

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0250

Developing Compassionate Pedagogical Practice with Students as Co-Researchers

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Abstract: This is a 'work in progress' paper of emerging findings arising from a SRHE funded study, which aims to: co-create best practice guidelines and tools with psychology students to support the development of compassionate pedagogical practice. Compassionate pedagogy is about ensuring teaching and interactions with students and colleagues are based on kindness, followed through by actions and practices that alleviate suffering and promote wellbeing. The conceptual framework for the study also draws upon critical intersectional pedagogy, which promotes interdependence between students and teachers and collective learning. This is a small-scale focused ethnography involving: (a) ten students (9 UG students; 1 PhD student) as co-researchers. The paper will report on initial analysis of data arising from innovative use of Nancy Kline's Thinking Environment™, and arts-based methods using movies and music. We will also illustrate how students were supported in developing skills of self-compassion, and 'speaking truth to power'.

Paper: Introduction and context

This paper focuses on innovation in teaching practice and the scholarship of learning and teaching. This is a 'work in progress' paper of a small-scale research study, which aims to:

- Co-create best practice guidelines and tools with students to support the development of compassionate pedagogical practice.

It is grounded in the context of the University of Westminster's core strategic value of being compassionate, and the development of our Compassionate Pedagogy Learning Community. This is informed by the growing literature around the value and importance of compassionate pedagogy (Freire, 1992; Gibbs, 2017; Godfrey, Larkin-Wells & Frechette, 2018). We define compassionate pedagogy as actions and practices that promote teaching and interactions with students and colleagues based on kindness, and which address bias, discrimination and difference, and promote wellbeing (Waddington, 2021a).

Conceptual and theoretical foundations

The conceptual framework for the research draws upon: (i) critical compassionate pedagogy – which encourages educators to critique institutional and classroom practices that ideologically place students at disadvantaged positions, and also involves teachers-as-researchers being self-reflective of their actions (Waddington, 2021a); and (ii) intersectional compassionate pedagogy – which promotes interdependence between students and teachers, difficulties and differences are not erased, and where the aim is to bring them as much as possible into the light of collective learning (Godfrey et al., 2018). Theoretically the research draws upon critical lenses of compassion, which include: (i) compassion as narrative; (ii) compassion as interpersonal work; and (iii) seeing compassion through student lenses. It also draws upon applied psychology – which includes an understanding of the science of mindful self-compassion, a systems psychodynamic approach, and a commitment to work together to change organisational culture (Nowlan, 2021; Waddington, 2019; 2021a; Waddington & Kaplan, 2021).

Research methodology

This is a focused-ethnography, which is typified by short-term fieldwork, researchers with insider or background knowledge of the cultural group, and intensive methods of data collection and recording (Wall, 2015). In this study we are also participant observers of our teaching and research practices, which requires systematic reflexive analysis of our subjective understandings and ontological assumptions (Harland, 2014).

The main data collection takes place from September – December 2021 during the semester one teaching period, using a range of empirical materials and approaches. These include Nancy Kline's (2009) Thinking Environment™, reflexive researcher journals, field notes, participant and non-participant classroom observations, interviews, documentary analysis, student stories and personal narratives. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) guides data analysis, and preliminary data collection is underway in the form of reflexive writing. Other preparatory work includes:

- *March 2021 – Compassion: What do you see:* a student panel comprising UG, PG and PhD students; this marked the beginning of recruitment of students as co-researchers, and development of the concept of 'seeing compassion through student lenses'.
- *May 2021 – Time to Think Foundation Course:* both authors as lead academic researchers attended this course in order to develop innovative Thinking Environment™ methods of data collection with students as co-researchers and equal thinking partners.
- *July 2021 – Critical Reflections on Ripples of Compassion:* University of Westminster Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation (CETI) workshop to develop tools for developing compassionate pedagogy arising from *Towards the Compassionate University* (Waddington, 2012b).

Ethical considerations

The study is conducted in line with the University's *Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research*. Students receive supportive peer supervision from the University's Interfaith Advisor (external to the research team, and appropriately trained) to enable and support them in 'speaking truth to power'. Students also receive resources to help them to develop skills of self-compassion (Nowlan, 2021). A steering group holds the researchers to account regarding the British Psychological Society's (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*.

Next steps

Student co-researchers (N=10) will be recruited from the researchers' personal student database from three BSc programmes: Psychology; Cognitive and Clinical Neuroscience; Psychology and Counselling. One PhD student will be recruited from the part-time visiting lecturer database, as doctoral researchers inhabit a liminal and precarious position as both students and teachers. This can be stressful, and (Hancock, 2018) recommends that PhD students who teach will benefit from a focus on self-compassion and compassion for the students they teach. Innovative arts-based research methods, including movies and music (Leavy, 2020; Waddington & Erbmman, 2021), will be used in data collection and analysis. On completion of data collection a 1-day workshop using visual methods of data analysis will capture emerging findings and the characteristics of students as co-researchers and equal thinking partners.

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