

Humanizing Digital Platforms: Learner Centric Education

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Today everyone is speaking of the new reality; a reality whose nucleus is all things digital. With UI, UX and artificial intelligence propelling how we experience the world, the changes in landscape of communication, relationships, education etc. are inevitable. To add to this already changing landscape, the pandemic accelerated the relationship with technology. But humans are adaptive, our cognitive flexibility gives us the agility to morph with changing times. One of the best examples of this has been moving education online. In a limited time, frame, schools and colleges alike, moved classes online. Tutors and students both learned new tools and platforms to achieve this. Many associations, colleges and government programs are being established to facilitate optimum use of various platforms and LMS, which is extremely important and quintessential factor in online teach. However, even though touched upon sporadically, many of these trainings or good practices did not cover the Human aspect or emotion in online teaching. Considering this I decided to embark on an experimental project while teaching. Instead of using multiple platforms and apps, I concentrated on only using video calls for classes with Human components of inspiration, personalization, community, motivation, conversation and support to facilitate learning, creative explorations and student engagement.



Figure 1

This exploration of teaching pedagogy, integrated each of these components during face to face teaching and well as independent learning. Qualitative feedback was cumulated intermittently as well as after the completion of the modules as well as after the completion of the specific projects. The students were the part of the Undergraduate Program for Fashion styling and Image Design, from Level 1,2 and 3. They have varied level of experience, skill and projects. There was a consciousness implementation of the human emotion components in both instructional classes as well as mentoring. This study and exploration was mutually beneficial,

for the students as well as me, the faculty and course leader. Following are the examining of each of these components, step taken to create or convey each of them and the way they facilitated student engagement and learning.

Community: According to the Harvard business publishing education “*The more you can build community, the more your students will feel invested in the course, and the more likely they are to engage in the work*” (Schino, 2020). The digital world is full of communities. Communities for artist, designers, Bollywood actors, causes, so on and so forth. However, building a community amongst students in the educational context can be more of a challenge. Students can be shy, secretive of their work, competitive or just disinterested. But if given a common purpose and a unifying element, students could be extremely engaged in creating a community to for support and learning from their peers. Keeping this mind, a community platform was created for students from all levels to interact on their final projects. The Platform was call “*I am where you are*”, a place where students could share their work, their struggles and concerns, without supervision from the faculty. Students were given guide lines on ethics, etiquette and the understanding of receiving and delivering constructive feedback. After the sessions students were asked what they thought about the interactive sessions and were they helpful? The feedback for these sessions were extremely positive. Students felt a sense of comradery, a common purpose to create. They shared their struggles and doubts and gave each other, various creative solutions from varied perspectives. In a traditional class scenario, students hesitate or do not get the opportunity to share all their work, but Online teaching has given students a platform to share their work, observe the work of their peers and give and receive feedback. Most of all it can give them common ground.

Inspiration: “*the secret of success in the consistency of purpose*” (Harmin and Toth, 2020). One of the biggest struggle of the students, was the lack of inspiration. To be stuck in a space, in front of a screen, many of my students felt a shortage of stimulus. The purpose to express and create dimmed because of future uncertainty. The mundane engulfed spark to innovate and create. A purposeful intervention was to create a space, where they could interact with other successful, creative individual who could inspire them, reignite the spark that could drive them to continue creating. Many such master classes were organized for the students. Unlike webinars, the students had the liberty to ask and interact with the industry guest. These sessions gave many of the students a sense of purpose, an association and an achievable goal. Though the effect may have been short-lived foe some, the exercise engaged the students, gave them an insight into their chosen design filed and a glimpse of clarity towards their creative goals. Bringing in speakers who the students can relate to, people who have had the same struggles as they are or will face in the future and Inspiring them with untold stories seemed to have a possible effect on the student’s creative outcomes.

Figure 2 is one such interaction with stylist and designer Tanya Sharma.

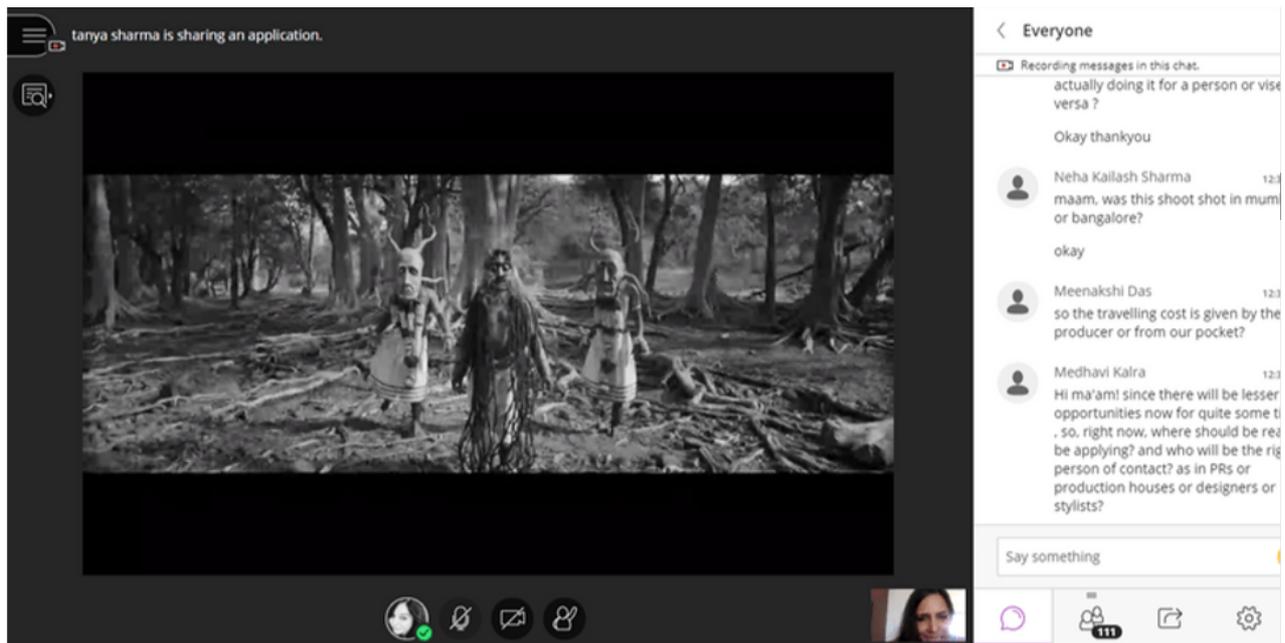


Figure 2: Inspiration

Support: As faculty, support is usually any integral part of all teaching and learning processes. Support can be offered in multiple ways. There is no right or wrong, as all tutors and all students perceive support, both emotional and intellectual, in their own way. However, my experience helped me diffract what support means to me, and the effects it had on student learning, engagement and outcomes. **SIMPLIFICATION** is using the tools at hand to simplification and organization the process and supports the learning of the students. For some students, some theories or concepts are hard to understand and more so in online teaching. Being able to create a balance between slowing the teaching process without boring the students with faster grasping abilities may be difficult, but simplification when made interactive could help create this balance. **EMAPATHY** through conversations, voice notes, video calls etc. This helps students cultivate the reasoning that *"Even though we are all isolated, we all isolated together, hence we are not alone"*. To communicate that even the tutors are facing the same struggles. Where we could decipher a student's understanding through body language and expression, now we have a blank screen. The value of empathy cannot be fully learnt or does not last for a module a course. We as tutors could help instil this value as a lifelong practice. **TRUST** in an essential ingredient in the relationship of a tutor and a student. The students trust in the faculty's ability is always paramount, however inculcating the students trust in their own abilities, by inculcating students trust in you, especially in uncertain times, would be a lifelong learning and benefit to the student.

Motivation: *"Motivation has been identified as a key factor in developing and sustaining a sense of community as well as learning and achievement in online contexts"* (Hartnett, n.d.). Motivation and inspiration are synonyms of each other however, one of the common concerns that I heard from the students was, that even if they felt inspired, even if they had ideas, they

were unable to motivate themselves to actually do something about it. many students started questioning their beliefs and careers choices. A statement I heard often was “*what is the point of being a stylist or an image designer?*” “*will the world even require our skill set?*”. To help the students I tried implementing the **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** motivation. Shown in figure 3 is the communication between the students and me. At regular intervals I would send them images of work and stories that created an impact. Below is the work of the street artist **Banksy** representing Zehra Dogan’s work (Sham, 2018), alongside is the work of one of the students.

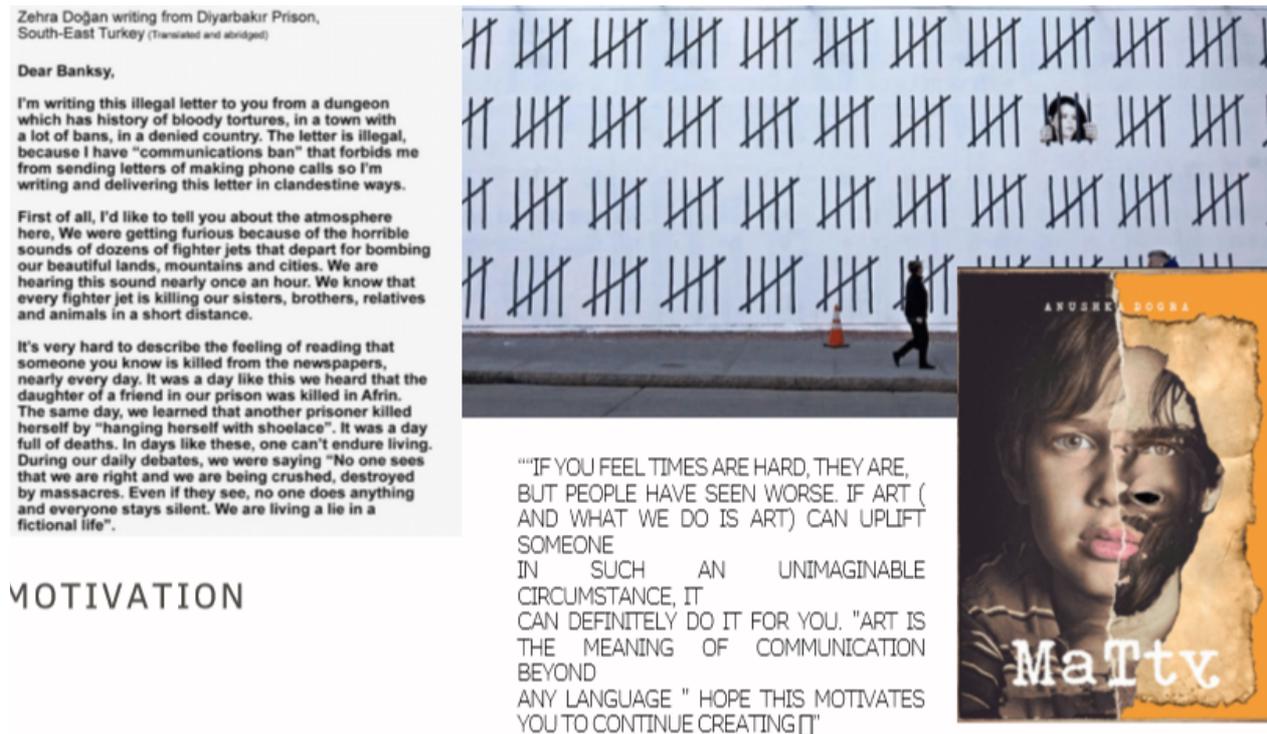


Figure 3: Letter By art by Zehra Dogan and Banksy. Book cover by Anushka Dogra

Conversation: Conversation seems like a given between people. However, online the dynamic of the same changes. Some students are **out-spoken** and are **engaged**, but for the students who **don't or rarely participate**, **conversation** and **active listening** became an important tool. Talking and primarily listening to students, including all in a community dynamic, helped even shy students interact. It worked as an **icebreaker** and gave a sense of relief even if sometimes it went off topic, or in my perspective, expanded the topic. The images in figure 4 are a representation of a student’s work. The concept revolved around dreams. During mentoring session just **conversation** helped the student to visualize the same in mood boards. The **conversation** may have **pendulum** between the dreams we see to what we dream to **achieve**, but the impact it had on all students participating and their work was apparent.

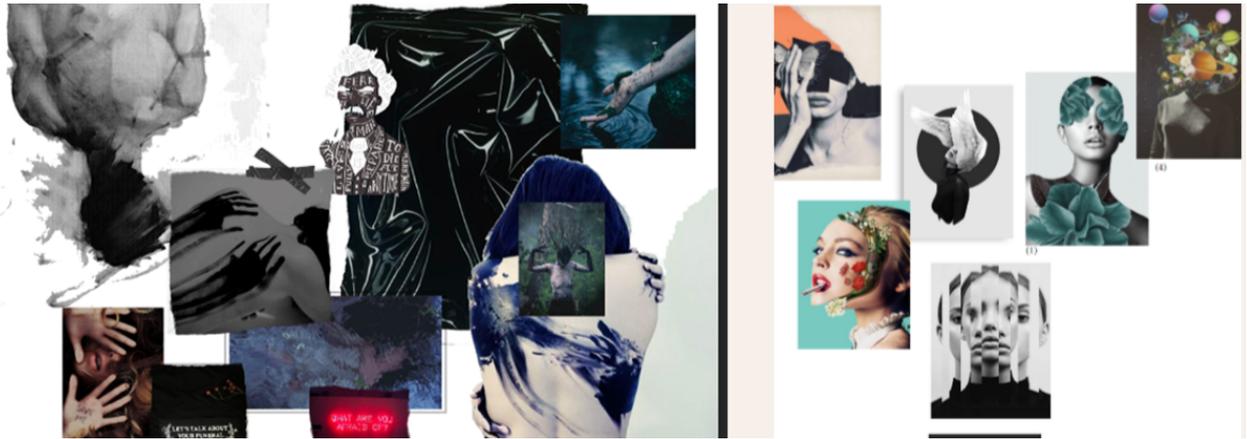


Figure 4: Mood boards, *Interpretation of Dreams* by Vishwa Hemani

Personalization: Personalization though effective may not be possible in larger cohorts. However, there are various steps that can be taken to **personalize** the **learning experience** of the student. The way I implemented is by giving the students **freedom** in choosing how they wanted to present their material. *“Personalization enables material to be presented in ways which are most meaningful and relevant to the student. A personalized learning program should include different presentation of materials”* (How to Drive Personalized Learning in Higher Education, 2020). *Figure 5 is the representations of student’s work.* Students had to create story boards for a visual photo biography. Many of them were apprehensive because they either thought that they didn’t have the hand skills or the digital skills to create these boards. Objective was not to see their skills, but instead was an exercise to **communicate** the flow and **ideation** of their photo biography. Giving them the liberty to choose their mode of presentations lead to diverse and interesting interpretations, as seen below.

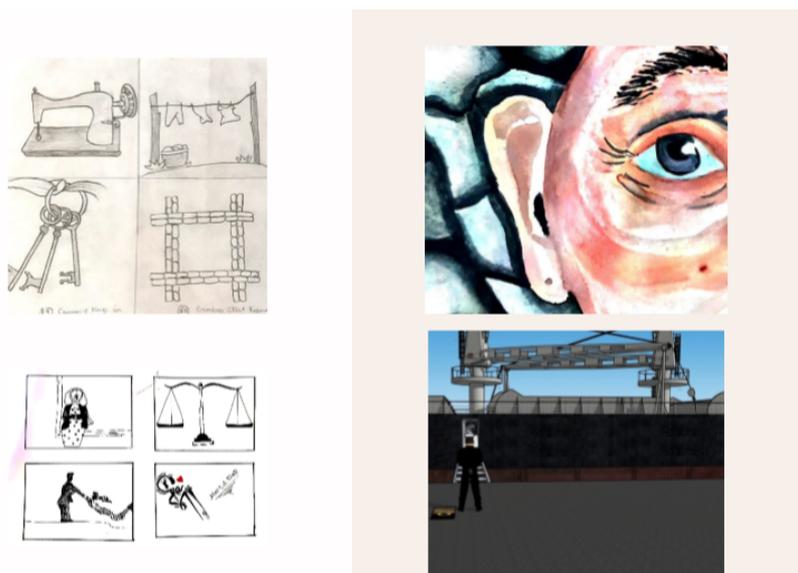
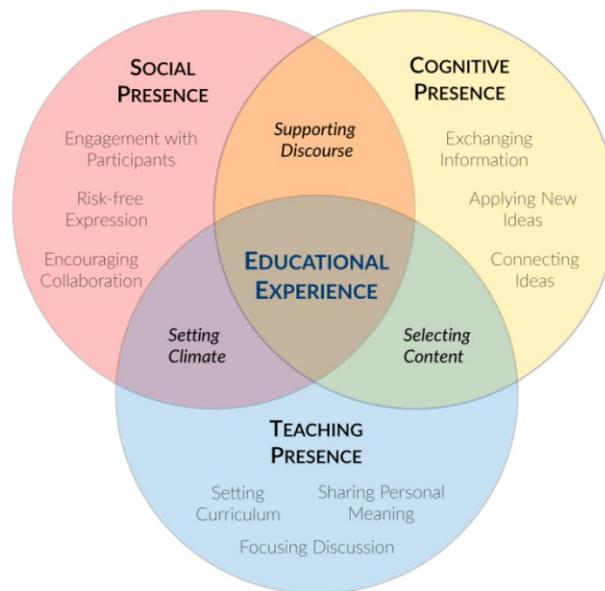


Figure 5: Student work from UGFSID level 1

Conclusion: Online education may not be a new concept, but the expanded implementation of the same, due to the pandemic, has made all educators adapt it, willing or unwillingly. Learning the different tools to enhance online learning is essential, but according to me, the insertion of the human value is equally important. As shown in figure 6 the community of inquiry model suggests that educational experience is a culmination of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. A balance between digitization and humanization could lead to an enhanced teaching and learning experience for students and tutors in all aspects and levels of education.

The Community of Inquiry Model



Adapted from Garrison, D.R., Anderson, T., Archer, W. (1999) Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education* 2(2), 87-105

Figure 6: (Broda, 1999)

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