, 1994, p. 15). These examples highlight a break from the dualistic separation of public/ private – providing a connection between the educator and the students. In different ways, therefore educators demonstrated that they understood that their students have complex lives and therefore needed to work together with students to create "communal contexts for learning" (hooks, 1994, p. 159).

Tactful pedagogical engagement also creates opportunities for spiritual growth. Considering how education can offer opportunities for healing – particularly relevant in the post-pandemic landscape – the enhanced institutional focus on wellbeing of students and educators has been a serendipitous and welcome consequence of COVID-19 and

emergency remote delivery. This awareness has not, of course, immediately led to better experiences; in fact, as our data attest, students and staff were negatively impacted by this urgent shift. However, we take from this a durable focus on the wholeness of the teaching and learning experience, with both students and educators given a language of description to articulate the importance of social connectedness, engagement, and emotion. Additionally, through increased social connectedness, there is the possibility that wellbeing could be considered as truly holistic and embedded rather than something taught through one-off "wellbeing" workshops.

There are several interconnected factors that lie at the heart of the spiritual dimension. Of particular significance is the time needed to develop relationships, to get to know each other, to take care of self and others. Time emerges as something of a double-edged sword in our analysis: while the reduction of time spent travelling to university opens space and flexibility, the shift to emergency remote delivery placed other demands on people's time, such as redesigning activities to work well, and students indicated that they found the relative lack of structure difficult. Making/finding time is requisite to opening the spiritual possibilities. When educators can adapt their teaching style with an openness of mind and heart in order to be able to "learn and grow without limits" (hooks, 1994, p. 207), then not only can the students learn from the educator but the educator can also learn from the students – that is, the two often distinct groups can instead be learners together. However, our data remind us of how gendered sociocultural, sociopolitical, temporal and spatial disparities constantly challenge the enactment of engaged pedagogy.

Conclusion

In this paper, we showed that the sudden move to emergency remote delivery highlights continuities and changes in how student engagement and learning is supported by universities through online modalities. Clear benefits are evident in our findings: educators and institutions exercised flexibility in their expectations of students by modifying assessment policies in order to take into account barriers affecting their learning. Moreover, concerns about students' wellbeing prompted educators to broaden their responsibilities to care about and for students, to address isolation and create a sense of belonging. However, responses to lockdown highlighted access and participation challenges for teaching and learning, including problems with internet connectivity and risks of student disengagement from boredom, time-management and personal difficulties. Thus, while there have been clear limitations resulting from the unplanned and urgent nature of emergency remote delivery, there is a sense of agreement in the student and staff data that the changes had created flexibility for many in ways that had been unattainable.

Further, as more learning moved into asynchronous modes, such as uploading pre-recorded lectures, students had more flexibility and autonomy as well as responsibility to determine schedules, pace and engagement with course materials. Moreover, the shift to hybrid/dual modes of delivery – online and in-person – offers opportunities to move beyond a singular experience. The flexibility offered by blended approaches permits plural options for students, educators and institutions, which can enhance "excitement", to use hooks' term, and engagement for all parties. Through the blending of a/synchronous

components and careful course design, informed by the research published on equitable online teaching and learning, opportunities for engaged pedagogy are (somewhat) opened, allowing individuals to design learning experiences to suit their students' needs.

Exploring possibilities for engaged teaching as advocated for by hooks through the lens of CALDMR students – thereby capturing multiple, intersecting forms of disadvantage – can help to identify the opportunities for more critical, CALD-recognitive and holistic approaches to teaching and learning that will offer better educational experiences for *all* students. This involves addressing both the structural and the spiritual opportunities that the pandemic has created. The mandate for doing so can be found in the idea that universities can be unnecessarily "uncaring" or hostile places for some students because of erroneous assumptions about what students can draw on to support themselves, which COVID-19 has magnified; as hooks (1994) articulates, "the academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created" (p. 207). The warrant for rethinking our practices in ways that make our teaching and learning more exciting, more caring, more engaging is therefore clear; however, much more research is needed to explore the impacts of mass online teaching and learning – whether emergency remote delivery, hybrid, fully online – because it is clear that online is here to stay.

Notes

1. Equity cohorts are formally identified in Australia as students from Indigenous, low-socioeconomic (low SES), and rural and remote backgrounds; CALDMR students are no longer an identified equity cohort in government policy or funding but they are often captured in universities' equity practices under the low SES category.
2. We note Tesar's (2020) commentary on the idea of "post-COVID"; he writes "'Post' is an interesting predicament because it is clear that we cannot be – anytime soon – post Covid-19. It is likely that we will carry Covid-19 with us for a very long time, and not necessarily in a linear progression. As such, it may mean a very long, unclear and messy transformation" (p. 558).
3. The Refugee Education Special Interest is a group of people from the community, higher education, vocational education and school sectors in Australia who have an interest in supporting educational opportunities for students from refugee backgrounds: http://refugee-education.org/.

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