Humanisation of higher education

Re-imagining the university together with students

Patric Wallin

Abstract

Transaction, competition and opposition have become imperative in higher education. In this article, I will explore where to go from here building on critical pedagogy and ideas from students-as-partners and undergraduate research. Using the course 'Environments for learning in higher education' as an empirical starting point and approaching students' work through qualitative document analysis, I will explore: (1) what students focus on when given the opportunity to design their own research questions around learning environments; and (2) how they re-imagine and frame future learning environments in the higher education. With this as a backdrop, I will discuss how a critical dialogic teaching praxis can help to think about the university as a place for collaboration between students and academics with the common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning.

Keywords

critical pedagogy, dialogue, humanisation, interdisciplinarity, neoliberal critique, praxis, students-as-partners, teaching

As part of a rise in neoliberal ideology and practices, education landscapes all over the world have changed in profound ways during the last few decades (Connell 2013). The influence of market thinking and human capital theory has deeply changed the language used in education, and as Henry Giroux (2002: 426) pointed out 'one consequence is that civic discourse has given way to the language of commercialism, privatisation, and deregulation'. It is through the emphasis of the free market, efficiency and value for money that neoliberalism reshapes education by promoting individualism, competition, and consumption in society (Harvey 2005) and increasingly positions students as consumers (Molesworth et al. 2009). As a

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result, the dominant imperative that emerges within this higher education landscape is an imperative of transaction, competition and opposition. By foregrounding students as consumers, with a focus on individual performance in a competitive environment that presents serious equity concerns, students and teachers in higher education are positioned in opposition to each other rather than moving in the same direction.

One idea that has emerged as a counter narrative is what has been termed *students-as-partners* (Cook-Sather 2014; Cook-Sather et al. 2018; Healey et al. 2014), which also relates to the idea of the *student as producer* rather than consumer (Neary 2016; Neary and Winn 2009). The increasing focus on students-as-partners is closely linked to the field of educational or academic development (Cook-Sather et al. 2019), which focuses more broadly on enhancing teaching and learning in higher education (Sutherland 2018). Amongst other things, educational development is interested in how to create accessible learning environments and improve learning experiences for all students (Grant et al. 2009). However, educational development has also been criticised for feeding the neoliberal discourse and reducing higher education to a technocratic practice by focusing on best practices and efficiency (Quinn 2012). Higher education as a merely technocratic practice neglects that education simultaneously is a moral practice that is shaped, interpreted and negotiated by the people involved in it (Biesta 2007, 2010). An emphasis on partnership has the potential to counteract the neoliberal turn of educational development, but at the same time it can potentially be appropriated by the neoliberal discourse (Matthews at al. 2018; Peters and Mathias 2018) and be reduced to an individual stepping-stone for a few selected students (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2021) and a career factor for academics.

Therefore, it is important that partnership is envisioned as a reciprocal relationship between students and teachers as part of a learning community, where both benefit and accept certain risks by engaging in something that is not fully predicable (Marquis et al. 2016; Peters and Mathias 2018). A partnership positions students as knowledgeable partners who contribute and shape their learning experiences (Healey et al. 2010; Jensen and Bennett 2016). Moreover, Kathrine Jensen and Liz Bennett (2016: 42) argue that ‘the way that this occurs is through the use of dialogue’. Dialogue should, however, not be understood as a mere technique (Shor and Freire 1987) but also as part of the developmental process in becoming knowledgeable partners. Such a definition of partnership reflects the principles and values of authenticity, reciprocity, being more, hope and responsibility.

Establishing this link between students-as-partners and critical pedagogy is important as it provides foundational values that can counteract neoliberal domestication and technocratic threats to meaningful partnership (Peters and Mathias 2018).

In addition to students-as-partners, the involvement of students in research has been discussed in broad terms, across various settings and gained considerable interest. One particular approach that is widely used in this regard involves undergraduate research experiences (UREs), where students are becoming researchers (Brew 2013; Lopatto 2003). Whereas students-as-partners can be conceptually linked to educational development, UREs are grounded within and focus on disciplinary research. Furthermore, they are predominantly offered in the science, technology and engineering fields (Brew 2013). Adapting UREs to higher education research means positioning students as knowledge producers, which moves beyond research *on* students and research *with* students to rather develop as research *by* students. As such, their positions emerge as central rather than additional, which seemingly may disrupt traditional forms of knowledge construction.

In the following, I will argue for how to combine ideas from students-as-partners and undergraduate research with a foundation in critical pedagogy into a critical dialogic teaching praxis and how this can lead to new forms of higher education research and educational development. In this way, I will explore where to go from here and how to create counter-narratives that emphasise the collective instead of individualism, trust instead of accountability, and maybe most importantly narratives that allow us to re-imagine higher education in a time where it is increasingly difficult to think radical and dream of a different society. The course 'Environments for learning in higher education' will serve as an empirical starting point for this work. However, rather than looking on the students experiences as I have done previously (Wallin 2020b; Wallin and Aarsand 2019), I will shift focus towards the artefacts that students produce within the course. Through qualitative document analysis, I will explore: (1) what students focus on when given the opportunity to design their own research questions around learning environments; and (2) how they imagine and frame future learning environments in higher education. Building on the analysis of the empirical material, I will then discuss in more general terms the underlying critical dialogic teaching praxis and how it can help to think about and imagine the university as a place for collaboration between student and academics with the common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning.

Research context and design

The context for this work is the interdisciplinary course 'Environments for learning in higher education'. A 7.5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) course at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Norway that lies under the Experts in Teamwork (EiT) umbrella. In total, more than one hundred courses are held each year under the EiT umbrella, with over three thousand students (see Wallin et al., 2017 for further details on EiT). Participation in one EiT course is mandatory for most master students at the university, meaning that students from all professions and disciplines are participating. Courses under the EiT umbrella have a group based final summative assessment that is comprised of two parts. 50 per cent of the final grade is based on a process report and 50 per cent on a project report. In the process report, student teams reflect and exemplify the process and development of their team dynamics with the help of specific situations that they have experienced during the course. The project report, on the other hand, focuses on the research project that the students have worked on. In the 'Environments for learning in higher education' EiT course, the students also have the opportunity to present their project in formats other than a report, for example, as a podcast, a video, a website or an app. Assessment criteria are developed and discussed in partnership with the students to suit the different formats. Through these discussions, the aim is to raise the general awareness about the assessment criteria and to co-create a shared understanding of what quality entails in this course and within each format.

On a more concrete level, the idea is that students, by defining, planning and running their own research projects, can raise questions about university learning environments that they deem important and remain in control as to how to conduct and frame their research. The course has twenty to thirty students each year from various study programmes working in groups of four to six over a period of fifteen weeks with weekly full-day (8:00–16:00) meetings on a self-defined research project coupled to the overall theme of the course. During the weekly meetings, students work on their group projects in a self-defined manner and the teacher acts similar to a dialogue partner (Shor 1996) and critical friend (Costa and Kallick 1993) to provide additional perspectives to the students' ideas and approaches, as well as reoccurring formative feedback. Examples of research projects include: *How to create an inclusive university environment*; *Identity places:*

Balancing disciplinary belonging and interdisciplinarity collaborations; and *Insights into active learning and learning environments in higher education.*

From a pedagogical standpoint, the underlying framework of EiT builds on ideas from experiential learning (Kolb 1984) and aims at providing students with an arena for experiencing and exploring different approaches to interdisciplinary teamwork. In addition, teaching in the 'Environments for learning in higher education' course is grounded in ideas from critical pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire. Central here is the idea of a dialogical approach to teaching that values and respects the experiences that everyone brings with them to the course and the co-creation of an opportunity space, where it is possible to be teacher and student at the same time (Shor and Freire 1987). By conceptualising teaching as a critical dialogic praxis, the hope is to create an opportunity space to counteract dehumanisation in teaching.

Over the last five years (2017–2021), a total of 122 students have taken the course. Working in groups of four to six, they have designed, planned and conducted their own group research projects leading to a total of twenty-three different projects. In previous work, I have focused on how students experience co-creating opportunity spaces within the course and illustrated how various positions emerge, change, and fluctuate within the educational space of an interdisciplinary course (Wallin and Aarsand 2019). Furthermore, I have studied how the course creates spaces that enable students and teachers to express, explore and negotiate their perspectives and co-create timescapes (Wallin 2020b). In this study, I will shift focus and use project reports and other artefacts produced by the students as a starting point for a qualitative document analysis. In this way, I will be able to explore what students focus on when given the opportunity to design their own research questions around learning environments and how they re-imagine and frame future learning environments. Document analysis is a particular applicable approach here, as it can help to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights by focusing on stable artefacts. One potential challenge is that the artefacts are produced for a purpose other than being researched and therefore might not provide sufficient detail for exploring certain research questions (Bowen 2009). In this particular case, this is, however, a minor problem, as the focus in this study is on what and how students research higher education and how they imagine future learning environments, which the artefacts are meant to address.

The research artefacts from all twenty-three groups that took the 'Environments for learning in higher education' course between 2017 and 2021

were included in the analysis process. Initially, all reports, podcasts and other materials were examined to familiarise the author with the material. It is also important to point out that the author has deep contextual understanding of the students' work from teaching the course. After the initial familiarisation with the data, an iterative process of reading and interpretation was used to organise information and initial categories were developed to capture the material. Subsequently, a more focused re-reading of the material was used to recognise patterns and emerging themes across the different categories (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Finally, these themes were organised under two headings: (1) Research themes and directions; and (2) Research design, context and dissemination.

Empirical findings

Research themes and directions

Based on the document analysis of the students' project work, it is clear that the groups have covered a number of different topics relevant for higher education research and development ranging from teaching approaches and educational activities to on-site and on-line spaces, over assessment and learning outcomes, to psychosocial aspects including identity, belonging, motivation, well-being and social relations. One contemporary trend during the COVID-19 pandemic was a stronger focus on on-line educational spaces, but oftentimes with an emphasis of how changed modalities influence the psychosocial aspects of higher education.

It appears, overall, from the projects that many students have a desire to explore the social-relational dimension of higher education in their projects. One group, for example, explored the construction of identity and belonging in connection to on-site spaces. They studied and analysed a number of different spaces on campus and discussed their role for identity constructions and sense of belonging in the light of theory on group processes, community, domain identification and attachment. Grounded in this discussion, the group provides concrete recommendations for the development of the future campus at the university:

> It seems necessary to ask questions about how one can reconcile the two goals in the campus project: a strong disciplinary belonging and vivid interdisciplinary collaborations. Using theory that connects places and well-being, belonging, identity and learning, we analyse selected exist-

> ing identity spaces at the university and how these are used. Following a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of possible solutions for identity spaces at the new campus, and how they can help to achieve the two goals, the report concludes with recommendations for specific solutions. (Group 1 in 2018)

Extending on the concept of belonging and identity, another group focuses on relations in higher education. In the introduction to their podcast series called 'Alone among many: How are students' learning motivations affected by relationships at the university?', the group describes the transition of a fictive character from high school to university pointing towards the importance of relations to friends, peers and teachers and how difficult it is for students to handle a lack of those relations:

> After completing high school with flying colours, she moves and starts university – but here everything changes: After initiation week, she did not find any like-minded people. Lisa shows up at a lecture with over 200 other students and, after wandering around a bit, looking for familiar faces, she sits alone in the large auditorium. During her lunch break, she sits in the individual study room to avoid more stigma by being seen alone. . . . Lisa feels discouraged and already begins to fantasise about quitting her studies, but she does not want to disappoint her parents. As the exam period approaches, Lisa has still not spoken to any of her teachers – they do not even know her name. She feels increasingly lonely and like a failure, which really affects her motivation and studies. (Group 5 in 2020)

Related to the importance of relations in higher education, another project took a closer look at 'Communication between students and teachers: The effect on the learning environment'. Based on a survey, they found a clear disparity of how students and teachers perceive their communication around expectations, where students experience that their expectations are not valued or taken into account:

> It can be seen that there is a clear difference in the perception of whether the teacher asks about students' expectations or not. It is slightly unclear from the data whether the teachers think they are asking or not, but it is quite clear what the students mean. The fact that 90 per cent of the students have answered that teachers do not ask about their expectations is well connected with the fact that they also believe that their expectations are not taken into account. (Group 1 in 2017)

On a more general level, grounded in their empirical data, the group found great disagreements in several areas and concluded that one major problem is that students and teachers do not talk enough with each other:

> A tendency that is repeated in the results is a great disagreement between students and the teacher. This especially applies to the questions around expectations, achievement of learning objectives, course structure and whether the feedback of the reference groups is taken into account. There may be several reasons for this, but what was revealed in the survey was largely a lack of communication between the parties. What must be discussed is how an environment can be created for a like-minded academic discussion between the course coordinator and students. (Group 1 in 2017)

The apparent focus on social-relational aspects in higher education is also visible in projects that on first sight appear to have a more practical focus. For example, one group set out to study assessment practices in higher education but based on the student survey data moved their focus towards social pressure, competition and students' self-esteem in relation to assessment and grades. They discussed and problematised how grades have become the central element in higher education, displacing learning, education and development:

> The results show that the current grading and assessment system leads to grade pressure and competition between students, which in turn has an impact on motivation for learning and which learning strategies the students use. . . . Grade achievement is a key factor in how students consider themselves and other students. . . . Furthermore, society is based on education sorting students according to grade performance. Admission to further studies and workplaces is based to a large or some extent on grades. . . . In other words, grades have become a crucial factor in students' self-esteem. This is a problematic context, simply because one attributes qualities to grades that they are not meant to have. (Group 3 in 2018)

Interestingly, none of the projects has focused on content or content related questions. One explanation for this might be that working in interdisciplinary groups stimulated students to go beyond concrete courses and content and rather ask more general didactical and pedagogical questions that are relevant across disciplines.

Research design, context, and dissemination

On a research design level, the students use different approaches and there is a variety of data collection methods amongst the groups that use empirical approaches. It appears that students take with them different approaches and methods that they are familiar with from their study programmes and integrate those into their projects. For example, one group used affinity diagrams, a method not widely used in higher education research, to analyse semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. They argued that this approach allowed them to involve the entire group in the analysis process. Through the analysis, they identified twelve clusters with insights, problems and opportunities that are at the centre of a workshop methodology that they proposed for educational development:

> The affinity diagram analysis approach led to everyone having the same understanding of the task and its challenges. This is how the group laid the foundation for an orderly and clear process. . . . The purpose of an Affinity Diagram is to be able to collect, summarise and reformulate codes with the same message and theme to see common features and main messages in a large data material. After categorisation, the group went through the diagram to try to find interesting connections, both within and across the categories. Such identified relationships represent various forms of insight, problems and opportunities in the data, which in turn can be used as a starting point in creative problem-solving exercises. . . . In order to find solutions to the problems, the group chose to reformulate the problems into possibilities, using the method 'How can we'. 'How can we' is a method where one reformulates problems into possibilities, and the possibilities can further be used to find solutions. The advantage of formulating the questions in this way is that you open up for many creative ways to solve the problems and suggest that there are solutions. Based on this, the group has developed a tool that can be used when answering 'How can we' questions. (Group 2 in 2018)

Overall, seven groups have conducted interviews both with students, teachers and other employees at the university and used qualitative frameworks like thematic analysis and as mentioned affinity diagram analysis to approach their research questions. In addition to interviews, seven groups have designed and distributed their own surveys to collect empirical data from students, as well as teachers. The emphasis in the analysis of the survey data has been on simple statistics for Likert-scale questions and the

inclusion of free-text answers to provide additional nuances to the quantitative information. One group focused on the analysis of existing learning spaces and approached them through the theoretical lenses of identity and belonging. The remaining eight groups did not collect empirical material on their own but focused more on literature work to explore their research questions.

With respect to the research context, it is noteworthy to point out that all groups have a clear focus on the university that they study at (NTNU). The projects do integrate international research from a wide literature but contextualise it within the boundary conditions of NTNU. This is probably no surprise, but important, as it means that the research that the students work on has a clear connection to their local context and can potentially be readily integrated into local educational development. Furthermore, the students incorporate their own experiences and contextual understanding into their projects, as well as utilise their existing connections and networks to distribute surveys, find interviewees, and overall leverage their work.

Discussions on how students want to disseminate their findings and influence educational development at the university start already early on in the course with the aim to highlight different opportunities. However, the majority of the groups write up their research in the form of a report that oftentimes resembles journal articles both in structure and length with around seven thousand to nine thousand words. Nevertheless, there are some examples, where groups chose to deviate from more familiar report structures with an introduction, background, methodology, context, results, discussion and outlook section, and find different ways to write up their research work. For example, one group choose to develop five fictive personas in their report 'When the campus closed – 5 stories from lockdown' and use them to explore different experiences in relation to on-line education.

> Using five different fictive personas, this project tries to show different perspectives and experiences related to on-line teaching. The personas show how different situations, personalities and experiences affect students' studies and lives. Grounded in different theories and the research literature, we use these five personas to present different experiences of on-line teaching, both positive and negative. In this project, we try to shed light on the fact that there is no common conclusion for what is perceived as a good learning environment. However, through reflection on the personas, we try to arrive at some general factors that can be useful to reflect upon in on-line teaching. (Group 1 in 2021)

Furthermore, six groups have produced podcasts to share their findings with others. The podcasts range from one episode up to one and half hours to a series with six episodes covering different aspects of their research. One group, for example, focused on everyday studying in on-line spaces and chose to produce four podcast episodes: (1) 'An introduction to on-line education', (2) 'Students' perspectives', (3) 'Teachers' perspectives', and (4) 'The learning environment of the future: More or less in the cloud?' They argued that sharing their work as a podcast can contribute to create a mutual understanding around learning environments in on-line and on-site spaces:

> We hope that both students and lecturers listen to the podcast, and that it can help create a mutual understanding of what is needed to improve the current learning environment and what requirements and opportunities the future learning environments bring. (Group 2 in 2021)

Finally, it is important to point out that all groups present their work during a mini conference for other teachers from the department, educational developers, study counsellors, campus developers and others on the last day of the course, in addition to reports or other artefacts.

Discussion

In the following, I will discuss the findings from the analysis of the students' research projects and subsequently open the discussion and approach the question 'Where do we go from here?' from a pedagogical standpoint. Grounded in concepts from critical pedagogy (Shor and Freire 1987), partnership (e.g. Cook-Sather et al. 2018), and undergraduate research (Jenkins and Healey 2011), I will discuss how to create opportunity spaces that challenge neoliberal narratives and how a critical dialogic teaching praxis can help think about and imagine the university as a place for collaboration between students and academics with the common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning.

Based on the qualitative document analysis of the research artefacts that students have produced in the 'Environments for learning in higher education' course over the last five years, it appears that given the opportunity to design, run and present their own research projects on higher educations, students strongly emphasise the social-relational dimension of higher education. The analysis also reveals a methodological variation

that students employ to approach their projects. It is apparent that groups carefully consider and build on their individual expertise. In this way, the research design is noticeably anchored in students' previous experiences rather than being superimposed on them.

With respect to the content, it is through their research projects that the students underscore and illustrate the importance of seeing students and teachers as first and foremost humans. Instead of marked agendas and control, they present, through their research, the importance of social justice, trust and respect in educational practices. Instead of testing, they wish to focus on learning and to be active participants in higher education. Instead of individualism, they highlight community, relations and belonging as central for higher education. In other words, the students challenge, the focus on individualism in neoliberal discourses, meaning everyone is responsible for their own success, but also their own failure (Harvey 2005; Symeonidis 2014).

Based on the analysis of the project reports, it appears that there might be a potential underlying wish for a different kind of higher education amongst some of the students in this interdisciplinary course. At the same time, it is important to point out that to some extent the students also contribute to the neoliberal discourse themselves and only to a limited degree challenge the status quo. This is very much in line with findings from one of my previous studies with a focus on Swedish upper secondary school, where interviews showed how students contributed to a neoliberal discourse, while simultaneously trying to work around it (Wallin 2020a).

In contrast to the variation in methodological approaches, the document analysis shows much less variation when it comes to how students disseminate their projects. While alienated and disappointed by a focus on grades, the students still, to a large extent, prefer to write up their projects in reports that reassemble journal articles instead of playing with and exploring alternative dissemination formats (see also Wallin et al. 2021). This report format is something that students across disciplines appear to be very familiar with and experience as less risky than playing with other dissemination forms. However, there appears to be a slight shift in what formats students choose, from exclusively reports in 2017 towards more alternative formats in 2020 and 2021. This has likely to do with me as a teacher and the framing of the opportunity space. After the first two years, I put much more emphasis on dialogues around how students want to raise their voice and get heard early on in the course. This illustrates to some

extent how easy it is for teachers to consciously or unconsciously influence students.

Regardless of the dissemination format, research contributions from the students over the years have clearly been leveraged in ongoing educational development projects and stimulated new projects. In other words, the projects are meaningful beyond the boundaries of the course, live on after the students are finished, and continue to influence educational development processes. Here, the strong local contextualisation of the students' research can be regarded as a possibility rather than a limitation, as it makes the translation from the projects into wider practice at NTNU easier. With this in mind, I argue that the approaches in the course described here, where students can drive their own higher education research projects creates a very important opportunity space to work across disciplinary boundaries and ask questions about university pedagogy and higher education, as well as think differently about what a university can be. Within the co-created space of the course, it is possible to reframe what higher education is about and reconsider underlying assumptions that heavily shape how students' approach and see higher education (Wallin and Aarsand 2019). Unfortunately, the course is in the eighth semester, so there are limited possibilities for students to act on and demand change from other teachers to provide and co-create with students' alternatives to the problem that 'students are learning how to pass exams and not how to work together or how to appreciate learning in itself' (Symeonidis 2014: 34).

In the following, I will return to the idea of co-creating an opportunity space to re-image higher education and the question 'Where do we go from here?' The aim of the course is that by defining, planning and running their own research projects, students can raise questions about university learning environments that they deem important and remain in control as to how to conduct and frame their research. At the heart of this idea that classrooms can be co-creation spaces lies the work of Paulo Freire and other critical pedagogues. To discuss how teaching can create opportunities for students to question the status quo and re-imagine higher education, praxis and dialogue are two central ideas. Praxis describes the process of reflecting and acting on the world with the aim to transform it as it unfolds continuously and simultaneously (Freire 1970). Freire (1970) argues that the engagement in reflective, transformative action, with others, is a lifelong pursuit that is needed to counteract dehumanisation in teaching and change oppressive structures, practices, policies, attitudes and social relations. The

second central idea is dialogue. Dialogue emphasises the exploration of diverse perspectives with the aim to understand a topic more fully, rather than convincing someone else. It is a moment to reflect on subjective realities in the making and remaking and part of the historical progress in becoming human beings. I argue that dialogue comes in three main forms in the 'Environments for learning in higher education' course: dialogue between students, dialogue with the field of higher education research, and dialogue between teacher and students.

Working in interdisciplinary groups and with the aim to contribute with their unique perspectives, dialogue within the student group allows students to challenge assumptions and reference frames about research paradigms and enables thought provoking conversations between the students about their ontological and epistemological positions. On a project level, this means that the work has the potential to go beyond specific course development actions within the contextual boundaries of a single discipline and rather focus on questions that go across disciplines. While a course provides potentially conflicting boundary conditions, it also provides unique opportunities for more inclusive and open forms of partnership by involving students who otherwise would not participate in activities linked to higher education research and educational development. In this way, it can counter act tendencies to only involve 'the usual suspects' (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2021) and broaden student partnerships.

Considering dialogue as more than having conversations, I argue that it also unfolds between students and the field of higher education research. The students read and consider other research in their projects and position their own work within a larger research field. At the same time, they also contribute to the field themselves through the artefacts that they produce. Furthermore, through the focus on contributing to higher education research, the opportunity space extends beyond the boundaries of the course itself. It means that students can actually contribute to ongoing debates and the overall educational development at the university. By making the reports, presentations and other artefacts openly available, the projects can directly contribute to educational development. In this way, students indeed take positions as knowledge producers (Neary 2016) by making their work available to the local community, as discussed above.

Finally, a focus on dialogue between teacher and students, I argue, potentially can help to challenge traditional positions and knowledge hierarchies (Wallin and Aarsand 2019). This happens through the collaboration

between students and academics with the common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning (Neary 2016). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that teachers and students have different prerequisites and starting position. They bring with them their own experiences, assumptions and dreams, and it is crucial to recognise that they are human beings in the making (Freire 1970). The aim is not to undermine differences, but rather co-create an opportunity space where it is possible to acknowledge and talk about these differences. The risk lies in partnership becoming a buzz word and a teacher centred praxis that only serves teachers and feeds the neoliberal discourse (Peters and Mathias 2018). Therefore, it is important to conceptualise and acknowledge dialogue and partnership as mindsets that have a political and ethical dimension rather than methods and skills alone. They build on an understanding of education as liberation (Shor and Freire 1987). As Freire (1970) pointed out, teaching and learning are not neutral processes, regardless of the fact that their political and ethical dimension is acknowledged or denied. Furthermore, teaching needs to be connected, and considered in relation, to the world around us and being human. Following this line of thinking, humanisation stands at the core of education – humanisation as a process of becoming more fully human through critical, dialogical praxis.

I argue, building upon these ideas, that teaching as a critical dialogic praxis can create an opportunity space for students and teachers to learn with and from each other by acknowledging everyone as humans in the making. This praxis opens opportunities to encourage critical thought and questioning or what Freire calls 'conscientização' – the process of deepening one's understanding of the social world. I further argue that it is by re-considering the relationship between undergraduate teaching and academic research that it is possible to co-create the university as a place for collaboration between student and academics with the common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning. By considering each other as partners, rather than in opposition to each other, the aim is for students and teachers to create a space, where collective cultures can emerge and flourish. This form of *radical collegiality* genuinely challenges and subverts accepted power relationships and also has an explicit political goal: 'it is through radical collegiality that one upholds democratic community' (Fielding 1999: 29).

Finally, in a world where young adults are constantly exposed to advertisement that shapes their imagination of what a happy or successful life

looks like (Jhally 1987, 2003), education needs to provide a counter pole by providing students with opportunities for intellectual development and collective action. Universities need to remain important places, where young people meet and organise to make their voices heard. Creating opportunities for students to learn how to ask difficult questions about the status quo and re-imagine a different kind of society and way of being can potentially give hope to teachers and students. Hope in the sense that Ernst Bloch (1954) describes it as a realisation of our humanisation. A hope that is required to reclaim our classrooms. As bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994: 12) urges us:

> The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn. With these essays, I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

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