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A pedagogy of vulnerability: Its relevance to diversity teaching and 'humanising' higher education

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Abstract

This paper attempts to unpack and propose an alternative to a frequent resistance towards generating discussion and exploration of uncomfortable or controversial topics within university teaching, in conjunction with encouraging academics to experiment with modelling authentic and courageous dialogues when addressing topics focussing on diversity, difference and intersectionality in the classroom. It presents reflections on adopting a 'pedagogy of vulnerability' in teaching and learning within higher education which dismantles the hierarchical dynamics of power between educators and learners. Via cultivating a co-learner stance for pursuing knowledge and wisdom, an activist motivation towards addressing matters of identity and social justice emerges. The qualities and practices of the vulnerable educator are described alongside their positive impact upon student participation, empowerment and engagement without ignoring the challenges and pitfalls of such approach in the context of institutional politics. Using the example of its application within teaching a counselling and psychotherapy degree at a university setting, it concludes with insights and a vision for its role in serving a more humane and relational higher education and an invitation for considering such a pedagogic approach in the context of different disciplines.

Keywords

vulnerability, experiential, diversity teaching, decolonisation, higher education

Introduction

In the context of the decolonisation movement within higher education (Battiste, 2017; Bhambra et al., 2018), such as the critically examined studies that informed the global comparative review across disciplines conducted by Shahjahan et al. (2022) and, in the social sciences more specifically (Reyez-Cruz and Sonn, 2011; Ascione, 2016; Moreirra, 2020), there is a question arising around cultivating teaching styles that facilitate brave discussions in the classroom, with the aim to invite introspection, reflexivity, critical thinking and an engagement with social responsibility

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amongst students and staff. This appears particularly crucial for practitioner degree courses where learners are required to not only acquire theoretical knowledge and competencies as they prepare to work with (often vulnerable) people but also to cultivate an embodied stance that assists them in acknowledging potential prejudices or growth edges in themselves (Kite and Whitley, 2016), to be able to practise ethically within their professional role. Below I will be reflecting on the insights gained by working relationally with students when teaching controversial, emotive and politically charged topics within a counselling training course via using tentative self-disclosure and exposing a more vulnerable, as opposed to 'authoritative', persona. Reflexive practice is crucial, especially in counselling and psychotherapy training, as (a) it safeguards tentative and ethical decision-making; (b) prepares a safe space for clients, in the hope of avoiding unintended malpractice – which can occur due to lack of awareness around bias and intersectionality, and (c) focuses on evidence-based and trauma-informed practice (Fuertes and Williams, 2017).

Positionality is at the core of authentic dialogue (Carter et al., 2014), therefore, sharing information about the author of this paper at the onset appears useful: I am a female, middle-aged psychotherapy practitioner with over 20 years of experience in multi-cultural therapeutic and educational settings. I am also an academic, supervisor and qualitative researcher, teaching within the School of Psychology at a university which is situated in one of the most diverse locations in London. I am a voluntary migrant who moved to the UK from an EU country at an adult age and despite my time being predominantly spent in educational and professional contexts, my experience of living and working in a host culture has been influenced by incidents of being at the receiving end of microaggressions or being 'othered', as instigated by my identity characteristics of diversity and difference. Worth noting that the example of my doctoral study (Christodoulidi, 2010) on living and working as a foreign therapist in a host culture has highlighted that such experience also offers an opportunity to reflect on one's liminality and intersectionality in ways that may have not been previously brought to awareness or may have stayed invisible to self or others. As an example, my Mediterranean skin tone has meant that I am perceived as neither 'black' nor 'white', at least not according to binary definitions and descriptions, similar to the experience of those who identify as people of dual heritage, even though I am not aware of a cultural 'mix' in my family of origin. That can result in facing reactions of confusion, rejection or 'suspicion' by different communities who are seeking a neat 'category' of identity, often carrying stereotypes or prejudices that remain unquestioned, even when unintended. Over the last 10 years of my employment at a higher education institution in multi-cultural London, I have experimented with employing pedagogies that present an alignment of values with the discipline I teach to support my objectives as an educator; these are to cultivate professional conscience, inquisitive curiosity, self-reflexivity and relational intelligence amongst the future counsellors I work with in our experiential classroom. An example of how I foster personalised and culturally sensitive learning appears in the co-authored paper (Galbally and Christodoulidi, 2023) where the dynamics of setting empathetic boundaries that hold disadvantage, adversity, and professional requirements in a 'compassionate tension' are discussed.

My journey to appreciating the effectiveness and value of adopting a *pedagogy of vulnerability* (Brantmeier and McKenna, 2020), which will be discussed further below, has originated from my previous immersion in the *pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1996) and the *pedagogy of the heart* (Freire, 1997), both combining educational and political philosophies and, bringing the role of the educator as reformer, to the fore. There seems to be both discomfort and promise in adopting a tentative but deliberate pedagogic approach in higher education that opens to deeper experiencing and a shared space

for powerful feelings, amongst students and educators, to emerge, about subjects that matter. I have discovered that these are usually the feelings that drive activist action, and the suggestion is that when educators can model such ways of being for students, they can access their own voice and inner position that can drive positive action in themselves (Norgard et al., 2020; Davids and Waghid, 2021).

Vulnerability as a concept and relational stance

Vulnerability is a concept that often carries negative connotations for the lay person; it can be perceived as failure or a weakness of character or something that may be weaponised and used against oneself (Huddy, 2015). The concept has been examined in the context of various disciplines such as health and social sciences, policy making and academic research (Virokannas et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2017; Hutcheon and Lashewicz, 2014). Researchers, such as Brené Brown (2015) have restored its place in the realms of demonstrating emotional strength, fostering relational connection, operating alongside resilience and instigating powerful and authentic influence within relationships, leadership, parenting and human interaction as a whole.

In contrast to its common public use, it is a term that is valued more in the field of counselling and psychotherapy (Jordan, 2008; Ward and McLeod, 2021) and is presented with more positive and transformational potential in terms of facilitating relational depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2005). It also increasingly appears in the field of education (Yair, 2008); however, in contexts like Higher Education where the power differential between lecturers and students alongside dynamics of privilege that determine access and progression at these levels, it becomes even more prominent to explore the nature of relationships, teaching styles and approaches to pastoral care. This is with the aim to break barriers related to participation, progression and retention (Galbally and Christodoulidi, 2023) and empower marginalised groups more specifically who, alongside the challenges related to their learning, they usually carry the psychological impact of growing up in the face of microaggressions or stereotyping (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury, 2018).

How can students dare ask bold, often uncomfortable questions or voice the reality of their own experience when being taught by educators who do not model such risk-taking themselves? These are the kind of risks I have been taking with students on counselling and psychotherapy courses, to attempt to shift the focus of exploration from pure intellectual debates to accessing insights that reside in *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi, 2009) and advanced reflexivity about the interplay of diversity and culture when working cross-culturally with clients of diverse backgrounds. This is in accordance with creating *brave spaces* (Ali, 2017) that become fertile conversational places that allow students to engage with difficult conversations about emotive topics. Below I reflect on some of the characteristics of such pedagogic praxis.

Vulnerability within universities: revisiting the authority persona

Among university academics, one can encounter strong personalities, with a wealth of the highest degree qualifications and professional expertise; this may come with a challenge when it is to embrace less orthodox or traditional modes of thinking around professional identities and teaching styles, particularly ones that may be perceived as threatening to upend the comfort of the status quo or what is already tried and tested for its effectiveness (Maylor, 2018). Lecturers and tutors may feel reluctant to adopt a style of teaching that entails some level of self-disclosure or standing as a less authoritative figure in the classroom (Altbach, 2001); some may also feel uncertain about instigating discussions on uncomfortable topics that can potentially create an atmosphere of conflict that is challenging to navigate and contain (William, 2016). However,

my experience has shown that besides the skills I have as a psychotherapist to handle such group dynamics, risking vulnerability myself in the classroom tends to break barriers that link to perception and communication amongst students; it also models not just an emotionally intelligent stance (Urquijo et al., 2019) but also what Karayel (2021) calls *'inclusive intelligence'* which is based on six pillars as follows, which I link to the role of university academics:

1. *Self-awareness/vulnerability/humility*: students are looking for role models in their teachers across their educational journey, people who embody the qualities they promote.
2. *Empathy*: attempting a mutual understanding of what it is like to be in another's position proves to be an agent in creating a positive working alliance, which supports learning.
3. *Engagement:* students need to have interaction, to be able to translate what they learn to the real world; to do so they want to be in a learning space that encourages their engagement and participation.
4. *Cultural wisdom:* instead of attempting to learn about cultures different to one's own, a cultural humility stance that admits to not knowing appears to be a way towards cultivating more wisdom when reflecting on the complexities of cultural differences.
5. *Accountability:* being open to answer questions about implementation of policies and procedures in a transparent way appears to foster the trust and faith students place in those who teach them and the institution which hosts them.
6. *Commitment:* remaining confident in addressing the issues, including conflicts that may arise, without losing sight of the vision and shared objectives with students, in light of institutional politics.

It is important to note that not all vulnerabilities are equal in the sense that there are the ones that relate to existential themes such as the awareness of uncertainty and mortality which we cannot escape (Binder, 2022) and there are the ones which are parts of systems of oppression, such as the discomfort that arises when our privileges are questioned or under threat (Braveman et al., 2022), which I see as pivotal to be interrogated and disrupted. I have observed in my classes that when I cultivate relationship and connection with students that holds space for 'leaving our shame or rage aside', after it has been explored in structured and skilfully facilitated spaces, that is likely to support a process that uncovers difficult states of truth, in a multiplicity of voices. It is the shift from intellectual debate to a heartfelt *'encounter'* that unmasks topics which sometimes remain hidden – under the broader 'diversity' umbrella as an example – instead of being explicitly named and explored in an experiential way. I feel guided by Kevin Kester's (in Cremin, H. and Kester, K., 2020) description of the *vulnerable educator* described as someone who:

a. Enters into the teachable moment with all of her/himself, body, mind, heart and spirit
b. Is open to the other, noticing them, beholding them, delighting in their presence
c. Allows others to affect him/her, is challenged, confirmed, inspired by others
d. Takes note of the learning that does occur and plans for development and growth, and
e. Practices critical yet compassionate thinking

As Brantmeier (2013) summarises, the core formula of this pedagogy is that the educator is prepared to share their stories, join the students as co-learner and admit when they do not know; thus, such use of selfmodels reflexivity and enthusiasm for engaging with the unknown (Cabrera et al., 2002). In sharing one's story with discernment and inviting students to choose what to share of their own, what is co-created

is the *lived curriculum* in the classroom (Olson, 2000). That appears to be particularly empowering for students who identify as belonging to a marginalised group (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and often have suffered several years of feeling silenced or disrespected, as will be further argued below. In co-learning, students are invited to be the sojourners on the quest of exploration of knowledge and discovering the nuances and critical stances of a phenomenon, towards discovering more wisdom. As a lecturer, when I position myself as a co-learner in the class, even about topics I have spent years researching, I set the tone for students to engage with curiosity and interest, in a journey of discovery where there are often more unconscious or less accessible layers to unpack and deepen understanding. It is significant that I do that by admitting that even when I possess theoretical knowledge, that is never exhaustive and it cannot honour the lived experience of those in front of me, which is unique to them. Therefore, I step down from a figure of authority to a position of a facilitator who contains and manages the process of learning but allows for experimentation, creativity and permission to make mistakes. These are framed as opportunities for new discoveries and exploration of what personalised learning may look like to meet individual learning styles and learning needs (Galbally and Christodoulidi, 2023).

Vulnerability in the context of teaching and learning about diversity

Brantmeier (2013) argues that when educators are to teach on topics that focus on power, oppression and privilege, the practice of vulnerability can be a powerful agent to this work. This is something I have witnessed in my practice that, when I expose the aspects of my social and cultural identity to learners and invite them to explore their own, we are likely to engage in a dialogue that goes beyond defensiveness or silencing (Henry and Thorsen, 2021). By coupling a pedagogy of vulnerability with a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999) which engages the historical and political dimensions of a subject, learners seem more able to negotiate, with suitable support from the educator who joins them in the space of stepping out of the comfort zone, what material they can access in a reflexive manner. As an example, I may openly share stories of my privilege as someone who had access to higher education without question and at the same time, I will share the stressful journey towards applying for and gaining a scholarship to undertake my doctoral studies, which I could not have otherwise afforded. I may also share my experience of being a woman in academia, as a working parent of migrant status who has no community or extended family to offer support. I may offer stories of the challenges I encounter in parenting children of dual heritage in a predominantly white society. I reflect on how people may perceive me by reading or hearing my foreign name and how their perceptions may shift when I sign a letter or correspondence using my 'Dr.' initials, which demonstrates the social capital gained by educational success (White, 1982; Battle and Lewis, 2002). At the same time, I admit to 'not always knowing' what the most suitable use of language may be in certain audiences and that I also struggle with the use of acronyms when it comes to specific groups which oblige us to adhere to some kind of shared characteristics; and yet they exclude various dimensions of more liminal or invisible identities.

A powerful example is when teaching about racism and dynamics of while privilege in the context of mental health practice, which appears as a paradox at first sight. One could argue that the practice of counselling and psychotherapy is a space where attitudes of oppression, prejudice and stigmatisation or instances of micro-aggressions would be least expected. The field of a therapeutic relationship is one where acts or attitudes of victimisation are not compatible with the ethical principles of non-maleficence, beneficence and equity; and yet, in the history of

mental health provision, there has been numerous examples of reporting racism within mental health delivery (for example, see the list compiled by Ridley, 1995, p.8). Minority clients may have unfavourable experiences when they seek counselling (e.g. Netto, 2006) that may occur in various forms and contexts such as when they are being assessed for a diagnosis or when they are assigned a particular professional within an agency or when arrangements are considered in terms of the modality or duration or cost of their treatment. That could happen even when the therapist has good intentions, as Fernando (1988) highlights:

> *Racist practices in the context of "bad practice" are easier to detect that those within seemingly "good" practice. Ordinary services carried out by ordinary, honest and decent people can be racist…and it is assumed that "good" practice is automatically non-racist* (pp. 152–153)

The roots of such phenomenon begin with the fact that topics such as racism, ableism, sexism and their intersections are often avoided in the core training curricula (Constantine et all, 2007); unless there is a lecturer of colour or of other protected characteristics within a faculty team who actively chooses to deliver such sessions, often as an addition to the core schedule as opposed to the topics being embedded within core modules or exclusively designed as full term modules within a degree programme (Niemann, 2016). Whilst representation matters for learners who want to see educators that look like them and have experienced similar challenges in their lives as a result of systemic oppressive structures, it is also true that educators who belong to dominant cultural groups need to be taking initiatives to immerse themselves and be able to teach such topics, without disowning responsibility to do so or expecting to be educated by those who embody the 'difference' in more visible ways (Arday, 2018). There is always scope to reflect on one's privileges and aspects of identity that are intertwined with a particular life story and tap into that as a springboard to engage students in reflective dialogue, self-examination and critical thinking.

If we do not teach in ways that encourage personal, courageous reflexivity, especially around the role of white privilege, the risk is that decolonisation will take place at an intellectual level alone, if at all (Moosavi, 2020). Also, the purpose is to include the institutional, societal and structural levels of inequality and oppression which offer the wider implications of such phenomena but do return to the fact that – for collective change to take place – the work starts with the self, at individual level, where each of us is taking the deep dive within to tap into the force that drives the collective efforts towards dismantling functions of supremacy and promoting social justice (Omarjee, 2018; Verma, 2022).

This applies also to how academic assessments are designed where instead of using predominantly western-focused or historically white-driven theories and constructs, what is needed is to include – if not centralise – indigenous knowledge (Harvey and Russell-Mundine, 2019) by black and brown authors also to include localised case-studies and experiential learning reflexive journals, decolonial content and diversified as well as innovative assessment questions that allow students to choose to research areas of interest that represent their own experience (Verma, 2022; Fakunle et al., 2022). An important issue to highlight is that adopting a pedagogy of vulnerability is not to be perceived as not upholding academic and professional standards when it comes to expectations about exams and assessments. The boundaries and transparency of expectations can be maintained whilst at the same time students are to be invited to employ their professional conscience when personal difficulties are preventing them from meeting those and take initiative such as requesting a study break or engaging with support services that can assist them towards overcoming their challenges. I have found that the same relational stance that emphasises the message that tutors are

powering *with* the student (vs. powering *over*) towards the same objective to succeed, tends to bring positive results (Symonds, 2021).

From bystander to activist, from passive learner to active participant: vulnerability as a catalyst

When it comes to teaching on topics that touch upon social justice phenomena, I often encounter well-intended people who wish to contribute to making a difference but seem to feel 'paralysed' by fear or uncertainty and remain 'stuck' in a bystander or spectator position, without really knowing how to act (Berkowitz, 2009). When exploring this together, it becomes apparent that this is not due to apathy or indifference; those who are already in activist roles interpret such stance as an attitude of diffusing responsibility and there has been early research in social psychology, such as the one by Latane and Darley (1970) which formulated models that explain why someone may decide to offer help or not when witnessing an emergency or injustice. Their findings concluded that there are factors such as perception of moral obligation, fear of blame or being judged, fear of facing consequences, ambiguity, inadequacy, confusion amongst others that contribute to such (in)decision. Whilst decision-making models (Latane et al., 1970; Bennett et al., 2014) provide a framework towards understanding some of the attitudes involved in how people choose to act (or not) when exposed to experiences or knowledge, they do not seem to address what may potentially be motivating factors that sensitise people at a more gut level (Emeghara, 2020). Reflecting on the shifts I notice in student classroom participation when exposed to challenging topics, it is my impression that getting in touch with ones' own vulnerability is something that creates an avenue towards the potential of moving from sole perception to a motivation for taking action.

As an example, when I present a lecture on an emotive topic which I am aware can be triggering for the students present, besides the usual 'trigger warning' that is often advised, I often show a slide with an image of myself as a child; with this exposure, I invite students to attend to their own 'inner child' (Bradshaw, 1992; Firman and Russell, 1994; Chapple, 2021) as we proceed with the content, and adopt an attitude of self-compassion towards the emotional responses that may occur, by noticing both the adult learner who is present and the 'younger self' who usually asks for sensitivity or protection. As we proceed with the content, I may incorporate other visual, audio or metaphorical images that convey messages which land in a more embodied way (Anderson, 2018), and I find that students generate discussions where they make links between theory and practice by reflecting on their own experiences.

Below I share some examples of student feedback, following such sessions:

> "The lecturer is happy to provide examples from her personal and professional life to facilitate learning…this encourages us students to reflect on the material in relation to our own life and practice too."

> "The personal anecdotes of the lecturer brings things to life for us; I am more likely to overcome my shyness and participate in the discussion about a topic that feels difficult."

> "I love that the lecturer brings personal experiences in order to help us link theory with practice. That teaches me what to expect when I go out in the real world to work as a counsellor."

> "The lecturer's enthusiasm is inspiring, even when we discuss very controversial topics. Her honesty and tentative disclosures model for us how to be courageous and congruent and move beyond the debates, actually take some action!"

> "It is easy to be silent or hide behind dry theory – the risks the lecturer tends to take make the topic feel much more tangible."

> "This style of teaching affirms my experience, I feel seen. It is brave, congruent and offers an environment where we can explore uncomfortable questions."

Good working alliance with students is the starting point (Rogers, 2009). An assessment of who is in the room and whether adequate support is on offer is also essential as the material learners may be exposed to and the approach they are invited to engage with can bring up traumas that require a level of containment. When teaching counsellors and psychotherapists who undertake a practitioner degree at university, the programmes require that learners attend personal therapy as part of their personal and professional development. They are also engaging with reflective journaling, experiential group work and assessments that are inviting them to author reflexively using the 'I' person and drawing from personal experiences or applying theory into understanding their own personal history and relationships. There is also an ethical dimension to consider when inviting students to form the lived curriculum in the classroom via sharing personal stories, something that Booth (2012) discusses in more depth and emphasises the fact that clear boundaries, expectations and suitable signposting is outlined so that students can take ownership and make suitable choices for themselves.

Being privileged and under-privileged simultaneously is something that occurs in academic contexts (e.g. Burnell Reilly, 2022) by the very fact that an educator may have originally come from a poor socioeconomic background but has managed to undertake and complete the highest level of qualifications or that a student may be someone from a marginalised group in terms of race and ethnicity but has been able to access the possibility of gaining a university degree. This position invites fruitful discussions about intersectional identities (Boylorn and Orbe, 2021) and the tensions that arise by often conflicting positions or ways of being in the world.

Some pitfalls and warnings about vulnerability in higher education

Like with any framework, it is important to pay attention to what a pedagogy of vulnerability is *not* and acknowledge what may be some of the criticisms that may arise for those who may attempt to employ it within their own discipline, acknowledging the fact that vulnerability more broadly is a contested concept (Virokannas et al., 2020).

Showing vulnerability in the classroom, especially when it comes to diversity teaching that was argued further above, is not about adopting a position of excusing or enabling; it is not about weaponising fragility (Di'Angelo, 2018) towards covert oppressive practices. It is also not about adopting a rescuer or 'saviour position' or about shaming or about inviting conflict. Self-disclosure in the classroom requires a level of discernment (Himelstein and Kimbrough, 2010) and being prepared to receive the often unintended and unconscious projections, rejections or resistance from learners who want to engage but may be less familiar with the breakthrough that can emerge as a result of facing one's discomfort head on (Luck, 2010; Pellegrini, 2010). Perhaps those lecturing in disciplines such as psychology, counselling and social sciences may feel more equipped by the fact that they are likely to have gone through a journey of personal exploration themselves as part of their training or as something that eventually motivated to enter these disciplines; however, the support that HE staff require to be able to maintain such pedagogic stances in the long run is not to be ignored. This is perhaps more likely to be on offer when an institution is prepared to move from models that perceive students-as-consumers and teachers-as-producers to fundamentaly 'humane' values and practices (Devis-Rozental and Clarke, 2020) that overcome the paralysis of political correctness and do preserve more of a 'therapeutic presence' (Solomon and Nashat, 2010) and a *higher* education ethos.

Sometimes there is a risk of subjugation and de-legitimisation towards educators who adopt these pedagogies in HE settings by those above them in the hierarchy. The argument that addressing issues of diversity is good for business, innovation, workplace wellbeing and ethical decision-making is made in several contexts (Phillips, 2014). However, it is sometimes the case when dynamics of inequality, marginalisation, exclusion or even exploitation are taking place, a resistance may arise with regards to *who* and *how* one will break the 'bad news' and implement corrective measures. There is sometimes a 'blame culture' (Vince and Saleem, 2004) which immediately assumes the dominant identities (i.e. white, male and able bodied) in the seat of the 'perpetrator' in such instances whereas the case may be that an employee or student of different characteristics may have operated outsides rules or expectations or exhibited behaviours of misconduct and expect to be given allowances for such (O'Shea et al., 2016).

There is also the phenomenon of 'performative' attitudes (Bell, 1980) towards equity or actions where an individual or a team or a department may be, as example, demonstrating acts of accountability towards failures that concern minority staff at work or students in a class, without investigating the incidents or contexts where these may or may have not arisen, as way of facilitating career progression or reporting they have addressed the degree-awarding gap. Such instances of misuse of power or even scapegoating, demoralising or shaming innocent voices who attempt to expose such examples of pseudo-care could potentially be avoided if higher education institutions became more open to seek external consultancy and reflective practice input (Jasper, 2013) to identify the more unconscious collective dynamics that occur in groups and systems (Diamond, 2008).

A suggested vision ahead

This paper has argued for the suitability and effectiveness of a 'pedagogy of vulnerability' model when approaching uncomfortable or controversial topics within higher education. It has been an attempt to encourage and support educators and leaders to model suitable risk-taking which often results in breaking the silence amongst students and/or colleagues and fosters courageous self-reflection, the application of critical thinking and the development of authentic social justice attitudes within practitioner courses, such as the case I discussed in the context of the university where I currently work. The invitation remains to explore its relevance and application in other disciplines and encourage interdisciplinary discussions towards generating a framework via which staff and students can engage within brave spaces that promote dismantling inequalities or overt and covert violations of boundaries and foster activist stances that emerge via a commitment to individual and collective transformation, which is often uncomfortable (Sarpong, 2020).

In a similar way that I consider psychotherapy a political act (Avissar, 2016), it is evident from this article that I am a supporter of the argument that education is to raise consciousness and encourage learners to tap into the visceral knowledge alongside fuelling it towards social justice, something that appears much needed in our era; this is timely given that we increasingly observe higher education values being heavily compromised by corporate targets and business mindsets that tend to treat learners as consumers (Bunce et al., 2017; Finney and Finney, 2010). From an existential perspective, one could argue that there is a calling for taking responsibility and choosing to interrogate imposed practices and offering learning environments which foster creativity, agency, critical thinking, self-reflection and courage to express diverse voices. As university educators, we are being taught by students as much as we invite them in co-learning (Bovill, 2020). More broadly, this pedagogy may be valued as an agent towards a paradigm shift which centres education as the heart of social change (Verma, 2010), via moving from a politics of blame to a politics of working together in a spirit of

collaboration, courage, respect and humility (Cooper, 2023) and contributes to the development of contemplative teaching and embodied learning.

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