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Kindness in Higher Education: Fostering the Human(e) Element of Teaching and Learning

Guest Editors

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Editorial 7 (SI1): Kindness in higher education: Fostering the human(e) element of teaching and learning

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Introduction

The seeds of inspiration for this JALT Special Issue focussing on Kindness in Higher Education began some years back within the Kaplan Australia and New Zealand organisation where human flourishing is highly valued by the Executive and management teams. Across the organisation, leaders have partnered with the Kindness Factory in Australia, an organisation led by Kath Koschel (2023), who advocates that kindness is the key to human connection. As a learning organisation, human flourishing and connection is a key value that drives the Kaplan business units and underpins its commitment to student-centric and human-responsive educational endeavours.

In 2020, a Kaplan higher education symposium invited academic staff to explore the integration of kindness, human flourishing, and higher education learning through the works of Garrison (2007; 2017). The Garrison Inquiry Framework (2007; 2017) was deemed to be an apt tool as a lens to delve deeper into the higher education agenda, particularly during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, as it was specifically designed to create a community of learners "where students are fully engaged in collaboratively constructing meaningful and worthwhile knowledge" (Garrison, 2006, p. 25).

The model (Garrison, 2007, 2017) was also designed to critique learning in higher education and was useful in positioning academic discussions through the interplay of three perspectives: (a) teaching presence that shapes the educational process of learning, (b) cognitive presence that invites the collaborative construction of knowledge through inquiry learning, and (c) social presence or the capacity to connect as a community through learning including staff and students, both professionally and personally (Aspland & Fox, 2022).

Social connections and dialogical communication amongst educators and students on both a personal and a professional dimension were also important foci for the academics attending the symposium, and these concepts were embedded in Garrison's social presence. This was and remains particularly important in a time when disconnections are highly plausible and present in the daily work of teachers.

Cognitive presence has been central to a range of real concerns in the dynamic context of higher education during the 2020 to 2024 period, particularly in reconstituting circumstances where the impact of generative artificial intelligence is reshaping academic work in ways not yet imagined.

Teaching presence in its newly evolving forms continues to be the key responsibility of teaching academics, designed to achieve designated learning outcomes but also to generate positive student engagement, student satisfaction and a sense of community (Garrison, 2007). These themes dominated the professional conversations throughout a series of symposia conducted since 2020 and have led to the generation of insightful publications that critique "the daunting challenge(s)" (Garrison, 2007, p. 26) which educators continue to face today, including those published in an earlier JALT edition (Volume 5, Number 2, 2022).

What we have witnessed as academics within Kaplan and across many higher education institutions is that the sustained engagement of the vibrant education community of academics nationally and globally can be enhanced through a strong community of practice, the introduction of new learning frameworks, the introduction of innovative pedagogical practices, and critical conversations that are central to the interplay of teaching, cognitive, and social presences (Garrison, 2006). The present JALT Special Issue provides testimony to this observation, as can be witnessed

in each of the papers presented forthwith.

However, also of significance here is that within the complexities and dimensions of the interplay of teaching, cognitive, and social presences, a component of kindness is identifiable that has sustained the academic and student communities throughout the years, and it has generated a deep sense of connectedness amongst staff and the leaders of educational innovations in higher education in response to the challenges of new times. Amidst a global higher education context of uncertainty and, at times, trauma, the papers that follow provide insights into a growing community of academics electing to facilitate the power of kindness to address the unique challenges that students and staff alike are confronted with as they strive to achieve high-quality learning outcomes for all.

Overview of issue 7 (SI1)

The first article by Aspland and Fox reports on a systematic review that delves into the growing scholarly interest in kindness, particularly its relevance within higher education. Despite its popularity, the concept of kindness remains ambiguously defined in academic literature. This review aims to bridge this gap by proposing a research agenda to guide future inquiries. Key findings include the identification of 13 themes related to kindness in higher education, with a predominant focus on kindness pedagogy and its beneficial influence on both student and educator experiences.

Transitioning from the research landscape of kindness, the following articles in this issue offer more specific insights into how students perceive and experience kindness within their educational settings. A large-scale survey situated in Southern Nigeria, reported by Ambe et al., investigates the critical role of social and cognitive presence from the perspective of fourth-year education-major students. Their research reveals a robust correlation between social presence, academic success, cognitive presence, and critical thinking. Findings indicate that advancing social connections and cognitive engagement significantly improves students' overall educational experiences, thereby highlighting the importance of embracing these elements into teaching practices.

Extending the attention from students to educators, the next article authored by Jaber Kamali and his team portrays teachers' perspectives on effective language teaching components within a supportive CoI framework. Their thematic analysis of the interview data collected from local teachers in Iran identifies nine sub-themes encompassing teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence. Essential insights underscore the significance of classroom dynamics, critical thinking, and positive relationships in promoting effective teaching. These findings contribute to assisting educators and policymakers in refining teaching strategies and curricula.

Regarding the role of kindness in learning and teaching, the contributions involved in this special edition do not only seek to address 'what do they think of it' but also attempt to discover 'how can they implement it'. Three articles share the same interest in presenting innovative pedagogical approaches that incorporate kindness into educational practices. Teakel et al. evaluate the impact of embedded tutors trained in a pedagogy of kindness on university first-year students. The tutors provided individualised support, emphasising empathy and academic integrity. Their results demonstrate a remarkable reduction in academic misconduct and enhanced student performance, particularly among at-risk students. This study underscores the efficacy of integrating kindness into tutoring practices to foster student success and ethical behaviour.

Further exploring the theme of pedagogical kindness, Kelland et al. discuss the theoretical underpinnings of a student-led, service-learning course that is designed to humanise the learning environment and nurture ethical development and its applications in a South African university. The proposed course, 'IiNtetho zoBomi', concentrates on the integration of ethical considerations into tertiary education and promotes student autonomy and social responsibility. This article illustrates how a humanising pedagogy can transform educational experiences and address broader societal issues.

In alignment with these innovative implementations, the final research article exemplifies how technology and care can be harmoniously integrated into teacher education. Jones et al. present a unique approach to initial teacher education through the adoption of a caring HyFlex pedagogy. Their model combines face-to-face and online learning, stressing interpersonal rapport and flexible delivery to support regional students in Australia. The study highlights the significance of care in educational practices and demonstrates how technology can be leveraged to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Their example of practice shows positive outcomes for student engagement and success, especially in regional communities.

Complementing these research articles, the interview contributed by Vojinovikj et al. (2024) depicts strategic perspectives on the implementation of kindness at an institutional level. As the Academic Dean of Kaplan Business School (KBS), one of the most reputable teaching-focused institutions in Australia whose student-centric pedagogy has been globally acknowledged, Professor James Adonopoulos elucidates KBS's commitment to kindness and student-centricity. This interview provides valuable insights into how higher education institutions can cultivate an academic culture of care and support in relation to teaching and learning, curriculum design and development, student support and engagement, and leadership and continuous improvement, thereby creating a more compassionate and effective educational landscape.

Concluding remarks

This special edition presents a comprehensive exploration of kindness in higher education, beginning with Aspland and Fox's systematic review, which identifies key themes and proposes a future research agenda. The subsequent articles provide in-depth analyses of both students' and educators' perspectives, emphasising the critical roles of

social and cognitive presence in enhancing educational outcomes. Collectively, these contributions underscore the transformative power of kindness in creating inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments, offering valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and institutions aiming to enhance the educational landscape.

Future research should focus on several key areas. Longitudinal studies are essential to investigate the long-term impacts of kindness on students and educators, providing insight into its enduring benefits and challenges. Understanding how kindness initiatives affect the mental well-being of students and staff is also crucial, as this will provide valuable data to inform and improve mental health support strategies within educational settings. Additionally, interdisciplinary research integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and education is necessary to comprehend the broader impacts of kindness and its intersection with various aspects of educational environments.

By addressing these areas, future research can deepen our understanding of kindness in higher education, offering robust evidence to support its integration into educational practices and policies. This, in turn, will foster more compassionate, inclusive, and effective learning environments, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience for both students and educators.

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Finding a place for Kindness within higher education: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

A look at social media platforms and media headlines, confirms that public discourse feature matters pertaining to well-being, altruism, benevolence, compassion, and community health. In our complex and rapidly changing world, the importance of kindness in society has become increasingly evident. A surge of interest in kindness can be aligned to the 2019-2022 pandemic, during which the global community sought avenues to demonstrate kindness to others and themselves. Whilst the concept of kindness dates to the 13th century, it has increasingly permeated everyday conversations, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. Despite its popularity, kindness lacks a precise scholarly definition, leaving uncertainty about its impact on teaching, learning, and research in higher education contexts. This paper aims to explore this gap by (a) reviewing existing research on kindness in higher education and (b) proposing a research agenda to guide future investigations. A systematic literature review (SLR), guided by the frameworks of Fox and Diezmann (2007, 2017) and Fox and Smith (2023), was conducted to examine the presence of kindness in higher education research literature and identify any prevailing themes.

Introduction

In our increasingly complex and changing world, there is an overwhelming need for kindness in society. The swell of interest in kindness can be aligned with the pandemic of 2019-2022, when the global community sought ways to show kindness to others and themselves. Social media and press headlines promoted wellbeing, altruism, and community health. The common message across the different forums was aptly captured by Kath Koschel and her work through the Kindness Factory, where she states: "Kindness is the key to human connection … despite the loneliness epidemic" (Koschel, 2023). Whilst the concept of kindness is currently trending, the definition of kindness can be dated back to the 13th century when the concepts of friendliness, deliberately doing good to others, and compassion were found in scriptures and songs.

Kindness is not a single entity but is conceptualised as the interplay of values, ways of thinking and actions encompassing overt behavioural and affective components. It has been proposed (e.g., Otake et al., 2006) that kindness has three main facets: considering the feelings of others; demonstrating acceptance, courtesy, and love towards others; and behaving honourably towards them; more commonly referred to as acts of kindness. Kindness has been recognised in popular contexts as planned and deliberate actions intended to benefit others. It has been more formally defined as "having or showing a friendly, generous, and considerate nature, and as encompassing gentleness, respect, amiability, and concern" (Johnstone, 2010). Similarly, Habibis et al. (2016) refer to kindness as 'an authentic and caring response to the call of the "Other"' (p. 400). While Curry et al. (2018) portray kindness as actions intended to benefit others, Erikson (2019) suggests that academic psychology tends to avoid the concept of kindness. According to Binfet (2015), the research that focusses on preventing unkind behaviour such as bullying is more proliferate in the literature than that which analyses the promotion of kind behaviour. This gap in the general academic literature aligns with the lack of a common definition of kindness in the psychological literature. Thus, when considering the place of kindness in the research literature pertaining to higher education, it comes up short.

The increasing current popular interest in the phenomenon of kindness can be associated with several contemporary developments. First, there has been the momentous rise of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), particularly in Australia, and its advocacy that kindness is fundamental to human nature. For example, kindness is one of the 24 character strengths listed within the virtue category of humanity in Peterson and Seligman's 2004 VIA Inventory of Strengths. Some of these include the proposition that kindness increases psychological flourishing; increases happiness and self-esteem; reduces social anxiety; increases self-esteem and optimism; heightens feelings of self-worth; and diminishes social anxiety (Carter, 2011; Hamilton, 2017; Layous et al., 2012; Passmore & Oates, 2022). Second, a wealth of converging scientific evidence, as outlined below, has shown that kindness has numerous benefits. Research evidence (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Exline et al., 2012; Rowland, 2018; Tashjian, 2018) overwhelmingly confirms that being kind and being a recipient of kindness positively influences a person's sense of well-being (Post, 2005). Finally, thoughts and actions that reflect the attributes of kindness contribute to building a more cohesive society due to the presence of increasing prosocial behaviours.

In the current political, economic, and environmental climate, the place of kindness in communities of all types is vital for enhancing positivity and feelings of hope (Rowland, 2018). Humans living in social groups prosper from positive behaviours through enacting various types of mutually beneficial cooperative interaction, including altruism and several different types of kindness (Curry et al., 2018). Though still an emerging area of empirical inquiry, kindness is gaining traction as a distinct research topic, having previously been included in studies of prosocial behaviour, altruism, and compassion (Algoe, 2019).

While kindness has become increasingly embedded in our everyday discourse, particularly through and post-pandemic, it lacks scholarly definition, and as such, it has had little impact on the emerging research set in the context of higher education. Higher education is complex yet is generally recognised as a sector of essential social and educational institutions influencing individuals, communities and society through the creation and dispersion of knowledge, as well as developing human capacities through learning. It is arguable that how knowledge is created, transmitted, and transformed, together with the presence of a respectful and inclusive learning environment in higher education institutions, can significantly influence students' and academics' experiences of kindness. Pressures on expectations, financial constraints experienced by students and the university, changing modes of learning, and technology have altered the university experience. However, recent years have seen an increase in pedagogies associated with kindness (Daniel, 2019) and compassion (Andrew et al., 2023) in higher education. Nonetheless, embedding kindness into higher education appears to have received less attention in the research literature (Rowland, 2018). Day and Robinson (2022) and Aspland and Fox (2022) concur that kindness in the curriculum is a topic seldom taught at the tertiary level. The purpose of this article is exploratory in nature, and it aims to (a) establish the scope of research evidence that underpins kindness in higher education and (b) establish the framing of a research agenda to guide further investigation.

Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) informed by the works of Fox and Diezmann (2007, 2017) and Fox and Smith (2023) was conducted to ascertain the existence of the concept of kindness in higher education and its prevalence in research literature. The SLR requires meticulous documentation of the procedures used to review the literature and to select appropriate papers (Pickering & Byrne, 2013). Therefore, a defined protocol was established identifying the steps conducted as outlined in Figure 1 below. The SLR research method consists of three phases: planning, execution, and reporting (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The first two steps formed part of the methodology utilised for this project.

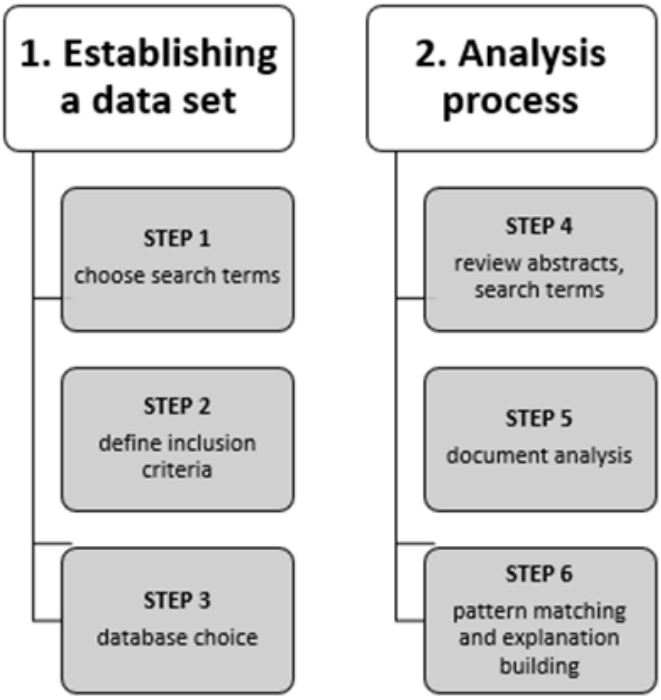

Figure 1. Methodology protocol steps.

Establishing a data set

At the outset, we acknowledge that there are threats to the validity of an SLR, including publication selection bias, inaccuracy in data extraction, and misclassification (Sjøberg et al., 2005). We also recognise that it is impossible to achieve complete coverage of everything written on a topic. However, to ensure a robust representation of the material, a university librarian supported the search with the determination of search terms, strings, database choices, and the creation of the initial dataset of articles for review. Having critiqued the process, three key steps were taken to establish the data set and these are outlined below.

Step 1: Choosing search terms

In consultation with a university librarian, we reviewed synonyms for the search for kindness in higher education and trialled terms. Given that our aim was to identify literature specifically pertaining to kindness, we chose to explore synonyms to ensure coverage of the higher education context.

A combination of search terms and fields created a range of ERIC on EBSCO database results ranging from 0 papers through to 100 papers, with a Google Scholar search identifying 509,000 papers relating to kindness in higher education in 0.12 seconds. After trialling a range of keywords, we settled on the search string AB kindness AND AB ('higher education' OR college OR university). This provided a suitable sample of papers to analyse for the purposes of this project.

Step 2: Define inclusion criteria

Articles in the database were limited to the 1992–2023 time frame. The search strategy covered only peer-reviewed journal articles because (a) they reflect the interests and values of mainstream research communities, and (b) credibility is determined through the peer-review process. At this stage, other publications, such as dissertations, conference proceedings, and editorial pieces, were excluded from the search.

Step 3: Choosing a database

The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database on EBSCOhost was the data source for this study. ERIC, which is sponsored by the USA Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, was used as it is a comprehensive, searchable, Internet-based bibliographic and full-text database of education research and information. The ERIC database contains content or 1,900,000 records with links to 590,000 full-text documents. A large range of abstracts representing the breadth of national and international education-related books, papers and articles was available through ERIC. Google Scholar, a commonly used web-based academic search engine, catalogues between 2 and 100 million records of both academic and grey literature. Whilst there is ongoing debate regarding the utility of Google Scholar as an academic resource (see Boeker et al., 2013; De Winter et al., 2014), it was used to supplement the library database search. Due to the extensive grey literature and following the recommendation from Haddaway et al. (2015), the search of articles focused only on the first 200 results.

After completing these three steps, applying the limiters of 1992-2022, ERIC database, peer-reviewed, the search strings AB kindness AND AB ('higher education' OR college OR university), and the Google Scholar search, 300 journal articles were discovered.

Analysis process

The data were analysed using the Framework Method of analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), which involved (a) familiarisation with the data, (b) identification of themes, (c) indexing or categorisation of themes, (d) charting of data in tabular or graphical formats, and (e) mapping and interpretation of data. These processes occurred throughout the abovementioned three steps.

The fourth step was to review the abstracts and key terms (e.g., kindness, higher education) of all 300 papers. The focus of this content analysis was to eliminate articles that did not represent the search goals. This manual check was conducted to ensure relevance. The closer examination reduced the data pool to 88 articles (59 papers from the ERIC database search and 29 papers from the Google Scholar search). An example of papers that were eliminated included papers that focussed on research set in the context of researching schooling but not higher education. Notably, some articles appeared more than once, and the word 'kind' was used to mean 'in the same way' rather than the human

act of kindness.

The fifth step was a document analysis (Rapley & Jenkings, 2010) with a focus on content analysis (Weber, 1990). A colour coding exercise highlighted key text and assisted in categorising and frequency of definitions.

The sixth step involved pattern matching and explanation building (Yin, 2009). The articles were reviewed to determine how kindness was embedded in higher education.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis of the data identified 13 themes. Most of the papers aligned with three key themes: (a) the *Kindness pedagogy theme*; (b) the subset group investigating *Kindness online pedagogies* (total of 30 papers); and (c) the theme encompassing student behaviours and traits (19 papers). There were 10 papers that investigated the presence of kindness across the university environment and 6 papers that focussed more deeply on the interplay of character traits and kindness in the higher education context. Academic leadership in relation to kindness advocacy in higher education providers was identified in 5 papers. The lens of gender when considering the concept of kindness in higher education was evident in just 5 papers, and the findings were not conclusive. Papers exploring curriculum, assessment, intrinsic motivation, service learning and faith-based themes are represented in a total of only 12 papers (see Figure 2 below). Thirteen themes in total were identified across the higher education literature, including the following listed from greatest to least common:

- Kindness pedagogy (20 papers identified)
- Kindness online pedagogy (10 papers identified)
- Kindness and gender (5 papers identified)
- Academic leadership and kindness in the higher education context (5 papers identified)
- Kindness and the university environment (10 papers identified)
- Kindness and strength of character in the context of higher education (6 papers identified)
- Student behaviour and kindness traits (19 papers identified)
- Kindness embedded in the higher education curriculum (1 paper identified)
- Assessment and kindness (2 papers identified)
- Intrinsic motivation and relatedness to kindness in the context of higher education (1 paper identified)
- Cultural dimensions of kindness (5 papers identified)
- Faith-based notions of kindness (2 papers identified)
- Service learning and Kindness (1 paper identified)

The prevalence of each theme within the search for this project is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

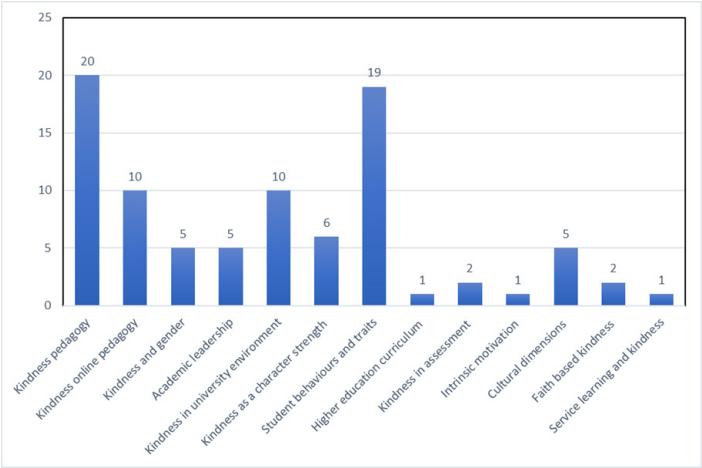

Figure 2. Kindness in higher education themes.

Insights to date

Based on the content analysis of the selected papers, a great deal of the research that investigated the concept of kindness in the context of higher education was aligned with the theme of pedagogy. This was inclusive of two categories. The theme *Kindness pedagogy* is inclusive of the generic pedagogy focus (20 papers) as well as those research papers that explore the presence of kindness in online pedagogy (10 papers), totalling 34.48% of the data set. In both the generic literature and that pertaining to online pedagogy, a pedagogy of kindness is not a new concept and has been reported in the literature in the pre-COVID context and throughout time. There has been a recognition across these papers that a pedagogy of kindness requires academics to recognise positionality, power, and identity and to approach teaching and learning through the lens of compassion and trust. In the context of higher education, pedagogy is central to the scholarship of learning and teaching (SoLT), both institutionally and professionally, for individual academics. As such, SoLT and professional practices that overtly incorporate the concept of kindness can be complex and unique to a particular context or teacher and fluid in their constructs. Such practices can be research-based and/or intuitive or experiential. It is well recognised in the higher education SoLT literature that the delivery of accredited curriculum across contexts, even within the same institution, can be very individualistic as it comprises both evidence-based pedagogical choices and relies on the academic's personal philosophies and pedagogical values.

This systematic literature review shows that the importance of elements of kindness embedded in academic pedagogy is gaining momentum as academics acknowledge the importance of connection with and care for students. This was particularly evident in the research that has been completed during and post-COVID, both nationally and

globally. The research, mainly small-scale studies, argues that kindness, care, compassion, and empathy are central to pedagogical engagement that benefits both learners and educators in their academic lives. This was strongly reported in the research writings that emerged throughout the pandemic as academics pivoted quickly to online learning environments applying pedagogies promoting human connection, care and compassion to improve student learning outcomes during times of crisis. These propositions have been researched and reported on predominantly since 2020. Whether this momentum will continue to grow in the post-pandemic years is yet to be seen through empirical literature.

The strong theme of *Student behaviours and traits* features research that investigates student behaviours displayed in their learning and during their engagements on campus. Nineteen papers (21.84% of the data set) explored student wellbeing, mental health, altruism, self-compassion, and self-kindness in the context of higher education, and how these traits positively correlated with student satisfaction and success. Aligning with this theme was also the finding that some academic disciplines required kindness, which was a critical component of the profession into which the students would likely graduate. For example, a paper written in 1970 identified expected capacities and characteristics of medical students, stating honesty, kindness, physical endurance, some degree of manual dexterity and preparedness to dedicate to the care of the patients were anticipated traits of students joining the medical profession (Ellis, 1970). In the current dataset, this was true of teaching and nursing professions.

While only 6.9% of the search findings or 6 papers were identified with a focus on *Character strength* within the higher education context, the work of Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman's research identified 24-character strengths (2014) connecting with the *Student behaviours and traits* theme. Peterson and Seligman's work has influenced corporations throughout Australia and the US and is prevalent in the restructuring of school pedagogies throughout Australia. While the influence of Peterson and Seligman is not as dominant in the higher education sector, it is likely that this framework will be reported more widely in future research. Within the index published by Peterson and Seligman (2014), the character strength of kindness is subsumed into the class of humanity that also includes love and social intelligence. Of importance here is that the 6 papers included in this theme investigate students' traits of kindness and how they correlate with the academic rigour of higher education courses, an important proposition. Similar research, including small-scale case studies, has been reported at the higher education symposia hosted by Kaplan Australia and New Zealand in 2022 and 2023. However, conference papers were not included in the initial search. A meta-analysis of small-scale studies of this type is a priority for further research.

Ten papers (11.49% of the dataset) identified in the systematic review process reported how a kind higher education environment positively influences student engagement on campus. This theme reflected a collection of papers that investigated how professional and academic staff actions in the operational space build trust, confidence, and a safe place to engage, and argued how such action is successful in reducing bullying and anti-social behaviours. One paper suggests that the priority for professional staff on campuses should be to provide guidance, service, and care for students with regularity, consistency, and efficiency (Yoder, 2019) and that in these workspaces, 'simple kindness' is necessary for both students and staff. Fiamengo (2013) argued that higher education providers should be places where students are given not only information, training, and legitimate support conducive to success with counselling services where needed, but also kindness in abundance. Interestingly, kindness was suggested to be gender specific, evidenced in 5 papers (5.75% of the data set) that proposed that there were gender differences in individuals' kind behaviours, implying that females exhibited kinder behaviours, thoughts, and actions than males. This proposition requires further analysis through more large-scale research, so it is not claimed as a generalisation here. Rather it is a tentative theme identified through the analysis of a small number of papers highlighted in this systematic review.

There were also 5 papers (5.75% of the data set) that explored the cultural nuances of kindness in the context of higher education. For example, one paper (Hsu et al., 2021) indicated that Chinese cultural values, such as knowledge, kindness, tolerance of others and harmony, were featured significantly in Chinese students' expectations in higher education. Another paper (Piper, 2016) investigated the role of 'Ubunti', an African philosophy of human kindness that can be utilised in supporting higher education students. The place of kindness in cross-cultural contexts within higher education is deemed a rich source of future evidenced-based inquiry.

Interestingly, only 5 (5.75% of the data set) papers were aligned with kindness and academic leadership in the context of higher education. These papers investigated how mentoring amongst academics can incorporate kindness and enhance acceptance and wellbeing among staff. For example, one paper (Erikson, 2019) affirms that kindness must be seen in a framework of values within higher education providers' mission statements and that it is central to communication that promotes academic partnerships with all stakeholders. There was only one paper within the 88 papers that addressed kindness at the organisational senior leadership and university culture level. Waddington (2018) suggests care, kindness, and compassion are not separate from being professional, but represent the fundamentals of humanity in the workplace; a workplace that requires kindness in leadership and the enhancement of compassionate institutional cultures. She argues that higher education providers, including universities, ought to be 'caregiving organisations' because of their role and primary task of helping students to learn.

Two further findings provided deeper insight into kindness in higher education. Firstly, most peer-reviewed articles in the data set have been published since the beginning of COVID-19 in 2019-2020. As the pandemic raged, people around the globe experienced long periods of isolation, psychological stress, and emotional exhaustion. Research

conducted since this period has identified that caring behaviours, random acts of kindness, compassion, and self-kindness have increased (Matos et al., 2023) due to the pain experienced by many throughout the pandemic. While this is important across the broader society, a similar finding cannot be evidenced for those working in higher education based on this SLR. As new publications are submitted from providers, from 2024 onwards, there may be new evidence to challenge the status quo. There is certainly a need to complete impact studies of this type if stronger conclusions are to be made regarding the correlation between kindness and positive higher education experiences for students and staff.

Across many sectors, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a surge in research on kindness. In the sector of higher education, while the pandemic required academics to pivot to online pedagogies and kindness featured significantly in these articles, a complimentary set of publications identified COVID as the motive for the study. Eighteen per cent of the papers (20 papers) identified during the content analysis noted that the research was completed at a time when higher education was experiencing pedagogical transitions implicit in the pandemic conditions. The review identified only two publications focussing on the concept of kindness in higher education from 1970 until 2007, a period of 37 years. In the following ten years until 2017, an increase to 28 articles appeared. However, in the four years from 2019 until 2023, 68 articles have been retrieved. Clearly, there is a strong correlation between the impact of the pandemic and the growing prevalence of the pedagogy of kindness in higher education. This is evident in Figure 3 below. Whether this will continue beyond 2023 is unknown at this point.

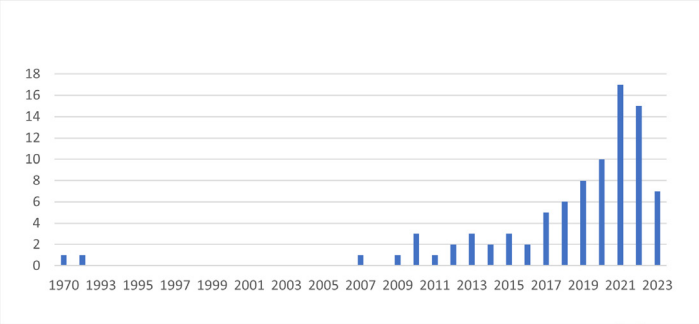

Figure 3. Year of published papers that formed the core of the systematic literature review.

This database suggests that, though still a nascent area of empirical inquiry, kindness is emerging as a distinct research topic, having previously been subsumed under the larger areas of study of prosocial behaviour, altruism, and compassion (Helliwell et al., 2022). While this is affirming for kindness advocates and influencers, one can conclude that there remains a dearth of research examining the coalescence of kindness and higher education (Binfet et al., 2022).

Secondly, the SLR revealed that 26% of research was conducted in the Health and Education disciplines, which is encouraging as most graduates will enter a caring profession. But for higher education across the board, there is clearly more work that can be done. This call, however, is not new to the current audience. Twelve years ago, Rowland (2009) called for attention to kindness in the profession of teaching to include everything a teacher does to encourage, predict, and plan for, accommodate, respect and respond to students' emotional and learning needs. Such calls, as ascertained in the SLR, are only minimal in other disciplines such as Creative Arts (1 paper), Business and Management (1 paper), Sports Science (1 paper) and STEM (2 papers).

Conclusion

As higher education undergoes review and scrutiny by the current Commonwealth government in Australia, the place of kindness, inclusive of attributes including empathy, compassion, honesty, gratitude, trust, and humility (see https://thekindnesscurriculum.com), has not been explicitly identified at the level of policy or as a national priority. The proliferation of research that has emerged since 2019 has the potential to significantly improve the sector's understanding of the role of kindness in higher education, but the systematic literature review suggests scant attention to kindness at the governance level of higher education providers, including universities. However, what is featured strongly on both the political and higher education agendas is reshaping graduate attributes to reflect workplace and employer demands more closely. The predominant view is that to be successful, graduates will need to possess non-technical skills, which are social and emotional in nature, such as empathy, kindness, leadership, flexibility, resilience, adaptability, and communication (Mohd & Abid, 2020). Deloitte Access Economics (2017) forecasts that the number of jobs in soft skill-intensive occupations are expected to grow at 2.5 times the rate of jobs in other occupations and that by 2030, it is anticipated that soft skill-intensive occupations will make up almost two thirds of the workforce. According to Billing et al. (2021), companies' skill-building efforts have focused on building employees' social, emotional, and advanced cognitive skills. Whilst many universities embedded graduate attributes including life-long learning, generic, transferable, or soft skills focussing on graduate employability (Oliver, 2011), into their courses, deeper attention is warranted from the perspective of research. In fact, it can be argued in this context that an immediate rethink of the graduate attributes is required to be more inclusive of soft skills, including the attributes of kindness in preparation for a more meaningful education, one that prepares students more appropriately in a poly-crisis environment (Tooze, 2023) in ways that respond to both human endeavour and employer needs and demands. Other educational environments, such as schools in Australia, are moving in this direction (see Kindness Curriculum at https://thekindnesscurriculum.com), and it is timely for higher education to review its mission, values, strategy and programs as the sector reconsiders its future purposes.

For kindness to be truly embraced in higher education, it must feature in strategic, operational, and academic agendas. Whilst further research and a robust evidence base will support these endeavours, higher education leaders must take up the challenge and value kindness for human, social, and economic advancement. Currently, despite

COVID-19's push towards kindness research, reform is slow and minimalist. For the higher education providers who are keen to take up the challenge, the words of Waddington (2018) are instructive:

> …, in the future, universities (and higher education providers) that can demonstrate their compassionate credentials and pedagogy will be the successful universities, and this requires kindness in leadership and compassionate institutional cultures. Therefore, … in order to nurture cultures of compassion, universities (and higher education providers) require their leaders – as the carriers of culture – to embody compassion in their leadership practice. However, this needs to be a shared approach, rather than a dominant, hierarchical top-down approach, and is characterised by openness, curiosity, kindness, authenticity, appreciation and above all compassion. (Waddington, 2018, p. 87)

This is a call for higher education providers to look to schools in Australia as well as the empirical literature for inspiration. As many schools throughout the nation are inviting their students and communities to value kindness (or its equivalent) as central to their core business of education, so too higher education providers can think towards the future in preparing their graduates with knowledge, skills and dispositions that contribute to building a better world for generations to come. Koschel (2023) has noted in her text: "As humans evolved, we have learned that kindness is important - maybe the most important thing of all - for any functioning society". What better place to embed kindness than in higher education, one of the most influential spaces in Australia for human flourishing and development.

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Exploring students' perceptions and the significance of social and cognitive presence in their educational voyage

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perspectives on the importance of social and cognitive presence throughout their educational experience. Four hundred and fifty fourth-year education-major students from five universities in Southern Nigeria participated in the research. We adopted a correlational research design using the survey approach. A questionnaire of the four-point Likert variety was used for data collection. The data obtained were subjected to simple linear regression and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. The study's findings demonstrate a positive relationship between students' evaluations of their social presence and their academic success. Also, a strong correlation between cognitive presence, student involvement and critical thinking was found. In addition, the current study revealed a significant association between students' total educational experiences and their degrees of social and cognitive presence. These findings have implications for educational methods, emphasising the value of encouraging social connection, cognitive engagement, and the fusion of educational opportunities. The knowledge acquired from this study will help researchers, educators, and policymakers develop more effective curricula and improve teaching methods, which will ultimately help students perform better overall.

Introduction

Students navigate the intricate landscapes of education, where the interplay of human interaction and intellectual engagement impacts their learning experiences as they embark on a journey of knowledge and self-discovery. The importance of social and cognitive presence within the educational arena has taken on new dimensions in this era of digital connection and developing pedagogical paradigms, altering the very nature of how students engage with their learning settings. As these young brains make their way through the halls of academia, it becomes increasingly important to delve into their views to unravel the fabric of thoughts and perceptions that underpin the critical roles of social connectedness and cognitive stimulation. This investigation of the subtle dance between social relationships and cognitive processes reveals a rich canvas of implications for improving teaching tactics, developing deeper comprehension, and nourishing learners' holistic growth. This article sets out on an exploratory quest to untangle the tangled web of students' ideas of the fundamental importance of social and cognitive presence in their educational journey.

Finding out how students view social and cognitive presence in the classroom provides useful information. It also improves pedagogical strategies and allows for more individualized teaching methods for more engaging learning experiences. When it comes to online learning, insights help with platform optimization, social and cognitive presence promotion for better quality, and closing engagement gaps. Individual preferences allow for personalized learning experiences that increase motivation and satisfaction. They also support initiatives for better student retention and create a supportive academic environment (Shafi & Middleton, 2023). Teachers gain from research-based professional development, which creates dynamic learning environments.

Background and rationale for the study

The idea of social presence, which stems from social psychology and communication, has received much attention in educational settings. The term "social presence" describes how much people in mediated communication environments, such as online classrooms and virtual learning environments, see and feel a sense of human contact and closeness. Understanding the significance of social presence in educational settings is essential for improving student engagement and overall learning outcomes as technology continues to change the educational landscape.

One of the main components of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is cognitive presence, which is the active use of critical thinking by students in a variety of learning environments. These environments include traditional classrooms, online courses, and hybrid formats, and they require higher-order thinking skills like analysis and synthesis. Activities that encourage inquiry, questioning, and concept application are characteristics of effective cognitive presence. Teachers create a supportive yet challenging environment that promotes meaningful discussions and allows students to become reflective, independent learners.

The traditional classroom, which was once limited to physical institutions, has evolved into a dynamic virtual battleground (Ephraim et al., 2022). This transformation has resulted in a reconsideration of the importance of social interactions and cognitive processes in influencing students' learning experiences. While educational technology provides unprecedented opportunities for connectivity, it also raises concerns about the depth and quality of human engagement in these digital environments. Furthermore, as pedagogical techniques shift towards learner-centred paradigms, understanding how students perceive the fusion of social relationships and cognitive stimuli becomes increasingly important for informed instructional design.

Despite the growing emphasis on online and traditional educational experiences, there needs to be more understanding of how students perceive and value social and cognitive presence throughout their educational journey. The lack of comprehensive insights into the dynamics of these elements hinders educators and institutions in optimizing learning environments. Therefore, the research problem at hand is to explore students' perceptions and discern the significance of both social and cognitive presence in shaping their educational experiences, with the overarching goal of informing strategies that enhance student engagement, satisfaction, and academic outcomes.

Research objectives

The purpose of this study is to dive into the many facets of students' perceptions of social and cognitive presence in their educational journey. The precise goals are as follows:

1. Examine whether students' perceived social presence correlates with their learning outcomes.

2. Investigate whether higher levels of cognitive presence lead to increased student engagement and critical thinking.

3. Investigate the relationship between levels of social and cognitive presence and their combined effects on students' overall educational experiences.

Significance

This study intends to contribute to both theoretical and practical realms by revealing students' opinions on the delicate interplay between social and cognitive presence. The findings will help us better understand how students interact with their learning environments, informing pedagogical practices that encourage meaningful connections and cognitive development. Furthermore, the outcome of this study has the potential to aid educators, curriculum innovators, and educational policymakers in improving the effectiveness of online and offline learning experiences. As technology continues to transform the educational landscape, a thorough understanding of students' views becomes an essential compass for guiding modern teaching.

Literature review

Related literature is reviewed based on the following headings and subheadings.

Theoretical backgrounds

Social constructivism and its relevance to social presence

Social constructivism emphasizes the collaborative construction of knowledge through social interactions, focusing on learning within a social context. It emphasizes the essence of social presence in educational settings, as it fosters meaningful and effective learning experiences. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development suggests that learning is most effective when engaged with knowledgeable peers or mentors (Murphy et al., 2015). Akpan et al. (2020) highlight the importance of social constructivism and social presence in an educational environment. Social constructivist learning environments foster collaborative knowledge construction through discussions, debates, and joint problem-solving activities. Deri (2022) notes that student success is linked to prior achievements, witnessing others succeed, influential encouragement, and positive states. By recognizing the interplay between these concepts, educators can create learning environments that promote effective outcomes and meaningful interactions. Educators need to promote constructivist teaching methods for active student engagement and participation in the classroom (Ambe et al., 2023).

Cognitive engagement theories and their connection to cognitive presence

Cognitive engagement theories are crucial in understanding and enhancing cognitive presence in educational settings. Social Cognitive Theory, by Bandura (1977), emphasizes observational learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy in cognitive engagement (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2015). Constructivist Learning Theory, by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes social interaction and collaborative learning, stimulating higher-order thinking and cognitive presence (Stewart, 2018). Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory, by Collins et al. (1989) transfers cognitive skills and knowledge from experts to novice learners through authentic experiences (Imiere, 2019; Matsuo & Tsukube, 2020). By implementing these theories, educators can create environments that foster meaningful cognitive engagement and promote cognitive presence among learners.

Social presence in educational settings

Conceptual framework

Social presence is the degree to which individuals feel connected, engaged, and able to establish meaningful interactions in online or virtual educational environments (Oh et al., 2018). According to Richardson et al. (2017), social presence is defined as the capacity to recognize individuals in a virtual setting. It is challenging to develop a social presence, but it is an essential component of online learning (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016). In educational settings, social presence plays a pivotal role in facilitating effective learning experiences, promoting student engagement, and building a sense of community among learners (Richardson et al., 2017).

Theoretical underpinnings

The cornerstone of this concept is Short, Williams, and Christie's 1976 Social Presence Theory, as detailed in Khan et al. (2017) and Weidlich et al. (2018). According to the hypothesis, the capacity of different communication channels to transmit social cues influences the degree of social presence felt by participants. When applied to educational contexts, various elements determine the degree of social presence, including communication tools, interaction design, teacher presence, and student-student interactions (Roque-Hernández et al., 2021; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Cunningham, 2015). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) concept, developed by Garrison (2016), is another set of theoretical foundations and dimensions of social presence. This structure acts as a basic framework for understanding social interaction in online education. Cognitive, educational, and social presences are the three interconnected presences that CoI suggests. This paradigm states that emotional expression, both verbally and nonverbally, plays a central role in social presence and promotes a sense of belonging and connection for both students and teachers.

Dimensions and importance of social presence in educational settings

In its ability to decrease the isolation that is frequently felt in virtual education contexts, social presence has significance. Richardson et al. (2017) underlined the impact of social presence on the satisfaction of students and their perceived success in studying. When students have a strong social presence, they are more likely to participate in meaningful interactions, share personal experiences, and create a sense of neighbourhood (Richardson et al., 2017). Social presence can be felt in the following ways.

Technological affordances and social presence.

Technology improvements have expanded the various ways that social presence might be encouraged in educational settings. The illusion of social presence is enhanced by real-time interactions and visual cues made possible through video conferencing technologies, discussion forums, and collaboration platforms (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2018). Thomas et al. (2017) and Moran et al. (2020) found that visual and aural cues, as well as text-based communication, improve social interaction in online learning settings. The pattern of interactions and the experience of presence are shaped by the choice of communication tools (synchronous or asynchronous). Tools that influence social presence include video conferencing, discussion forums, and collaborative papers (Yoon & Leem, 2021; Khalil & Ebner, 2017).

The form and organization of online activities and debates, according to Nah et al. (2016), Shafi and Middleton (2023) determine the level of involvement and connectivity. Tasks that encourage meaningful interactions can improve social presence (Andel et al., 2020). According to Lowenthal and Dunlap (2018) and Matuzas (2021), students' comfort level with communication technologies affects their capacity to express themselves clearly and participate in dialogues. Students' verbal and written communication abilities influence their capacity to connect with others and express emotion (Gunasekara et al., 2022).

Instructor presence and social interaction.

The instructor must be present in order to encourage social presence and involvement. Dolan et al. (2017) highlighted the significance of teachers' active participation in creating a social presence through prompt feedback, conversation facilitation, and the creation of a welcoming online environment. Learners feel more socially present when their instructors are friendly, approachable, and available (Tackie, 2022). According to Martin et al. (2020), the active participation of instructors through prompt feedback, direction, and facilitation contributes to perceptions of social presence among learners.

Cultural considerations and social presence.

It is important to recognize cultural variety and how it affects social presence. How social presence is sensed and perceived is in turn influenced by cultural norms and communication techniques. The necessity for culturally inclusive tactics to improve social presence was highlighted by Anyichie and Butler (2023) and Gunawardena (2020), who recognized that various learners might interpret and engage with social cues differently. Individuals' interpretations of and attempts to develop a social presence in online educational situations may be influenced by their cultural origins and communication norms (Gunawardena, 2020).

The interactions between students.

Peer relationships promote a sense of community and social contact, hence boosting social presence (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016). Examples of peer interactions include collaborative projects and group conversations (Peeters, 2019; Neh, 2018). Greater social presence in educational settings is associated with better learning results, higher engagement, and a sense of belonging. (Fabris et al., 2023). Educators may design environments that support social presence and improve the entire educational process by considering communication technologies, interaction design, instructor presence, and student interactions.

Cognitive presence in educational settings

Social presence affects both the cognitive and emotional facets of engagement, according to research. Researchers Ouyang and Chang (2019) and Guo et al. (2021) discovered that social presence significantly influenced cognitive engagement, which is defined by introspective debates and critical thinking. Moreover, social presence had a favorable impact on emotional involvement, including feelings of belongingness and rapport (Richardson et al., 2017). Effective learning and engagement in educational contexts depend heavily on cognitive presence. It includes the mental processes that students go through, whether they are learning in a regular classroom or online. Teachers and instructional designers can improve learning experiences and promote deeper cognitive engagement among learners by looking into the factors that influence cognitive presence.

Dimensions of cognitive presence

Cognitive engagement is sparked in the first stage by the introduction of demanding and thought-provoking stimuli. Designing triggering events that pique learners' interest and inspire them to learn more can be done using real-world challenges, authentic settings, or intriguing questions (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Al Mamun & Lawrie, 2023). The learners then take part in exploratory activities to find resources and information to deal with the triggering event. Research assignments, group projects, and online debates encourage cognitive inquiry so that students can collect important information and different viewpoints (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). In the integration phase, learners synthesize the information acquired and connect it with prior knowledge. Integrative exercises promote linkages, pattern recognition, and the development of deep understanding in students. Examples include idea mapping, case studies, and reflective journaling (He et al., 2023).

To clarify their understanding and address any cognitive dissonance, learners engage in critical reflection and dialogue. Debates, peer evaluations, and Socratic questioning are all incorporated into resolution activities to encourage more in-depth critical thinking and metacognitive awareness. (Boa et al., 2018; Alsaleh, 2020). The elements that influence cognitive presence have been the subject of numerous studies. Learner readiness is one of these elements. It is defined as the cognitive, linguistic, behavioural, socio-emotional, motor, and physical traits that indicate preparedness for formal educational instruction (Dong et al., 2020). Another element is social connection, which enhances cognitive presence through meaningful communication with students and teachers through online forums or team projects (Joksimovi et al., 2015). Task design is a further element that, in accordance with Al Mamun and Lawrie (2023), fosters cognitive presence and engagement through realistic, well-structured tasks that are in line with learning objectives. Efficient instructor facilitation aids students in building cognitive presence through scaffolding and timely feedback.

A study on cognitive presence and group knowledge creation in online learning was done by Sadaf et al. (2021). After examining 30 publications, they discovered that the phases of exploration and integration were more helpful than the phases of triggering and resolution. These results offer guidance for educators to improve the calibre of online learning; researchers and curriculum designers are needed.

Olesova and Lim (2017) investigated how students' cognitive presence during asynchronous online threaded discussions was impacted by their role assignments. The learners participated in a virtual course, and changes in cognitive presence levels were investigated using a mixed-methods approach. This study showed proof that using scripted role assignments in asynchronous online discussions can be a successful teaching strategy.

Utilizing the Community of Inquiry paradigm, Kilis and Yildirim (2019) found that students' social, cognitive, and instructional posting habits in online learning environments are high and can be improved through treatment. Factors like real-life scenarios and reflective course activities were found to be significant. However, media articles still need to be more adequately reflected in the voices of students up until now (Sullivan et al., 2023). According to a study by Law et al. (2019), student enrolment and learning motivation have a beneficial effect on students' ability to learn in blended learning environments. Whereas learning motivation just affects social presence, immersion has a positive effect on one's presence both socially and cognitively, teaching presence benefits both cognitive and social presence directly and indirectly.

Methodology

This study benefited from a correlational research design using the survey approach, which is a non-experimental approach that focuses on investigating the statistical association between two or more variables without intervening or manipulating them. Its primary goal is to discern whether alterations in one variable coincide with changes in another and to what degree. Correlational studies are instrumental in uncovering relationships, recognizing patterns, and facilitating predictions (Asamoah, 2014). Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that these studies do not establish causation. In other words, they cannot definitively assert that changes in one variable directly lead to changes in another. We sought to find out the relationship between students' perceived social and cognitive presence and their learning outcomes and critical thinking. For data collection, we conducted surveys using a questionnaire so that the students could express their opinions. The instrument was a 36-item survey questionnaire; it was made up of the learning outcome questionnaire (LOQ) and the students' perception of social and cognitive presence questionnaire (SPSCPQ), which were compressed into one and administered to the participants. It was constructed using a four-point Likert scale with Strongly Agree (SA, 4-points), Agree (A, 3-points), Disagree (D, 2-points), and Strongly Disagree (SD, 1-point).

This approach provided profound, nuanced insights into the significance of these presences and how students perceive them. These researchers created the questionnaire, and the Cronbach alpha reliability (Bonett & Wright, 2015) method was employed to evaluate for consistency after it was validated for content and goodness of fit by specialists in test assessments. The outcomes demonstrated that the tools were suitable for gathering the necessary data for this investigation.

Participants

Students from Southern Nigeria in their fourth year in the faculties of education at five public universities participated in this study. The selection criteria were developed since, in year four, students had enough university experience to recognize the social and cognitive presence in their academic journey. Records from the Deans' offices of the Faculties of Education at the Universities of Calabar, Port Harcourt, Uyo, Nsukka, and Alex Ekwueme Federal University in Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo-Ebonyi State revealed that there are 622, 566, 340, 464, and 320 fourth-year students overall in all departments, respectively. Four hundred fifty students were utilized as the sample size for the study, which is roughly the average number of students in the population. Ninety students were selected as study participants from each university.

Ethical consideration

This research was approved by the University of Calabar's Ethical Committee on Research and Patents. We submitted an application letter to the committee along with the article title, abstract, participant list, and research instrument. After careful review, the committee approved our team's request. We then presented the same approval letter to the other four sampled universities, who also permitted us to collect data.

Three hypotheses shaped the study and the analysis of the data. These are listed below:

- Hypothesis 1: Students' perceived social presence does not positively influence their learning outcomes.
- Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of cognitive presence do not lead to increased student engagement and critical thinking.
- Hypothesis 3: The levels of social and cognitive presence and their combined effects on students' overall educational experiences are not significantly correlated.

The data obtained were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Hypothesis 1 was evaluated through the application of simple linear regression, as we had a solitary predictor (perceived social presence) and a single outcome variable (learning outcomes).

To examine Hypothesis 2, a multiple regression analysis was employed. This analysis aimed to investigate the connection between cognitive presence (an independent variable) and student engagement, as well as critical thinking (a dependent variable). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was used to measure the strength and direction of linear correlations between social presence, cognitive presence, and students' educational experiences.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Students perceived social presence does not positively influence their learning outcomes

The two factors in this hypothesis were learning outcomes and perceived social presence. Continuous measurements were made of both variables. Simple Linear Regression analysis was employed to evaluate this hypothesis. Table 1 displays the findings of the analysis. The summary of the simple linear regression analysis for the correlation between students' perceived social presence and academic results is also shown in Table 1. With a crucial F-ratio of 3.84 and 1: 448 degrees of freedom, Table 1's result reveals that the regression output's analysis of variance produced an F-ratio of 78.304 (p. 05), which is statistically significant at the .05 level of probability. This result proves that the predictor of the model, perceived social presence, significantly contributes to explaining the variation in the dependent variable (Learning Outcomes).

The computed F-ratio is significantly higher than the necessary F-ratio of 3.84, confirming the model's statistical significance. A regression coefficient (R) of .386 and a coefficient of determination (R2) of .149 are also displayed in Table 1's result. This result suggests that changes in perceived social presence are responsible for 38.6% of the variation in learning outcomes results and that perceived social presence strongly predicted the size of learning outcomes.

Results in the same Table 1 indicate positive unstandardized and standardized Beta coefficients (B and Beta) of 1.234 and .386, respectively, as the result of the regression weights of the predictor variable (perceived social presence). Research indicates that perceived social presence and learning outcomes results are positively correlated. As a result, Table 1's result displays a t-value of 8.849 (p< .05). This suggests that perceived social presence was a significant predictor of learning outcome result variation. So, Hypothesis One is disproved because of this finding. This finding means that students' perceived social presence positively influences their learning outcomes.

Table 1. An overview of the results of a simple linear regression study on the relationship between students' perceived social presence and learning outcomes.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.386	.149	.147	.89756		
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression		63.083	1	63.083	78.304	.000
Residual		360.917	448	.806		
Total		424.000	449			
Variable		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)		21.709	.675		32.183	.000
Learning Outcomes		1.234	.047	.386	8.849	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), perceived Social Presence
b. Dependent Variable: Learning Outcomes

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of cognitive presence do not lead to increased student engagement and critical thinking

This hypothesis included two variables: cognitive presence as well as student engagement and critical thinking. Continuous measurements were made of both variables. A simple linear regression analysis was employed to evaluate this hypothesis. Table 2 displays the findings of the analysis. The findings from a simple linear regression study of the correlation between students' cognitive presence and their engagement and critical thinking are summarized in Table 2. With a crucial F-ratio of 3.84 and 1:448 degrees of freedom, Table 2's result reveals that the regression output's analysis of variance produced an F-ratio of 8.679 (p.05), which is statistically significant at the .05 level of probability.

As a result, the data for cognitive presence fit the model more closely than they would have if cognitive presence had not been included in the model, indicating that cognitive presence strongly predicted the overall variance in student engagement and critical thinking. A regression coefficient (R) of .138 and a coefficient of determination (R2) of .019 are also displayed in Table 2's result. This result suggests that cognitive presence strongly predicted the level of student engagement and critical thinking and that changes in cognitive presence are responsible for 13.8% of the variation in student engagement and critical thinking.

Results in Table 2 reveal positive unstandardized and standardized Beta coefficients (B and Beta) .120 and .138, respectively, for the regression weights of the predictor variable (cognitive presence). Hence, student engagement and critical thinking are positively correlated with cognitive presence, and an increase in cognitive presence will result in increases in both variables of more than one unit. As a result, Table 2's outcome displays a t-value of 2.946 (p<.05). This suggests that differences in student engagement and critical thinking were significantly predicted by cognitive presence. So, hypothesis two is disproved because of this finding. Thus, higher degrees of cognitive presence promote critical thinking and greater levels of student engagement.

Table 2. An overview of the results of a basic linear regression study on the relationship between students' cognitive presence and student engagement and critical thinking.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.138	.019	.017	.75278		
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression		4.918	1	4.918	8.679	.003
Residual		253.873	448	.567		
Total		258.791	449			
Variable		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)		11.803	.718		16.441	.000
Student Engagement		.120	.041	.138	2.946	.003

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cognitive Presence.
b. Dependent Variable: Student Engagement and critical thinking.

Hypothesis 3: The levels of social and cognitive presence and their combined effects on students' overall educational experiences are not significantly correlated

According to the analyses shown in Table 3, the critical r-value is .092. The calculated r-value (.227) is much greater than the critical value established against 448 degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance, indicating that the observed correlation is statistically significant. The observed link is not likely to have occurred by random chance, according to the evidence. The results show a positive correlation between students' total educational experiences and social and cognitive presence. It is typically true that as a student's social and cognitive presence increases, so do their overall educational experiences, even though the association's

strength is generally seen as being mild. Hence, the null hypothesis was refuted. This result suggests a significant correlation between students' levels of social and cognitive presence and their overall educational experiences.

Table 3. A description of the levels of social and cognitive presence and how they interact to affect students' overall educational experiences according to a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis (N=450).

Variables	Mean	SD	Cal- value	Sig.
Social and cognitive presence	35.05	1.39	.227**	.000
Students' overall educational experiences	27.67	.972		

**Significant at 0.05 level, df 448, critical r-value = .092

Discussion

The first hypothesis, which posited that students' perceived social presence does not have a positive influence on their learning outcomes, was rejected. This finding demonstrates that the way students view their social presence does have an impact on how well they study. According to the identified positive association, changes in perceived social presence are responsible for variations in learning outcome results and perceived social presence was a reliable predictor of learning outcome magnitude. This result supports the viewpoint put forth by Richardson et al. (2017), which highlights the critical role that social presence plays in generating effective learning experiences in educational situations. This phenomenon covers the enhancement of student participation and the formation of a communal ambience among learners. Furthermore, congruence with the findings of Fabris et al. (2023) is evident, as they underscored the association between heightened social presence in educational environments and enhanced learning outcomes, heightened engagement levels, and an augmented sense of belonging.

The second hypothesis, which states that higher levels of cognitive presence do not lead to increased student engagement and critical thinking, was also rejected. This result shows that cognitive presence has a strong potential to predict student engagement and critical thinking, and it emphasizes the fact that variations in cognitive presence are responsible for the observed diversity in student engagement and critical thinking levels. The results show a strong relationship between student involvement, critical thinking, and cognitive presence, with increases in cognitive presence being accompanied by increases in both engagement and critical thinking. This finding is in line with previous research that highlights the critical role that cognitive presence plays in promoting efficient learning and increased engagement in educational situations. It is consistent with Kilis and Yildirim's (2019) research, which showed that students' posting behaviours, encompassing pedagogical presence, social presence, and cognitive presence, have significant improvement potential. Similar to Ouyang and Chang (2019) and Guo et al. (2021) who came to similar conclusions, the current research supports the importance of social presence for cognitive engagement, which is characterized by reflective discussions and critical thinking.

The third hypothesis, which declares that the levels of social and cognitive presence and their combined effects on students' overall educational experiences are not significantly correlated, was rejected. The findings indicate a connection between students' social and cognitive presence levels and their overall educational experiences. This result is in line with the viewpoint advanced by Richardson et al. (2017), which emphasizes the critical role that social presence and cognitive presence play in enabling successful educational experiences, encouraging learner engagement, and developing a sense of community among learners in educational environments. The current discovery also accords with Law et al. (2019)'s findings, which supported the idea that student enrolment and learning motivation both have a favorable impact on students' ability to learn in blended learning environments. While learner immersion has a favorable impression on presence, both social and cognitive, learning motivation only has an impact on social presence. Also, it turns out that teaching presence is a positive element that directly and indirectly improves both cognitive and social presence.

Implications for educational practice

The first finding has implications for educational practice in that it should prioritize increasing social interaction, building relationships, fostering a supportive environment, using student-centered approaches, encouraging peer feedback, and supporting collaborative learning experiences. By encouraging student participation, motivation, and a sense of community, these tactics can improve learning results. Tools and platforms that encourage social participation might be useful in blended learning settings when face-to-face encounters may be scarce. Other ways to improve social presence include developing a supportive environment, using student-centered strategies, establishing connections, encouraging peer feedback, and planning cooperative learning activities. Educational practices can enhance overall learning experiences and increase learning outcomes by identifying and fostering students' perceived social presence.

The second finding demonstrates how critical thinking and student engagement are both greatly influenced by cognitive presence. Teachers should give higher-order cognitive abilities like analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and problem-solving a higher priority in order to increase student involvement. Structured learning activities, inquiry-based learning activities, discussions and debates, feedback that encourages reflection, cooperative learning communities, tailored learning pathways, the development of metacognition, and integrated assessment systems can all help achieve this. Educators can improve both student engagement and the growth of complex cognitive skills by creating an environment where students are encouraged to think critically, reflect on their learning processes, and interact fully with the materials.

It has important ramifications for educational practice that there is a favorable association between students' overall educational experiences and their social and cognitive presence. A longitudinal learning strategy can be used by educators, with a focus on scaffolding learning activities,

integrating prior knowledge, interdisciplinary learning, reflective practice, peer mentoring, holistic curriculum design, growth evaluation, and student-centered assistance. These techniques support students' long-term development and improvement of their social and cognitive presence. Teachers can create a more enriching and significant learning environment for their students by incorporating scaffolded learning activities, integrating prior knowledge, fostering interdisciplinary learning, encouraging reflective practice, leveraging peer mentorship and collaboration, holistic curriculum design, and incorporating assessments.

Conclusion

Important conclusions from the study were drawn regarding students' educational experiences and perceptions of cognitive presence and social presence. Firstly, it was shown that learners' perceived social interaction had a big impact on how well they learned. Secondly, it was indicated that cognitive presence had a strong capacity for predicting student engagement and critical thinking. The discovery of cognitive presence as a variable causing changes in the levels of student engagement and critical thinking served to emphasize this relationship even more. The findings of the study also revealed a favorable and positive relationship between students' degrees of social and cognitive presence and the cumulative nature of their educational experiences.

The study emphasizes the importance of social connections and interactions in educational settings, emphasizing social presence's effects on education outcomes. It emphasizes the need for instructional strategies that promote higher-order cognitive processes, student engagement, and analytical thinking. The research recommends creating curricula that capitalize on pupil relationships and cognitive engagement, promoting academic advancement and individual growth. This knowledge can influence pedagogical approaches, instructional design, and educational policy, enabling educators, researchers, and policymakers to develop more effective teaching methods and curricula.

Despite the abovementioned pedagogical implications, it is noteworthy that the demographics, cross-sectional design, self-report bias, one method of data collection, and contextual factors may all have impacts on the study's conclusions. For our future research, it is necessary to focus on several main approaches such as longitudinal studies, comparative studies, mixed-methods investigations, instructor perspectives, intervention studies, online vs. offline comparisons, cultural aspects, technology integration, learning outcomes, and comparing disciplines. These methods will give a more thorough knowledge of how students feel about their social and cognitive presence during their educational experience. It will be possible to gain a more nuanced knowledge of students' views of social and cognitive presence in their educational journey by addressing these considerations and following these paths.

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Exploring the effective language teaching components from teachers' point of view: A community of inquiry perspective

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Abstract

Our research article explores teachers' perceptions of components of effective language teaching from a community of inquiry (CoI) perspective. 20 teachers completed a narrative frame, 15 of whom participated in a semi-structured interview in which they discussed the factors contributing to effective teaching. The thematic analysis of the data employing the underpinning theoretical framework of the study revealed nine sub-themes in three CoI themes. The sub-themes in the teaching presence theme were classroom dynamic and discourse, classroom and learning management, and evaluation and assessment. The emergence of meaningful learning, critical thinking, and students' engagement was observed in cognitive presence, and learning environment, sociocultural peculiarities, and positive relationships emerged in social presence. The findings of this study may assist teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers in improving their understanding of effective teaching and its components and planning, designing, and implementing accordingly.

Introduction

Effective teaching, including improving student learning, school effectiveness, teacher evaluation, designing and enhancing teacher education programs, and skill and strategy training (Chen et al., 2012; Dome´nech Betoret & Go´mez Artiga, 2004; Kamali, 2023; Owan et al., 2023; Racey et al., 2024), is crucial for attaining educational outcomes. In other words, effective teaching and teachers' understanding of this concept influence the improvement of students' outcomes (Elton, 1998). Different studies have investigated the components of effective teaching and their impact on students' achievements, concluding that effective teachers need to have good subject knowledge (Walshaw, 2012), design well-structured lessons (Iqbal et al., 2021), ask appropriate questions to engage and challenge learners (Walsh, 2006), conduct assessment effectively (Ko et al., 2013), and navigate between various roles adaptively (Kamali, 2014, 2021, 2023). However, the components of effective teaching in different subjects may differ (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). For example, in the field of second language instruction or English Language Teaching (ELT), the subject of instruction and means of teaching are the same (Brosh, 1996); that is, those characteristics need to be explored separately (Borg, 2006).

In addition, in terms of the mode of instruction, there are distinctions between online teaching and traditional face-to-face instruction because of factors such as the changing roles of teacher and student, flexibility, interaction, and communication (Young, 2006; Zhang et al., 2024). The Community of Inquiry framework (henceforth CoI) represents one of the theoretical models originally devised to explore the intricate attributes of effective online teaching (Garrison et al., 2000). However, this study is one of the first attempts to adopt it in in-person education and explore its potential for this mode of instruction.

Therefore, this study attempts to explore the factors impacting teaching effectiveness from teachers' perspectives and examines the contribution of the CoI framework to effective teaching in face-to-face classes. The findings of this study will benefit teachers by raising their awareness about the components of effective teaching. It will also be beneficial for teacher educators by encouraging them to include the components of CoI, consider the effectiveness of teaching components in their courses and contribute towards the training of language teachers to assist them in conducting high-quality face-to-face classes. Consequently, students benefit from the effective teaching they will receive in their classes. Furthermore, the findings of this study can expand the existing literature on CoI by applying this framework for the first time to face-to-face classes.

Literature review

Effective teaching

Effective teaching is a multidimensional concept (Ko et al., 2013). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards of the U.S. introduced factors like commitment to students, extensive knowledge about the subjects taught and how to teach these subjects, responsibility for managing and monitoring student learning, reflection on practice and learning from teachers' experiences, and membership in learning communities as features of highly accomplished teaching (Serafini, 2002).

Different researchers have already studied teachers and teaching effectiveness to identify the characteristics of effective teachers and teaching (e.g., Beishuizen et al., 2001; Chen, 2007; Chen et al., 2012; Çakmak & Gündüz, 2018; Ghafar & Lestari, 2023; Harrison et al., 2022; Tavakoli & Baniasad-Azad, 2016). Chen (2007) conducted a study to explore Chinese school teachers' perspectives regarding excellent teaching and identified four general characteristics of excellent teaching: "(1) caring for students, (2) guiding various aspects of students' development, (3) connecting school knowledge to other areas like real-world settings, and (4) planning structured lessons" (p. 288). Similarly, Beishuizen et al. (2001), in search of understanding the opinions of primary and high school teachers about the characteristics of excellent or effective teachers, found that excellent primary teachers are competent instructors who are able to transmit knowledge and skills, while effective high school teachers are those who can establish teacher-student relationships successfully. Another study by Chen et al. (2012) developed a model for the characteristics of excellent teachers, concluding that an excellent teacher is exam-oriented, develops lifelong learners, is student-focused, engages students, and is a professional learner. Tavakoli and Baniasad-Azad (2016), however, noted that student-centeredness and exam-oriented teaching are the most important features for running effective sessions. Çakmak and Gündüz (2018) also observed that objectiveness, competence, and consistency plus creating a positive learning environment, preparing for lessons, and managing the classroom are the essential characteristics of an effective teacher. Recently, Ghafar and Lestari (2023), in a critical review, concluded that an effective learning environment provides dynamic instruction to meet students' requirements. This climate encourages students' sense of belonging, provides equal opportunities for students to participate in classroom communications, and requires teachers to provide students with constructive feedback. In another review, Harrison et al. (2022) focused on effective teaching in higher education to examine the currently used approaches to evaluate and improve teaching practices in higher education. The findings identified that assessing teaching effectiveness through different methods, such as student feedback about teaching quality, teachers' self-assessment tools, peer review of teaching, and educational portfolios, can enhance teaching quality.

The CoI framework, as an influential theoretical and practical framework for online education (Kozan & Caskurlu, 2018), encourages active and creative learners' engagement and focuses on thinking and learning collaboratively (Garrison, 2016). This framework can be used to design and evaluate effective learning environments by adapting the classroom to its three core elements - cognitive presence (CP), social presence (SP), and teaching presence (TP) (Arbaugh, 2013), through developing critical thinking, encouraging collaboration, creating a shared community, designing well-structured lessons, providing appropriate feedback, and

facilitating learning (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

Theoretical framework: Community of Inquiry

The CoI framework, originating from the constructivist perspective and being widely used (Bozkurt et al., 2015), consists of three essential elements as indicators of teaching effectiveness in online learning environments: social presence (SP), cognitive presence (CP), and teacher presence (TP). The primary purpose of this framework is to oversee and administer the dynamic educational journey within an online learning setting, aiming to foster critical thinking and collaborative learning (Aspland & Fox, 2022; Garrison & Akyol, 2013). Lipman (2003) states a CoI is where students listen to one "another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions" (p. 20).

The first element, CP, is the extent to which participants can construct meaning and knowledge through collaboration. The second element, SP, which has the function of facilitating and supporting the CP, is defined as the participant's ability to see themselves as part of a community where they are their real selves and experience enjoyment and satisfaction while communicating and constructing knowledge. The last element, TP, is done by a teacher who is responsible for designing the course, presenting the course content, assessing the learned materials, providing appropriate instruction, and facilitating the learning process (Garrison et al., 2000).

Four phases - triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution, are needed to operationalize and assess the CP (Garrison et al., 2000). The development of social interaction among learners is called SP and can be measured through three dimensions: open communication, affective expression, and group cohesion (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The last presence, TP, consists of three dimensions: instructional management, building understanding, and direct instruction (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

Despite the extensive literature on the characteristics of effective teaching and teachers, a notable gap exists in understanding the essential elements of effective language teaching from teachers' perspectives. This gap is particularly perceivable in face-to-face classes within the CoI framework. Although this framework has attracted much attention (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007) and is considered to be one of the most extensively used frameworks in online teaching and learning (Jan et al., 2019), it has not been extensively implemented in in-person teaching except for some earlier attempts such as Warner (2016). Despite this background of the studies that tried to apply this framework to face-to-face education, exploring the teachers' perception of it in such classes is still in its infancy.

Therefore, to fill the existing gap, the current study seeks to explore the components of effective language teaching from teachers' point of view through the lens of the CoI framework in face-to-face classes facing some constraints compared to their online counterparts (Warner, 2016), with the purpose of facilitating meaningful learning experiences (Garrison, 2016). To this end, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the components of effective language teaching from teachers' perspectives in face-to-face classes?

2. How does CoI contribute to these components?

Method

Participants and research context

The participants of this study were 15 English language teachers teaching general English courses to adult and young adult learners using various ELT textbooks in diverse teaching contexts, including private language institutes, state-owned standardized language institutes, public schools, and the private sector in different cities of Iran. To recruit the participants, nearly 30 EFL teachers were contacted via social media (WhatsApp, Telegram, or email) and sent invitations to fill out the narrative forms about their effective teaching components. A total of 20 teachers completed the narrative frames and 15 of them consented to attend semi-structured interviews. The teachers who accepted the invitation to participate in this study were informed of the goals of the research and the anonymity of their responses. Among the volunteer participants, three were male and twelve were female teachers with teaching experiences ranging from about one year to seventeen years and they were between 23 – 40 years old. Nearly half of the participating teachers (n=7) held a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), and three of them were educated in English literature or translation studies. Two of the participants (T1 and T15) held bachelor's degrees in philosophy and public health, non-relevant to English or language teaching. Additionally, one participant was (at the time of this study) a doctoral student of TEFL. It is noteworthy that although not all the participants work in higher education, they all had the experience of studying, teaching, or working in such an environment. The demographic information of the participants is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participating teachers.

Participants	Education	Gender and Age	Teaching Experience (years)	Teaching Context
T1	BA in Philosophy	Female, 35	4	General English courses to adult learners in Iran
T2	MA in TELT	Female, 33	10	General English courses at private language institutes in Iran
T3	BA in English Literature + CELTA	Female, 26	2	Elementary level English courses at a Chinese school
T4	BA in TEFL	Female, 25	4	Private tutor, teaching online and face-to-face classes in Iran
T5	BA in English Literature	Female, 40	17	General English and preparation for IELTS courses to adult learners in Tehran, Iran
T6	MA in TELT	Male, 25	4	Private tutor in Bushehr, Iran
T7	MA in TELT	Female, 31	12	General English courses to adult learners at a branch of a nationally standardized language institute in Tehran, Iran
T8	BA in TELT	Male, 28	6	General English courses at public high schools (7-9th grade) in Kashan, Iran
T9	MA student of English Translation	Female, 24	5	General English courses to young adult learners at a private language center in Shiraz, Iran
T10	M.A. in TEFL	Female, 25	3	General English and IELTS courses to adults at a private language institute in Shiraz, Iran
T11	M.A. in TEFL	Female, 39	14	General English to teenagers and adults at a branch of a nationally standardized language institute in Shiraz, Iran
T12	PhD candidate in TEFL	Female, 29	8	Private institutes, private tutoring, general English at universities, teenagers and adults

T13	MA in TEFL	Female, 30	6	Private language institutes, all age ranges
T14	MA in TEFL	Male, 30	7	Private language institutes and public schools, teenagers and adults
T15	BA in Public Health	Female, 23	1	Private language institutes, kids and teenagers

This study was conducted in the EFL context where all the participants were Iranian teachers of the English language. Similar to any EFL context, the English language in Iran is spoken mainly in the classroom, where the teachers are considered to provide the most important language sample to the language learners. In the EFL context of Iran, English language teaching takes place in various educational settings, including public schools and private language institutions. For more than five decades, English has been taught in Iranian public schools, however, private and state-owned language institutions have played a considerable role in educating language students, particularly in the past two decades (Haghighi & Norton, 2017). These higher-education institutes and schools, together with the private sector, follow the shared aim of helping EFL language learners meet their linguistic needs and objectives. Based on this significant common purpose, researching the effectiveness of language teaching endeavors is of great importance. Therefore, this study sought to unpack the most effective teaching components utilized by Iranian English language teachers in an EFL context.

Data collection

For this qualitative research, data were collected using written narrative frames in Google Docs and in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with each of the participating teachers individually in an online communication platform, mostly in Google Meet. Similar to writing frames, narrative frames provide a "skeleton to scaffold writing" (Warwick & Maloch, 2003, p. 59). Narrative frames, as a valuable tool to collect data in investigating teachers' perspectives, consist of "starters, connectives and sentence modifiers which gives children [teachers] a structure within which they can concentrate on communicating what they want to say whilst scaffolding them in the use of a particular generic form" (Wray & Lewis, 1997, p. 122). Thus, they "have a supportive and guiding function" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 375). In the present study, the narrative frames were employed by asking the participants to complete the following frames: a) The best class I had was when ... because … b) I did not like one of my classes very much when ... because… c) The best class for me is the one which….

All the researchers were involved in the recruitment of the participants and each of them was responsible for interviewing about 4-5 EFL teachers. In order for the participants to communicate their ideas more accurately and in detail, the interviews were all conducted in Persian, i.e., the first language of the participants. Each semi-structured interview lasted from 30-45 minutes and, with the permission of the participants, was audio-recorded for further analysis. During the interviews, the interviewer used open-ended questions and encouraged the participants to freely express their opinions about the most effective aspects of their teaching based on their own teaching experiences in their classes.

As the interview questions were written in accordance with the CoI theoretical framework of this study, the participants were asked to elaborate on the most effective aspect of their teaching in relation to the three interrelated elements from the framework, i.e., the SP, CP, and TP in the higher education experience. To illustrate how information about SP was elicited, the participants were asked the following question: 'How do you encourage a sense of rapport, community, and group spirit in your classes?' The questions were asked with the aim of understanding the most effective components of the EFL teachers' teaching.

Data analysis

Since one of the main aims of the researchers was to arrive at codes and themes that could comprehensively and accurately represent the effective teaching components, the data collected for this study were analyzed following the procedures of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, subsequent to the data transcription stage, the researchers read the transcriptions repeatedly, to become familiarized with the data. Next, initial codes were assigned to the preliminary list of ideas and responses. The researchers who were involved in codifying and categorizing the data were all Iranian language teaching practitioners. The fact that they were all English language teachers having the experience of working in higher education, positioned them as individuals familiar with the peculiarities of the EFL classrooms and the codes and themes that emerged from the data through the lens of the CoI.

As for the categorization of the data, following the manual color-coding procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the extracted codes were assigned three color-codes: TP, SP, and CP. In this regard, we developed codes in accordance with the elements of the CoI. For instance, the participants' ideas about their most effective teaching skills concerning initiating discussions, giving clear instructions, providing detailed feedback, and motivating students' active collaboration were categorized as the TP. The participants' shared ideas and examples of the effective component of their teaching associated with creating a sense of rapport, community, and/or group spirit in their classes represented the SP. Finally, the teachers' remarks on the most impactful element of their teaching, in relation to promoting meaningful learning and critical thinking in their students as well as engaging their students in thinking and brainstorming activities, were categorized as the CP elements.

At the final stage, to ensure the trustworthiness and the quality of the findings, we adopted a form of respondent validation approach, i.e., interviewee transcript review (ITR). As some of the interviewees had declared that they would like to understand how their remarks would be used for our research purposes, a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their answers was sent to them to be read and reviewed in terms of the accuracy of interpretation of their remarks.

In accordance with ethical guidelines and to ensure the ethical considerations of conducting research with human participants, the interviewers informed the participating

EFL teachers about the purpose of the study, their rights to confidentiality, and the anonymity of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study and filling in the narrative forms. Additionally, as some of the interviewees had declared that they would like to understand how their remarks would be used for our research purposes, a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their answers was sent to them to be read and reviewed, following a respondent validation approach, i.e., interviewee transcript review (ITR) (Rowlands, 2021), participants were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the transcription and interpretation of their remarks.

Findings

Data analysis revealed a number of sub-themes that emerged under the three levels of the present study underpinning the CoI theoretical framework, namely cognitive, social, and pedagogical elements that were considered to be the components of effective teaching from teachers' points of view. The elements are thematically represented in Figure 1, and in each theme, three sub-themes emerged, which include a number of components influencing teaching. These components will be discussed in turn.

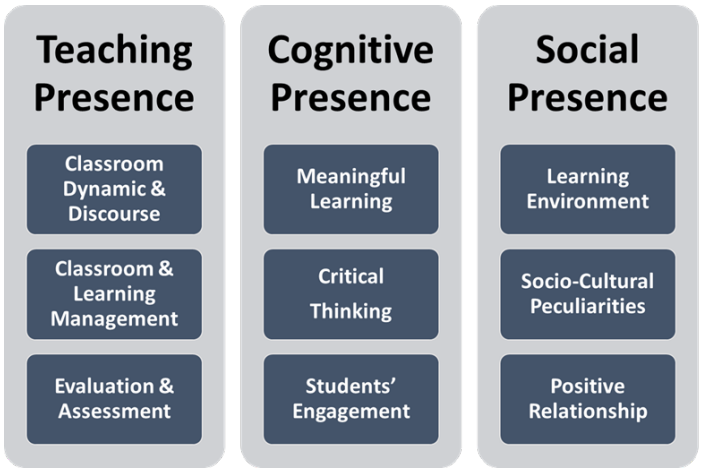

Figure 1. Thematic representation of effective teaching components from CoI perspective.

Teaching presence

Regarding teaching presence (TP), three sub-themes emerged from the data. The first sub-theme was classroom dynamic and discourse, which included components such as reducing teacher talking time (TTT), preparedness and adaptability, and presenting clear instruction checking questions (ICQs). T1 explained that engaging students in thinking and brainstorming activities encourages them to speak more in class and participate more often, which reduces TTT as a result. Moreover, T11 asserted that the elements of preparedness and adaptability are of great importance in teaching effectively. She stated in her interview:

> I always try to be prepared for my classes, even the ones with fixed syllabuses which I have taught before. In addition, I try to design warm-up activities and present the lesson based on the learners' characteristic traits and their proficiency level in the class. (T11, Interview)

Giving clear and precise instructions was also considered to be a key component of effective teaching. T10 addressed this point by admitting there were times that her students "felt unconfident and lower than the class educational level" (T10, Interview) because they could not follow the activities through the course. However, T12 stated in her interview that clear and precise instruction delivery is not always effective, especially in classes with negligent students. T5's interview confirmed T12's experience, but she (T5) stated that "although there are always some students who do the activities wrong, by providing clear instructions we can be assured that the majority will do the exercises correctly" (T5, Interview).

The second sub-theme of TP was classroom and learning management. Having a clear and standard syllabus and framework, practical teaching, and using audiovisual aids related to the lesson content were among the important components of the second sub-theme. T14 explained that one of the most effective elements of teaching successfully is following a clear syllabus. He wrote in his narrative:

> The class that I didn't like very much was my senior class at … university where the syllabus and method did not match the level of the students, so the learners' motivation gradually disappeared and I was also worn out. The syllabus and content should also be in accordance with the level of the students in that no student feels afraid of making mistakes. (T14, Narrative Frame)

While T4 confirmed T14's opinion, she also added that giving a clear and fixed syllabus to students in advance helped them "to be prepared for specific tasks related to each session" (T4, Interview). Furthermore, T3 mentioned the idea of teaching "practically with techniques as opposed to merely explaining the theories" to the students (T3, Interview). She argued that in order to learn more effectively, students can benefit from different techniques such as "knowing how to use a dictionary correctly or how to improve their listening through songs and music" (T3, Interview). As the last factor, the idea of using audiovisual aids was introduced by T15 and she asserted that it could enhance students' understanding if it is relevant specifically to the lesson content. (T15, Interview)

The last sub-theme of TP was evaluation and assessment, which brought giving feedback and regular quizzes and assessments into the spotlight. According to T14, giving precise feedback was a crucial part of the class, especially for productive tasks. He stated that it helped students to know their errors and receive specific solutions to correct them. T2 also mentioned the significance of feedback in the class in a narration:

> The best class is the one in which I have my best performance; for example, I make students as active as possible or give them enough chances to speak so I can provide feedback on their vocabulary use and grammatical accuracy. (T2, Narrative Frame)

While T13 agreed with the importance of giving precise feedback in class, she emphasized that it should be conducted correctly. She explained that teachers should present feedback that is "true and real", as comments that are "excessively positive" may negatively affect the students' learning (T13, Interview).

Having regular quizzes and assessments was another effective component in students' evaluation. Two of the teachers stated that for the teaching phase to be effective, it needs to be followed by assessment. T8 believed that the monthly quizzes which he gave his students were effective in their learning. In addition, T2 asserted that "especially after teaching vocabulary", she tested students' learning by giving them tests and quizzes (T2, Interview).

Cognitive presence

Cognitive presence (CP) included three sub-themes. The first sub-theme, meaningful learning, was defined by using brainstorming techniques, deep and long-term learning, and having real-life examples. Eight teachers referred to the brainstorming technique as an effective way to activate students' previous schemata. T15 explained that "connecting the previous content with the new content and drawing a comparison between them is of significant importance, especially in teenagers' classes and in teaching grammar" (T15, Interview). T7 added to this point by expressing "My students can engage in brainstorming in groups as it encourages collaboration and group work" (T7, Interview). It was also mentioned by T9 as "an enjoyable learning experience" (T9, Interview) for her students when she asked them to think about something and share their ideas.

Deep and long-term learning was another component in defining the meaningful learning sub-theme. T6 mentioned in his interview that "when the students learn new lessons and relate them to their real-life experiences, the things they learn last longer and are better learned" (T6, Interview). T12, however, believed that students' age plays a crucial role in deep and meaningful learning. She explained that for older learners and higher levels, it could be easier to relate the new content to students' previous knowledge.

The last component of meaningful learning was having real-life examples in the class. This was pointed out by T6, who stated in his interview that "When I am teaching new words or structures, I ask my students to bring real-life example sentences, which I find to be more effective than reading the examples in the book" (T6, Interview). T14 additionally believed that when the new content is related to students' real lives, it becomes more meaningful and instills a sense of confidence in them to believe they can use the language learned in the real world.

Critical thinking was the second sub-theme of CP, which comprised two components, namely discussion on both cliché and controversial topics and encouraging students' production and participation at higher levels. Seven teachers agreed that discussion on different topics for critical thinking worked better with learners of higher education levels. T15 explained in her interview:

> Critical thinking begins at the pre-teaching phase. Students are asked to think about a topic and express their opinions which is highly dependent on their age. It means that students with higher knowledge of the language and the world participate in critical activities more than less proficient and younger learners. With younger students, we merely expect yes or no answers and a couple of sentences to discuss at this phase. (T15, Interview)

T4 added that sometimes, especially at lower levels, she helped the students with "activating the initial idea in their minds" so that they had something to discuss (T4, Interview). It was also emphasized by T11 that discussion and critical thinking are more beneficial to intermediate and advanced learners to boost production in speaking activities specifically. She continued in her interview:

> Introducing thought-provoking topics is effective when students' speaking level is appropriate and sufficient. In fact, presenting controversial topics that are trendy in students' daily lives can enhance their participation in discussion, which eventually leads to more practice and most probably better learning. (T11, Interview)

While confirming the ideas above, T2 believed that not only controversial topics but also discussion could be boosted because of raising the topics of "daily cliché in students' lives" (T2, Interview). She continued "Because it is related to daily life, everybody has something to share and there are always some opinions that differ from others regarding life stereotypes which could boost discussion and engagement" (T2, Interview).

The last sub-theme of CP was students' engagement which consisted of two significant components, namely, having motivated students and having creative activities in the class. T4 wrote in her narrative frame:

> The best class I had was IELTS classes because students are active and motivated, so there is no need to persuade them to learn more and more. You do your job, and it is up to them to study or not. I did not like one of my elementary classes very much. The reason is that they lacked motivation and discipline. The best class for me is the one in which I can work on IELTS speaking. It helps me broaden more knowledge about various topics and students enjoy it as well. (T4, Narrative Frame)

T1 and T10 both confirmed the idea in their narrative frames. They mentioned that students' motivation and 'eagerness' are among the key factors for their engagement in the class. T10 narrated:

> The best class I had was the one which was three months long and we worked on *Mindset for IELTS* book 2. It was the best because almost all of the students were motivated to study hard and engage in the activities for the entire 35 sessions. They were really eager to learn and take part in discussions. (T10, Narrative Frame)

T14 added creativity as an important factor in teaching effectively and engaging students in class. He mentioned in his interview that "creativity should be within the order and framework of the class" in order to be effective (T14, Interview). T1 also explained in her interview:

> Having a creative learning environment is of great importance. Because it enables students to use the language as a tool for communication so that they can engage in class activities instead of focusing on learning the language directly, which can be less interesting or exciting. (T1, Interview)

Social presence

Social presence (SP), which is the last theme of our framework, also comprised three sub-themes: the learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationships. Regarding the first sub-theme, learning environment, two components were found: creating a safe and encouraging learning environment, and defining classroom norms. Thirteen teachers in the study mentioned the importance of creating a safe and encouraging learning environment. T1 stated that having team activities is a necessary component of a safe learning space. T5 confirmed and addressed the issue in her interview:

> When my students make mistakes while doing teamwork, I try to show that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process and there is no shame in that. Moreover, I encourage them to not only learn from their own mistakes but also from their partners' mistakes. (T5, Interview)

T8 mentioned the importance of setting classroom norms to have a successful learning environment. He illustrated this by saying "When I set clear norms for my classes, students expect each other to respect the norms as members of a small community. Because, you know, every community has some rules" (T8, Interview). T1 also believed in the importance of having classroom norms, as she wrote in her narrative form 'The best class for me is the one which the students are eager to learn and also they are punctual' (T1, Narrative Frame).

Socio-cultural peculiarities are the second sub-theme of SP, which includes comparing teaching methods, teaching unsuitable classes, and financial satisfaction. T5 posited that in order to have a successful teaching experience, it was crucial to have students' respect and trust. She wrote in her narrative form:

> I didn't like the classes in which students compared my method of teaching with their previous teacher's, even though that method seemed awkward, and asked or expected me to do the same! The best class is the class in which students trust me and see the beneficial effects of my teaching method! (T5, Narrative Form)

T10 additionally stated that it is significantly important that we teach the appropriate class based on our potential. She narrated:

> I didn't like the first class I had. It wasn't suitable for me. As the first class, I shouldn't have had an adult class with three grown-up men when I was only 22 and had no idea how to manage the class! Also, they had to be prepared for the PTE exam in 40 days and I didn't know a thing about it, so, they would ask me a lot of questions that I wasn't able to answer. (T10, Narrative Frame)

Financial satisfaction was another influential factor in a successful teaching experience addressed by T12. She addressed the point in her interview by saying 'If teachers have career and financial satisfaction, they can reduce the number of their classes. Consequently, they will have more time to prepare educational material, which eventually results in having a more effective teaching experience' (T12, Interview).

The last sub-theme of SP was a positive relationship. It was defined by a significant code which was encouraging rapport in the class. Encouraging rapport was expressed by 10 teachers participating in the study. T6 asserted that "I always try to be friends with my students and when they say something wrong or make mistakes, I calmly correct them. I don't like to be so serious about it" (T6, Interview). T13 considered "having a good rapport" as one of the most important elements of her teaching (T13, Interview). T14 added that 'the amount of rapport depends on teachers' characteristics, but it is really important to create some levels of personal connections with the students, which is beyond the class level' (T14, Interview). While none of the teachers denied the crucial role of having rapport in the class, T3 mentioned that it could be unachievable in some circumstances which could make a course less fruitful. She explained in her interview:

> Encouraging rapport is very difficult as I am a foreigner who doesn't share the same L1 with the children at school. So, it seems that students do not like this idea and tend not to listen to me most of the time, especially during group activities. It prevents me from performing the task properly as they don't seem to like to follow my instructions. (T3, Interview)

However, she tried to find alternative ways to create rapport in her classes. She stated "I understood that they enjoy watching videos in the class and become extremely happy when I play videos for them. Therefore, I used the idea to encourage some amount of positive relationship between us" (T3, Interview).

Discussion

As a response to a view of teaching which considers it a multifaceted issue (Ko et al., 2013) and not simply transferring information from one person to the other, multilayer analytical frameworks are brought into the spotlight, one of which is the Community of Inquiry (CoI). This framework was adopted in the present study in order to identify the underlying elements of effective teaching from teachers' perspectives, which comprised social, teaching, and cognitive components (Garrison & Akyol, 2013). The novelty

of this study lies in its attempt to apply this framework to face-to-face education, considering that it was originally proposed for an online one. Each component and sub-theme in this study helps understand the CoI framework per se in the context of language education. These findings can assure the readers of how these CoI elements are fruitful in increasing the desired outcome of language classes.

Our findings elucidate teachers' perceptions of what makes their teaching effective through the CoI framework. From the TP aspect of CoI, classroom dynamic and discourse, classroom and learning management, and evaluation and assessment were highlighted by the participants. Not only are these findings identified by the participants of this study, but also the effectiveness of these components and their constituents (e.g. exam-oriented teaching and preparedness) have been affirmed by numerous studies (Alzeebaree & Hassan, 2021; Ko et al., 2013; Tajeddin & Kamali, 2023; Tavakoli & Baniasad-Azad, 2016; Walker, 2008). For example, overuse of TTT is considered inappropriate because the more a teacher talks, the less chance there is for the students to practice their own speaking (Tajeddin & Kamali, 2020). Therefore, the findings of this study reveal that teachers can boost their performance by paying closer attention to techniques and principles underlying the TP such as conducting regular quizzes at the end of each chapter or by providing clearer instructions. Meaningful learning, critical thinking, and student engagement were sub-themes of CP that emerged from the data to be the most effective components in the cognitive aspects of effective teaching. These results corroborate the findings of numerous researchers (Chen, 2007; Saleh, 2019; Yang & Gamble, 2013) that confirm the effectiveness of techniques and approaches, such as encouraging critical thinking, that form these principles. In life, there will be situations where people should make important decisions or give responses to complex situations and questions. Without promoting critical thinking in classrooms, learners may not be able to address these situations effectively enough to succeed in an L2 community. Kamali (2014, 2021, 2023) posited that teacher metamorphosis (transforming a teacher – or a teacher trainer – to a material designer, assessor, and critical thinker) is a path toward effective teaching; the concept that this study further confirms. This study could add to this concept arguing that teacher metamorphosis is not only needed in online learning but also seems essential considering that there are new skills in the contemporary world that teachers should attain urgently and critically such as digital literacy, multicultural and multilingual peculiarities, global representations and the like. There are also three main elements in the SP of effective teaching including learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationship. The findings of this study on this theme are in line with previous studies (Davis, 2001; Hainsworth et al., 2023; Javahery & Kamali, 2023; Martin & Collie, 2019) which argued that positive relationships can enhance the experience of learning and teaching. This research contributes to the existing pool of knowledge arguing that teachers' positive attitude towards supportive relationship with students also facilitates this process. The fact that most participants considered establishing a good rapport with learners as an effective element in their classrooms emphasizes the importance of psychological and affective factors that may not be assessed directly, i.e. rapport and good relationships with learners cannot be measured in numbers but can be deduced implicitly by the success rate of learners. Furthermore, sociocultural peculiarities, like teacher job and pay satisfaction, have been also proven to have a positive correlation with teaching performance (Kamali & Nazari, 2023). This is not a new finding, however, since previous studies on management and organizational behavior have already discussed it for years (Currall et al., 2005; Jinyevu, 2013; Kavalić et al., 2023).

Unlike previous studies (Alzeebaree & Hassan, 2021; Ko et al., 2013; Nel & Muller, 2010), the findings of this study did not count English proficiency (subject knowledge) as an important effective teaching element since it was absent in the responses given by the participants of our study. Tsang (2017) argues that although English proficiency is a major effective factor in language teaching, other teaching components become more important once a certain level of language proficiency is achieved. Therefore, the reason for not stating language proficiency as an effective element of teaching may be that the participants had crossed that threshold so other skills became more prominent in their view. That is, the extensive knowledge of a teacher in General English, surpassing that of typical language instructors, may not significantly impact a student. This shows there may be more important factors such as emotional and social factors (e.g., rapport) which can have a greater impact on learners. Therefore, this study implies the superiority of SP over TP components.

The inclusiveness of our study is one of its novel qualities as it scrutinizes the elements of effective teaching from multiple aspects of the CoI framework in face-to-face education which can provide teachers and teacher educators the opportunity to prepare more effectively for this mode of classes and workshops.

Conclusion

Our research contributes to deepening teachers' understanding of effective elements that can be used in classrooms in order to enhance learning outcomes in language classrooms. The CoI framework employed in this project helped us to analyze effective language teaching components in a broader scope including not only teaching but also social and psychological (cognitive) factors affecting the process of language teaching and learning. Thematic analysis on the data with an eye on the underpinning theoretical framework of the study (CoI) revealed nine sub-themes in different CoI themes: classroom dynamic & discourse, classroom & learning management, and evaluation and assessment in TP; meaningful learning, critical thinking, and students' engagement in CP; and learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationship in SP.

Three groups of scholars can benefit from the findings of this study, namely teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers. Teachers, first, may deepen their understanding of effective teaching by delving into the results of this study and comparing it with their own classroom experiences. This can be done by teachers asking themselves questions regarding

any of the components of this study. For example, "Am I using effective classroom management techniques?" or "How can I reduce TTT in my classes and encourage my students to produce and practice the target language more in a purposeful manner in a context similar to that of a native L2 community?". Second, teacher educators can design CoI-informed courses for teachers that deal with different aspects of teaching, curriculum and syllabus design, and assessment rather than sticking to older theories and traditional techniques. Thereby, teachers who learn CoI-based teaching techniques may automatically produce better outcomes, since those techniques have been identified as more effective, especially with a consideration of learners' cognitive and affective factors, as opposed to their older counterparts. Finally, policymakers can apply the results of this study in their strategic planning and education to facilitate the process of effective teaching through means such as adapting the coursebooks and their topics, providing digital equipment for classrooms, and educating pre-service and in-service teachers about effective teaching.

A promising avenue for future research lies in different ways to improve teachers' capabilities in each area or elicit more elements of effective teaching from teachers in various educational contexts in different cultures. Besides, using modern computer-mediated tools and software such as Nvivo, MAXQDA, etc. may further help in providing more robust data analysis. This is especially beneficial when there is a larger pool of participants, replicating the study with which, may enlighten teachers and researchers more about effective teaching techniques. It would also be useful to investigate the ways through which governments and education authorities can facilitate implementing these criteria in a nationwide scope.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- In your opinion, what are the most effective elements of your teaching?
- What do you think about the impact of teaching styles and strategies on the success of your sessions?
- What do you think about the impact of learners' cognitive abilities on the success of your sessions?
- What do you think about the impact of sociocultural issues on the success of your sessions?
- How can promoting meaningful learning and critical thinking of your students make your teaching effective?
- What are the potential effects of engaging students in thinking and brainstorming activities in your classes? Why is it effective/ineffective?
- How do you encourage a sense of rapport, community, and group spirit in your classes? What do you think would be the effects of them?
- What are the effects of the following teaching skills in your classes? Initiating discussions, giving clear instructions, providing detailed feedback, and motivating students' active collaboration. How do these skills affect the quality of your teaching?
- Are there any other strategies you employ to allow your students to benefit from your teaching even more effectively? Please explain.

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Embedded tutors: Enhancing student success and academic integrity with a pedagogy of kindness in first-year university

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Abstract

Recent disruptions to higher education, including generative artificial intelligence, have highlighted an increased need for student support, particularly to enable a smooth transition in first-year university. The timing and the tone of support are critical. Here, content expert tutors were embedded in 24 first-year units to provide one-on-one draft assessment feedforward. Tutors received training on using the principle of the pedagogy of kindness; showing concern, compassion and empathy when interacting with students, and raising academic misconduct concerns. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of employing a pedagogy of kindness in tutor sessions on preventing academic integrity issues. Of the 704 draft assessments submitted, 51 students (7%) engaged in a discussion regarding academic integrity. Of these 51 students, 45 students passed their unit and only one required further investigation for academic misconduct. Tutors proactively contacted students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit. At-risk students who met with a tutor were more likely to pass their subject and achieved a higher average cumulative mark (51% vs 41%, $p<0.05$). In this paper, we evaluate how tutors providing a pedagogy of kindness increased meaningful learning and student success when incorporating cognitive presence. A responsive strategy using this pedagogical approach was implemented to address the increased use of generative artificial intelligence tools and to decrease the incidence of student academic misconduct.

Introduction

The Australian government is working on major tertiary education reforms via the Australian Universities Accord (Department of Education of Australian Government, February 21, 2024). As part of the reforms, the government is introducing new legislative requirements for higher education providers. Australian universities must produce and comply with a Support for Students Policy. The policy requires universities to have support in place to enable students to complete their studies successfully and to identify at-risk students. In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and students experienced a rapid shift to online study; parallelled by student support services being accessible online. Online learning poses significant challenges for students as they can feel isolated and disconnected. Students often feel disempowered, demotivated, marginalised, and anxious, and these feelings negatively impact their learning (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Lesoski, 2022). The pedagogy of kindness in student interactions can mitigate these feelings and support students' wellbeing (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Mindfulness and cognitive presence help students to feel connected and promote meaningful learning, as humanisation in education promotes student well-being (Tan, 2022).

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have the potential to significantly disrupt the higher education sector. Australian universities are required to submit a 'credible action plan' to mitigate the risk of the use of generative and other AI in higher education (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA]). Generative artificial intelligence tools (GAIT), such as ChatGPT, use large language models which generate text that can appear human-like (Cotton et al., 2023). Natural language processing is employed to create content tailored to prompts (Elkhatat et al., 2023). Automated paraphrasing tools suggest changes to text to improve aspects of the writing, such as grammar and spelling. Tools are becoming more sophisticated as natural language processing advances in technology occur (Roe & Perkins, 2022). As the number of students who use GAIT and automated paraphrasing tools to shape written work continues to rise (Cotton et al., 2023; Roe & Perkins, 2022), the next challenge in higher education is adapting to the use of GAIT by university students. With all new technologies and GAIT available at their fingertips, the question becomes: how can we support students to make ethical and informed choices to avoid breaching academic integrity, particularly in their first year of university? We argue that a focus on transformative and preventative strategies is needed for effective learning and addressing academic integrity issues, including the use of GAIT or plagiarism.

A pedagogy of kindness in teaching positively influences student learning and enhances student engagement. Students who feel connected are more receptive to advice and guidance and more likely to respond effectively without their confidence being negatively impacted (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Stephens, 2021). When addressing sensitive issues such as academic integrity, students can comprehend the significance of academic misconduct more effectively when they are in a safe and respectful environment. Therefore, a focus on a pedagogy of kindness and creating a safe space for proactive and open dialogue to occur contributes to a positive experience and promotes academic integrity. However, courage is required when discussing sensitive or difficult issues with students with the goal of providing truthful and actionable feedback (Clegg & Rowland, 2010). In the case that a student did not breach academic integrity, it is prudent to exercise caution when providing guidance. This approach takes into consideration any inadvertent academic misconduct, and other circumstances students can encounter that may warrant further discussion or support.

At a regional Australian university, the cross-faculty Embedded Tutor Program was established in 2021. Tutors provide one-on-one support for students enrolled in first-year units to improve student success (Linden et al., 2022). In the second semester of 2023, a Turnitin draft submission portal was created for 24 units in which students could submit their draft assessment for the tutor to review prior to and during a tutoring session. In this study, we identify an opportunity for embedded support to facilitate a supportive, meaningful, and kind dialogue regarding any academic integrity issues identified using Turnitin. The prominent pedagogical approach used by the embedded tutors in addressing suspected breaches of academic integrity in the preparation of written assessments is a pedagogy of kindness. This pedagogical approach was implemented to reduce incidences of academic misconduct.

Literature review

Pedagogy of kindness and cognitive presence

Kindness is a human value that has been identified as being important in education for student well-being and effective learning (Mackay, 2021; Tan, 2022). A pedagogy of kindness is a teaching philosophy that is increasingly valued in education literature (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021; Stephens, 2021) as it fosters a supportive learning environment and enhances student wellbeing and success. Interestingly, Willard (1929) introduced the concept of kindness in teaching nearly a century ago. However, the focus on kindness in education has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Key tenets of a pedagogy of kindness involve showing concern for the students' situation, caring for them as individuals, compassion for challenges they may be facing, and empathy and understanding for their learning journey when interacting with students. Kindness involves the tutor demonstrating these personal attributes in conjunction with professional attributes of knowledge sharing and guidance. The need for kindness extends beyond the pandemic to consideration of student diversity, current situational issues and emotional needs as students may be carers, working, and/or living in geographically remote areas (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021).

A pedagogy of kindness can have improved efficacy when the teacher demonstrates cognitive presence in the learning interaction using active listening. The importance of teacher presence, particularly in online learning, has been well established and involves the teacher visually and mentally participating in the discussion (Garrison, 2017). Hearing any

concerns or challenges that are creating barriers to learning validates the student's contribution and self-worth (Aspland & Fox, 2022). Connectedness and creating a partnership in learning are vital for student engagement, wellbeing, and success, and are crucial when implementing a pedagogy of kindness (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021; Aspland & Fox, 2022). Kindness, by allowing a student to talk, provides time for the student to voice their concerns, challenges, and/or learning needs. Acknowledging the student's voice enables the student to feel connected and be an important partner in the learning process (Maharaj, 2022). Addressing the students' concerns allows them to focus on learning (Lodge et al., 2018).

The language used and feedback provided should be positive and actionable. Positive affirmation of the effort the student has put into their work prior to discussing areas for improvement recognises their contribution and builds trust (Prochazka et al., 2020). Using kind language to then identify areas for improvement encourages a compassionate and safe learning experience. Providing positive feedback leads to more meaningful learning experiences bolstering student's confidence (Prochazka et al., 2020; Teakel et al., 2023). As the growing body of literature supports the importance of incorporating empathy, compassion, kindness, and cognitive presence in teaching to enhance the student experience, adopting these elements in higher education tutoring programs will also positively impact the student experience and student success.

Feedforward and feedback

Assessment feedback is one of the few opportunities in higher education to provide a personalised experience to cater for individual student learning (Karunanayake, 2022). Targeted and personalised feedback is highly motivating; increasing students' confidence and performance (Teakel et al., 2023). Feedback provided post-assessment submission is most effective when it is individualised and timely (Kift, 2015). To effectively impact learning and improve feedback literacy, ideally, feedback should not be provided at the same time as grades are released. Feedback should be provided for students in their time of need during the teaching period. This allows both for the development of feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) and feedforward to subsequent assessments (Court, 2014; Hendry et al., 2016). Feedforward on assessments enables students to scaffold their learning as they progress through the unit, and providing support early in the unit allows students to improve their academic abilities (Sadler et al., 2023). However, students require more than written feedback to feel supported. Students require cognitive presence and human connection to facilitate meaningful learning from the feedback (Aspland & Fox, 2022).

Tutoring programs that increase students' access to meaningful feedback can benefit both students and tutors (Burgess et al., 2016; Williams & Fowler, 2014). As the number of students who use GAIT continues to rise (Cotton et al., 2023; Roe & Perkins, 2022), the role of the tutor in educating and supporting students to avoid engaging in academic misconduct is imperative. Students begin to develop feedback literacy at the beginning of their year of study. However, teacher feedback literacy in providing valuable feedback for students is equally as important (Boud & Dawson, 2023) and effective feedback on assessments can increase student engagement with feedback (Henderson et al., 2021). Therefore, training lecturers and tutors in the delivery of feedback and teaching pedagogies is crucial for effective feedback for students. Sustainable feedforward on assessments increases feedback literacy as well as supports students in developing good study practices and self-efficacy (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Court, 2014; Hendry et al., 2016). We propose that early interventions such as embedding tutors to provide draft assessment feedforward in first-year units will likely improve students' feedback literacy early in the transition to university.

Academic integrity and mitigating the inappropriate use of GAIT

Academic integrity is an issue for higher education institutions (Hodgkinson et al., 2016; Kasneci et al., 2023; Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). Plagiarism has traditionally been and still is a prominent concern. Student engagement in academic misconduct is influenced by internal or external pressures and associated negative emotions, and this is more evident in cases of opportunistic academic misconduct (Hodgkinson et al., 2016). External stressors, such as family pressure, can increase student vulnerability to engage in contract cheating (Selemani et al., 2018). In addition, studies have shown that students at risk of engaging in academic misconduct are influenced by both their motivation to learn and their satisfaction with support services (Rundle et al., 2023). Here lies an opportunity to improve student motivation to learn, offer support that has a positive impact on the student experience, and ultimately reduce the risk of students engaging in academic misconduct. In recent years, students have perpetually engaged in activities that breach academic integrity in higher education. However, just as higher education institutions were making strides in understanding and mitigating the incidence of academic misconduct, a notable development emerged: GAIT.

As the prevalence of GAIT continues to increase in higher education, it presents a conundrum for universities regarding assurance of academic integrity standards (Sullivan et al., 2023). Concerns have been raised across the higher education sector regarding the use of GAIT by students in the preparation of assessments (Cotton et al., 2023). The use of GAIT is discouraged both to promote equity for students and to avoid 'cheating' to maintain academic standards (Sullivan et al., 2023). In addition, GAIT has been demonstrated to 'hallucinate' and provide inaccurate or nonsensical information (Ji et al., 2023). The use of GAIT can be detected using tools such as the Turnitin AI detection tool (Afuro & Mutanga, 2021). However, shortly after a tool for detecting GAIT is made available, the developers make further improvements, and the GAIT is once again undetectable. It is, therefore, challenging for universities to detect GAIT, and the accuracy and reliability of detectors of GAIT have been called into question (Elkhatat et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). In addition, the consequences of incorrectly interrogating a student for the inappropriate use of GAIT

are alarming and potentially devastating for the student. For example, GAIT detectors have been found to incorrectly identify text as AI-generated with a negative bias for students who have English as an additional language (EAL) (Liang et al., 2023). Potential causes of marginalisation of non-native English speakers need to be eliminated before the use of GAIT detection should be implemented at scale in higher education institutions.

The traditional approach to addressing academic misconduct is negative feedback, and punitive and unsympathetic measures, contributing to fearful learning environments (Young et al., 2018). The student is often required to prove that they have not engaged in academic misconduct or to admit culpability. Existing literature calls for preventative strategies to address academic integrity issues in higher education to enable transformative student learning (Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). We propose that 'a carrot is more effective than a stick'; students who are provided with preventative education and alternative support (carrot) benefit more than those who experience the punitive repercussion (stick) that results from an academic misconduct allegation and investigation.

We hypothesise that improved cognitive presence and a pedagogy of kindness in tutoring can positively impact meaningful learning and student success. Kindness can provide a safe and compassionate environment for student learning of sensitive issues such as academic integrity and AI misuse. In this study, we evaluate if this pedagogical approach is beneficial when providing feedforward on assessments in the first year and in facilitating a preventative strategy for addressing academic integrity issues.

Methodology

The theoretical perspective for this study is derived from situativity learning theory, where learning is influenced by the student's situation (socially and culturally) and is positioned in the student's experience (Durning & Artino, 2011). The environment created for the learning has a unique contribution to the learning. Kindness pedagogy considers the student's situation, any challenges they may be experiencing and provides a safe and compassionate learning space (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Social constructivism as a research paradigm enables interpretation of the student experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which was the aim of the study when researching if kindness enables a meaningful learning experience whilst discussing academic integrity issues.

Training on a pedagogy of kindness in tutoring

Tutors involved in the program at the University were provided with training regarding the effective use of technology, teaching pedagogies, and tone of voice when interacting with students. Tutors were advised to support students based on relevant teaching pedagogies and theories, such as transition pedagogy (Kift, 2015) and the pedagogy of kindness (Aspland & Fox, 2022). Tutors were encouraged to contact their supervisor or the unit coordinator if they were unsure of how to address a concern with a student. The following resources were developed to support the embedded tutors: (i) a training session (or recording) on the use of the Turnitin submission portal, (ii) a training session (or recording) regarding identifying student academic misconduct and strategies for addressing academic integrity with students, and (iii) a quick reference guide for tutors on accessing and marking up assessments in Turnitin.

Draft assessment feedback

Within the Learning Management System (LMS), a portal (Turnitin) was embedded in the tutor link for students to submit a draft assessment. This was in addition to the portal in which students submit their final assessment. All students could submit their assessment via the draft assessment submission portal. There was no limit on the number of times a student could submit their assessment via this portal. No data was stored from these submissions to ensure that there was no positive match with the final assessment submission. No grade value was assigned to the draft submission, and the draft did not contribute to the final cumulative unit grade. Introducing the draft portals required planning during the onboarding of academic teaching staff, as well as the set-up and training needs for tutors. Implementation involved adapting the approach in real-time to optimise the experience for both students and tutors.

In the second semester of 2023, tutors with subject-specific expertise were embedded in 29 first-year undergraduate units across the University. By selecting these units, approximately 70% of all commencing students at the University had access to a tutor, and the largest courses included nursing, education, and social work. One-on-one feedforward on draft assessments was available in a 2–3 weeks period prior to the due date of written assessment items. Students submitted their draft assessment through the Turnitin draft submission portal in 24 units. Five units with embedded tutors opted not to use Turnitin. The Turnitin AI detection tool was in use. Details of the Embedded Tutor Program were indicated to students in unit outlines and announcements made by the unit coordinator or embedded tutor in the LMS and/or online class times to normalise the use of all support available. Bookings were made using online scheduling (Calendly), and the tutor sessions were facilitated via Zoom.

Students were supported to evaluate their own work and identify strengths in their writing and were advised where key concepts or content understanding had not been demonstrated. They were also encouraged to support their writing with peer-reviewed rationale and guided to conduct literature searches. Students were often referred to other support services, such as the Academic Skills team or Library Services, for assistance with writing, paraphrasing, or referencing. In addition, students were able to make suggested improvements to their assessment before submitting the final version.

Enhancing academic integrity

When the aim of a tutor session was to discuss an academic integrity issue, the tutor worked through each area of concern with an educative approach and a pedagogy of kindness. Students were advised of alternative ways to support their peers without breaching academic integrity, such as discussing key concepts, booking a tutor session, using the discussion forum within the LMS, and sharing peer-reviewed journal articles.

Tutors could visualise both the Turnitin similarity score and the AI score when reviewing assessments. Students could only view the Turnitin similarity score and matching text. The Turnitin similarity score indicated aspects of the writing that are comparable to other writing that is found on the internet. The AI score indicated the confidence level of text being generated using GAIT. Students were not permitted to use GAIT to complete any part of their assessment, and the unit outline indicated that assessments must be entirely a student's own work. Therefore, a Turnitin similarity score and/or AI score above a certain percentage was considered a flag for a potential issue. If there was a flag evident, this prompted a non-accusative, educative, and supportive dialogue regarding the concerns raised relating to academic integrity. As the issues were identified and addressed in the drafting stage of assessment preparation, students were given the opportunity to implement changes based on the feedback provided by the embedded tutor. The details of conversations held with students regarding potential academic integrity issues were recorded in a data collection form completed by tutors at the end of each tutor session.

Targeted support for students

Targeted outreach was used to encourage students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit to access additional and prioritised support. The Retention Team worked closely with the unit coordinators to identify 366 students who were at risk of failing the unit due to lack of engagement or poor performance in a previous assessment item. Assessment marks and submission of assessments were monitored during the semester for all students who were enrolled in a unit with an embedded tutor. Assessment marks were accessed in the online grading platform (Grade Centre) within the LMS. Students who did not pass or received a borderline pass (55% or less of the total available marks) for an assessment were proactively contacted by an embedded tutor. Students were encouraged to book a tutor session before submitting a subsequent assessment and/or referred to other support services available at the University where appropriate. Where possible, students were provided with a phone call in which the embedded tutor was able to book a tutor session over the phone. When a phone call was not successful, students were sent an email that contained a link to the tutor booking page. An online form stored within the LMS was completed to capture the details of targeted outreach. Post-semester, the embedded tutors could meet with students with an additional assessment or regarding a failed assessment before resubmission to review feedback to increase the student's feedback literacy. Of the students identified as at risk of failing their unit who were proactively contacted and offered additional support, 46 students received a phone call from an embedded tutor, 316 students received an email, and 4 students received both a phone call and an email.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval for this study was received from the [University] Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Protocol Nos. H21170 & H22085) to analyse grade data as well as collect and evaluate feedback in online surveys from students, tutors, and lecturers.

Data analysis

The assessment marks and cumulative grades (out of 100) were downloaded from the grading platform (Grade Centre) within the LMS. All statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism version 9.5.1 (GraphPad Software, La Jolla, California, USA). Embedded tutors completed an online form stored within the LMS to capture the details of each tutor session. This form was used to match the students who met with an embedded tutor with student grades. A z-score test for two population proportions was conducted to determine the difference in pass rates for students who met with a tutor and those who did not. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

Feedback was collected from lecturers, tutors, and students who participated in the Embedded Tutor Program to record future improvements to the processes. The Tutor Program has previously undergone continuous improvements, particularly in providing training and support for tutors and targeted outreach and support of students at risk of failing their unit, as informed by feedback surveys. Students, tutors, and lecturers were provided with a link to access a voluntary, anonymous feedback survey only once at the end of the semester. Consent was obtained from all participants. The feedback survey for students consisted of seven sliding scale response questions and five short answer questions (see Table 1). The feedback survey for lecturers consisted of five short answer questions. The feedback survey for tutors consisted of five sliding scale response questions and five short answer questions. Responses from all participants were de-identified before analysis. An NVivo thematic qualitative analysis of the feedback was performed to identify themes in responses from students (n=157), tutors (n=28), and lecturers (n=18). Word clouds were generated using WordArt.com (California, USA) from unstructured responses from tutors and lecturers. Each word cloud displays 25 words. The size of each word is proportional to the number of times it was mentioned.

Results and discussion

Improved student experience and success

In the second semester of 2023, the Embedded Tutor Program offered students the opportunity to connect with embedded tutors who are content experts across the three

Table 1. Feedback survey questions.

Student feedback survey	Tutor feedback survey	Lecturer feedback survey
How engaging was your experience with an embedded tutor? (SS)	Did the use of Turnitin portal for draft assessment submissions reduce administration time? (SS)	How did the Embedded Tutors Program impact your academic workload? (SA)
How important was it that your embedded tutor had subject-specific knowledge? (SS)	Did using the Turnitin tool help evaluate the quality of the students' assessments? (SS)	What did you like most about the Embedded Tutors Program? (SA)
If available, how likely are you to rebook/book a tutor session with an embedded tutor in the future? (SS)	Was the Turnitin similarity score useful in providing an educative approach to support students? (SS)	In your opinion, what aspects of the Embedded Tutors Program could be improved, and how? (SA)
How was your experience submitting your assessment in the Turnitin draft portal? (SS)	Was the Turnitin AI score useful in providing an educative approach to support students? (SS)	Anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with an embedded tutor in your subject? (SA)
Were you able to use the feedback from Turnitin to improve your assessment? (SS)	Would you like to continue to use a tool to assist in evaluating the quality of assessments? (SS)	Could you please list the characteristics that you feel are important for an 'ideal' embedded tutor? (SA)
Did using Turnitin help you to evaluate the quality of your own work? (SS)	How did you use the feedback provided by Turnitin to support students? (SA)	
Did the tutor help you to understand your Turnitin similarity score and assessment quality? (SS)	Could you please list the characteristics that you feel are important for an 'ideal' embedded tutor? (SA)	
What prompted you to make a booking with an embedded tutor? (SA)	What did you like most about the Embedded Tutors Program? (SA)	
How useful was the feedback from Turnitin in preparing your assessment? (SA)	What aspects of the Embedded Tutor Program could be improved, and how? (SA)	
What did you like the most about the Embedded Tutor Program? (SA)	Anything else you would like to tell us about your experience as an embedded tutor? (SA)	
What aspects of the Embedded Tutor Program could be improved? (SA)		

Note. Two question types were used in the surveys: sliding scale (SS) and short answer question (SA).

faculties. In total, 846 students attended 1583 tutor sessions with 38 dedicated tutors. On average, 17% of students enrolled in a unit with an embedded tutor and met up with a tutor at least once during the semester. Several students met a tutor in more than one unit. Of the 157 students who responded to the feedback survey, 67% of students strongly agreed and 17% agreed with the statement 'My experience with an embedded tutor was engaging'. In addition, 85% of students agreed that 'The tutor session(s) exceeded my expectations for the type of academic support offered in first-year university'. As previously shown, there was a significant shift in the grade distribution of students who met with a tutor (Teakel et al., 2024). Students were less likely to receive zero-fail, fail or pass grades and more likely to receive credit, distinction, or high-distinction grades (Figure 1). Students who met with a tutor were significantly more likely to pass the unit (see Figure 2, 95% tutor and 77% no tutor; $p<0.05$) and had an average cumulative grade 13% higher than students who did not meet with a tutor. While acknowledging that not all students who accessed tutor support were at-risk, targeted outreach increased the number of at-risk students who accessed support, and it was not limited to high-achieving individuals. The authors have previously reported that embedded tutor support is more impactful for students from equity backgrounds (Teakel et al., 2023).

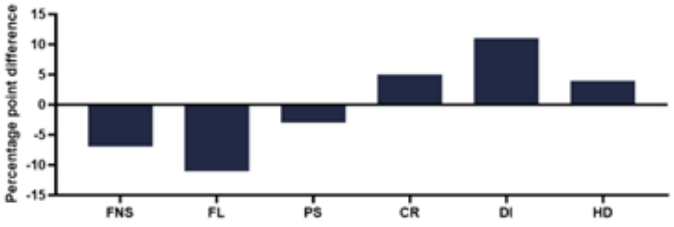

Figure 1. Percentage point difference in average grades of students who met with a tutor vs students who did not meet with a tutor.

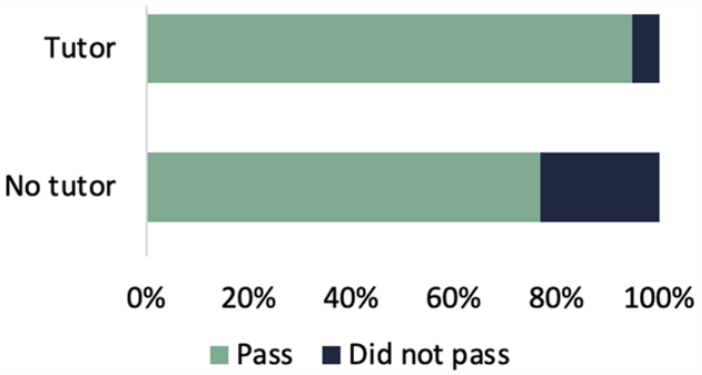

Figure 2. Percentage pass rates of students who met with a tutor (Tutor) vs students who did not meet with a tutor (No tutor), $p<0.05$.

Targeted support for students

As part of targeted outreach to support students, 366 students who were identified as at risk of failing their unit were proactively contacted and offered additional support. In total, 29 percent of students booked a tutor session and were significantly more likely to pass their unit (69 percent, $p<0.05$) and the average cumulative mark was a pass (51%). Of the remaining at-risk students who did not book a tutor session, 58 percent achieved a passing grade, and the average cumulative mark was a fail grade (41%). First-year design principles indicate a need for early response systems to identify students who appear to be disengaging through targeted communication regarding available support services (Kift, 2015). A systematic review found that targeted approaches can be effective, particularly when developed for first-year at-risk students (Eather et al., 2022). It is important when developing early response systems that they are explainable to students; for example, contacting students who have missed assessments has been shown to be successful (Linden et al., 2023). We propose that, where possible, universities should be contacting students who have failed an assessment early in their course and providing one-on-one support with a pedagogy of kindness.

Pedagogy of kindness

To address the research question, 'Can employing a pedagogy of kindness when providing feedforward on assessments in the first year enable a more meaningful and effective learning experience for students?', we evaluated feedback from students and tutors. This pedagogical approach, in which tutors approached students with curiosity and kindness, was also used to facilitate a preventative strategy for addressing academic integrity issues. One tutor described their approach as 'gentle questioning'. Students need to feel heard, safe, and supported with kindness when discussing sensitive issues such as academic abilities and academic integrity, as demonstrated by quotes below from students and tutors.

> "The effortless way they were able to assist me, and do it in a kind and considerate way." (S63)

> "I enjoyed the effective way feedback was given, and the fact that my tutor was engaging and kind." (S112)

"The flexibility to book times when I need it and the help the tutor gave me. There was no judgement about how much I did/didn't know or had done/not done in assignments. As someone with anxiety, this was very helpful with completing work." (S56)

"Being able to create a safe space where feedback doesn't sound like 'you've made a mistake' but sounds like 'here's where you could improve or better articulate this'. Being mindful of the vulnerability of students asking for help. Creating a space where you are equal with the student, meeting them as a person who is also on a learning journey." (T6)

"Being supportive and building student confidence. Let them know that they are not the only one struggling." (T17)

Students learn most effectively when both the tutor and the student are present and engaged (Aspland & Fox, 2022; Garrison, 2017). Establishing a sense of belonging and fostering a partnership in learning, contributes significantly to improved learning outcomes for students. By prioritising understanding, kindness, and interpersonal interactions, not only does student learning become more meaningful, but overall student wellbeing is also enhanced (Gorny-Wegrzyn, 2021). We propose that a pedagogy of kindness is the catalyst required to enhance the student experience and ensure that students get the most out of tutoring by being cognitively present in the learning process.

Facilitating meaningful interactions between tutors and students is contingent on understanding what success means to them. This personalised and nuanced approach to supporting students allowed tutors to recognise and celebrate what signifies success at an individual level. Tutors reflected on finding opportunities for "*understanding and celebrating success!*" (T2). We asked our tutors and lecturers, 'What are the ideal characteristics of an embedded tutor?' (see Figure 3). The responses from the perspective of tutors and lecturers who are involved in the Embedded Tutor Program demonstrate a contrast in perspectives, particularly relating to professional vs personal attributes.

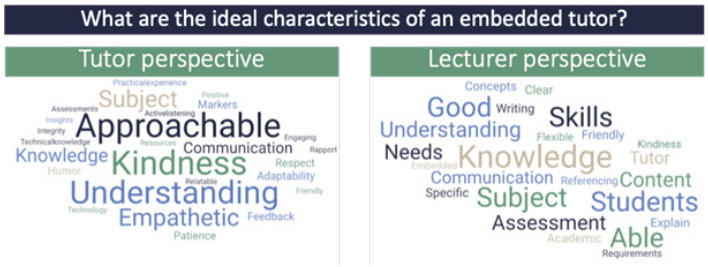

Figure 3. Word cloud of ideal characteristics of tutors generated using unstructured responses from tutors (left) and lecturers (right).

Tutors and lecturers demonstrated a shared value for certain tutor qualities that are realised due to the delivery of tutor sessions and Program design. For example, both tutors and lecturers acknowledged the importance of being flexible and adaptable in teaching style to support students as demonstrated in the quotes below. This individualised support is often not feasible in large classroom settings.

"Being adaptive and prepared to change through the learning styles to suit the situation. Build on the students' strengths." (T22)

"Flexible to cater for the needs of diverse learners." (L12)

The personal and professional attributes of a tutor can impact student engagement and success. In a recent study, tutors were shown to place a high value in professional characteristics such as timeliness, organisation, and communication; and, to lesser extent, personal attributes including patience, commitment, enthusiasm, empathy, and creativity (Alexander et al., 2022). The characteristics highlighted in this study were closely aligned with the key attributes identified by our tutors and lecturers. However, our embedded tutors placed greater emphasis on personal attributes such as being approachable, empathetic, and kind, and even having 'a sense of humour' as demonstrated in the quotes below.

"Empathy, listening to the student and what their needs are. Knowing how to discuss things in a variety of ways to suit individual learning styles." (T8)

"A compassionate approach to addressing students needs. Also, providing guidance that allows students to think for themselves and develop their opinions." (T10)

"Empathy and listening beyond words." (T28)

This shift in the pedagogical landscape demonstrates tutors prioritising personal attributes over instructional and authoritative guidance and is aligned with acknowledging the multifaceted and complex nature of student learning. Tutors can offer a more holistic educational experience by embracing human-centred connection rather than rigid conferral of knowledge. This requires further research into how empathy, compassion, and kindness impact the student experience and student success.

Similarly, while students were not explicitly asked what the ideal characteristics of an embedded tutor are, open-ended responses to the question 'What did you like most about the Embedded Tutor Program?' indicated that students valued the kindness, friendliness, approachability, and professionalism of the embedded tutors as demonstrated in the quotes below

"Friendly approachable tutor" (S4)

"Helpful, great advice, supportive and positive feedback gave me confidence." (S26)

"Very approachable, helpful and knowledgeable" (S69)

"If you were going in the wrong direction they redirected you. They were friendly and professional. They were invested in helping." (S102)

"Approachable. No question was too hard." (S105)

Lecturers emphasised the importance of knowledge and understanding, relating this directly to the subject and assessment as demonstrated in the following quotes.

> "That the embedded tutor has an understanding of the subject ... and has engaged with the content of the subject, assessment requirements, and any online tutorials." (L1)

> "Good communication skills, good knowledge of [university] assessment processes." (L2)

In contrast, when identifying understanding as a characteristic, embedded tutors were more likely to be considering individual student needs and circumstances to provide personalised support.

> "Being student focused, providing positive constructive feedback, showing caring; understanding of the challenges they face." (T20)

> "I believe being present with the student helps alleviate the anxiety they may be experiencing. It can be tough when you are trying to ease into the new university life with different peers, and a different environment, so sometimes being present with the student and understanding their concerns helps a lot." (T3)

Training regarding the tone of voice and pedagogy of kindness approach is reflected in the responses from embedded tutors. Evidence that introducing key pedagogies into training can impact the delivery of support to students is presented in this study. Sustainable and continuous training with a focus on teaching pedagogies and encouraging personable and relatable connectedness will continue to enable a pedagogy of kindness to shine through in the Embedded Tutor Program.

An intervention to enhance academic integrity

The use of GAIT for learning and AI-enabled feedback has increased rapidly at universities due to increased development of and access to large language model tools such as ChatGPT (Kasneci et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). The first response from many higher education institutions worldwide was to ban the use of GAIT. The recent spike in the detection of suspected academic misconduct in higher education can be in part attributed to the increased use and detection of GAIT. However, there is the potential for GAIT to be used effectively for learning, for example, as an adaptive tutor in which the GAIT responds to the specific prompts of the student and identifies knowledge gaps (Sottilare et al., 2018). In certain fields, employees are often expected to be competent in utilising GAIT, which poses a quandary for universities. Students in these fields need to be prepared for the ethical use of GAIT in their future employment. Therefore, to accommodate the identified demand for GAIT-experienced graduates and to enhance student employability skills, universities will need to promote the ethical and responsible use of GAIT.

In the current study, a potential academic integrity issue was detected using Turnitin in 51 of 704 (7%) draft assessments. These were submitted via the draft assessment portal and to be reviewed by an embedded tutor. The academic integrity issues identified are listed in Table 2. The most common issue was a high AI score, indicating that a high proportion of the assessment was written by GAIT. Despite the AI score being mentioned in 19 comments provided by tutors, this was followed by that the issue could be a 'false positive' in nearly half of those cases. The level of scepticism that the embedded tutors held for the accuracy of GAIT detection adds to the current literature arguing that the use of GAIT detectors is not entirely accurate or reliable (Elkhatat et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2023). As tutors were aware that there was a chance that the detector was not accurate, there was no reason to be punitive or accusative of wrongdoing. Explanations for potentially false positive indicators were provided such as "*identified as being due to a copy and paste of parts of the assessment task*" (T4). Tutors also made comments such as 'minor issue' and 'misunderstanding'. Despite this, the majority of tutors who responded to the feedback survey agreed with the statement that 'I would like to continue to use a tool to assist in evaluating the quality of assessments'. One tutor commented, "*Despite my reluctance with the Turnitin submission process for drafts, I did find that it worked fine. It helped to have all the drafts together in one place for easy access*" (T2).

Table 2. Identification of academic integrity issues.

Academic integrity issue	Number of cases	Percentage of cases (%)
High AI score	19	40
Lack of paraphrasing	12	25
Inappropriate sources	9	19
High similarity score	9	19
Referencing	9	19
Overuse of quotes or incorrect citation	6	13
Plagiarism	5	10

The remaining issues were related to more traditional academic integrity breaches, including a lack of paraphrasing and referencing. Inadequacies in supporting students in the development of these skills are reported in the literature (Kier & Ives, 2022). Tutors were able to focus on the identified academic integrity issues, explaining why this was an issue and suggesting strategies the student could use to avoid academic misconduct. As tutors were reviewing draft assessments prior to submission, there were no negative consequences for students, as they had not yet submitted their final work. Some tutors describe the tone used to question students on whether the work was entirely their own as 'inquisitive'. Preventative strategies, such as creating opportunities to discuss sensitive issues such as academic integrity issues (intentional or unintentional) in a non-judgemental and safe environment, have the potential to enable transformative and meaningful learning (Kier & Ives, 2022; Young et al., 2018). Literature supports that when the student feels valued and has increased self-worth, they feel safe to engage in dialogue regarding transforming their academic behaviour and learning in a positive way (Stephens, 2021). Of the 51 students who were flagged for potential academic integrity issues in their written assessment, 45 students (88%) passed their subject, and only one student was flagged for student academic misconduct and required

further investigation following the official assessment submission. The student concerned was a student who has English as an additional language, which may have been a contributing factor (Liang et al., 2023).

An online survey was used to evaluate the student experience regarding using Turnitin for submission and revision of draft assessments. While 76 percent of students provided positive feedback on the usefulness of the Turnitin feedback, 24 percent of students indicated that they either found it not useful or did not know how to use it. Students were asked 'Overall, how useful was the feedback from Turnitin in preparing your assessment?'. Typical responses included "*useful once it was explained*". As some students who submitted their assessments via Turnitin demonstrated a lack of confidence in the interpretation and implementation of Turnitin-generated feedback, having tutors to assist in understanding feedback was highly valued. Tutors noted that suspected plagiarism often appeared unintentional and the result of poor understanding of citation and paraphrasing. Students were encouraged to revise their work before submission using the feedback provided by Turnitin combined with feedforward from tutors. Discussions with students were centred around how to support students to change their approach, access resources and subject readings, minimise plagiarism, paraphrase, interpret and improve similarity scores, and reference and cite quotes correctly. Tutors made comments such as "*It was a positive, supportive conversation*". As all students have access to submit their assessments through Turnitin, normalising the use of the Turnitin tool for students to evaluate the quality of their own work may help to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct in future assessments. Tutors reassured students and provided positive guidance where possible.

> "[I] reassured him that he could build upon what he has learnt in the subject so far and not to panic". (T7)

Of the students contacted as part of the targeted outreach for assessment support initiative, four students had a conversation with an embedded tutor regarding academic integrity on a separate occasion. As the individualised feedback was delivered before the assessment submission, it was both 'just in time' and 'just for me' (Kift, 2015). There was no subsequent academic misconduct investigation for these students. Three students contacted as part of the outreach initiative, who did not meet with an embedded tutor, were later investigated for student academic misconduct. In a recent study, reasons for engaging in academic misconduct were categorised into students' personal characteristics, lack of institutional rules and academic integrity policies, and teaching or assessment related such as poorly designed exams (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022). However, an additional factor impacting students' engagement in academic misconduct was individual learning abilities. Students who are identified as being at risk of academic misconduct can be proactively targeted and supported (Tolman, 2017). This presents an opportunity for higher education institutions to proactively support students to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the expansion of the Embedded Tutor Program into a university-wide sustainable model of support for students is a product of innovation and adaptability. We demonstrate how the interplay of kindness and cognitive presence, with just-in-time support, can effectively increase student success in the first year. This approach fosters positive relationships and promotes student engagement and retention (Teakel et al., 2023). We demonstrate that tutoring within a pedagogy of kindness framework enhances the impact of support. We propose that the sustained success of this program and other support services will require continuous training for tutors and teaching staff focussing on teaching pedagogies centred around kindness, cognitive presence, and empathy. We also highlight the potential of the program to prevent academic misconduct in the crucial first year/transition to university. As students are enthusiastically embracing GAIT, it is imperative that higher education institutions provide comprehensive guidance to students on the ethical and responsible use of GAIT and be explicit with expectations and transparency to align with higher education academic integrity principles. A limitation of this study is the difficulty in predicting how the enhancement of GAIT will impact learning in higher education. Future research should investigate the sustainability and feasibility of expanding this approach to supporting students on a larger scale as GAIT become more advanced and widely adopted in higher education. We propose that the development of educative and preventative strategies, rather than addressing issues post-submission, will significantly enhance academic integrity in higher education. Integration of pedagogy of kindness and supportive environments that encourage open dialogue regarding sensitive academic issues has the potential to improve the overall student experience significantly.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, ST, upon reasonable request.

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A pedagogy of being: Humanising learning environments in the South African tertiary sector

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Abstract

In this study, we explore the theoretical underpinnings and the practical implementation of a one-year student-led and student-centred service-learning course called "IiNtetho zoBomi", translated from isiXhosa – one of South Africa's twelve official languages – as "conversations about life". The Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics, Department of Philosophy, at Rhodes University in South Africa, has been developing and implementing this course for the past decade in response to widespread calls for transforming South African universities and producing socially responsible, ethical graduates. "IiNtetho zoBomi" aims to show students how important the life of the mind is for cultivating autonomy and sociality, for bridging the gap between the lives of thought and action; and, by doing this, to show students the intimate relationship between thinking, reading, writing, human freedom, and the ethical life. Relatedly, the course challenges the widespread assumption that education's aim is capacitation rather than human growth and does so in a genuinely practical way that increases the likelihood of impacting affect and behaviour.

Introduction

This study is a collaborative effort between colleagues at the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics (AGCLE) in the Department of Philosophy at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa in which we explore our one-year student-led, service-learning course in ethics, "IiNtetho zoBomi: Conversations About Life". IiNtetho zoBomi (hereafter 'IZ') means "conversations about life" in isiXhosa, the principal language spoken in the Eastern Cape and one of the twelve official languages of South Africa. The Eastern Cape is one of South Africa's poorest provinces. It is blighted by extremely high levels of unemployment and grinding, even desperate, poverty. Rhodes University is the only research-intensive university in South Africa in a largely rural area. It was named after one of the British Empire's most notorious representatives, Cecil John Rhodes. Despite multiple attempts to rename the university, its original name remains. As its name suggests, Rhodes University was, until recently, a predominantly white elite institution, but it has undergone a radical demographic transformation in the last few years. It is now primarily a black working-class university, with many of our students coming from public schools for the disenfranchised located in rural or peri-urban townships.

South African universities are mainly derivative; they were set up to emulate Western universities. Indeed, it is in light of this that calls for the transformation of South African universities are widespread from the grassroots to governmental levels. The South African Department of Education's "Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation", aimed at guiding the direction of South African higher education in response to the demands of the new democratic and anti-racist dispensation, indicates that:

> Higher education will have to be more responsive to societal interests and needs. South Africa is a developing and modernising African country in a period of transition from racial discrimination and oppression towards a democratic order. Aspects of this context should be reflected in the content, focus and delivery modes. (Department of Education, 1996, p. 13)

Indeed, the "White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education", states that:

> Higher education has an unmatched obligation, which has not been adequately fulfilled, to help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests. (Department of Education, 1997, p. 4)

The ethics taught in South African universities varies little from what is taught in the global north. However, African ethics has increasingly found its way into many universities' curricula, typically as an aside. The AGCLE is the only academic unit in the country experimenting with new ways of teaching ethics beyond a purely theoretical engagement with the discipline. Our aim in IZ is to provide the conditions for our students to consider in a genuinely practical way how critical engagement with ethical issues plays a crucial role in allowing us to live the sorts of lives we would want to live were we given the opportunity to carefully reflect on what matters most to us. In what follows, we will explore IZ's theoretical underpinnings and practical implementation.

IZ is a student-led service-learning course aimed at promoting active engagement with the course content to foster students' intelligent growth. This humanising pedagogy finds concrete expression in the various aspects of the course, from student-led lectures to peer-to-peer dialogues and service learning.

In our first decade, AGCLE staff have worked with students, tutors, and teaching assistants to create and permanently renew IZ, a service-learning, student-led course in ethics that pays its qualified respects to the late 18th and early 19th–century German founder of the liberal university Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of *Bildung* or self-formation (Herdt, 2019). Our reconstruction of *Bildung* lacks the elitism characteristic of the original idea. This idea has largely been lost in contemporary global universities, and South African universities are no exception. Following the global social trend, education has increasingly become commodified and equated with mere training (Mckenzie, 1995; Wilkinson et al., 2023). In what follows, we explore what we think of as a humanising pedagogy – a pedagogy being consonant with D. Randy Garrison's (2016) Community of Inquiry – as well as how our thoughts find concrete expression in the service-learning component of IZ.

We aim to foster a love for learning in our students and a recognition of the importance of working to refine the practice of living by exposing students to the theoretical underpinnings of the course from the get-go and providing them with a host of opportunities for exploratory discourse. The course is laid bare in front of our students, so they are encouraged to understand the why of what we are doing at every point in the course. The principal form of assessment is the reflective journal. There, students integrate what is discussed in class, including tutorials and service learning, with their own experiences. We seek to encourage and enable them to think through what they are doing as students – including the role of education in self-formation or *Bildung* and the relationship between education, ethics, self-formation, and personal freedom. Once they understand the rationale behind IZ, they can critically reflect on higher education's purposes and take ownership of and responsibility for their learning in IZ and their other courses.

IZ is a response to dissatisfaction (e.g., Benson et al., 2017; Nussbaum, 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2023) with the current state of higher education in general and South Africa, which is increasingly focused on upskilling students for employment to the exclusion of Bildung. Moreover, learning requires that students attend, and attention is biased; that is, people attend to what interests them, and what interests them is informed by their lifeworlds – or worlds of lived experience. As such, teachers must have a clear sense of who their students are and the schemas they bring into the classroom so that we can teach in ways that accord with their interests while gradually expanding their spheres of concern. To achieve this, we need to focus on how best to integrate the new into what is already there in the minds of our

students. This learning process is one of the central insights of Paulo Freire's (1970) defence of a humanising pedagogy, and one of the insights that guide Garrison's (2016) idea of a "community of inquiry" and the growing literature on compassionate teaching and a pedagogy of kindness (e.g., Aspland et al., 2022; Day et al., 2022; Tan, 2022). Just as we cannot teach advanced mathematics to someone who does not know the basics precisely because the new must be able to latch onto what is already there, so too does learner success depend on associating what is covered in class with what is already in memory, with students' pictures of reality.

Similarly, teachers are not paying sufficient attention to "the hidden lives of learners", to borrow the title of Graham Nuthall's (2007) pioneering study on what goes on in students' minds while in class; and hence, teachers struggle to deal with the inattentiveness pandemic affecting younger generations. Relatedly, by failing to take into consideration, or be attentive to, the social contexts in which our students live and learn and form their identities, and so creating what Boughey and McKenna (2021) call "decontextualised learners", we end up locating issues with student motivation and performance in students themselves and fail to see them as informed by systemic social or contextual factors.

Another concern is that universities and teachers are often blind to critical aspects of "the hidden curriculum", the indirect teaching and learning that happens mainly under the radar, typically without the knowledge or conscious reflection of teachers or students; teachings about disciplinary roles, values, literacies, and commitments. This is the dark matter of teaching and learning, and its effects can be beneficial or insidious. One of the insidious aspects is that we are not challenging the consumer capitalist ethos pervading contemporary society. Hence, in the eyes of many, if not most of our students, whether rich or poor, black or white, universities have become the ticket to remunerated employment and little more. We ask our students why they come to university in class, and they discuss this in their reflective journals. Some of the most common replies are that they are at university to 'secure the bag' – money – or 'the soft life' – the life of conspicuous consumption, exemplified by the lifestyles of celebrities or social media influencers. So, mainly by omission, universities perpetuate rather than challenge preconceptions formed in a neoliberal world where acquisitiveness has taken centre stage in social life and the imaginaries of those growing in an era of hyper-consumption.

Finally, there is the thought/action dualism that worried John Dewey – one of the most influential philosophers of education of the late 19th and early to mid-20th century – discussed throughout his corpus. We will elaborate further on this dualism below. However, its effect is that students typically do not understand the value of understanding, and 'bookish' people, something academics tend to be, are seen to 'live in the clouds', so the worlds of thought and action, of ideas and experience, remain dirempted in the classroom. For learning to succeed, we must place scaffolds below the point at which day one at university typically commences; that is, we must show students why learning should matter to them in the first place rather than wrongly assume, as is usually the case, that because what is taught matters to teachers, it must also matter to students.

These are some of our AGCLE team's concerns. More shall be mentioned below. We conceived of IZ to help address these concerns and others. IZ aims to induct students into the world of learning and to show them how reading, writing, thinking, and being are interrelated and how education will better equip them to navigate life and its travails as agents rather than leaves blown by forces they do not understand and over which they have little control. One way of characterising the central aim of IZ is to create conditions where individuals learn to have an ethical say in how their lives unfold. We invite our students to consider that this is what it means to be an agent in the superlative sense, an ethical agent.

This study will proceed as follows: In the next section, we will continue to explore the concerns that IZ is designed to respond to. First, through the lens of feminist standpoint epistemology, we explore the phenomenon of epistemic marginalisation to contextualise the university experience of many of our students, an experience that we need to understand to build the new onto what is already there in experience. In other words, we explore how, given our students' lived experiences, when confronted with university life, they often experience university as alienating, jarring with their preconceptions of what it means to know and of their pre-reflective understandings of the place of knowledge in life. Second, we explore threats to what Arendt (2006) calls the "two-in-one", the critical self-reflexivity that allows us to take authorial control of our lives. Third, we return to Dewey's concern with the thought-action dualism and the diremption of capacitation and growth in higher education to the detriment of our students' appreciation of the value of an education. Here, we explore the need for higher education to promote what Dewey termed intelligent growth, explored throughout his corpus. In the third section, we offer part of the solution that we have found to the problems described in the second section – the adoption of a humanising pedagogy that fosters students' love of learning, their intelligent growth, and the "two-in-one" – the life of active critical introspections – necessary for leading responsible, ethical lives. Here, we elucidate some of the theoretical underpinnings of the course, the ideas that explain its design and content. In the fourth section, we turn to the course's service-learning component, which exemplifies our pedagogical approach, describing IZ's service-learning through the lens of Garrison's Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, 2016; Kamali et al., 2024) before wrapping things up in the final section.

Concerns motivating the development and design of IZ

Before turning to the theoretical underpinnings of IZ, we will provide the reader with a more detailed discussion of the concerns motivating the development and design of the course. First, we explore the need to address the experience of epistemic marginalisation of many of our students, to speak to them from where they stand and enable them to see the true value of education. Second, we explore how global social trends threaten our students' ability to critically

and reflexively engage with themselves, their world, and their education. Finally, we turn to the need to address the thought-action dualism affecting both students and teachers, which prevents our students from understanding education as the existential endeavour we think it ought to be.

Addressing epistemic marginalisation

Our students find themselves in a world saturated with information; they are inundated with piles of cognitive overstimulation and face the vexing task of sorting through each pile and situating themselves within the chaos. This labour of locating themselves vexes epistemically marginalised students. Most of our students are black and working class and often come from rural or peri-urban environments. These are places where epistemic practices differ significantly from those in university classrooms. Their schooling does not adequately equip them to feel at home in universities, and their experiences are often profoundly alienating, frequently leading to feelings of inadequacy and being ignored. When asked, our students typically report that they come to university to acquire an education, but they spend very little time acquiring or producing knowledge; they often do not see the value of pursuing knowledge for personal growth. Their social positioning on the margins may alienate them from the collective mechanisms of knowledge production (Lave & Wenger, 2003; Wenger, 1999). As such, they might not see themselves in spaces of knowledge development and, in turn, may invest minimal effort in participating within those spaces. The distance between what they bring to class and what happens in class seems unbridgeable to many of them. In this sense, far too many of our students are epistemically marginalised.

With this in mind, it would prove helpful to approach our educative endeavours cognisant of where our students are coming from and link new knowledge to the understandings our students bring into the classroom. Again, in our curricular practices, we must respect how knowledge is acquired by associating the new with an already-existing pattern. Here, we turn to standpoint epistemology. This field of philosophy considers the knower's social position and works to determine to what degree one can be a knower and what factors impact or impair learning. The question informing this field of philosophy is, "How does the specific locus I occupy in society by my class, gender, sexuality, or race positively or negatively influence my understanding?".

According to Toole (2019), standpoint epistemology has three theses, the first being epistemic privilege, which is "committed to the [claim] that some epistemic advantage can be drawn from the position of powerlessness" (p. 600). Certain pockets of knowledge are only or best accessible to those on the margins, and to gain that knowledge, one must have faced a struggle, thus bringing us to the second thesis, achievement. Epistemic success is achieved by members of marginalised groups by "critically [examining] the relationship between one's social situatedness and one's oppression (or oppressive role) within a social system" (Toole, 2019, p. 600); this process is called consciousness-raising and requires a conducive environment sensitive to positionality's epistemic role. The third and most critical thesis is situated knowledge, which can be stated as follows: "For certain propositions p, whether an epistemic agent is in a position to know that p depends on some non-epistemic social facts about that agent" (Toole, 2019, p. 601). According to this thesis, the traditional epistemic features, such as truth, reliability, evidence and justification, and so on, are not the only features that a person can use to be validated as a knower; therefore, "it is this sense in which one's social identity, a non-epistemic feature, makes a difference to what one is in a position to know" (Toole, 2019, p. 601).

It may be the case that many of our students cannot fully articulate their experiences because they may lack the conceptual resources to do so. Conceptual resources are aids that epistemic agents use to make sense of, understand, and articulate their experiences; "these include language, concepts and their associated criteria for sorting [knowledge]… and do not stand independently of experience" (Pohlhaus, 2011, p. 718). If epistemic agents, in this case, our students, do not have the conceptual resources needed to adequately understand or express their apathy towards knowledge as produced and constructed in our largely derivative universities, then they will not be able to articulate their lived experiences either for themselves or to others. They can perform their apathy for all to see but cannot typically make sense of it or express their experience in words. Indeed, we contend that making sense of it in the classroom would help undermine the apathy we find there. This is something we do in IZ. We invite our students to reflect on the sources of their apathy.

As situated knowers, many of our students potentially struggle to find intrinsic value in an abstract – almost fantastical from their points of view – notion of knowledge that never had them in mind in its formulation. They have been given a basic education that they have commodified as a means to an end and relegated knowledge to those with the leisure of pondering the abstract as they navigate their real, often very challenging, lived experiences. When they reach for their conceptual aids – the hermeneutical resources at their disposal – they hesitate because what they know does not harmonise with the mainstream understanding of what it means to know, particularly insofar as what they know, even if they provide sufficient evidence for their claims, is often not deemed to be 'valid knowledge' from the perspective of those in positions of authority in the contemporary South African academy. Fricker (2007) discusses the issue of epistemic marginalisation in some detail. She argues that a person's disadvantaged social positioning negatively impacts how their lived experience is perceived and interpreted. Fricker calls this "hermeneutic injustice". This is when a person's "social situation is such that a collective hermeneutical gap prevents them from making sense of an experience which is strongly in their interests to render intelligible" (Fricker, 2007, p. 7).

To make sense of our experiences, we tap into our collective knowledge reservoir to understand and articulate them. However, when that reservoir cannot make sense of your experience or assist you, you may feel like your experience is invalid. Toole (2019, p. 609) exemplifies this sort of injustice with her experience as a bi-racial person experiencing

colourism for the first time:

> A college recruiter from a historically black college/university…visited to offer me a scholarship. But upon meeting me, he did not review the offer with me; instead, he handed me a packet with information and immediately departed. I later gathered that it is unusual for a college recruiter to behave in this way, and I inferred that what ultimately best explained what happened was that he was surprised (and perhaps disappointed) by the fact that I am a fairly light-skinned biracial woman. At the time, I knew that there was something unnerving and hurtful about the experience. But, as I did not possess the concept for colorism, I did not fully understand what had occurred, or why. It was not until many years later, when I acquired the concept, that I recognized this as an instance of colorism. Learning this concept threw into sharp relief an experience that had been somewhat vague for me until then.

All our students bring their lived experiences to the academy, which affects how they interact with knowledge creation in contemporary South African universities. This is to be expected. However, this interaction may negatively impact students' lived experiences from epistemologically marginalised backgrounds. Their experiences of knowledge creation in our universities may be of such a nature that they lack the conceptual aids needed to interpret their experiences properly. How they know needs to be looked at from the vantage point of their situatedness – considering their "hidden lives" and the contexts within which they were formed and are continually shaped as knowers. It may be the case that most of our students value education as a ticket to employment over knowledge or education as fundamentally related to self-formation and self-mastery. This is because of the apparent payoff that education as a ticket to employment is seen to bring coupled with their inability to understand and articulate their relationship to or lived experiences of an education system that treats them as "decontextualised learners", to borrow the language of Boughey and McKenna (2021) again. In contrast, they do not see the payoff of knowledge or education for *Bildung* because they rarely see themselves in the roles of knowledge creators in our universities. We consider these issues when designing and redesigning IZ and invite our students to reflect on them.

Addressing threats to the "two-in-one"

We now turn to the centrality of education in fostering lifelong refined critical reflection, Arendt's (2006) "two-in-one". This is a fundamental structural feature of agential existence; rather than an inner monologue, if not impaired, we experience an inner polyphony of voices where views are challenged and affirmed in the dynamic process we call thinking. Refining the "two-in-one" is a central dimension of *Bildung*. Indeed, self-formation demands the ongoing refinement of the "two-in-one" as selves form themselves through thinking. If thinking is not functioning correctly, it is at the mercy of forces over which it has no control, undermining our ability to shape our lives as agents.

As previously lamented, universities have become training grounds for professionals rather than places to promote human growth. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with preparing students for professional life. The problem is that professionalisation comes at the expense of personal growth in the mainstream contemporary university. Schools, on the other hand, have become training grounds for future university-goers. The market needs professionals who will embrace its commitments, and the education sector responds by producing them. However, significantly, the response has come about by neglecting the autonomous individual. Professionals are trained to align their expertise to the designs of their employers rather than engage as human beings in the necessarily collaborative job of helping to build a better world or, less grandiosely but by no means unrelatedly, professionals, indeed human beings, committed to self-mastery, something inseparable from working with others for the sake of improving the conditions of life and increasing our understandings of reality in all its variegated dimensions.

In a 2012 documentary directed by Raoul Martinez and Joshua van Praag, *The lottery of birth*, Jeff Schmidt (2000), author of *Disciplined minds: A critical look at salaried professionals and the soul-battering system that shapes their lives*, states that "Professionals are deliberately produced to be intellectually and politically subordinate". In *The lottery of birth*, Schmidt illustrates the idea of subordination with the anecdote of two young nuclear weapons designers working in a nuclear weapons design laboratory. When asked by a journalist what the worst part of their job was, they rejoined that it was dealing with unstable computers lacking sufficient capacity. They were not, it seems, able to consider the higher purposes they were unthinkingly serving. The scope of their concerns was subordinated to the aims of their employers. Again, this may be an example of thoughtless subordination that perniciously affects human life. The tragedy of this mentality mirrors the divorce in the education sector between vocational – capacitation – and non-vocational – growth – dimensions of education, as philosopher Richard Rorty (2000) would put it, where the vocational is privileged, and the non-vocational is at best grasped as a minor addition.

Thoughtless subordination is indeed a central theme of *The lottery of birth*. The documentary aims to show to what extent freedom or self-mastery is an achievement rather than a starting point. Indeed, the documentary shows us the extent to which believing that one is born free is one of the surest ways of not being so, of becoming the slave of forces over which one has no control. Nicholas Woodeson, the narrator of *The lottery of birth*, states, "In fact, to take our freedom for granted is to extinguish the possibility of attaining it" (cited in Schmidt, 2000). The documentary also explores the relationship between *Bildung* and the work required to contribute to improving social life. This relationship should come as no surprise, especially if one recognises the extent to which a blind allegiance to the rat race perpetuates injustice. This allegiance can be challenged by the practice of self-mastery, when individuals decide to take responsibility for the direction of their lives despite the nudging power of circumstances. To become responsible is to become imbued with a sense of personal autonomy, of

being one constitutionally embedded in a network of many.

We screen *The lottery of birth* in the first few weeks of the course. The documentary and our conversations about it help our students see to what extent we must struggle to grasp what lies beyond the veils of illusion partly constituted by ideological forces and commonplace psychological mechanisms, which we explore in some detail in the course.

Being subordinate in this manner is exemplified by the behaviour of *Schutzstaffel* (SS) officer Adolf Eichmann, as described in Arendt's (2022) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. Eichmann, according to Arendt, was thoughtless. This, for her, is not the same as being stupid. Eichmann was, from the point of view of instrumental rationality, a highly effective bureaucrat in charge of the transportation throughout Europe of prisoners to an almost guaranteed death in concentration and death camps. He was an effective professional and a pathetic human being, a kind of thoughtless human automaton unable, it seems, to engage in the inner dialogue – Arendt's "two-in-one" – which is a central aspect of what Freire (2000) and hooks (1994) describe as "the practice of freedom", another way of describing the renewed conception of *Bildung* that informs IZ. It seems that Eichmann only had one inner voice, a monologue; hence, despite not being stupid, he could not interrogate his commitments critically. And it is in this regard that his behaviour was thoughtless. No voice in him could significantly challenge the genocidal life path he had taken. His relationship to the social forces set in motion by Hitler was unmediated by a conscience, something requiring the "two-in-one". It is not only that there was one Eichmann for all to see. According to Arendt, it was also the case that there was only one inner Eichmann, devoid of any conflict or an inner polyphony. The ability to evaluate requires the imaginative leap into alternative perspectives on a single issue. If Arendt's analysis is correct, Eichmann could hardly be said to have authorial control over his life. To have authorial control involves the "two-in-one" of mental life. In this regard, Eichmann was a poorly educated man trained, rather than educated in the proper sense, to follow projects set by others unthinkingly. He could perform his professional activities flawlessly as required by his superiors but lacked the inner life necessary to recognise that his contribution to existence was entirely negative.

Although Arendt does not use the phrase "practice of freedom", it is clear that this is at the heart of her concerns with the "two-in-one" of mental life. It is what allows for agential existence. Assuming Arendt was right about Eichmann's radically impoverished inner life, we can say that his existence resembles an automaton's. Eichmann is an extreme example, to be sure – more because of the consequences of his univocity than of his univocity as such, which is arguably widespread across the human population – but he is also a paradigmatic example of the subordination of professionals.

Eichmann lacked an inner community of inquiry, which can only exist amid an external community of inquiry. To a significant extent, his monologue is a function of those who surrounded him and encouraged him not to think or question. Instead, it fostered blind allegiance to a vision of humanity that was not dissimilar to a colony of ants. Indeed, the Nazi party operated in an echo chamber, a topic we return to below.

Graeber (2018) explores more mundane examples in *Bullshit jobs: A theory*. One can productively read Graeber through an Arendtean lens and argue that his book aims to show the extent to which mainstream employment and the educational sector that shapes professionals fosters thoughtlessness and, relatedly, banality in the sense of uncritical compliance to the status quo due to an impoverished inner life caused by the erosion of the "two-in-one" essential for agential existence.

Society, including contemporary educational institutions, fosters atomistic thoughtlessness, the solitary individual competing with others for goals considered sacrosanct given the impoverishment of the "two-in-one". Neoliberal consumer capitalism needs a compliant workforce subordinated to the aims of employers, so educational establishments provide them. Educational establishments also, arguably, do not do enough to create the conditions for dialogical encounters with others who challenge our preconceptions on an ongoing basis. In this regard, human autonomy, freedom in this sense, depends on adequately constituted communities of inquiry where the "two-in-one" can thrive. Insofar as this is the case, it has to be understood in relation to both the relationality and vulnerability at the heart of the human condition.

The examples explored above from Eichmann to the nuclear weapons designers highlight the central role that communities of inquiry play in what Dewey describes as intelligent growth, which requires, following Garrison and others, a collaborative learning space. All the above topics inform the design of IZ and are discussed in class.

Addressing thought-action dualism

According to Dewey, the aim of education is intelligent growth. Intelligent growth aims not at subordination but at personal and political freedom. In both cases, freedom is achieved when "Impulses and desires are … ordered by intelligence" (Dewey, 1997, p. 64). According to Dewey (1997), when they are not so ordered, they are ordered by "accidental circumstances" (p. 64), that is, circumstances that push people hither and thither without the critical intervention of the "two-in-one". For Dewey (1997, p. 64),

> Impulses and desires that are not ordered by intelligence are under the control of accidental circumstances. It may be a loss rather than a gain to escape from the control of another person only to find one's conduct dictated by immediate whim and caprice; that is, at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgement has not entered. A person whose conduct is controlled in this way has, at most, only the illusion of freedom. He is directed by forces over which he has no command.

The examples presented in the previous section show that educating professionals ought to be connected to intelligent growth. Refraining from integrating capacitation

with growth, the vocational and non-vocational aspects of education foster thoughtlessness and, paraphrasing Schmidt (2000), intellectual and political subordination. This subordination motivated Orwell's (2003) *Nineteen eighty-four* and Arendt's (2017) *The origins of totalitarianism*. The novel and the treatise explore what life with others would look like if univocity replaced the "two-in-one" across the population and suggest the need for robust and critical communities of inquiry that foster thoughtfulness and intelligent growth.

According to Dewey (1997), intelligent growth is only possible if we work to eliminate the dualism at the heart of educative practices across the globe. He is speaking here of the thought-action duality. The consequence of this dualism is that thought fails to be adequately integrated into life. Again, this dualism helps explain both the high incidence of 'bookish' intellectuals who 'live with their heads in the clouds' and the pervasive anti-intellectualism of social life.

We can observe that this dualism plays itself out in the contemporary classroom. University teachers stand before the class and speak to an audience largely uninterested in what is being shared and are often frustrated to the point of bloodcurdling anger at witnessing this apathy. However, teachers need to recognise that central to successful teaching is showing students why what is being shared in class should matter to them. Recall that we learn by linking the new to the pattern of what is already there. So, students need to be able to add new information to a pre-existing pattern. For something to matter, it must fit into this pattern, where their specific lived realities have shaped it.

Related to this insight, Nuthall (2007), Hattie (2008), and others believe that too much focus has been placed on teaching rather than learning, that is, how students or learners learn. While it is undoubtedly true that we need to focus on how our students learn, the debate between proponents of child-centred education, teacher-centred education, and Biesta's (2022) "world-centred education" seems misplaced. Together, these focal points are imperative to the educative project in equal measure. But it is also true, and here we agree with Biesta that ultimately, the point of education is to invite students to grasp different aspects of reality either for the first time or renewed. This new or renewed grasp of experience is constitutive of intelligent growth.

Returning to the issue of dualism and mirroring the problem of 'bookishness', students often have little sense of how having thoughts – indeed increasingly sophisticated thoughts – is a central dimension of freedom understood as an intelligent practice aimed at growth. Most of our students see freedom as the freedom to do whatever they want without considering how those wants have been, for good or bad, shaped by circumstances that are essentially out of their control. Failings born of noxious ideologies illustrate the centrality of communities of inquiry. More often than not, we learn from others without even realising how those who share the world with us profoundly impact what matters to us and our knowledge pursuits. Where teachers tend to value experiencing ideas as valuable in their own right from their points of view, students often only hear words and more words. Our students have typically not come to university for the love of understanding. Indeed, our typical students do not relate understanding with growth beyond the monetary aspirations that acquiring a degree will typically fulfil. Given the neoliberal, consumer capitalist ethos shaping the lives of our students, combined with the precarious economic circumstances of most of them, the typical student is in a rush to get a degree understood as a key to a salary. So, for them, education becomes mere training. For the average student, growth is primarily confused with prosperity, with "having" rather than "being", to borrow Fromm's (2008) distinction. In Fromm's words, "the content [what is taught] does not become part of [students'] system of thought, enriching and widening it" (Fromm, 2008, p. 24).

For these reasons, as we see it, following Dewey, Garrison, and others, teachers should, at the heart of their pedagogy, be concerned with addressing the problem of how to engage with students such that the knowledge shared can be integrated into their students' own "system of thought, enriching and widening it" (Fromm, 2008, p. 24). To quote Fromm (2008, pp. 24-25) again, incorporating the above-quoted passages into the broader context of his thought at length:

> Students in the having mode of existence will listen to a lecture, hearing the words and understanding their logical structure and their meaning and, as best they can, will write down every word in their looseleaf notebooks—so that, later on, they can memorize their notes and thus pass an examination. But the content does not become part of their own individual system of thought, enriching and widening it. Instead, they transform the words they hear into fixed clusters of thought, or whole theories, which they store up. The students and the content of the lectures remain strangers to each other, except that each student has become the owner of a collection of statements made by somebody else (who had either created them or taken them over from another source).
>
> Students in the having mode have but one aim: to hold onto what they 'learned', either by entrusting it firmly to their memories or by carefully guarding their notes. They do not have to produce or create something new. In fact, the having–type individuals feel rather disturbed by new thoughts or ideas about a subject because the new puts into question the fixed sum of information they have. Indeed, to one for whom having is the main form of relatedness to the world, ideas that cannot easily be pinned down (or penned down) are frightening—like everything else that grows and changes, and thus is not controllable.
>
> The process of learning has an entirely different quality for students in the being mode of relatedness to the world. To begin with, they do not go to the course lectures, even to the first one in a course, as *tabulae rasae*. They have thought beforehand about the problems the lectures will be dealing with and have in mind certain questions and problems of their own. They have been occupied with the topic and it interests them. Instead of being passive receptacles

> of words and ideas, they listen, they hear, and most importantly, receive and respond in an active, productive way. What they listen to stimulates their own thinking processes. New questions, new ideas, new perspectives arise in their minds. Their listening is an alive process. They listen with interest, hear what the lecturer says, and spontaneously come to life in response to what they hear. They do not simply acquire knowledge that they can take home and memorize. Each student has been affected and has changed: each is different after the lecture than he or she was before it.

What we should add to Fromm's distinction is the idea that students in the having mode are primarily interested in having for purely instrumental reasons. On the other hand, students in the being mode are interested in growing and understand that ideas are living things that have potentially transformative power. For them, learning is continuous with intelligent growth. Contrary to students in the having mode – the bulk of our students – students in the being mode do not grasp what they learn as inert. Instead, for students in the being mode, learning is a journey of discovery rather than a shopping spree of ideas.

The fact that the having mode rather than the being mode of human existence has taken precedence in most societies across the globe has to do with the communities within which people are raised. To succeed pedagogically, we must create alternative communities, communities of inquiry where the being mode is privileged, where people learn to become active participants in a collective effort to learn. And this is indeed what we do in IZ. As ignorance is born of collectives that promote it, such as communities informed by consumer capitalism and the values primarily fostered by social media, so too is intelligent growth born of communities that critically engage with the status quo and promote the formation of the "two-in-one".

A pedagogy of being: Theoretical underpinnings and the nuts and bolts of IZ

In what follows, we continue to explore the basic ideas informing IZ, focusing on ideas that address some of the concerns described above. We discuss these ideas with students in class; they constitute the early content of what is taught in class and serve as the foundational ideas upon which the rest of the year's content is built.

We want to show our students early in the course that self-formation is not something an individual can do in isolation. Individuals are constituted by their interactions with others, which must be of a proper sort for unimpaired growth to take place. The proper social space for individuals to grow is a space of contestation, where a polyphony is heard, dialogue flourishes, and differing, even antagonistic, perspectives come together to foster critical reflection and the growth of all group members. As Garrison (2016, pp. 11-12) puts it:

> Critical thinking is more than self-reflection and is invariably socially situated. It is a form of disciplined inquiry that moves the individual beyond autonomous thought. Personal meaning must be put to the test. […] Only through the process of diagnosing misconceptions and considering alternative conceptions are we able to achieve confidence in our thinking. [...] To think is to question; to question is to inquire. Most importantly, to think is to question one's own thoughts and this requires intervention.

Most crucially, a space of open dialogue fosters inner dialogue. This "two-in-one" is central to the life of someone committed to the thoughtfulness that should be the main aim of any adequately constituted educative endeavour.

Students are invited to reflect on the idea that the space of open dialogue differs from what Nguyen (2020) calls epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, such as sects, where the echo of one voice resonates throughout, and the "two-in-one" that defines the life of the unimpaired mind is thwarted. In this regard, Nguyen's echo chamber is totalitarian, disturbingly similar to what is portrayed in Arendt (2017) and Orwell (2003). Thought requires others to think with us rather than passively echo the herd-like utterances of those whose ability to take responsibility for their lives has been impaired.

At this point, it is worth noting that the only way of leaving an echo chamber is if someone from outside rescues us, underscoring the importance of others in the mental formation of autonomous, self-propelled individuals. Only in this way can a second voice occupy the inner space of a captured mind. To rescue us, someone must work to repair our trust in those with different beliefs and values, those who represent different ways of experiencing the world, and those from different "worlds" to borrow Lugones' (1987) language. Even when not trapped in an echo chamber, however, working with others is crucial to developing the awareness of self, others, and social reality needed for growth. Parochialism forms parochial minds and a lack of openness to others and experience.

As discussed by Garrison and following, in particular, the thinking of the father of sociobiology, Wilson (2000), the success of our species – and the reasons for its potential downfall as attested by the rate at which our 'intelligent' greed is ravaging the living world – is a function of cooperation. But it is not merely cooperation. Ants and bees cooperate in complex ways, but they have been doing much the same for millions of years. Our richness is that our modes of cooperation are driven by our intelligence and the language that is its medium. Our ability to adapt, innovate, and learn is second to none in the animal kingdom.

Despite this, the educational sector today privileges a form of radical autonomy that is antithetical to the fact of our sociality. Students are encouraged to compete with one another rather than to work together to find solutions to problems. They are tested as atomistic individuals rather than as communities of inquiry. As Garrison (2016, p. 16) puts it:

> Competition can undermine group cohesion and the development of a community of learners by shutting down open communication and the sharing

> of ideas. Competition in a learning setting limits the possibilities of being exposed to new ideas, changing misconceptions, and developing new perspectives.

Competition can be essential to growth, but only if informed by a spirit of cooperation and mutuality.

We have, for a decade now, been attempting to challenge our students' misconceptions of self and personal growth as radically divorced from education and, relatedly, to show students that not actively engaging is deleterious to them from their own considered points of view.

What, then, is a pedagogy of being? A pedagogy of being foregrounds how we – as students and teachers – relate to one another, our perceptions of self and others, and the attitudes we need to bring to the project of learning and creating knowledge together if we want our students to seriously engage with content and integrate what they learn into their lives. IZ is designed to create alternative communities – critical and collaborative communities of inquiry – where the being mode is privileged. IZ is designed to engage our students in ways that enable them to actively integrate knowledge into their own "system of thought, enriching and widening it" (Fromm, 2008, p. 24) in collective efforts to learn or pursue intelligent growth. Through collective inquiry – including student-led lecture discussions, peer-to-peer dialogues, and service-learning activities – IZ aims to enable students to develop the "two-in-one" that fosters intelligent growth, autonomy, and freedom while undermining their experience of epistemic marginalisation in the academy and so enabling them to see themselves as part of different communities of inquiry.

Recall that since we are constituted through our interactions with others, self-formation is not something an individual does alone. As suggested above, critical self-reflective thought requires others to think with us in a space of open, honest, and critically engaged dialogue, in a space of contestation. Such dialogue fosters inner dialogue. However, interactions with others must be of a particular sort if growth is to occur, and learning environments characterised by certain attitudes towards learning with and relating to one another must first be cultivated for these kinds of interactions to manifest. In Garrison's (2016, p. 12) words,

> Thinking collaboratively is dependent upon constructing a culture of inquiry in the context of purposeful, engaged, and trusting communities. [...] Thinking collaboratively is a deep and meaningful approach to learning that relies on critical and creative thinking through sustained engagement with content and other learners. This collaborative approach to thinking extends beyond acquiring information or developing basic competencies. It necessitates that learners assume responsibility and understand intellectual inquiry as constructing personal meaning and confirming understanding through purposeful engagement.

The ability to evaluate, which undermines univocity, emerges in our dialogical encounters with others. But, because these encounters must be of the sort that can challenge our preconceptions, they have to be entered into with an attitude of openness and humility, which enables us to take the imaginative leaps into alternative perspectives required to "[confirm] understanding through purposeful engagement" (Garrison, 2016, p. 12). Laying the foundations of this environment or for this community, encouraging our students to adopt these attitudes, or establishing "social presence", to use Garrison's terms, is one of the first aims of IZ and is introduced to students at the outset of the course as the ethics of conversation.

The ethics of conversation speaks to principles that guide and underpin our interactions with one another and how we work with others in various learning spaces and activities in IZ. These principles are drawn from work in multiple disciplines – e.g., philosophy, cognitive science, education, and psychology – all of which suggest the need and lay the foundations for the openness and humility in our interactions with others required to create critical and cooperative communities of inquiry that recognise multiple voices, address epistemic marginalisation, and develop the "two-in-one" of healthy mental life.

Early in the course, we expose our students to *The lottery of birth* mentioned above, in which a central argument asks them to consider the arbitrary ways they come to hold some of their most deeply cherished beliefs and values. We expose them to Galef's (2021) work on motivated reasoning, Chabris and Simons' (2010) selective attention research, and Wallace's (2009) discussion of our "natural default settings", challenging students to consider what they see or fail to see and how they see it, and inviting them to want to see what is the case, to want to become lucidly aware of what is in front of them, of themselves, others, the world around them, and their role in (re)shaping themselves and this world.

We expose them to Fernbach and Sloman's (2017) work in *The knowledge illusion: Why we never think alone*, explaining how most of what we know or draw on in our thinking comes from outside us, from other minds, shattering the illusion of understanding that all of us hold to a greater or lesser extent, and hopefully, the epistemic arrogance that often accompanies it. These lessons also highlight the central role of collective inquiry for intelligent growth and foreground once again the openness and humility that we want our students to bring to collective inquiry as socially situated beings working together with others in collaborative communities of inquiry.

We expose our students to Freeman's (2015) work on attention that, drawing on the insights of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch, suggests the need for displacing the ego – a "holding-in-abeyance" (Freeman, 2015, p. 165) – in our interactions with others to allow the other and what is other to emerge on its terms; of an "unselfing" (Freeman, 2015, p. 160) that provides the space and opportunity for the other to reveal themselves or itself free of our preconceptions and biases.

We expose them to the work of Lugones (1987) on playful "'world'-travelling", work that draws upon and supplements Frye's (1983) concept of "loving perception", the kind of perception that, again, allows what is separate to or independent from the self to emerge on its own terms.

Lugones claims that "we can learn to be through loving each other" (Lugones, 1987, p. 8). This phrase highlights three primary concepts at the heart of Lugones' work on recognition – concepts we want our students to explore, particularly as they relate to one another – learning, loving, and being. While Lugones' account of playful "world"-travelling focuses primarily on what it means to recognise the other – another person with different views, perhaps even one of a different culture, race, religion, and so on – through her writing, she points our students to an intersubjectivity that lies at the heart of being, learning, and growing. To know oneself, to be a complete subject and to make meaning with others, one has to recognise the other and oneself in the other's "world". There is a reciprocity inherent in this account of recognition. In travelling in and through one another's "worlds", we become fully subject to ourselves and one another. Through this process, we learn and grow – be and become – with one another. Learning this way with others enables the wholeness and certainty of the subject concerning other subjects. Lugones, once again, emphasises the importance of openness to our students – "an openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' [they] inhabit playfully" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). To bring Lugones into conversation with Arendt and Garrison, engaging with Lugones shows our students how "'world'-travelling", recognising and working with others in purposeful communities of inquiry "defined here by purpose, interdependence and communication" (Garrison, 2016, p. 14) develops and fosters the "two-in-one".

What we call "the ethics of conversation" is fundamental to learning and intelligent growth, to "widening the lens", which Butler (2023) asserts in her ongoing defence of democratic struggle. While, like Butler, we must never forget that widening our lens can be difficult and that it can necessitate changing habitual ways of thinking and being, we must also be reminded that "stumbling is part of learning and making an error is part of learning, especially when we are learning something new" (Butler, 2023, 09:43). Akin to Lugones, Butler argues that we must be open to others to widen our lens. And we have to do this to be free. "Freedom is a struggle", she argues (Butler, 2023, 11:35). Indeed, according to Butler (2023), we have to claim our freedom because our selves are formed over time, and we do not know what our time and place will make of us. Rousingly, Butler (2023, 11:50) asserts that: "When we live in a democracy, we assume that we are living according to certain principles – to equality, freedom, justice – and yet we are constantly learning what freedom is, and what equality is, and what justice can be". To continue learning is to remain open to meaningful dialogue with others. In the same interview mentioned above, Butler (2023, 10:14) urges us "to allow ourselves to be challenged and accept the invitation to revise our ways of thinking because that is the only way of being open". We would add that being continuously open to revising our thinking in light of new evidence is the only way to grow.

Service-learning: A "purposeful learning environment"

In what remains of this paper, we turn our attention to one of the defining features of IZ – that it is a student-led service-learning course. We will focus on our student-led, service-learning work vis-a-vis the theoretical underpinnings and concerns of IZ, which we have already explored above, and Garrison's (2016) Community of Inquiry framework – particularly the three interdependent elements he speaks of when discussing the educational experience in a community of inquiry – namely, social, cognitive, and teaching presence. While Garrison's framework was originally derived to reflect on effective teaching practices in online teaching environments, work is beginning to emerge, bringing this framework to bear on effective teaching practices in face-to-face learning environments (see Kamali et al., 2024; Warner, 2016). We show that service learning in IZ offers a purposeful, collaborative, and cooperative learning environment, to use Garrison's terms, designed and facilitated to stimulate and foster all three presences and contribute to the creation in IZ of the kind of alternative learning environment we spoke of above in which *Bildung* and the being mode of education are privileged. Through engaging in service-learning, the process by which our students reflectively and actively integrate what they are learning into their "system of thought, enriching and widening it" (Fromm, 2008, p. 24) is furthered.

Before turning to service-learning itself and service-learning in IZ, let us quickly expand on Garrison's framework and our use of it here. Recall that Garrison's framework takes a leaf from Dewey's philosophy of education, according to which thinking and acting are inseparable, and reflective thinking draws connections or conceptualises relationships between the world of ideas and the world of experience, allowing, as Dewey would put it, for the ongoing reinterpretation of experience that constitutes education. Given this, many of Garrison's ideas are also unsurprisingly consistent with those of Fromm, quoted above. For instance, we could liken Garrison's distinction between "surface" and "deep" approaches to learning to Fromm's distinction between the having and being modes of education. Garrison's Community of Inquiry framework, that is, is a deep approach to teaching and learning that, we would argue, privileges the being mode of education. We can see this in Garrison's description of the process of inquiry in a community of inquiry, where he writes:

> The dynamic must be a rational process where members of the group are encouraged to collaboratively and critically explore (find new relevant ideas), interpret (relate to previous ideas), challenge (question accepted truths), and integrate thoughts (create new ideas) into more satisfactory interpretations of our experiences. (Garrison, 2016, p. 15)

Like Fromm, Garrison focuses not on rote memorisation of content in the having mode but on active, critical, and creative engagement with ideas and experiences, working to integrate the new into the old, make sense of it or question it. In line with this approach to education, Garrison argues that "collaborative thinking is a whole body experience [...] an

individual is fully engaged, cognitively and transactionally, in a purposeful group of learners" (2016, p. 12). Importantly, this kind of engagement needs to be planned for, fostered, and sustained in the community of inquiry since: "There is risk in engaging others in critical discourse [...] [which] can be an inhibitor if trust and open channels of communication are not established" (Garrison, 2016, p. 45). Garrison speaks about three interdependent elements that he identifies as co-constitutive of the educational experience – social, cognitive, and teaching presence – and claims that each needs to be planned for, fostered, and sustained throughout the inquiry process.

For Garrison (2016), social presence refers to a sense of community committed to an academic purpose and characterised by open communication, collaborative and constructive engagement, and cohesion born of "the ability of participants to identify with the group or course of study, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of projecting their individual personalities" (p. 34).

Fostering social presence, for Garrison, takes time and relies on open communication. It should be among our priorities as educators to welcome students into a new course or community, as it sets the stage for and supports both cognitive and teaching presence moving forward. In this sense, social presence is often described as having primacy over both cognitive and teaching presences (see Kamali et al., 2024). As Garrison (2016, p. 36) puts it:

> Social presence is first focused on the purpose of the inquiry (identity to the group) and then on ensuring the conditions for free and open communication within the group… the focus must first be on group identity and cohesion established in an environment of open and free communication.

Cognitive presence, which, for Garrison (2016), is "the core of a community of inquiry and, as such, focuses on thinking and learning collaboratively" (p. 40), is once again understood in Deweyan terms. Inquiry, for Garrison, is a dynamic process in which we deliberate, act, perceive, and conceive. Or, put differently, inquiry leads from perception or awareness to deliberation or reflective thinking, to conception or the construction of ideas and confirmation of meaning, and finally to action, which once again leads us back to perception. For Garrison (2016), this process brings together the individual's world with the shared world of discourse through experience – "the complex process of constructing meaning reflectively and negotiating understanding collaboratively" (p. 35).

Finally, teaching presence speaks to "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social presences" (Garrison, 2016, p. 37) in a community of inquiry – "the crucial element in establishing and sustaining a community of inquiry" (Garrison, 2016, p. 50). Because of its role in establishing and sustaining the community, Aspland and Fox (2022) argue for the adoption of a pedagogy of kindness, focusing on the interplay between kindness and teaching presence and how this enhances the quality of students' learning and engagement, as well as students' experience of education. Engaging with work emerging on what Tan (2022) calls the "heartware" of education resonates with our pedagogy of being and various aspects of the course including the adoption of mindfulness practices in class.

Garrison stresses that teaching presence is not teacher presence and that responsibilities "for constructing personal meaning but also for shaping the discourse of the group" (Garrison, 2016, p. 37) should be shared among participants in the community of inquiry "based on their knowledge and expertise" (Garrison, 2016, p. 17) or ability. Despite this, however, much of the literature employing this framework speaks of teaching presence in relation to the educator alone. Aspland and Fox (2022), for instance, speak of teaching presence as the "key responsibility of the academic" (p. 148). Because responsibility for teaching presence is shared, it is intimately related to developing what Garrison calls "shared metacognition" or "metacognitive awareness", an awareness of and ability to regulate the inquiry process for oneself and others. Metacognition, as he describes it, mediates between individual cognitive functions and collaborative learning activities and is "essential to monitor and manage thinking individually and collaboratively" (Garrison, 2016, p. 37). The shared responsibility for teaching presence is central to the student-led design of IZ.

Based on what has already been said, we aim to create a purposeful, collaborative community of inquiry in IZ. Indeed, the design and facilitation of each of the course's components, from student-led lectures to peer-to-peer dialogues and service-learning, can be considered in terms of encouraging, fostering, and sustaining social, cognitive and teaching presence. This should not be surprising, given that we share many philosophical influences with Garrison. What we describe as our pedagogy of being, for instance, is vital to establishing and sustaining social, cognitive, and teaching presence and, as Garrison recommends, is prioritised and highlighted in class from the outset of the course. We recognise, with Garrison and others employing his framework (see Kamali et al., 2024), the need to make social presence our initial priority and aim to establish an academic purpose and identity amongst our students that is underpinned by a critically reflective attitude of humility and curiosity about oneself, others, and one's context that can only be fostered by engaging in dialogue, action, and reflection with others (see Tan, 2022). As Garrison reminds us, we first need to establish the right kind of community in which our students feel able to participate and contribute their thoughts and values openly and honestly before we can genuinely expect them to learn from or even be motivated to participate in the kinds of dialogue and service-learning activities central to IZ. We want to focus on how IZ, as a service-learning course, exemplifies Garrison's picture of a purposeful, collaborative community of inquiry. Indeed, IZ's student-led service-learning component is part of a larger community of inquiry and hopefully comes to constitute further communities within it.

Learning through service stems from Dewey's ideas of experiential learning, where the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is deemed vital to learning and so is consistent with the pedagogical philosophy underpinning IZ. Indeed, as we will see, service-learning bridges the gap

between thought and action that so worried Dewey and, in so doing, undermines the thought-action duality, creating a whole-body educational experience and prompting our students to begin to view their education as more than simple capacitation for future employers, indeed as a holistic journey of *Bildung*. Service learning is defined in the literature as

> a credit bearing educational experience in which students participate in organised service activity that meets identified community needs, and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

Based on the above definition, four core characteristics provide a framework for course development, including "an emphasis on the different ways of learning and understanding, the value of human experience as a source of learning, the requirement for reflective thinking to transform experience into learning and an ethical foundation that stresses citizenship to community" (Roakes & Norris-Tirrell, 2000, p. 101).

In IZ, students serve as mentors and tutors in a year-long program of weekly, one-on-one, interactive sessions with younger learners at local, no-fee paying primary schools, engaging the content they are exploring in IZ with the learners. This is to not only enrich the learners' life orientation work at school and improve their English literacy, but also to work towards fostering the learners' self-formation, personal freedom, and love of learning – widening their lenses and enriching their thinking. Given that the learners are central to the community of inquiry fostered between mentor and mentee, our students must be metacognitively aware of the need to foster social and teaching presence between them. They invite their mentees into the IZ community of inquiry established during class. Just as they have hopefully fostered social presence working with one another in IZ, including a commitment to a shared academic purpose and community of inquiry before participating in service learning, they now work towards inviting their mentees into this community to explore the content they have been learning about underpinned by the ethics of conversation and a pedagogy of being.

For this reason, our students' first engagement with the learners revolves around playing games selected by the mentees. This activity builds trust in the relationship between mentor and mentee, paving the way for open and honest communication and for cognitive and teaching presence through acknowledging and recognising learners' skills, interests, and needs (see Aspland & Fox, 2022). Again, working towards social presence is our students' initial priority going into the primary schools and precedes any academic work they undertake with their mentees. Our students first foster social presence with their mentees to develop the requisite relationships and create the conditions to support their own and their mentees' cognitive and social presences moving forward in the programme. While doing this, they exercise and foster teaching presence; as student-teachers, they learn by and through teaching while directing their mentee's inquiry, including their social and cognitive presences. They develop metacognitive awareness and a better understanding of the why of IZ, sharing responsibility for the direction of the course. They also foster teaching presence insofar as they direct thinking and dialogue and shape discourse during their sessions with their mentees, developing, as they do, a different way of thinking about knowledge production and epistemic access and marginalisation. Teaching presence in IZ is deliberately shared among teachers, students, and learners in the service-learning component of IZ, which enhances cognitive and social presence by enabling students to co-construct meaning in IZ and form a collective identity, respectively.

Insofar as they draw upon, indeed teach and model IZ course content and principles in their service to their mentees, our students also get the opportunity to engage with their course content in a sustained, critical, and creative manner with each other and their mentees (see Howard, 2002), and learn from the experiences and perspectives of our community partners enhancing cognitive presence.

Service-learning students are typically said in the literature to learn vital skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and improved communication while learning about and from those they work with and serve (see Fisher et al., 2017). We would add that engaging in service-learning shifts the "hidden curriculum" in a positive direction, leading them to question tacitly dominant ideas about where they can learn, whom they can learn from, and who produces and shares knowledge and directs inquiry, as well as the value of human experience as a source of learning. Relatedly, and insofar as it draws on experience, IZ's service learning brings new content into conversation with the old, with the pictures of reality that our students and their mentees bring to IZ, giving students something to hook onto. In Garrison's (2016) terms, service learning in IZ provides our students with the invaluable opportunity to think and learn collaboratively with younger learners through meaningful discourse and action or collective inquiry – collective efforts to explore and make sense of the concepts covered in the course together in purposeful communities of inquiry. These opportunities not only enable our students and their mentees to engage in the dynamic process of practical inquiry iteratively – moving between perception, deliberation/reflection, conception, and action – but also enable different perspectives to play an equal role in deliberation and meaning-making, bringing personal "worlds" of meaning into contact with the shared "worlds" of discourse.

Students in service-learning courses work together with community partners and others to share their respective knowledge and experiences to find solutions to socio-economic concerns and, in so doing, learn while also affecting social change. Learning, here, is not confined to the four walls of the lecture venue or even to the hallowed halls of the university but is instead explored through interaction and engagement with local communities. Service-learning provides our students with access to alternative communities and perspectives, which enables them to "widen their lens", as Butler (2023) puts it, emphasising different ways of learning and understanding different knowledge claims. In

light of this, respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection are core values fostered through service learning. It is always important, for example, to respect the ways of being, circumstances, and outlook of the community one's students are serving (Butin, 2003).

Service learning should not only benefit the server but should also be a mutually beneficial process that encourages genuine participation and partnership with the community. For instance, the community should be involved by articulating and contributing to the programme from its inception (see Bringle et al., 2009). The primary schools, their learners, and the caregivers of these learners constitute our community partners in IZ and, together with the AGCLE team, identify the needs and interests of the community. They also continue to play a central and formative role in the continued deliberation about, design, and facilitation of the program as it unfolds each year. Teaching presence in IZ is fostered and shared more broadly among the mentees and our community partners as well. In contributing to the design and facilitation of IZ's learning content and spaces both at their schools and at our university in class, learners and community partners contribute to the construction of ideas and draw on their abilities, experiences, and expertise or situated knowledge to direct thinking and dialogue and shape discourse. Therefore, service-learning in IZ is not a linear process where students attend lectures and then go into disadvantaged communities to apply the knowledge gained in lectures. This program emphasises the assets in these communities, e.g., the knowledge and skills that learners and community partners can share with students during their interactions and brings these into the educational experience. This reciprocal process is where learning takes place. The learning process continues when community partners contribute to the course content. This co-creation of knowledge focuses on what students can learn from service learning and what community partners can contribute to co-creating course content. Their views, experiences, and skills cannot be found in textbooks and are invaluable to learning in IZ.

Recall that reflecting on service-learning is said to "transform experience into learning" (Roakes & Norris-Tirell, 2000, p. 101), enhancing what our students have learned during lectures and conversations (see Osman & Peterson, 2013) and providing further content and meaning for future deliberations, conceptions, actions, and reflections. Reflective thinking can be achieved through, for example, small group discussions that provide students with a platform to engage with one another critically, share their experiences, and unpack their learning processes (see Bellner & Pomery, 2005). These kinds of discussions take place weekly in peer-to-peer dialogues in IZ. Reflection can also be achieved by keeping a reflective journal in which students utilise concepts and theories from class to reflect on and (re)frame their experiences in and conceptions about communities (see Bellner & Pomery, 2005; Rhoads, 1997). Both our students and the learners keep private reflective journals, enabling them to think about and through why, how, and what they are learning and to integrate this learning into their own "system of thought" (Fromm, 2008, p. 24). Insofar as this is the case, service-learning and reflective thought about their service-learning engagements bridges the gap between our students' experiences and the world of action, on the one hand, and their ideas and the world of thought, on the other. Reflective practices of this sort are central to promoting Garrison's cognitive presence.

Research on service-learning courses suggests that students' personal and professional attitudes change through engaging in service-learning (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; Howard, 2002; Osman & Peterson, 2013). For instance, service learning has been shown to enhance civic responsibility in students, perhaps because of their improved understanding of those around them, their social context, and themselves, as well as their role in reshaping, indeed their capacity to reshape, this context. A review of the research suggests that service learning contributes to students' personal and social development – enhancing their self-esteem and leadership skills and building citizenship, civic and social responsibility – and improves their academic performance – e.g., their ability to apply concepts in novel and exciting ways (see Fisher et al., 2017). Thus, service learning creates collaboration and partnerships between communities and universities and works towards transforming both communities and students (Osman & Peterson, 2013). The IZ service-learning component exposes our students and primary school learners to different ways of learning about and engaging with their respective course content—encouraging them to work together and learn from and with each other, transforming themselves and their communities.

Service-learning in IZ plays a central role in responding to the concerns we outlined at the beginning of this paper – it speaks to more than mere capacitation; indeed, it speaks to transformation and *Bildung* through education; it challenges the thought-action duality by bringing the worlds of ideas and experience into direct contact with one another; and works with the operations of memory, enabling our students to build their growing understanding of content into their pictures of reality. Finally, it challenges the "hidden curriculum", shifting academic norms, values, and commitments, hopefully showing our students why learning should matter to them and, in so doing, humanising the learning environment of IZ.

Concluding remarks

We now offer a few words on how effectively we have achieved the educational ideals IZ was developed to achieve. In 2019, IZ received a glowing review from educational sociologist Kathy Luckett and feminist philosopher Ann Cahill. But we have never been complacent about our achievements; we constantly explore new possibilities. There are clear signs that students are responding positively to the course in large numbers. However, the course is embedded in a university system that remains relatively stuck in a business-as-usual approach to education. A course such as IZ would be more effective if its approach could be embraced more widely. Given the inertia characteristic of institutions of higher learning, we understand that to achieve our aims more fully, we will have to swim against the current for a while longer. An interesting aspect of our struggle is that contemporary vision and mission statements, and our university's is no exception, tend to align perfectly with our work. Still, this

alignment does not seem to translate into unambiguous institutional support.

We must now push hard to find spaces at our university and in the higher education sector more broadly to implement things we have learned throughout the years. We follow Dewey, Arendt, Freire, hooks, and many others in thinking that, at bottom, the ethical life is the self-reflective life, the life of the "two-in-one" that is at the heart of what Dewey refers to as intelligent growth, although he does not describe things in this way. We should note that this conception of the ethical life is identical to education as *Bildung* or self-formation divested of its elitist origins. Suppose we cannot intelligently and on an ongoing basis exercise our ability to have a say on how our lives will go. In that case, we end up being at the mercy of internal and external forces over which we have little control. In other words, we lose the ability to self-regulate and guide our lives with principles that we have thoughtfully helped to weave into the fabric of our lives. We should add that this process is not finite. It demands ongoing critical interrogation in light of ever-changing circumstances.

We are being approached by other South African universities expressing interest in our work, a positive sign that a commitment to changing our largely derivative pedagogical practices is slowly emerging in the South African tertiary sector. At the AGCLE, we continue to hope beyond hope that institutions of higher learning will take a leaf from the pedagogical experimentation that defines our deep commitment to transforming our students' lives and, in this way, helping to address the conditions of life in our troubled society.

In this paper, we have outlined the basic tenets that shape IZ and the vision of education informing it. We have explored the concerns and theoretical underpinnings of IZ as a student-led, service-learning course in ethics designed to respond to concerns with the state of higher education in South African tertiary institutions tasked with the "unmatched obligation" to transform and respond to societal concerns and interests by fostering a critical civil society. In response to these calls, IZ aims to transform the ways ethics is taught in South African universities from a purely theoretical discipline to a whole-body learning experience that allows our students to consider ethical issues in a genuinely practical way, revealing to them the stake they have in the ethical or the centrality of ethics to their lives as ethical agents as well as the intimate relationships that exist between education, ethics, and personal freedom or *Bildung*. In so doing, IZ aims to address the hidden lives of our students, including experiences of epistemic marginalisation and the thought-action duality – including the separation of capacitation and growth – in education that threatens the "two-in-one" or critical reflexivity needed to take responsibility for one's life.

As discussed above, IZ's conceptual underpinnings, content, and practical implementation converge. IZ is designed with a student-led pedagogical approach emphasising active engagement with the course content to promote students' intelligent growth. This humanising pedagogy finds concrete expression in the various aspects of the course, from student-led lectures to peer-to-peer dialogues and service learning. IZ's pedagogy of being is inspired by the philosophical work of Dewey, Freire, hooks, Fromm, and Rorty, among others discussed above, and the service-learning component of IZ brings their ideas to life, from the role of education in intelligent growth and Bildung, in enabling the reshaping or reinvention of the self, to critical, active engagement with societal concerns and interests. Here, we have described service learning in IZ through the lens of Garrison's Community of Inquiry framework, highlighting the interactions of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in a purposeful service-learning environment in which Bildung and the being mode of education are privileged. We hope to have succeeded in showing to what extent courses such as IZ are central to what should be happening in universities and, in particular, persuading the reader that IZ, or a course like IZ, is central to transforming South African higher education.

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Building a caring HyFlex pedagogy: An example of practice in an initial teacher education program

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Abstract

In our Australian regional communities, equity of participation and parity of access to initial teacher education courses have been a long-standing issue. Developing a caring HyFlex pedagogy that positions interpersonal and collegial relationships as central to the teaching and learning process and addresses the tyranny of distance is core to integrating technology and enhancing interaction to overcome barriers within regional communities. This example of practice provides the perspectives of a tutor and a student to illustrate the role of care and technology in building a student's learning journey. Pairing pedagogical care with a hybrid and flexible (HyFlex) delivery model presents an opportunity for an innovative regional pedagogy that makes a unique contribution to the established literature about both caring and HyFlex technology implementations.

Introduction

Conceptualising and implementing educational technology should occur through collaborative and constructive educational experiences (Garrison, 2016). Yet in regional education contexts, technology is often considered in a utilitarian way to conquer distances or resourcing issues (Beatty, 2019) with subsequent technology implementations heavily focused on 'transmission of content' (Garrison, 2016). In this paper, we present a work-in-progress example of higher education practice for delivering initial teacher education (ITE) programs at an outer regional campus of an Australian university. (According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), the remoteness structure defines remoteness areas for the purpose of releasing and analysing statistics. Remoteness areas divide Australia into five classes of remoteness which are characterised by a measure of relative geographic access to services.) We illustrate how coming from a place of care and kindness informed the selection and implementation of educational technology and delivery models of a professional experience placement course that is mandatory for program completion and graduate teacher registration.

The ITE program and course deliveries at the outer regional campus encompass diverse geographic, contextual, and digital footprints. Students enrolled in the ITE program reside in regional towns and communities, some being a few minutes' drive from the campus while others being hundreds of kilometres away in remote locations. For the students, this generates a significant cognitive load whilst managing the pressure and demands of their studies. In addition, the cost of fuel and little to no income during their compulsory pre-service placements (between six and eight weeks) is a significant financial burden to already geo-economically vulnerable students.

Engaging and supporting students in this context requires more than just a transactional teacher-student relationship. It also requires care. Motta and Bennett (2018) describe the importance of intentionally interrogating this concept as a way of "foregrounding the centrality of caring work, and its potential to play a wider role in reinvigorating democratising Higher Education (HE) pedagogical practices" (p. 363). This provided a conceptual starting point or 'affective turn' for the pedagogy of care enacted in the regional ITE program delivery to critically consider pedagogy in the locationally specific context and how this is situated within the broader and holistic sense of education as a relational dynamic.

While the phrase *educational technology* (EdTech) does not conjure images of care, often technology is positioned as a necessity or practical tool to achieve a specific outcome (Beatty, 2019). However, in this example of practice, the selection and application of technology was in the context of care being central to the teaching and learning process. In this pedagogy of care, e-learning as either online or blended learning (Garrison, 2016) was transcended through the development of a hybrid and flexible (HyFlex) model, where students were provided with the option of attending classes on campus or online (or both). Equivalent HyFlex course structures, first described in 2006 (Beatty, 2019), gained prominence during the pandemic to allow for education to continue in response to the necessity of social distancing (Beatty, 2020). However, in this case, the course delivery team came to their caring HyFlex structure without formal knowledge of the model. Rather, their intent was to build trusting and caring communication within genuine, reciprocated relationships between students and their tutors while establishing a learning environment.

In this paper, we present both the tutor and student perspective of a caring HyFlex pedagogy using the affordances of the University provided technology to illustrate the role of care and technology in building a student learning journey. We conduct an analysis of the example of practice with a specific focus on the three forms of 'presence' as described in Garrison's (2016) Community of Inquiry (CoI) model and demonstrate the potential for improved agency of choice for students and the promotion of affective and embodied praxis in the delivery of regional ITE courses leading to a more positive and effective learning experience. Further, we offer insights into the development of the HyFlex approach and how the development and implementation of the model have been accelerated through academic and professional collaboration. We conclude with reflection and recommendations for further research with a view to the development, codification, and scaling of a regional pedagogy for ITE programs.

In the current study, the application of technology is situated through a human(e) or caring framework as part of a pedagogy of care. The strategies described are part of a deliberate and targeted approach to ensure equity of access for regional students. The concept of care in an education context is part of the contemporary debate about access and widening participation in higher education (Motta & Bennett, 2018). In the positioning of this paper, we highlight the potential for using care as a starting point in the consideration of educational technologies, identifying a potential knowledge gap within the field of ITE.

Theoretical underpinnings

The example of practice is theoretically guided by three frameworks. The first one is Garrison's Community of Inquiry model (CoI), which provides a framework for understanding e-learning in higher education (Garrison, 2016). The second one is the HyFlex model, initially described by Brian Beatty who is a Professor of Instructional Design and Technology in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies, and Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University in 2006 (Beatty, 2019). Thirdly, these are enhanced through the concept of a pedagogy of care, informed by the work of Motta and Bennett (2018).

Community of inquiry

Garrison's (2016) CoI model focuses on the specific elements which are essential for a meaningful educational experience. He describes the framework as involving the learning unfolding within the community through the interaction of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Garrison, 2016). Figure 1 shows a simplified version of the

CoI model, where the overlapping elements focus on the engagement with participants (students), content, goals and direction building into an educational experience through a supporting discourse, climate setting, and regulation of learning. These elements play a pivotal role in fostering productive and meaningful learning experiences in diverse higher education settings while embracing and nurturing the humane aspect of education.

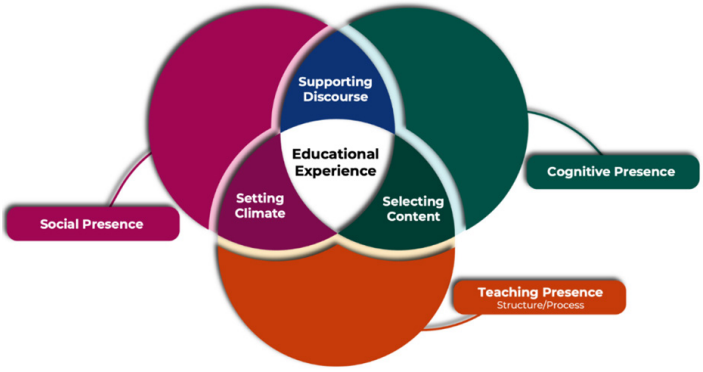

Figure 1. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, 2016).

The CoI model has been widely used as a theoretical framework due to the focus on the student and relationships as opposed to the technology in e-learning. While not a systematic review, some examples include the application of the CoI model to individual courses (see Stafford, 2022) and to the teacher's point of view (see Kamali et al., 2024) as well as to entire subjects (see Zhang et al., 2023). The challenge of removing the focus of technology from e-learning is best illustrated by good practice examples that focus on the non-technology components of e-learning (e.g., TELAS and Quality Matters). Garrison's (2016) CoI model allows the application in e-learning, regardless of the educational technology utilised, with the goal that "sound educational principles must inevitably guide the implementation of these innovations if we are to realize (sic) meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences and outcomes" (p. 10).

This has relevance to our example of practice as the focus is not on the technology components of the caring HyFlex but rather the connection to the educational experience for the students as they build trusting and caring communication within genuine kindness and reciprocated relationships. The approach to educational technology implementation is not focussed on the technology nor the imperative to connect across distances. The example of practice starts from the relationships. Therefore, using the CoI as a theoretical framework provides insights into the caring HyFlex that are outside of a focus on technology.

HyFlex model

In his CoI framework, Garrison (2016) describes e-learning as either online or blended learning. However, the HyFlex model is more than either model. It is a hybrid model that combines face-to-face with online learning and allows students the option to attend sessions in the classroom, online, or both and swap between modes (Beatty, 2019, 2020; Educause, 2010). While the concept of HyFlex was introduced in 2006, it has gained popularity through the pandemic for educational continuity and then post-pandemic to allow for student flexibility (Beatty, 2019; Calonge et al., 2024).

Similar to the CoI model, Beatty (2019) does not focus on the technology of HyFlex but rather describes four values: Learner choice, equivalency, reusability, and accessibility. Therefore, the model is open to interpretation and application. HyFlex and technology-driven approaches play a crucial role in reducing educational inequalities, making learning more inclusive and accessible (Escudeiro et al., 2023). The HyFlex model has been applied in different ways across different institutions, with extensive lists of examples emerging (see Beatty, 2019; Raes et al., 2020).

The HyFlex model is not without pedagogical and technological challenges. From a student perspective, they are required to negotiate additional technology and self-discipline making for challenges in the learning environment (Raes et al., 2020). From the teacher's perspective, this includes technology management while building a learning environment that requires additional coordination from the teacher to manage multiple class environments (Raes et al., 2020). The implementation of a HyFlex method is accelerated when the institution has the technology in place (Educause, 2010). However, it requires consideration of the room, spaces, and technologies to best engage students who are significant and prone to issues due to that they study from a different location (especially in regional areas) (Beatty, 2019; Educause, 2010; Raes et al., 2020). Besides, there are other organisational factors that can enhance the HyFlex mode, including administrative systems, policies, and practices (Beatty, 2019).

Significant to the example of practice is the addition of care or caring into the HyFlex model. In the online environment hosting his book, Beatty (2019) continues to add examples of case studies of the HyFlex models. At the time of writing, there are 17 examples of implementations of HyFlex models. However, in those examples, there is no explicit mention of 'care' or 'caring' in any of them, nor is there mention in the systematic review produced by Raes et al. (2020). That is not to say that the examples and case studies do not come from a place of care. Rather, none include a reference to the inclusion of care in their description. Therefore, the inclusion of care into the caring HyFlex has the potential to make a unique contribution to the current literature on the model.

The pedagogy of care

The intentional foregrounding of care presents the potential for reinvigorating higher education pedagogical practices (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Motta and Bennett (2018) identify three themes to consider in care: "care as recognition, care as dialogic relationality, and care as affective and embodied praxis" (p. 363), and it is through these themes that relationships are shown to be central to enacting a pedagogy of care. Similarly, Aspland and Fox (2022) consider Garrison's concept of presence in the student-teacher relationship, highlighting the centrality of kindness, suggesting that "[t]o become a kind teacher involves more

than just a teaching tool" (p. 146).

Embracing a pedagogy of care positions interpersonal and collegial relationships as central to the teaching and learning process. Knowing our students as people and as learners, within and beyond the context of the learning space or location, significantly deepens the work of academic learning and the lived experience of enacted classroom practice (Motta & Bennett, 2018; Seary & Willans, 2020). Supporting this position, Tan (2022) suggests, "we are not just teachers and students" (p. 156), and it is our humanity and relationships that connect us and add value to the teaching and learning experience. Reciprocated relationships that are genuinely compassionate mean "we must know our students, and they must know us" (Tan, 2022, p. 157) in a transformative and intentional way.

When students' experiences and insights are shared and valued, both the dialogic relationality and emotion of the reciprocated relationships add depth to the shared experience, create a positive learning environment, and enhance the meaning-making processes (Tan, 2022). Walker and Gleaves (2016) characterise this positive and enabling practice of teaching and learning as "the active fostering of and maintenance of pedagogic relationships above all else" (p. 1). Plust et al. (2021) build upon this, stating that "[c]aring appears to be a perceptible manifestation of authenticity" (p. 314). Teachers who care about the subjects they teach, their students, and themselves transfer their passion for the profession.

Noddings' care theory, as outlined by Burke et al. (2012), Motta and Bennett's (2018) pedagogy of care, and Tan's (2022) focus on the human(e) elements of genuine and compassionate relationships emphasise that care goes beyond teaching, requiring individuals to perceive and receive caring actions. The tutor's recognition of students' individuality stresses the importance of an individualised approach, through dialogic relationality, recognition, and affective and embodied praxis (Burke et al., 2012; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Tan, 2022). This results in a positive student-teacher relationship and reciprocated kindness, showcasing the benefit of a pedagogy of care.

Background to the example of practice

The University's outer regional campus is located approximately 385 kilometres from a state-government capital city and 1,400 km from Canberra – the national capital city of Australia. Travelling from there to campus via road, car, or bus involves approximately a 4-hour and 25-minute drive via the National Highway, as indicated in Google Maps.

The embodied reality of this journey includes sharing a single-lane highway with cars, caravans, motor homes, buses, and interstate transport trucks, without mentioning some transporting double or triple trailers totalling more than 30 metres in length. In addition, the level of concentration needed to journey safely is a careful watch for wildlife (particularly kangaroos). Convenience and rest breaks are essential. What a straightforward 4-hour and 25-minute drive looks like on Google Maps is a demanding and sometimes tedious 6-hour journey. Students will travel from remote and very remote locations to attend classes on campus located in the outer regional area, and there is additional travel for their mandatory professional experience placements. Attending placements require them to commute long distances or relocate living arrangements to complete. In our example of practice, less than half of the students lived locally, with the remainder travelling from communities up to 250 km away. An extreme instance is that one student travelled up to 120 km return each day of her 40-day placement.

Since the introduction of the Bachelor of Education program in a regional campus in 2013 (Harvey & Walsh, 2018) and through the COVID-19 pandemic, these regionally delivered ITE programs continued mainly online as an external delivery option. Often, regional external students were supported by a metropolitan-based tutor with some pre-service placements supervised 'remotely' by phone or teleconference.

For students in these regional areas, there are also financial challenges, which prompt many to undertake concurrent work and study (Brosnan et al., 2023). As students increasingly opt for hybrid study-work approaches to their teaching careers and regional communities experience unmet demand for local or regionally attuned educators, regionally responsive pedagogies and educational technology designs become necessary.

Example of practice

In 2021-2022, academic staff from the selected university began to focus on the caring components of their teaching and learning practices, namely, a pedagogy of care. In early 2023, discussions with the Dean of Programs highlighted the intended benefits to ITE course and program delivery in the regions and promotion of student agency. The approach was recognised as innovative, and there was an opportunity to formalise, codify, and scale the model. The 'caring with technology utilisation', a way to connect externally through technology, had evolved into a caring HyFlex mode, a model granting flexibility between face-to-face and online options, ensuring the preservation of both teacher and cognitive presence without any negative repercussions (Garrison, 2016). The transition from 'caring with technology utilisation' to caring HyFlex was accelerated through the collaborative relationship between an academic and a professional staff member. It was through a recognition of care and shared commitment to addressing the educational challenges and navigating the intricacies of integrated technology to ensure students in regional areas could receive a high-quality education that a common interest was found. Taking both academic and professional services perspectives became an enabling factor in our example of practice.

The following example of practice is presented in a self-narrative manner from two perspectives: the tutor's (academic) and the students'. Understanding both the context and lived experience of the tutor and the student through self-narrative brings into focus "how lived life bears on lived educational experiences" (Hamilton et al., 2008,

p. 19). The tutor and the student come to the example of practice from different generational, geographic, and practitioner- inquirer perspectives. While both are early career researchers, the tutor has extensive practical knowledge of teaching, and the student is beginning her teaching career. Again, drawing on the work of Hamilton et al. (2008), ours "is a story of experience[s] that attempts to share information and learn from it" (p. 20).

The tutor's perspective describes the importance of care in their practice and how this drove the implementation of technology to address regional delivery challenges in ITE programs. Prior to joining the University in early 2021, the tutor was a classroom teacher and school leader in regional schools for more than two decades. Knowing her students as people and learners and fostering relationships with her students, their families, and the broader community has always featured highly in her practice. The specific strategies and practices employed in the evolution of the HyFlex model were taken from her journal entries and reflections of practice throughout the 2023 academic year. Technological skills were developed in situ by the tutor.

The student's perspective describes how her decision to relocate from a large metropolitan city to a regional area to finish her ITE degree and begin her teaching career was supported and enhanced by a pedagogy of care. In addition, the caring HyFlex delivery model provided agency of access to enable the multifaceted aspects of life, study, and career. The student's description of her learning journey and the impact of the caring HyFlex is compiled from interview transcripts, personal notes, and reflections on the transition from pre-service to independent and autonomous teacher.

Building a pedagogy of care – A regional educator's perspective

> What really keeps me awake at night is thinking about the pressures and demands placed on our final year pre-service teachers as students and individuals with lives and commitments outside of university; and how, to a large degree, the success of their final placement hinges on the quality of the pedagogic relationships between the pre-service teachers and supervising teachers, school sites, and the connections with the university teacher (Jones & Foran, 2024, p. 407).

Living and working in regional communities is a joy and a privilege; it is not a deficit position. As a teacher of children and young people and curriculum leader in schools for more than two decades, equity of participation and parity of access to education for all regional students have been the focus of my work even before I became an academic, tutor, and early career researcher.

Largely, regional courses are prepared in the metropolitan context. Course coordinators develop the content for tutors to deliver, ensuring consistency for all students, regardless of their mode of engagement or geographic location. Metropolitan, regional, and external classes all have access to the same content via a Moodle-based platform – Learnonline – and standardised tutor delivery is encouraged. As a regional tutor, it is my role to contextualise the content and structure the delivery to suit my class. This means preparing to engage with the content in multiple and simultaneous ways, which takes some planning and preparation.

Knowing my students and the diversity of our regional contexts is fundamental to this process, and I draw heavily upon my experience living and working in regional communities. Pedagogical care underpins my beliefs, actions, and commitment to regional teaching, learning, and research. Motta and Bennett (2018) describe how caring "pedagogical practice is manifested by teacher-commitment to embracing the whole student, and not reducing them to instrumentalist and homogenised careless motivations and aspirations" (p. 636). Knowing each student in our regional classes as students and as people with lives and lived experiences beyond the teaching and learning context, and them knowing me, gave them the confidence to provide constructive feedback and suggestions about how to improve the regional teaching and learning experience.

Finally, deeply listening to and reflecting upon my students' feedback has helped me envision and articulate how applying and innovating with the available technology would promote agency and choice. Embracing a flexible model was one way to address the regionally and locationally specific challenges for every student, regardless of their geographic location.

Implementing a caring HyFlex – A regional educator's perspective

When teaching ITE in a regionally located university, building positive relationships with students comes first and foremost. A genuine commitment to supporting students to navigate the complex demands of university requirements, study loads, paid work, and the demands of regional life – including driving long distances to and from university – comes from understanding the regional context (Green et al., 2020; Harrington et al., 2022).

When coming from a place of care, without huge confidence in my digital skills and no background in educational technology, my approach to the use of technology in classes developed quickly. My trust in the caring approach helped me overcome these concerns with the belief that any mistakes or errors would model mutual support when capabilities, technologies or infrastructure fail us.

At the start of each semester, I sent all students a recurring meeting maker and Zoom link and this ensured the class was scheduled in everyone's calendar (including mine). Zoom is the 'standard' videoconference platform, but we used Teams, Facetime, SMS or even phone calls on speaker when the technology was not our 'friend'.

Something we learnt very quickly was that while videoconference technology is a useful tool and quick to employ, we discovered that as a teaching tool, it was not enough on its own (Jones & Foran, 2024). This led to the introduction of the hybrid environment as we moved

to combine the face-to-face and online (synchronous) participants. We recorded, narrated and 'whiteboarded' our learning to ensure that those students participating (asynchronously) could engage with the recordings in a meaningful way. Thinking about how to best manage break-out groups and capture the rich discussions within them took trial and error to begin with because you cannot record them all.

We solved the problem of creating rich content for asynchronous students by ensuring that face-to-face class members had immediate access to Zoom, enabling us to flexibly group in-class participants with on-zoom ones for discussions. When we came together as a group, we shared key points, summarising our discussions, and 'whiteboarding' these in dot points. Those engaging asynchronously were able to access rich media and follow along through narrated content connected to the numbered slides, discussion summaries, and photos of whiteboards that were included with the link to the recording to the whole class. The unintended and welcome bonus was that this ensured we could all reflect and 'look back' and refresh our memories of how we engaged with the content.

Implementing a caring HyFlex model is not without its limitations. Enacting a caring HyFlex model of delivery has a lot of moving parts for a solo tutor. Delivering content, engaging students both in the classroom and online, providing cognitive commentary for asynchronous users, and managing videoconference functions are a juggling act. Unexpected technological issues and unstable internet connection interrupt access and engagement of and for students. Often, resolving this 'in the moment' is beyond the control and capacity of the student or tutor, and almost always impacts upon the teaching and learning experience.

Initially, there seemed like a lot of moving parts to keep track of, but it did not take long to become familiar with how to run and support the classes. We reached a point where our transitions between modes of delivery were (almost) seamless. I was not thinking about the technology; instead, I was thinking about how to build capacity through shared life and learning experiences in situ. Having the hybrid flexibility allowed my students to get the most out of our classes, regardless of how they accessed them. There was no need to plan for who was where, in class, on Zoom, listening along asynchronously, and so on. We just made sure all bases were covered, and everyone got what they needed.

A significant structural challenge was the false dichotomy of internal versus external class modes, which did not allow for a hybrid option. Until 2024, students only had the opportunity to choose an internal (on-campus) or external (online synchronous) class, with course coordinators determining if virtual classes would be made available. The caring HyFlex transcends the internal or external dichotomy, and in 2024, all professional experience regional placement courses for the program will be run this way.

Learning journey of a caring HyFlex model – A student's perspective

As a co-author of this paper and a member of the 2023 ITE student cohort, my learning journey in the outer regional town, 90 minutes away from the University campus, began with an email offering a $7,000 AUD scholarship from Catholic education, paving the way for a teaching placement opportunity in regional South Australia. It enticed me, as I had recently met someone from that town while on a study tour months earlier.

My decision to relocate, driven by a desire to contribute to a small community, required careful consideration of accommodation, logistics, support, and the feasibility of online study. Inspired by my friend, I gained a profound understanding of the town's needs, transforming my perspective and prompting me to pursue a job opportunity with a Special Authority to Teach, which is the authority provided to an individual in exceptional circumstances by the Teachers Registration Board to teach at schools in South Australia which are unable to secure the services of a registered teacher (TRBSA, 2021).

As I considered this journey, it brought attention to the challenges and opportunities students face in regional education. I had the impression that my only option for study would be online and external; and if there was to be a lack of tutor presence and limited personal, face-to-face interactions, this added to my concerns. The turning point came when I reached out to my friend. They knew about my intention to relocate and encouraged me to reach out to their lecturer. I contacted the tutor and expressed my interest in attending classes and workshops in person, to be able to have a positive relationship and connection to the University. Assured of the engagement and care, I took the opportunity and moved to Port Augusta, a small coastal city in South Australia, approximately 300 km drive from the state's capital city, Adelaide.

My classes offered a flexible blend of online and in-person learning experiences, allowing me autonomy, control, and ownership over my educational path. Having the opportunity to participate in mixed online and in-person learning experiences allowed me to exercise higher levels of thinking and adapting to new environments and communities. I felt empowered. Using various digital channels, such as Zoom, SMS, phone calls or group chats on social media, to connect with my tutor and other students, allowed me to navigate a demanding lifestyle that combined learning and work, both in the school sector and at the university.

My educator's student-centred approach which addressed my academic needs while ensuring I felt genuinely acknowledged as an individual learner, helped me feel connected, especially when feeling isolated from friends and family in a new country town (Baeten et al., 2013; OECD, 2023). I faced challenges that, without support, would have led to increased burnout. After challenges with my final year placement, I felt feelings of shame and failure, which were resolved and talked over with my educator via phone call, while commuting to placement in the morning.

A great support was the frequent check-ins and emails, which regularly ended with the hashtag *#hereifyouneed*. Academic knowledge and support were consistently communicated through workshops, emails, and poster boards, as were directions and support to summarise and reinforce key learnings (O'Brien, 2023). This triad of strategies ensured I had all the necessary information to feel confident in my potential for success. It also modelled how I would like to 'pay it forward' and further enact this innovative, holistic way of teaching in my own practice.

An infographic of my learning journey is shown in Figure 2. The experience has provided me with a transformative realisation and influenced my teaching perspective, underscoring the significance of feeling cared for and a way to enact a positive, supportive, and meaningful learning experience. This experience has become invaluable as I believe that our academic training often falls short in addressing practical skills for building caring relationships (Banda & Reyes, 2022; Burke et al., 2012; Cells et al., 2023; Flower et al., 2017; Harrington et al., 2022).

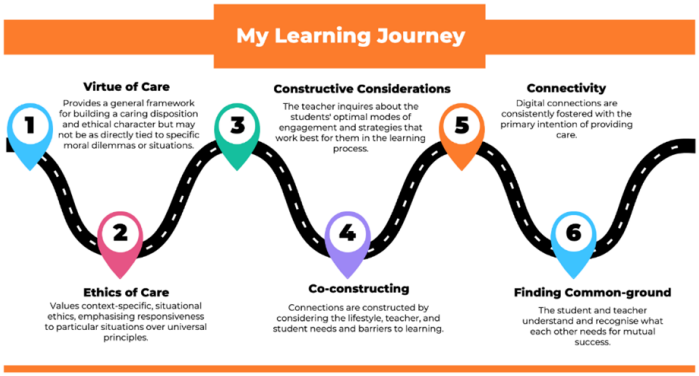

Figure 2. My learning journey (illustrated based on the student's description).

Discussion

The example of practice shows how coming from a caring approach has enriched the hybrid delivery, and there has been a positive impact on the student who was enrolled in the innovated program. While the caring HyFlex is in its infancy, our analysis of the example of practice demonstrates alignment to Garrison's (2016) CoI model with elements of social, cognitive, and teaching presence all illustrated as informed by a pedagogy of care and inclusive approach (Motta & Bennett, 2018; OECD, 2023).

In addition, while the process of intentionally developing a pedagogy of care commenced in 2021-2022, the implementation of a caring HyFlex was accelerated in 2023. This was partly due to the pedagogy of care being well-established and a strong relationship between the students and their educator, enabling a HyFlex model to be implemented with existing University-provided technology (Beatty, 2020). It was also accelerated because it was implemented with a small cohort outside a formal learning design process with an enabling academic and professional relationship.

Noteworthily, the impact identified in the example of the practice is largely anecdotal and requires further investigation into the efficacy of the caring HyFlex. Therefore, it is important to explore this in more detail to consider how this could be scaled beyond a regional pedagogical practice that "connect[s] notions of place, space and identity at the local level" (Walker-Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 89) to a caring HyFlex model that is applicable and transferable in any teaching and learning context.

Coming from a place of care

The regional educator's perspective illustrates what Banda and Reyes (2022) describe living and teaching within a community as "a caring ethic [that means] … being present in the moment to craft pedagogies that are responsive to the particular needs of both the teacher *and* students" (p. 6). Flores and Alfaro (2022) support this position: "[p]racticing love and care in our classrooms and relations with others is a life learning process" (p. 393). Personal investment in the relationship amplifies the nuances, validating the commitment to care made by both the teacher and the student, fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and responsive to individual and collective well-being (Harrington et al., 2022; Pietersen, 2023).

This sense of belonging, of being seen, heard, and accepted as a "co-teach[er] offers community and collaboration that can sustain the holistic well-being" (Banda & Reyes, 2022, p. 2) of ITE students, their tutors, and the communities in which they live and work. Drawing upon the seminal work of Zeichner (2010), the regional tutor embraces a pedagogy of care that supports and fosters genuine, reciprocated, and non-hierarchical relationships (Green et al., 2020) with and for regionally located ITE students. Following Zeichner's (2010) lead, the tutor aims to drive a

> shift in the epistemology of teacher education from a situation where academic knowledge is seen as the authoritative source of knowledge about teaching to one where different aspects of expertise that exist in schools and communities are brought into teacher education and coexist on a more equal plane with academic knowledge (Zeichner, 2010, p. 95).

The concept of recognition, dialogic relationality, and affective and embodied practice holds immense importance in cultivating a sense of belonging within the learning community and contributing to improved student retention (Harrington et al., 2022).

This relational approach bridges the gap between connection and community, as Garrison (2016) describes: "[C]ommunity is built with purpose, collaboration and trust" (p. 11). While the CoI model was not applied intentionally, it is still present, as illustrated in Figure 3. The social element was clear: a) through the care for people shown in the intent for students to communicate openly in a trusting environment (social presence); b) within the context of the learning environment built from care and trust (cognitive presence); and c) the care in teaching in the design, facilitation, and instructions provided (teaching presence).

Figure 3. How CoI was built through a model of care.

Utilising a caring HyFlex model and the technological tools that connect and engage students and their tutor draws upon the work of Kent and Taylor (2002) to give deeper insight into Motta and Bennett's (2018) exploration of dialogic relationality and the emotion of learning. The "five dialogic principles [of] mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment" capture the essence of dialogue in our context that "requires of participants that they take the good of others to heart when interacting" (Lane & Kent, 2018, p. 63). Enacting teaching and learning through a caring HyFlex model invites both the student and the tutor to be active participants in the experience. This builds and fosters reciprocated trust, care and dialogic relationality that underpins the relationships upon which a pedagogy of care is built.

In 2024, the caring HyFlex model will underpin ITE program delivery. The continued formalisation of our regional pedagogical practice has commenced with a view to codification and scaling. Sharing the example of practice provides opportunities for other educators to replicate the approach.

Measuring the impact on students

When coming from a place of care, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge students' life experiences and the insights they bring with them into the learning environment (Seary & Willans, 2020). The student's narrative of their learning journey shows the positive effects of the caring HyFlex. The utilisation of technology not only instilled flexibility and adaptability but also proved essential for the dynamic demands of the evolving educational and professional setting. This approach meets the challenge of developing new approaches to using the technology that "support new and more effective collaborative approaches to learning that engage learners in purposeful and meaningful discourse" (Garrison, 2016, p. 22).

The components of the CoI model are present in the narrative, as depicted in Figure 4, where social presence is evident through feelings of trust and strong connection with the choice of communication. The cognitive presence was described through descriptions of acknowledgement and trust to build a supporting learning environment. Teaching presence was felt through a conversational relationship where meaningful academic and social conversations were able to influence an active student role and learning identity.

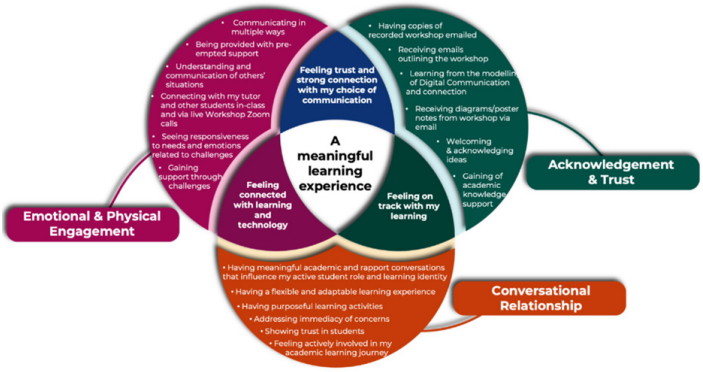

Figure 4. How CoI was experienced from a student's perspective.

The reflection on the student's experience brings to light the observation that academic training often neglects practical aspects of building meaningful relationships (Motta & Bennett, 2018). The student's commitment to emulate the tutor's supportive and student-centred approach underscores the significance of interpersonal skills and mentorship in the caring HyFlex outside of meeting prescribed learning outcomes. This commitment drives the student's dedication to positively contribute to the learning journeys of future teachers and students (Burke et al., 2012; Motta & Bennett, 2018). This presents an opportunity to consider the evaluation of the caring hybrid approach beyond the achievement of learning objectives.

Anecdotal feedback from the 2023 cohort of ITE students suggests that they are embracing the caring HyFlex model of delivery. Students indicated that this innovative approach keeps them connected to their regional peers and tutors while they work in schools and complete their ITE degree. The caring HyFlex offers the flexibility and connectivity of 'real learning opportunities' for this cohort as they cross the bridge from students and pre-service teachers to the 'work engaged learning' of beginning and early career teachers (Nagy & Robinson, 2013).

Despite the fact that this research is still in progress, preliminary findings suggest a pedagogy of care which embraces a HyFlex delivery model promoting student agency and choice to attend classes on campus, via synchronous video-conference software, or asynchronously through the recorded sessions, leads to regional students feeling more "involved" and "heard" throughout their courses. Thus, there is a need for further research to continue to validate our initial findings with a view to demonstrating its efficacy.

Showcasing a caring HyFlex

Beatty (2019) describes that the common impetus for HyFlex is resourcing. When he piloted the model, Beatty "sought solutions to the problem of needing to serve regional students with online and classroom options that allowed maximum student choice in participation mode" (p. 10). This is similar to the abovementioned example of practice, with the difference that our example comes from a place, which is explicitly about care. The caring drove the technology

selection and implementation.

With 20 years in education and no formal background in digital education or learning design, the educator/s implemented a caring HyFlex approach, which is consistent with the HyFlex values (Beatty, 2019) and aligned it with the CoI model (Garrison, 2016). This illustrates the possibilities which Garrison (2016) describes "[A] collaborative educational experience demands the experience and insight of reflective, flexible and knowledgeable educators to translate principles and guidelines to the ever-changing contingencies and exigencies of their particular environments" (p. 6). While the CoI model was not intentionally used, there is a clear connection to the model, as seen in Figure 5.

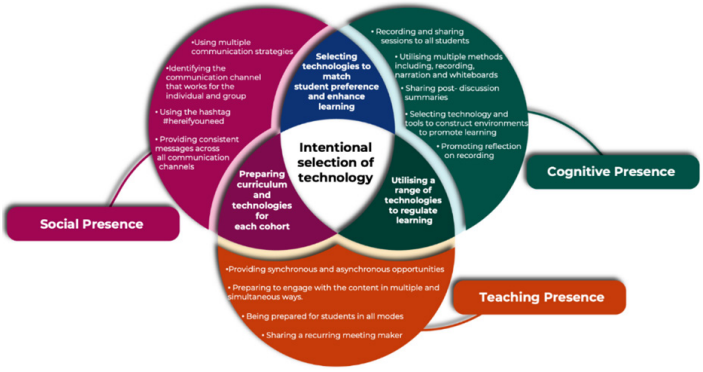

Figure 5. How CoI components are seen in technology implementation.

The rethinking of social presence was shown in the selection of technologies to match the student preferences and enhance learning, including personalisation of communication around a common message and the use of hashtags when communicating. The development of a learning environment ensured that students could access the content and engage in multiple ways, showing the cognitive components. Finally, the teaching presence was clear with the tutor preparing to engage with the content in multiple and simultaneous ways.

From a constructivist approach, the nurturing and maintenance of connections necessary to facilitate continual learning (see Siemens, 2004) is illustrated by the adaption of technology and interventions to better meet student needs. This approach to HyFlex is consistent with the development of other HyFlex environments (Beatty, 2019). The shift from video conference to hybrid class evolved to accommodate students who were unable to attend class. Initially, the Zoom link was sent 'in the moment' as it was needed. "[C]onnections [were] created with others, real-time collaboration [took] place, and the power of a just-in-time learning atmosphere [was enabled] …" (Utecht & Keller, 2019, p. 115). This transitioned into a consistent approach of including the Zoom link with the calendar request to offer flexibility for all students. The outcome was that: a) the class was able to nurture and maintain connections and facilitate continual learning, and b) no one missed out because they could not be there in person.

What could have begun as a technological fix to a geographical challenge was instead an intentional caring strategy and an iterative approach based on a dialogic relational approach. This is due to the pedagogy of care.

A pedagogy of care is a deep and genuine commitment to relationships that are central to the teaching and learning process. When applying the educational technology in their classes, rather than coming from a learning design approach, the team came from a place of caring. Utecht and Keller (2019, p. 107) expand on this, stating:

> The power lies not in the technology platforms themselves but in the connections they foster. Educators in both the K-12 and university classrooms who take risks and embrace these connected learning technologies have potential to uncover a whole new way of learning.

Technology was a tool to enable connections between students and their tutors, actively constructing new pedagogical knowledge.

A critical review of the regional tutor's approach shows an interesting approach to the design of the learning experience and the application of technology. Often, curriculum development utilises the University's provided infrastructure or is intentionally developed with learning designers. This sees the building of a learning environment from a theoretical or evidence base. However, in this case, it comes from an intuitive perspective, where the tutor used the technology that they felt was best to be utilised to further the pedagogy of care. This is counter to the evidence-based approach that is frequently espoused to improve the impact of digital technologies.

When talking about the Practical Inquiry (PI) model, Garrison (2016) tells us that concepts related to intuition and insight should not be ignored, which is the approach that followed the critical and reflective enquiry as the tutor learnt through on-the-run development of the caring HyFlex. However, this is not consistent with Neelen and Kirschner (2020), who argue that "no matter how we slice it, what it comes down to is: We need to use the evidence available to us to make sure we move beyond opinions and intuition" (p. 1). Given that there is a significant tension between acknowledging a learning process and the way learning design is approached, it is an area which may benefit from further research.

Considering the possibilities

Academic and teaching work is situated in an organisational context of administrative or professional services. In an e-learning context, Garrison (2016) raises non-teaching issues of policy, leadership, infrastructure, and curriculum development. In a HyFlex learning context, Beatty (2019) raises issues of time and facilities. However, there are other realities of university life in the form of professional services, including timetabling and workload.

One of the unique features of the example of practice is the relationship between the academic and professional staff, which also came from a place of care. The lead researcher is an academic with an ITE background and a focus on the pedagogy of care. The second researcher has a background

in digital education and currently holds a professional position. As their relationship grew, so did their sharing of complementary interests. They built a dialogic relationship of care and collegiality, which supported and enabled the regional tutor. As an example of caring as affective and embodied praxis, it was through this relationship that the unique nature of the caring HyFlex model was recognised and identified as a potential area for collaboration and research.

From a practical perspective, the 'professional services' of the academic unit were identified as enablers to the scaling of the regional pedagogical practice from which the caring HyFlex model evolved. Providing linkages to technical services, ICT support, timetabling, and workload has seen support for the model through the lobbying for additional technology infrastructure, recognising the need for alternative timetabling processes and reflecting this into the workload model. While these are part of the academic unit core support services, they were not initially flexible to the regional pedagogical practice until the caring HyFlex model was explored in a collaborative way.

Fostering collaborative relationships between academic and professional staff is a key enabler for the implementation of effective higher education and assessment. The caring and productive academic and professional relationship illustrates the opportunities to explore alternative ways of working, where teaching and learning 'services' work hand in hand with academic staff. Furthermore, there is potential to explore, beyond the organisational enabling factors into the emerging research, into third space staff.

Third space staff are defined as those who "exist in a working space that occurs between academic and professional practice, research and teaching, and sometimes operate amongst the spheres in academia, practice and industry ecosystems" (Hains-Wesson & Rahman, 2023). The possibility for third space staff who sit outside of the traditional areas of learning design to play an enabling role. Therefore, we suggest that this is an area that may warrant further investigation.

Conclusion

In the paper, we reiterate that "our educational ideals must drive the vision" (Garrison, 2016, p. 6). We also illustrate how the inclusion of care can add value to educational ideals and support the implementation of learning technologies with the possibility of increasing the impact on our students. We believe the experience of our regionally delivered ITE programs builds and promotes reciprocated relationships and professional collaboration between educators and students that respond to and shape the future of regional education (Garrison, 2016).

We are just starting our research. After an initial concept was presented at the National Regional conference to good feedback, Vacation Research Scholars have been funded to support the research into the caring HyFlex and the deliberate and targeted approach to equity of access for regional students. Building upon our preliminary work, the continued formalisation of a caring HyFlex in regional ITE delivery has commenced with a view to codification and scaling, building upon the collegiality of care between the two researchers. The relationship across academic and professional boundaries has enabled conversations about 'how do we do this/make this work', which has started to extend across the academic unit. Therefore, to be considered a modern approach to higher education, this model requires comprehensive research to demonstrate its impact on both students and educators, thereby informing educational practices.

In this paper, we suggest that developing a regional pedagogy that positions interpersonal and collegial relationships as central to the teaching and learning process and addresses the tyranny of distance is core to integrating technology and enhancing interaction to overcome barriers within regional communities. The false dichotomy presented to students of on-campus or online exposes the room to create an alternative which affords students agency of access promoting regional connectivity with peers, tutors, and educators in schools. The integration of pedagogical care with a HyFlex delivery model represents a novel approach that enhances the regional pedagogy and adds a distinctive contribution to the academic discourse on both caring and HyFlex technology implementations.

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Kaplan Business School's student-centred approach: An interview with Professor James Adonopoulos

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Abstract

In this wide-ranging interview, we explore the perspectives of Professor James Adonopoulos, the Academic Dean of Kaplan Business School (Australia) – one of the most reputable tertiary education providers in the field of business, globally recognised as the Business School of the Year for international students in 2023. This interview delves into Prof. Adonopoulos's academic strategies, initiatives, and practices that have culminated in a supportive and nurturing learning environment and a humane approach to teaching.

Addressing topics related to kindness and student centricity, Prof. Adonopoulos highlights the importance of discourse-based workshops in contrast to unidirectional lectures and explains how his national team of more than 600 teachers are engaged and equipped with the skills to cultivate an engaging learning environment. Prof. Adonopoulos argues that technical skills are insufficient for the modern workplace which demands that graduates also possess a formidable set of ethical standards, emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. He provides examples from his experiences at Kaplan Business School where he has led the creation of an inclusive, supportive, and psychologically safe academic culture that supports the emotional and intellectual growth of faculty and students. The proactive embrace of emerging technologies and the pursuit of disruptive innovation are additionally discussed in this interview with insights shared on what it means to teach and prepare students for the contemporary business world.

Introduction

Aleksandra Vojinovikj (Aleksandra): At the very beginning, allow us to congratulate you on your contribution to Kaplan Business School's (KBS) most recent global award – 'Business School of the Year' for international students. This is on top of KBS becoming Australia's ninth self–accrediting authority (in Australia, a self-accrediting authority means that a higher education provider is permitted to accredit some or all of its courses of study; see Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of Australian Government [2022]), as well as numerous awards and acknowledgements for the quality of teaching, student support, learner engagement, graduate outcomes, and student employability. All of that speaks volumes of the innovative and progressive approach to education at KBS. The education industry needs to learn from such reputable organisations, making this a particularly timely interview. Can you describe your initial reaction upon learning that KBS was named 'Business School of the Year' at the PIEoneer Awards in 2023?

Figure 1. Professor James Adonopoulos.

Professor James Adonopoulos (J.A.): It was a mixture of emotion, surprise, and pride. I was there with our executive director, Steve Knussen, and my colleague, Alex Reeman–Clark, who was likewise a colleague of mine at KBS back in 2016 when our institute was not as highly regarded. Back then, publicly available government data revealed a discomfiting gap between our aspirational vision for quality education and the reality at the time. However, since then, our net promoter score has tripled such that it is now consistently above plus 50, higher than almost every Fortune 500 company; likewise, we are now officially ranked as one of the top two business schools for postgraduate teaching quality. So, we have well and truly overcome the challenges we confronted in 2015 and 2016. Being at the ceremony in London was therefore validation for us that our many difficult decisions were ultimately successful.

The second sentiment was surprise. I genuinely did not expect us to win when considering the calibre of the other global finalists, so it was an absolute surprise to know that we were named the best business school for international education in the world. The third sentiment was pride, which stems from the fact that doing work that we know has a consequential impact on students is one thing; however, having that work recognised at a global level is something altogether different.

Figure 2. Professor James Adonopoulos (on the left), accepting the award for the 'Business School of the Year' at the PIEoneer Awards 2023. Source: The PIE Partnership (2023).

Athena Valassas (Athena): For those who are unfamiliar with your institution, could you provide a brief overview of KBS's history and core values?

J.A.: KBS started with just one campus over a decade ago and has grown over the years from an institute offering just a few courses that were relatively indistinguishable from the rest of the higher education sector to the inspirational institute we are today, which genuinely leads the sector. What I mean by inspirational is not just about awards. I am talking

about the fact that during the COVID–19 pandemic, when so many higher education providers around Australia and the world were shutting down programs, we were launching postgraduate Business Analytics courses, with hundreds of students enrolled in that first year and thousands ever since then. In a similar vein, when other institutions were shutting down their campuses in the midst of COVID-19, we were opening our Perth campus in Western Australia, with thousands of students having since enrolled.

As a school, what we represent is more than just typical business studies. We present a genuine national footprint as the only business school in Australia with campuses across the five capital cities as well as a sixth on the Gold Coast (the new KBS Gold Coast campus – has opened in early March 2024, with the first classes commencing on 18th March 2024; see Kaplan Business School [2024a]). Our courses now expand beyond the traditional business courses of an MBA and a Bachelor of Business to encompass, as mentioned, not just analytics but also IT, which we launched last year.

We are one of Australia's biggest institutes of higher education, certainly among the most trusted and respected.

Figure 3. Aleksandra Vojinovikj (one of the interviewers) teaching a class at the KBS Sydney campus. Source: Kaplan Business School, (2024b).

We're trusted and respected because we're a self–accrediting authority. This means that, of the 150+ institutes of higher education in Australia, we are one of only nine that TEQSA, our regulator, trusts with the accreditation and reaccreditation of their own programs, specifically business programs in our case.

Aleksandra: What do you believe sets KBS apart from other higher education institutions in terms of educational philosophy?

J.A.: The one key differentiating factor we have deliberately reinforced is our *supportive and nurturing learning environment*. That was never an aspirational vision because it was something we already were, unambiguously, based on official government data.

That explains why nearly every decision at KBS is authentically based on whether it will further reinforce our ability to be supportive and nurturing educators for students.

The learning experience is more than just what happens in the classroom. It encompasses every touch point, from when students first apply online to the way they're greeted on campus by our Student Experience personnel. It extends beyond their interactions with staff to include the ways in which we continue to support and nurture their development even after they graduate.

This is what fundamentally differentiates us. Other providers could state they support their students, but we have accumulated substantial evidence to prove that claim – not just awards but independently collected data such as sector-wide benchmarking, the International Student Barometer, and official government rankings.

You would know this personally, Aleksandra, since you were once an international student of ours. Coming to a foreign country where you don't know the language, where you're far from your support network, away from your loved ones, and confronted by unfamiliar customs and teaching methods is really quite overwhelming. To go through all that and still graduate successfully is only possible if you are enrolled with a supportive and nurturing educator like Kaplan Business School.

We have thousands of students who come to Australia and enrol at public universities under the assumption that there's a positive correlation between research-based rankings and student experience. But, as verified by the Australian Financial Review (Bennett, 2023) in November 2023, the higher an institute ranks in research, the lower its ranking for student experience. That's why they so often end up enrolling with us instead.

A humane approach to teaching

Athena: In a world that is increasingly interconnected, students need more than just academic knowledge. This includes fostering empathy, tolerance, and understanding of global issues. Students should be encouraged to appreciate diversity, engage in cross-cultural dialogues, and develop a sense of responsibility towards the broader global community (McDonald, 2000). How do you define a 'humane approach to teaching', and why is it important in

the context of international education?

J. A.: So, what does 'humane' mean? It means, in its simplest form, the ability to recognise that the person in front of you in the classroom is not just a student; it is not just someone with a student ID or someone who is Asian, Greek, or Brazilian. What you have in front of you is a human being. And if there is a human being in front of you, it essentially means they have emotions, experiences, thoughts, ambitions, flaws and shortfalls, skill deficits, strengths and talents; they are a fascinating and complex individual deserving of respect.

> ***So, if you're going to teach in a humane way, the only way to do that is not by being teacher-centric. It is by being student-centric.***

It is, therefore, not humane to walk into a classroom and act as though you are the one on show as the teacher. The people who must be on show are the students, and this means oftentimes slowing down to observe what is happening in the classroom and to notice what is not being said. It's so important to be cognisant of people's facial expressions, to observe if they're paying attention or transfixed by their phone, or if they're being participative or passive in a team activity – there are so many complications. To be humane necessitates that skill – the skill of observation – to see what an ordinary lecturer at a university would not be able to see. When you are facilitating a classroom activity, you are not using those ten minutes to browse your phone and review your notes. You are as engaged in the activity as the students. When you are speaking to students, you are not just focused on what you are saying; you are focused on how they are reacting because communication is reciprocal – the ultimate definition of communication is the exchange of understanding. The only way you can ascertain whether the exchange of understanding has occurred is when you, as the communicator, have received something back from the recipient to confirm they have received it in the way you intended. That is not going to happen unless you are observing their reaction.

Athena: Prioritising students' well–being, individual needs, and cultural sensitivity is an important part of incorporating a humane approach into the curriculum and pedagogy. In addition to meeting students' academic requirements, educators may foster an atmosphere that values diversity of thought, sensitivity for others, and a well–rounded education for everyone (Waddock, 2016). You already mentioned some relevant examples that speak of this approach. Could you share some more examples of how this approach is integrated into the curriculum and pedagogy at KBS?

J. A.: There are dozens of examples, but I will focus on the one that I'm confident has been most impactful for us, and that is what we call the *ten–minute rule*. The ten–minute rule was born out of our acknowledgement that lectures are the most pedagogically unsound method of instruction.

We, therefore, abolished all lectures and tutorials and replaced them with interactive workshops. But to ensure the workshops are facilitated consistently, we've engineered a series of cognitively stimulating activities within our slide decks that reinforce the learning outcomes, with each of those activities aligned to the AQF or Australian Qualifications Framework (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2021). They are designed to be more intense or more complex based on where the course is situated on the AQF. Since these activities are embedded within the slide decks, there is no additional work our teachers need to do beforehand. There is no need to prepare their own activities. They just facilitate those we have already designed for them. This has been one of the more consequential pedagogical methods we have adopted.

> ***Dialogue is very different from lecturing. It means the teacher is engaging in a meaningful and substantive conversation with their students. The teacher triggers different parts of the students' brains as they try to figure out an answer to a complex activity and interact to better understand a particular case study, which makes it a far more thrilling and engaging learning environment.***

Figure 4. Facilitating an in-class activity at KBS. Source: Kaplan Business School (2022).

In my early years as Academic Dean, numerous leaders across the higher education sector warned me about our strategic vision for KBS's academic function, especially in regard to our universal expansion of the workshop-style pedagogical method. I remember being maligned for abolishing lectures, and one of the more prominent arguments was that students from some regions would hate it because it's the antithesis of what they were used to in their home country. But our net promoter score skyrocketed across all nationalities when we introduced this format, thereby disproving the advocates for the status quo.

Aleksandra: You emphasised the importance of engaging in conversation with students. It has been argued that the successful teacher attempts to see things from the student's perspective, embracing kindness built on a foundation of moral values (Aspland & Fox, 2022). One way to look at humane education is as a proposed mechanism whereby positive treatment of other humans may be taught (Arbour

et al., 2009). In what ways does your faculty embody this humane approach in their interactions with students?

J. A.: You must be very careful with whom you recruit. When we introduced this teaching method in 2017, we had to adopt a phased approach, course by course: We started with our MBA, which was, and still is, our biggest course (our MBA at Kaplan Business School is the second biggest in Australia in terms of enrolments; there are more students enrolled in our MBA than almost any other in this country). Our revised process began with a mandatory audition. Our faculty members needed to demonstrate that they could facilitate a classroom exercise in a genuinely student-centric way – which we then gradually replicated across our other courses over the following trimesters.

However, that audition is not the only answer: the other part of the equation pertains to the pool from which our teachers are sourced. We learnt, for instance, that sourcing teachers from academia can backfire because if those teachers completed their high school studies, went straight to university, completed their bachelor's degree, then promptly progressed to their master's, and still remained at university until the completion of their PhD, meaning the only career they've ever really known is that of an academic, well, that makes it harder for them, in our experience, to truly relate to our students. Because what matters most to our students, and indeed what matters most to us, is whether our teachers' qualifications are complemented by substantial and relevant work experience that enables them to incorporate personal examples and stories in their teaching – because that's what our students find most engaging.

Creation of an optimal learning environment

Athena: Having talked about student-centred teaching, it is inevitable to consider the learning environment – the establishment of an educational setting that not only facilitates intellectual development but also fosters the emotional welfare of students and promotes a comprehensive approach to learning (Korpershoek et al., 2016). What strategies do you employ to create a learning environment that supports the emotional and intellectual growth of students?

J. A.: It must begin, I feel, with supporting the emotional and intellectual growth of our faculty. Since we are directing our faculty to teach in a supportive and nurturing manner, and we have specific performance metrics in place that evaluate them on whether they are indeed teaching in a supportive and nurturing manner, it is incumbent upon us as leaders to make sure we are exercising the same approach with our faculty members – for them to feel as though they are being supported and nurtured by us, not just emotionally, but intellectually. Since we expect them to be observant of students in the classroom, we have to be observant of them as our team members. For example, if their behaviour or body language suddenly changes, or they express a remark that feels odd or they send us an email with an uncharacteristic tone, or they are suddenly off sick with an unconvincing explanation, it's very important that we check in to see if they're okay.

There are so many factors that signify that someone is emotionally struggling. My team of Academic Directors and Academic Heads need to identify those instances and respond immediately with the kind of supportive and nurturing style we expect our teachers to deliver to our students.

For example, our Director of Academic Learning, Vanessa Stafford, and her colleague, Fiona Tang, ensure professional development sessions are made available for our staff on an almost weekly basis. And we have hundreds of resources that we have developed which can be accessed asynchronously. Staff can even book themselves in for a coaching session whenever they feel one is required. They're also entitled to the potential reimbursement of funds when they complete professional development activities of their own accord. They can also get extra funding to pursue a doctorate if they are employed on a permanent employment arrangement, which is, incidentally, a majority of our faculty on a full-time equivalent basis. So, my answer to your question about preserving and encouraging emotional and intellectual well-being is to ensure that all the above is being implemented. That's when there is a greater likelihood for it to then flow onto our students. If it does not occur for our staff, there is zero chance of making it happen for our students.

Aleksandra: This aligns well with the presence of kindness attributes in the learning environment. Research suggests that compassionate teachers foster learning environments which are more equitable, supportive, and conducive for learners of all capabilities and backgrounds (Tan, 2022). It has been noted that humans inherit a biological bias towards kindness, compassion, cooperation, love, and nurture (Goleman, 2006; Kagan, 2016). Some of these are part of the Kindness Curriculum for which you are a vocal advocate (Kindness Factory, 2019). What does your faculty do to incorporate the kindness attributes in the learning environment? How does your collaboration with the Kindness Factory™ reflect the learning environment that you create at KBS?

J. A.: The Kindness Factory is very close to my heart – I was the one who developed the twelve kindness attributes that constitute the Kindness Curriculum. I devised them based on research I had performed on the underpinnings of kindness which encompassed a review of all the credible empirical literature of the preceding ten years.

When we established the Kindness Curriculum two years ago, we set a very ambitious goal of having it integrated within 2025 schools by the year 2025. It is not yet 2025, but there are already more than 3500 schools that have adopted the Kindness Curriculum. So, yes, I am very proud of that. I am also proud that my colleague, Alex Reeman-Clark, our General Manager of Student Experience, has established Kindness Week, which means that every year, we have hundreds of our international students armed with Kindness Bingo cards as they perform random acts of kindness in the community. I am further proud that we're establishing

the Kind Company certification and that we are the first pilot company testing that it is workable, which means demonstrating that we are actively practising kindness with our staff, our community, our clients, our students, our students, our environment and so on.

Figure 5. KBS student ambassadors and staff are promoting Kindness Week on the street in Sydney, Australia. Credit: Kamashi Pokhrel.

Figure 6. Kind Company certification badge. Source: Kaplan Australia (2023).

To answer your question more directly – "What do we do in terms of the academic function?" – we genuinely embrace the kindness attributes in our day-to-day operations. For example, I facilitate a national online team-building event every trimester, which has been important for several reasons. One is that when I was appointed as Academic Dean in 2015, our national faculty numbered approximately 50 teachers, but we now have more than 600. So back then, I knew everyone's face, and I knew everyone's name. Today, that's not humanly possible, hence the importance of this team-building initiative which also meets a second purpose, specifically that our staff have asked for greater connection among their colleagues with whom they rarely interact or even see. We established this about a year and a half ago, and it involves me facilitating a team–building event that has nothing to do with academic learning but is instead simply an opportunity to interact. On each occasion, there is a different kindness attribute that constitutes the theme of the team-building event. The first one was focused on empathy, the second was on gratitude, the third on collaboration, and so on. I try to design some kind of activity related directly to the kindness attribute. We also have an Academic Awards program every trimester, which includes a Kindness Award with the peer-nominated recipient and they can be anyone within our academic function or external to it.

Aleksandra: You are an advocate for embracing and integrating technological breakthroughs in the education space, which is reflected in the way KBS approaches generative AI, for instance. However, the overall teaching approach at KBS is student–centred. How do these two co–exist?

J. A.: To oppose new technologies is the antithesis of student-centredness. Just in the past year, following ChatGPT's explosion, generative AI has permeated every aspect of industry and society. We, therefore, have an obligation to make sure that we are embracing it. Not just teaching it but genuinely embracing it even in our own daily practices. Otherwise, it would be negligent of us because we would be neglecting the human beings in our classrooms who are going to be entering workplaces with employers not just expecting but demanding they know how to utilise this truly transformative technology. If we have students graduating from KBS, and they have not been exposed to generative AI extensively (this means a majority of students' assessments permit the use of generative AI and that in the classroom, KBS educators are teaching students how to use this emerging technology), then we are cultivating graduates who are unlikely to be sufficiently employable. There are about three dozen experiments just this year that we have trialled at KBS specifically related to generative AI, which is why we are known across the sector as genuine leaders in this respect. That reputation is reinforced by my leadership of a GenAI community of practice on behalf of our peak body, IHEA, Independent Higher Education Australia, which attracts dozens of participating institutions, complemented by a set of guidelines I've authored that have been distributed across the independent sector so that other providers of higher education can similarly replicate our success with generative AI.

As a higher education provider, it would be inhumane not to embrace generative AI in absolutely every possible respect throughout teaching and learning if the ultimate aim is to strengthen students' employability.

Curriculum design and development

Athena: The conversation on the employability of graduates requires the exploration of one more topic: the curriculum. To provide students with a thorough and useful education, it is essential to establish a curriculum that encompasses a combination of theoretical concepts and practical, real-life applications. This approach ensures that students not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop the skills necessary to apply their learning in practical and professional contexts (Witt et al., 2019). How does the curriculum at KBS reflect a balance between theoretical knowledge and real–world applications?

J. A.: Well-embedded systems and audits and review checkpoints are critical – but ideally, never in any subject would we ever teach a student a theory without that theory being complemented by a real-life example or a relevant case study. Sometimes, it might be an anecdote, an industry exemplar, a consultancy firm's analysis, a governmental policy, a case study or anything else that brings that theory to life such that it demonstrates to students the way in which it can be immediately incorporated in their work. Importantly, these are embedded within our slide decks to ensure they are conveyed consistently, irrespective of the teacher or campus.

> ***Talking about academic theories is easy. But translating those theories into engaging examples that resonate with students is an altogether different skill but that's how you get students to pay attention in class. Academic theories are rarely perceived as relevant by students unless you can find a way to relate those concepts to their own world.***

Another example related to relevance emerged via my own experiences teaching our MBA's core leadership subject for five trimesters. I ensured that I removed any references to our students becoming a CEO or an executive because that isn't a realisable objective for a majority of students at any institute of higher education. We, therefore, focus less on the teaching of those very senior skills and more so on the very different skill set required to be an effective team leader or middle manager which is much more relevant for students.

In a similar vein, members of our academic management team, particularly Vanessa Stafford whom I mentioned earlier, as well as Adam Murphy, one of our Academic Heads, are pioneering the updating of our slide decks to ensure genuine diversity in our case studies and selection of images. This means our students are increasingly seeing people in our slides who look like them, be that in terms of their gender or ethnicity, thereby reinforcing that such accomplishments are potentially realisable for them.

Athena: Promoting the cultivation of empathy and ethical decision-making abilities in students is essential to foster the development of responsible and socially conscious corporate leaders. This holistic approach prepares future business leaders to navigate the complexities of the business world with a strong sense of responsibility and social awareness (Parks-Leduc et al., 2021). In what ways are students encouraged to develop empathy and ethical decision-making skills alongside business acumen?

J. A.: This was important to me even before I started working at Kaplan, even before I was an academic. I remember acutely when the global financial crisis happened, I was reading an article that ended up going viral because the title was something along the lines of "Are MBAs and business schools responsible for the global financial crisis?". The author's argument was that business schools, and particularly MBA degrees, are responsible for the global financial crisis, because they predominantly teach the profit imperative – the commercial motive. If that is the predominant message you send, of course catastrophes like the global financial crisis will occur. Hence, why our MBA was the first, and I believe still the only, MBA in Australia that mandates the completion of two particular core subjects, one of which is titled 'Emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and diversity'. The other is titled 'Governance, ethics and sustainability'.

The other way is that ethics as well as emotional intelligence are two of our seven graduate attributes, which means every single course comprises curriculum and assessments that are mapped to both ethics and EQ.

Aleksandra: As you've just stated, KBS's flagship MBA program is one of the first to embed core subjects within the curriculum that integrate concepts of emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and diversity. What are the implications of designing a curriculum that embodies emotional and cultural intelligence, motivation, and leadership? How does this contribute towards shaping the future business environment, noting that emotional intelligence enables leaders to generate excitement, optimism, and passion for the job ahead (Goleman et al., 2013)?

J. A.: It sends a very important message that technical skills are not enough, knowing how to read financial statements is not enough, being able to develop an organisational strategy is not enough, and understanding how to trade across borders is not enough. None of that is enough. Underpinning the success of all of that has to be the sociocultural element, such as social awareness and relationship management.

> ***When our students graduate, it's crucial that they enter the business world knowing it is not just the balance sheet or strategic plan that matters; it is also the interpersonal element that is oftentimes the most consequential for their ongoing success.***

One of my favourite quotes is, "*Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts*" (Mason, 2013) – that's a critical message we convey to our students. For example, our MBA has just one quantitative subject as a core subject. Just one specifically related to finance and economics. So, what does that implicitly tell our students? It tells our students that, yes, of

Figure 7. A graduation ceremony at KBS. Source: Kaplan Business School (2024c).

course, it's essential to understand the principles of finance and economics, but there is a lot more they also need to know if they are to experience holistic success in business and, indeed, throughout their careers.

Student support and engagement

Athena: You spoke of the importance of being observant, which also implies being aware of students' struggles. Assisting students who may be struggling educationally or emotionally requires a compassionate and multifaceted approach. Caring and comprehensive strategies are necessary to assist those who may be experiencing personal or academic difficulties (Kahu & Nelson, 2017). How does KBS support students who may be struggling academically or personally?

J. A.: The comprehensiveness and effectiveness of our student support mechanisms, especially throughout the pandemic, explains why we became recipients of the Student Support Award at the global PIEoneer Awards. We have, for instance, academic learning advisors in our Academic Success Centre who can meet with students one-on-one or in groups to assist with any aspect related to study skills. We also have counsellors at our campuses as well as a national network of teachers with whom students can meet even if they're not students of those teachers.

However, there are two other factors I feel are particularly impactful. One is that when someone is struggling, it is not just a question of the support service to which they can be triaged.

> ***Our approach to interventions is anticipatory, which means that we do not wait to intervene until the student is on the verge of failing. Of course, we still intervene at that point, but our priority is always to draw on the insights generated from predictive analytics as a more reliable method of identifying the likeliest risk factors for low progression or high attrition so that we can attempt to rescue students before it's too late.***

Therefore, we have dedicated intervention officers in each discipline who are remunerated to contact and proactively support students who miss consecutive classes, fail to submit an assessment or fall into any one of a number of risk categories we monitor on an ongoing basis, such as those that pertain to age, disability, stage of degree, First Nations ancestry, delivery mode, and so on.

Figure 8. Student experience personnel at KBS. Source: Kaplan Business School (2024d).

The other factor is that we fully subsidise Sonder, a mobile-based application that students can easily download for 24/7 support. This means our students can request that Sonder track their journey home if they are feeling unsafe, for example, or for mental wellness reasons whenever they need to connect with a qualified counsellor.

Aleksandra: Now, we would like to move on to another topic of which you are a relevant authority. You specialise in employee engagement (Adonopoulos, 2016). What are the most important lessons learnt from your research on employee engagement that we can apply to student engagement?

J. A.: There is probably one thing worth mentioning that many people generally do not regard as obvious. That is, when it comes to employee engagement, the number one most impactful factor is someone's immediate supervisor and not necessarily the CEO or executive.

> ***The one empirical truth about employee engagement is that the most impactful factors are the seemingly insignificant actions of the immediate supervisor: the little things they say and do, day to day – that is what affects an employee's engagement the most.***

Translating that empirical truth to our students' engagement necessitates identifying who, from the student's perspective, is their immediate supervisor. My hope is that they would regard that person to be their teacher. Of course, if they are enrolled in three or four subjects, they might have three or four teachers, all of whom would serve as their immediate supervisors. It is incumbent upon us to make sure that those

teaching our students are aware that the little things they say and do may seem insignificant to the teacher – but end up having the greatest significance from the student's perspective.

But it's not just about our teachers. It's also about our Student Experience team, who likewise serve as de facto supervisors, along with our campus managers, are genuinely phenomenal because they know our students by name, not by number, with authentic relationships cultivated over time.

Aleksandra: Maintaining that consistent environment shows a lot of integrity. Integrity is also one of the key values in developing a more inclusive and humane education that acknowledges and fosters student and staff agency (Abegglen et al., 2020). Is there room for kindness in dealing with cases of breaches of academic integrity?

J. A.: We are well regarded across the higher education sector and particularly by our regulator for our comprehensive approach to academic integrity, which always begins from a position of compassion. This means our first step is to focus on educating our students via a compulsory online module, learning resources, coaching and group training on how to complete their studies in accordance with the principles of academic integrity because often students engage in misconduct without even realising they are doing it. So, I think that is where kindness is best placed.

But when recidivism occurs, we have a responsibility to impose penalties that escalate with every repeated act of misconduct —since we also want to be kind to our graduates who have completed their degrees authentically.

Leadership and continuous improvement

Athena: Such an approach only confirms the values you have articulated so far: empathy, compassion, and respect. The cultivation of an organisational culture that is characterised by these values is of utmost importance to establish a working environment that not only fosters the well-being of individuals but also improves their overall performance (Dimitrov, 2015). As the Academic Dean of KBS, how do you model the humane approach in your leadership and administrative practices?

J. A.: This is going to sound a bit contradictory, but I feel compelled to admit that I am an uncompromising leader, which is to say that I feel it is essential to convey a non–negotiable attitude toward anyone who falls short of the values I have articulated throughout this interview. This means that, if someone is falling short of those values and they are in a position of influence – especially if they are an Academic Director, Academic Head, or a Subject Coordinator – I find it very hard to convey anything other than my profound disapproval for their contravention.

The way I personally embody a humane approach is by being very open about my own shortcomings. Pretty much every week, I will say or do something I regret, but I very quickly admit I've stuffed up and promptly reverse a decision when I encounter conflicting evidence because the message that I wish to send to my team is the importance of being humble enough to acknowledge when we make a mistake. So, if I am doing that, my hope is that others can find the confidence to do so as well. I never want to give the impression to my team that I consider myself a perfect model to follow in every respect. As recently as this week, I gave people constructive feedback that I coupled with: "I know I do this as well. This is something I, too, need to learn."

> ***I try to promote the kind of culture I most value by admitting that it is safe to get things wrong. I am an example of someone who does that on a regular basis and then admits it, rectifies it, learns from it, and progresses forward all the better for having experienced the setback.***

Aleksandra: I would like to go back to the organisational culture that you have built within KBS's academic function. The student–centred approach, which is distributed across the entire organisation, aligns well with the people–orientation dimension of organisational culture, revealing a leadership that takes into consideration the effect of outcomes on people within the organisation (Bamidele, 2022). You have demonstrated that employees whose fundamental needs are met reciprocate their leader's efforts by being more engaged (Adonopoulos, 2016). What are the implications of the organisational culture within KBS, and how is it reflected in the teaching approach?

J. A.: What it says is that we have the kind of culture people within which people want to work. We have extraordinarily low rates of faculty-staff attrition, for example, of approximately 4%. As a result, we are frequently approached by people wanting to work for us. So, that is one benefit.

But the ultimate benefit is stakeholder engagement – and stakeholders are not just students – stakeholders are our regulator, suppliers, colleagues, competitors, industry professionals, colleagues internationally and so on. The stronger your culture is, the more likely the members of that culture will be interacting in positive, cheerful, and constructive ways with any stakeholder, irrespective of whether they are internal or external, whether they are students or someone else. And we know we have a strong culture because our staff engagement results increase every single year. Our rate of faculty engagement is currently 92%, which further strengthens the Kaplan brand as a great place to work.

Looking ahead

Aleksandra: Could you tell us how KBS will continue to innovate and maintain its commitment to a humane approach to education in the future?

J. A.: That is easy – because innovation is my favourite part of the job – that is actually the primary reason we perform benchmarking. In other words, benchmarking for us is predominately an opportunity to identify what other institutions are failing to do so that we can step into that

space, own it and, by doing so, stand out as a genuinely innovative provider of higher education.

> ***That necessitates the cultivation of a culture where people feel it's safe to innovate because they know that if their innovations fail, they will never be punished; they will only be applauded for at least having attempted to experiment with a novel idea from which they have nevertheless learnt something valuable as a result.***

That explains why, in December 2022, we won the Excellence in Innovation Award at the Association for Tertiary Education Management's Best Practice Awards (ATEM, 2022).

A globally recognised innovation of ours is our Lifetime of Learning Guarantee, which provides alumni with two unparalleled benefits. The first is lifetime access to career coaching, which means that even if students return to their home country, they can still meet with our career advisors for personalised assistance with their CV, cover letter, career coaching, interview skills and so on. The second benefit is that they can continue attending – forever and for free – the online classes of any subject of the course from which they graduated. Yes, that's innovative, but it's also an acknowledgement that we need to make lifelong learning easily accessible for our students if they are to remain employable long after they have completed their studies at Kaplan Business School.

Aleksandra: Research suggests that kindness embedded in the business curriculum could contribute towards instilling ethical behaviour (Day & Robinson, 2022). In what ways can KBS foster student inspiration throughout their academic journey to cultivate a humane perspective that they can implement in their future professional endeavours?

J. A.: A couple of ways. The first is not to be so conceited as to think that we have all the answers. It is critical to provide forums for students to come up with their own ideas and to be supported with their implementation, which is why, for example, we provide our student ambassadors with funding to experiment with innovative ideas of their own.

The second is our responsiveness to student feedback and the authenticity with which we solicit that feedback. One of the best initiatives ever introduced at Kaplan has been what my colleague Alex Reeman-Clark launched back in 2016, which is Feedback Week – it happens every trimester for five consecutive days, during which our students are saturated with opportunities to give us feedback via a number of different forums. Our response rate is usually above 50%. We read and reflect on every comment for the purpose of identifying the six or so most prominent themes for which we then determine the optimal solutions that we announce to our entire student body within a week or two. This means we have implemented dozens upon dozens of major initiatives directly as a result of what our students have suggested. Feedback Week, therefore, reinforces for our students that they have a genuine voice and real influence which we suspect is quite rare across the higher education sector.

Athena: We have extensively explored the benefits, but what about the challenges? What are some of the challenges, if any, that you anticipate in implementing KBS's aspirations for a humane approach to teaching?

J. A.: A humane approach to teaching is absolutely not an aspiration of ours because that would imply that we're not humane today when independent evidence confirms that is definitely an apt descriptor of our teaching methods.

Our challenge, however, is to preserve that humane approach as we continue to grow in the trimesters ahead. Just in my own team, in the space of a year, we've recruited over 200 academics. That increases the pressure on us as academic leaders to make certain they're teaching in a supportive and nurturing manner, which is why we've almost doubled the number of Academic Heads and Directors so that our newest faculty members are themselves supported and nurtured by our management team.

Closing remarks

Athena: How has your experience, both as a student and as an academic, shaped your perception of the humane approach in your leadership?

J. A.: Something that happens to many academics is that they become out of touch with what life is actually like as a student. That is why I am still, and probably always will be, a university student. Even after I completed my Ph.D., I immediately enrolled in another bachelor's degree. This means I have never been disconnected from the life of a student. I am experiencing it myself every single week, via my own teachers at the university at which I am enrolled. So, that really helps me to understand the likely receptivity of ideas from a student's perspective.

> ***A benefit I bring to my role and to my team at Kaplan is that I have remained connected, in the most intricate way possible, with what it is like to be a student.***

Despite being enrolled in an undergraduate course where the average age among my fellow students is 18 or 19, I feel no discomfort whatsoever. On the contrary, I possibly derive more value from the learning experience than they do expressly because of the extent to which it informs the way I operate at KBS.

Aleksandra: In conclusion, we present a summary of practical strategies that KBS has used for student-centred teaching and learning:

- Employ leaders and teachers with a naturally supportive and nurturing disposition.

- Always reflect on whether you're acting in the capacity of a supportive and nurturing educator.
- Keep in mind that what you have in front of you is a classroom of unique human beings.
- Ensure reciprocal communication by soliciting student feedback and consistently addressing the prominent issues they identify.
- Replace lectures and tutorials with interactive workshops that comprise cognitively stimulating activities that reinforce the learning outcomes.
- Support faculty members' emotional and intellectual growth so that they are inspired to support their students' emotional and intellectual growth.
- Embed the attributes of kindness as standard practice.
- Always innovate with the core objective of further strengthening the student experience.

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