



Caring and compassionate pedagogies

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As higher education environments have become increasingly market-driven, there is a growing risk that teaching and learning is perceived as transactional, impersonal, and overly focused on outcomes. This shift, compounded by the pressures of massification, the lasting effects of global crises such as Covid-19, societal and political change globally, and the rapid integration of technologies like artificial intelligence, can lead us and our institutions to overlook the vital role of emotions, wellbeing, and attentiveness to individual circumstances and needs of both students and educators. In this section we will hear many voices urging a different approach.

Such tendencies have significant implications for fostering and sustaining thriving academic communities. The theme of *Caring and compassionate pedagogies* in this special issue brings together papers that explore ways to embrace diverse experiences in order to cultivate a more inclusive higher education culture. All of our authors' contributions address aspects of caring and compassion in pedagogic practices and assessment. Central to many of these papers are interconnecting themes of trauma, vulnerability, resilience, empowerment, partnership, justice, and liberation.

The first of these papers, a research study by Maha Bali, Daniela Gachago and Nicola Pallitt, considers participatory and culturally sensitive learning design and trauma-informed pedagogy. Using the equitable and socially-just practice of four learning designers in multi-country contexts, the authors showcase their model for Compassionate Learning Design, illustrating how dimensions of participation, justice, and care intersect to form an inspiring 'critical compassionate learning design praxis' (p.2). The call here is for readers to reflect on their own practices, to consider the recommendations of the model, and to act on and advocate for more compassionate and inclusive learning environments.

Also exploring the implications of trauma-informed pedagogy and learning design, Havva Görkem Altunbas, Xiaoyan Guo, Yuncong Liu, Helen Knowler and Tor Wright identify a gap in the learning development literature. Their research paper considers the harm caused by the legacies and entanglement of eugenic histories, which are embedded in university curricula, teaching, and research methodologies. In particular, the authors examine 'reparative pedagogies' (p.1) by critically assessing three example initiatives that have been part of a university-wide Eugenics Legacy Education Project (ELEP). The project enabled the team – comprising staff and students – to work collaboratively with educators across disciplines in ways that foregrounded care and respect, and that achieved small, but sustained, modifications of curriculum content and pedagogies.

In the third of our research papers focusing on different aspects of trauma-informed pedagogy, Uliana Tykha moves us from historic to contemporary harms in the university environment, conducting exploratory research with 30 Ukrainian students affected by the current conflict, to evaluate the impact of expressive, therapeutic writing practices on resilience and wellbeing. Uliana's paper shows how English as a Second Language in a range of genres, from poetry, reflective writing, narrative writing, free writing, and journaling, can be used as a transformative therapeutic tool. Rich, qualitative feedback generated from this research shows how expressive writing can scaffold emotional management, coping, gratitude, self-awareness, and personal growth. This has implications for a resilience-oriented curriculum design and a healing journey during times of conflict.

Also exploring creative outlets for care and compassion, Emma Sheppard, Tamar MacLellan and Erika Hawkes' inspiring brief communication considers a trauma-informed approach using art-based pedagogy for a 'haptic approach'. Here, arts and humanities-

based students and staff are collectively scaffolded into artistic practice and given the freedom to differentiate their engagement. Through non-verbal expression and follow-up co-creation of fictional 'what if' scenarios, individuals channel and explore their emotions to support the management of difficult, affective topics and experiences. Through the design of a workshop environment using artistic tools, the authors show how space can be created for freethinking, reflection, and dialogue around lived experiences of both educators and students.

The next few papers follow a theme of student-educator partnership, illustrating how co-creation and shared responsibility in learning foster caring and compassionate pedagogies that centre mutual respect, inclusivity, and student agency. Exploring curriculum co-design with students, subject educators and academic developers, Claire Singh, Jan Bowden, Tomasina Stacey, Jonathan Berliner and Charlotte Haberstroh reflect on a collaborative project to produce academic skills modules for midwifery education. Their case study argues for an iterative approach, highlighting empathy with student experience and considering prior learning and diversity of educational backgrounds to create inclusive and effective learning spaces. Foregrounding student voice also helped to clarify and meet expectations and shaped a series of lessons and recommendations offered by the authors.

Continuing in the theme of partnerships, Samantha J. Fontaine, Katie McNaught, Jennifer Hammond, Catherine Stalin, Katie Ross, Olivia Anderson-Nathan, Zoe Hatfield, Susan Mackenzie and Luiz Santos introduce a co-created intervention designed to support student and staff psychological safety in clinical learning environments. Their case study examines the Learning Environment Champions (LECs) initiative at the University of Glasgow's Small Animal Hospital, where students and staff worked together in reflective professional discussions to promote supportive and positive learning experiences. The LECs initiative harnessed relevant and authentic cooperative strategies for problem-solving as well as shared accountability, civility, and care for the academic community. Importantly, while the authors indicate its positive influence on teaching and clinical support of students, they also advise being mindful of potential unintended consequences, including the need to guard against compassion fatigue.

Emma Kennedy, Suzan Koseoglu, Shreyashi Chakraborty and Punitha Puttuswamy's research paper begins by considering the teacher-student partnership through the lens of 'professional dialogue' for effective large-group teaching. They highlight how rising cohort

sizes in UK higher education pose a barrier to two-way care and kindness-focused dialogues and to relationship building between students and educators. They also challenge the notion that mutual compassion in the learning environment is only due to human factors: practical aspects, such as available technology and classroom design, play a vital role in a pedagogy of care and kindness. The authors call for systemic change, considering institutional structures and the design of learning spaces 'with connection at the forefront' (p.12) as the foundation for enhanced teacher-student wellbeing.

Timothy J. Huzar's research paper takes a similar starting point, challenging the 'marketised conceptualisation' (p.1) of teacher-student relationships with the potential for more emancipatory classroom environments. Timothy's research focuses on the role of vulnerability in teaching as a means of resistance and as an enabler for more trusting and authentic learning spaces. The author draws on feminist thought and his own experiences of practising vulnerability in teaching to explore relational pedagogies and trust building between educators and students as a way of humanising learning spaces. He also considers how those who are caring can be more exposed to wounding and positions of marginalisation. Here, students and educators are seen as embodied beings, with a sense of meta-cognition and localised learning as a continuous and shared process.

In their powerful brief communication, Alice Graeupl, Amanda Miller and Marilena Antoniadou move our readers back towards trauma-informed approaches as a way to re-evaluate our assessment regulations and design. The authors draw, in particular, on experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic to examine inequality and the need for a change from traditional assessment methods to enhanced flexibility, authenticity, and compassionate feedback. Recognising how this collective and individual trauma has shaped and continues to impact educational experiences for both students and staff necessitates a paradigm shift: now is the time, they argue, to accelerate transformational change and focus efforts on creating psychologically safe and inclusive learning environments.

Chloe Courtenay also identifies opportunities for more compassionate and inclusive cultures. Noting that 'so often, universities tell students that they must do things without really telling them why' (p.7), Chloe considers justice issues in academic misconduct procedures, observing that the focus tends to be on negative and punitive approaches, and homogenising diverse social and cultural experiences. Drawing on a theory of

epistemic injustice to show how hermeneutical injustice can occur, this opinion piece calls for a more dialogic, critical thinking-focused approach that instils positivity and joy. This includes engaging with students as 'knowers', incorporating their different perspectives, and considering equitable access to resources.

In a similar vein, Karen Fitzgibbon's opinion piece explores justice within assessment resit practices. Using evidence from 'In Year Retrieval' (IYR) practice pilots, students were offered an opportunity to correct their failed mark within a short period of receiving it, with students and staff working in partnership via feedback and tracked changes. The author highlights that this more holistic approach enhances learning experiences by including learners from non-traditional backgrounds, facilitating the development of critical self-reflection and supporting retention and graduation outcomes.

The final paper in this *Caring and compassionate pedagogies* section takes us full circle, as Mia Zamora and Maha Bali model another international collaboration and multi-country research study. Like many of the contributors to this special issue, they draw on theory, practice, and their own personal experiences and positionality. In this case, Mia and Maha propose a new collaborative duoautoethnography approach to explore different ecosystems surrounding care and equity in education – relating to institutions, networks, communities, and individuals. They call for systemic changes, beyond privatised and individualised acts, and offer reflections on where our practice can fall short. Also, and entirely appropriate for the closing paper in this section of the journal, they sound a note of hope for a lifelong, collaborative, community-building approach that can both realise and nurture socially just ecosystems of care and lead to transformative change.

We exist in a climate where performativity defines much of how we work. The pursuit of measurable outcomes, accountability, and standardised targets creates an environment that might not feel conducive to care, compassion, trust, and wellbeing (Ball, 2003). This makes it even more important to cultivate spaces where these values are embedded in our practices rather than sidelined by systemic pressures. The contributors to this section remind us with clarity, passion, and through exemplification that we can do this, and it is by elevating compassion and care in academic culture that we enhance the learning environment and create the conditions for staff and students to belong and be valued. In turn, this creates a more sustainable, ethical, and arguably more effective, higher education community.

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