

Little Ego Deaths in the Social Justice Classroom: Reflections on student resistance from the perspective of existential and Buddhist psychologies

Remy Y. S. Low

Sydney School of Education and Social Work, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sydney

Abstract

Denial, defensiveness, disengagement. These are common responses from students in classrooms that invite critical self-reflection on the intersecting vectors of privilege and marginalisation. Such responses are commonly read from the perspective of the educator as ‘resistance’ – a concept that draws on a broadly psychoanalytic genealogy. In this paper, I offer alternative perspectives on student resistance in social justice classrooms. With reference to conceptualisations of the ego-self from existential and Buddhist psychologies, I reflect on how intersectional analyses may precipitate little ‘ego deaths,’ especially in teacher education classrooms where complicity with institutions and systems of inequality confronts those whose identities as preservice teachers are tied up with benevolent intent. Reflecting briefly on techniques developed within these traditions for dealing with such experiences, I gesture toward possibilities for their adaptation in a classroom context.

Keywords: Social Justice, Teacher Education, Resistance, Existentialism, Buddhism

Intersectional gridlock

‘Let’s just sit and have a think to ourselves for a few moments: in what ways have some of us benefitted from the dominant culture of educational institutions?’ I asked.

We had started the first year tutorial with a wide-ranging discussion about the attributes and behaviours of ‘ideal students’ that tend to be valued in Australian pre-schools and schools, and the sorts of social and cultural backgrounds that such valuing privileges. It was a noisy discussion with sufficient points raised in the room to fill a three-by-one-and-a-half metre whiteboard with a sprawling mind map that looked like the blueprint for constructing the sort of cyborg student that government education ministers fantasise about: cosmopolitan, upper middle-class Queen’s English-speaking all-rounders who clothe

their athletic and able-bodies in upmarket blazers that appear as tidy as the cisgenders of their wearers, who are as suave with multisyllabic words that issue forth from their lips as they are deft with numbers and catching balls. Giggles and recollected stories accompanied the construction of young Mr or Ms Perfect (probably Mr, we agreed), the towering shadows of their local incarnations many of us have experienced living in. From this cluster of institutional ideals, we moved seamlessly to a consideration of its 'others,' those 'problem students' who do not and cannot embody these attributes and behaviours, and what broader social forces conspire with educational institutions to render them as such.

These were relatively early days in the teacher education journeys of these students, but already we were engaged in a thoughtful unstitching of the fabric of privilege and marginalisation as woven together by educational institutions, unpicking and pulling at the threads of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and nationality (which is to say settler-colonialism in Australia) that 'operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities' (Collins, 2015, p.2). If, according to Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013), 'what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term "intersectionality," nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations', but rather 'its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power' (p. 795), then we were doing intersectionality! Or at least an aspect of it – the aspect Collins and Bilge (2016) call 'intersectionality as critical inquiry', which denotes 'a broad sense of using intersectional frameworks to study a range of social phenomena' (p.33), such as unequal educational outcomes as discussed in this tutorial. This is a common manifestation of intersectionality as it has grown and become institutionalised in higher education, but as Collins and Bilge (2016) point out, its widespread use as a conceptual framework for studying social phenomena can elide two of its conditions of possibility: firstly, the activist practices that generate intersectional knowledge, such as those that 'involve criticizing, rejecting, and/or trying to fix the social problems that come with complex social inequalities; and secondly, the very power relations that make intersectionality as critical inquiry in scholarship and the classroom possible and legitimate, and which relegates political considerations to 'areas outside the academy and contribute to the fiction that higher education is an ivory tower' (p.32). In other words, treating intersectionality primarily as an analytical approach underemphasises its other aspect – 'intersectionality as critical praxis', which 'refers to the ways in which people, either as

individuals or as part of groups, produce, draw upon, or use intersectional frameworks in their daily lives' (Collins & Bilge, 2015, p.32). To move from intersectionality as critical inquiry to critical praxis in the classroom, then, is to shift registers from the analytical (where issues of power, privilege, and marginalisation are 'out there') to lived experience (where these issues are 'in here': in this place, in this role, in this body). As Collins and Bilge (2015) assert:

College classrooms may be the place where students first learn about intersectionality, yet their experiences in dormitories, dining halls, libraries, sporting events, for those who must work to pay for their education, their jobs become the places where intersectionality is lived. (p.47)

So I wanted to shift registers and bring it home in that tutorial, or at least to where we sat: in a comfortably air-conditioned and well-equipped room at Australia's oldest university that relentlessly markets itself as an elite institution that recruits the 'best and brightest students', not least by inviting such youthful conquerors of competitive matriculation examinations to high teas with the Vice-Chancellor in bequeathed mansions complete with waistcoated waiters serving Vietnamese rice paper rolls and mini quiches (Joyner, 2016). I was not engaged in a conspiratorial discussion with subterranean subalterns in a dingy basement plotting to overthrow the educational-examination-industrial complex structured on class, cultural, and gender inequalities (Teese, 2000); they – actually, we – were a class of people who had 'made it' in that system, one way or another.

I took a breath and allowed for silence to fill the space, trying hard to practice the pedagogical wisdom of affording students some uninterrupted 'think time' to reflect. Like many educators whose pedagogical energies are fuelled by a mixture of anxiety and narcissism, I suffer the nagging feeling that quiet gaps between questions posed and student responses in the classroom are a gaping sinkhole that engagement tips into, even for the recommended disturbance-free minimum of only three-to-five seconds (Stahl, 1994).

Five seconds. I beckoned: 'Any thoughts?'

Ten seconds. Still holding the silent space. Now pushing out a slight smile to ease the tension in a non-interruptive way.

Fifteen seconds. I could hear myself beginning to coax myself: 'It'll be ok. It's all very new and confronting. Just give them some time.'

'I dunno... ' A voice broke the silence.

'I guess I've benefitted from going to a private school.' The female student offered, tentatively.

'Thank you for sharing that. How might going to a private school be understood as benefitting from the dominant culture?' I asked, self-consciously smiling and maintaining an open posture to affirm her courage.

'Well, I mean, people assume that because I went to a private school, like, I had heaps of help at school and my parents have money, and we kind of get given everything on a plate.' She moved quickly on this question. And her rejoinder bore a hint of aggression, or perhaps it was annoyance at being asked to self-scrutinise at nine-thirty in the morning.

'But... but you don't feel that's fair.'

'I just feel like my parents worked really hard and made heaps of sacrifices for me to get to where I am. I worked really hard too. I nearly had a breakdown in Year 12. It wasn't like everything was easy for me. It was actually fucking rough!'

'I'm sure you did work very hard.' I reassured her instinctively, partly out of surprise at the sudden change in tenor. This was the same student that, moments before, had jovially joined in to point out that students who always had their homework done on time and somehow also managed to fit in a raft of extracurricular activities were doted on by teachers.

'Yeah I understand what you mean.' A voice added from the back of the classroom. The male student spoke rapidly in bursts: 'I went to a selective school. People assume that I must be up myself, or I look down on other people. But I just worked really hard. My parents worked really hard too. They came to Australia and barely spoke any English, and they worked hard for me and my sister. Is it wrong to do well? As teachers, don't we want our students to do well?'

I could see other heads nodding in agreement.

'I don't think we're saying it's wrong to do well.' I urgently inserted, feeling like this discussion was getting away from me. 'What we're trying to do is consider how 'doing well' might be affected by the privileges we've received in some ways compared to others, and also the disadvantages we face in other ways within the education system.'

'But I don't feel privileged.' He retorted immediately.

Student Resistance

This gear shift from intersectionality as critical inquiry to critical praxis was not going quite as textbook smooth as I had expected. Were these the gear grinds wreaked by 'student resistance,' that gremlin of social justice classrooms? It certainly seemed to fit Shoshana Felman's (1987) oft-cited characterisation of it as a 'passion for ignorance' caused not by 'a simple lack of information but the incapacity – or the refusal – to acknowledge one's own implication in the information' (p.79). This notion of resistance as an active rebuffing of knowledge, specifically a knowing that pertains to oneself, has its basis in the

psychoanalytic tradition's writings that trace neurotic symptoms in patients to repression and its disavowal. Specifically, for Freud, resistance denotes a patient's defence mechanisms when induced to recall repressed memories that threaten their sense of self (i.e. their ego): 'The patient's self had been approached by an idea that proved to be intolerable, and aroused on the part of the self a force of repulsion, which had aimed to defend itself against this intolerable idea' (as cited in Cho, 2009, p.28). Ever the eloquent expositor, the father of psychoanalysis offers a vivid educational analogy of the relationship between repression and resistance in a 1909 lecture:

Let us suppose that in this lecture-room and among this audience, whose exemplary quiet and attentiveness I cannot sufficiently commend, there is nevertheless someone who is causing a disturbance and whose ill-mannered laughter, chattering and shuffling with his feet are distracting my attention from my task.

I have to announce that I cannot proceed with my lecture; and thereupon three or four of you who are strong men stand up and, after a short struggle, put the interrupter outside the door. So now he is "repressed", and I can continue my lecture. But in order that the interruption shall not be repeated, in case the individual who has been expelled should try to enter the room once more, the gentlemen who have put my will into effect place their chairs up against the door and thus establish a "resistance" after the repression has been accomplished. (Freud, 1909, para. 10)

From this, resistance (i.e. the chairs) can be understood as what the ego (i.e. Freud and the four strong men) uses to maintain the repressed memory (i.e. the annoying man) so that it can go on doing what it's doing. What is also implied in this analogy is that the ego knows what it does not want to know or remember. When taken into a clinical context, then, the patients' inability to remember is not to be taken to be a sign of obliviousness. In his remarks on 'Wild' psychoanalysis, which Felman cites in the development of her argument,

Freud (1912) posits that giving a neurotic patient information to combat ignorance in the hopes that this will bring an end to their symptoms is doomed to fail because resistance is its cause, not its effect.

In this interpretation, the inability to remember is itself an act of resistance to a process that is forcing a painful confrontation with the traumatic truth, which is repressed in the patient's unconscious (Cho, 2009, p.28). This inability or refusal to remember manifests itself, according to Freud (1920), in 'very many sorts [that are] extremely subtle and often hard to detect' forms that exhibit 'protean changes in the forms in which it manifests itself' (para. 4) – sometimes as 'a violent and tenacious resistance' (para. 2); at other times as 'intellectual resistance' (para. 8), which initially picks a fight with the analyst, then becomes willing to argue, and finally becomes an enthusiast for learning more.

At this point, one might be tempted to think of Freudian theories of resistance as accounting for every possible reaction to the psychoanalyst that does not fit the pattern of successful treatment. And Freud's (1900) claims about the ubiquity of the phenomenon – especially when he makes statements like: 'Whatever disturbs the progress of the work is a resistance' (para. 8) – certainly give off that impression. This paper is clearly not the place to rehash the century-long debates about the utility of resistance and repression as clinical concepts, but I do want to foreground its interpretive logic as I believe it undergirds many readings of student behaviour in social justice classrooms. For while I am enough of a poststructuralist in my dispositions to know that any theoretical edifice is a partial totalisation that 'sees the world from the point of view of a certain way of working, and generalizes that way of working into a whole worldview' (Wark, 2017, p.10), as a pragmatist (and let's be honest, all teachers are pragmatists), I think attention needs to be paid to their 'cash value' (James, 2000) – the practical effects of holding onto particular ways of interpreting classroom situations, students, and ourselves as teachers.

Consider the student responses in the tutorial scenario given above. In light of the information that had been shared about how educational institutions distribute value to some and not others in a way that reinforces inequalities, the refusal to acknowledge the personal gain from such an arrangement reads as textbook resistance: the barricading the

door of consciousness so as not to remember what has been repressed because it threatens the ego-self. For if to remember in the context of the social justice classroom is to 're-member' – that is, to put members of a social body or constituent parts of a structural or composite whole back together (Christian, in King & Swartz, 2014, p.15) – then the refusal to engage represents a resistance that intransigently guards the repressed truth that the students know, but won't admit: that their identities as student teachers in an elite university have been made possible by social institutions and systems that produce suffering for others. And, following Freud's expansive definition, their responses of displacement ('I nearly had a breakdown'), or denial ('I don't feel privileged'), or seeking further instruction ('As teachers, don't we want our students to do well?'), or passivity (the silence and head nodding), can all be read as the hydra heads of student resistance that seek to repel conscious awareness in order to defend the repressed belly of privilege.

All this, it would seem, presupposes that the social justice teacher – as the classroom analogue to the psychoanalyst – is the master plumber of the social unconscious, possessing both the ability to name any clogging of the pedagogical pipeline as resistance, and the right tools to unclog the flow between the ego and the repressed truth. An exemplar of this mode of interpretation is Barbara Applebaum's (2007) diagnosis of 'systemically privileged students', those 'who are afforded privileges that they take for granted because they are in one way or another ascribed membership to a dominant social group' (p.344). Because they have not experienced systemic oppression, she argues, they deny that it exists and in so doing, 'they deny that they are systemically privileged and contend that any advantage they enjoy is merited or "normal" and "natural"' (Applebaum, 2007, p.337). When such students exhibit behaviour at odds with the social justice teacher's expectations, they should not be regarded as merely disagreeing, but exhibiting 'a culturally sponsored defensiveness and refusal to engage that is not only offensive to the systemically marginalized but that also reproduces systems of oppression and privilege in the classroom' (Applebaum, 2007, p.339). Applebaum's (2007) prescription for this ill, which is to shut down any expression of disagreement that is interpreted as resisting engagement and to justify this by turning it back on the students ('one must engage before one can disagree', p.343), may seem a little extreme and not widely shared by others who write about student resistance. What appears to be more widely shared her interpretation of a range of behaviours as student resistance designed to protect privileged selves (i.e. egos) and the status quo that confers it (i.e. the

repressed), and which positions the teacher as the omniscient diagnostician (e.g. Bell, Morrow & Tastsoglou, 1999; Kumashiro, 2002; Hytten & Warren, 2003).

As a teacher, I am not entirely comfortable with this. While there is insight that can be generated from such a construal of noncompliant student behaviour, I submit that it obscures other possibilities for understanding students' responses (or lack thereof), which consequently limits the range of pedagogical approaches that may be adopted by social justice teachers (Ringrose, 2007). No doubt some students may fit the model of wilfully resisting knowledge to defend their privileges (so yes, I do think that there are obstinate douchebags littered amongst cohorts), but I submit that most students are far more complex than that. One of the key contributions of the theory of intersectionality to social justice education is, in my reckoning, to attune us to this nuance: that our students not easily reducible to monolithic categories of 'systemically privileged' and 'systemically marginalised' because they represent a variety of races, sexualities, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, ages, abilities, first languages, nationalities, and more, and hence are likely to be differentially privileged in some ways and marginalised in others (Collins & Bilge, 2016; also Dunn, Dotson, Ford & Roberts, 2014). Their responses can thus be read as arising from their interpretations of experiences along these different vectors, as can be seen in the tutorial scenario above where ability, language, and nationality were brought into play.

Given such complexity, perhaps different frames are needed that move beyond the polarity of the omniscient teacher versus resistant student to put both on the same side of the learning process, frames that show more compassion and respect for students struggling with confronting knowledge (Ringrose, 2007), and that provide tools for both students and teachers to process its unsettling effects (Berila, 2016). In the space that remains, I will outline two possible frames that may fit this bill. With reference to conceptualisations of the ego-self from existential psychology and from Buddhist psychology, I reflect on how intersectional analyses may precipitate little 'ego deaths' – 'the specific, subjective experience of the disappearance or cessation of one's normal sense of "I"' (Sandler, 2015, p.34) – especially in teacher education classrooms where personal complicity with institutions and systems of inequality, not least preschools and schools, confronts those

whose identities as preservice teachers are tied up with ‘contributing to society’ and ‘helping others’ (Ewing & Smith, 2003, p.20; also DiAngelo and Sensoy, 2014).

Existential Psychology

Existential psychology is a diverse, burgeoning field of research and therapeutic practice based on existential and phenomenological philosophy (Cooper, 2003). For the purposes of this paper, I will draw primarily on the work of Ernesto Spinelli, a contemporary exponent who has developed a sophisticated theoretical account of the functioning of the self over decades of work as a therapist. The ‘self’ is commonly assumed to be found through an ‘inward’ gaze as a product of the mind, and as something substantial and thing-like that one possesses – what Charles Taylor (2007) has characterised as the ‘buffered self’ (p.37) of Western modernity. Existential phenomenology, and existential psychology of the sort advanced by Spinelli (2001), places such assumptions into question by locating the self in its ‘indissoluble and indivisible interrelational grounding’ so that nothing meaningful can be stated or experienced about ‘self’ without ‘an implicit reliance upon the self’s interrelational placement in the world’ (p.42). For instance, to state anything about ourselves – say, about our personal attributes or an identity along any of the vectors mentioned above – ‘requires the existence of instances of ‘not-self’ or, more plainly, *others* (other human beings, other living things, the world in general) in order for that statement to hold any meaning’ (Spinelli, 2001, p.42).

Thus, the self does not emerge from ‘deep within’, according to this perspective, but amidst the interrelationship of the human being with others through acts of reflective consciousness that attempt to structure experiences and make them meaningful from an object-based standpoint – a rather complex point that Spinelli (2001) derives from the work of pragmatists, interactionists, social constructionists, and existential phenomenologists. In the midst of everyday experiences that we are immersed in, according to this view, our consciousness is focused upon objects or activities in the world. The self is temporarily set aside, and it only reappears upon reflection after the activity (i.e. self-reflection). ‘[I]t is in that shift from doing (or “being immersed in”) the activity to that of considering what we are, or have been doing, that the self emerges’ (Spinelli, 2001, p.43). As such, the sense of self is a construct of reflection, an attempt to fix and stabilise an image by cleaving an object called ‘I’ from the flux of lived experience, and which in turn structures and makes

meaningful subsequent interactions in the world with others (e.g. 'I am never going to be late again.'). This objectified sense of self is labelled the 'self-structure' by Spinelli (1994, 2001). Over time, the self-structure will come to contain and express a number of typically recurring, fixed patterns that structure a person's way of engaging with the world, what Spinelli (1994, 2001) calls 'sedimentations' – a term he draws from Merleau-Ponty's (1962) description of how past actions form bodily and sensory habits that bestow a 'familiarity with the world' (p.277).

So far so good. That is, until we are confronted with experiences or information that may not 'fit' patterns of fixed values, attitudes, behavioural stances and beliefs which sediment the self-structure, which is an inevitability given the latter is a reification amidst a living interrelation with human and nonhuman others that do not stay still (Bennett, 2010). And here we can come back to the social justice classroom: what happens when students whose senses of self as being 'good people' or 'socially aware' (or 'woke' if they subscribe to BuzzFeed) are confronted with their possible complicity in institutions and systems that perpetuate social suffering? When this occurs, two principal options become available, according to Spinelli (2001):

[E]ither the self-structure is opened to these challenges so that some particular aspect of the self-structure is re-constructed (or de-sedimented and re-sedimented anew as a different structure), or the existing self-structure is maintained via a particular strategy of *dissociation* of the challenging interrelational experience either in part or as a whole. (pp.48-49; also 1997, 2005)

In employing the term 'dissociation' to denote the self-structure's response of denying or 'disowning' those challenges in order to maintain its sedimentations, Spinelli (2001) is careful to insist that he is not pathologising those who do so; indeed, his argument is that we *all* tend to take the second option because the stakes for adopting the first option are high: 'That our more typical chosen stance relies upon the second option', he reasons, 'is made more explicable when we realize that the opening of any aspect or element of the self-structure to challenge alters the *whole* of the self-structure' (Spinelli, 2001, p.49). So, for

instance, some of us may see ourselves as socially conscious academics who care deeply about the world, and who gather once or twice a year in different locations around the world to share ideas about how to make the world better. Yet our senses of self remain unaffected when confronted with, for instance, information about how our air travel may be contributing significantly to devastating climate change (Gossling & Peeters, 2007), or how the electronic devices that we tap away at may contain coltan mined by Congolese workers under the gaze of machinegun wielding warlords (Nest, 2011). This may be because the ‘rational’ step of reconstructing our self-constructs are steeped in uncertainty and risk as to the consequences of taking such a step; there is no way of knowing or predicting its extent or direction. What would it mean for us as academics, say, to open ourselves to the knowledge abovementioned? Should we stop flying or electronically connecting? Or perhaps stop defining ourselves as being committed to social justice, or quit academia altogether?

I am not making an argument here for moral perfectionism. Quite the opposite. What I am seeking to do here is place teachers and students on the same side of the learning ledger: that apparently ‘irrational’ or defensive or, dare we say, resistant responses to challenging information are understandable because such responses seek to maintain the stability of the self-construct and ‘avoid or at least minimise the impact of the unknown and the uncertain’ (Spinelli, 2005, p.93). Of course, the challenge of social justice, for both teachers and students, is the ongoing work of relinquishing those impulses and sustaining self-structures that are more porous, open, and responsive to the challenges of interrelational existence.

Buddhist Psychology

This notion that the ego or self is a reified construct hewn from the flow of experience, and that sediments into ‘rigid dispositional stances’ (Spinelli, 2007, p.35), has resonances with the teachings of various schools in the Buddhist tradition, a point acknowledged by Spinelli (e.g. 2005, p.94; 2007, p.40). In Buddhist psychology, ‘the word ‘self’ is the collective noun for all our conditioning’ (Brazier, 1995, p.81), and numerous texts within the tradition can be read as deploying an array of metaphors that offer different angles on how it arises. One important model is that of the self being not one solid independent thing, but a composite of five *skandhas*, literally ‘heaps’ or ‘aggregates’: corporeality or form (*rūpa*); sensation (*vedana*); perception (*samjñā*); mental formations (*samskāra*); consciousness (*viñjāna*) (Fischer-

Schreiber, Ehrhard & Diener, 2010, p.206). Like existential psychology's insistence on the self as emerging amidst an interrelational world, the aggregates can be understood phenomenologically as our experiential and material conduits with everything – 'both inside us and outside us, in nature and in society' (Hanh, 1998, p.176; also Lusthaus, 2002) – which give rise to a sense of self. Beyond the interaction and functioning of the five aggregates, there is 'no persisting self or transcendent soul to be found' (Loy, 1996, p.85).

Again, so far so good. But the Buddhist tradition also points to a common human tendency: to become fixated on the 'illusion of self' (Loy, 1996, p.85). This occurs when the experience of the five aggregates, which should reveal 'the impermanent, nonself, and interdependent nature of all there is', become sources of attachment (*upadana skandha*) to a reified sense of self 'as an unchanging entity that can exist on its own' (Hanh, 1998, pp.182-183). For Buddhist psychology, then, what is at issue is not the sense of self *per se* – a pragmatic necessity for functioning in a social world (Epstein, 2008) – but rather the attachment to 'a sense of self that feels and believes itself to be *separate* from the rest of the world' (Loy, 2015, p.45). This inclination is problematic because it breeds ignorance of what Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) calls our 'interbeing' – that is, our inextricable interrelation with human and nonhuman others, and hence our responsibility for everything that happens around us, including the suffering and wellbeing of those others.

Coda

So what do existential and Buddhist psychologies offer to teachers in social justice classrooms, apart from theoretically (re)framing student resistance as wrought by the challenges to a sedimented sense of self that they may be attached to? In the first place, I argue, what the perspectives of these two traditions urge is a repositioning of 'us' as teachers alongside 'those' students on the same side of the learning process. For apart from Nietzschean *übermensch* and Buddhist *arhats* ('perfected ones'), it is likely that we are all on a lifelong journey of *unlearning* our senses of self to be more open to the challenges of interrelational existence, including becoming aware our implication in institutions and systems that distribute social privilege and suffering along intersecting dimensions.

In addition, these two traditions also offer practical techniques for how to proceed on this process of unlearning the rigidified, separate self. In therapeutic settings where existential psychology is drawn upon, for instance, clients are assisted to examine, reflect on and clarify their self-structures, and how it shapes their way of experiencing and relating in the world, 'such that they can truly choose this way of being or else, in identifying unnecessary and counter-productive limitations, embark on a process of transformation' (Cooper, 2003, pp.120-121; also Spinelli, 1997). In some contemporary strands of the Buddhist tradition, meditative observation of the five aggregates is used to loosen the defensive grip on the ego-self. Importantly, this is not taken to be mere introspection – a misconception that might lead to the reinforcement of the ego (Trungpa, 2002) – but the exercise of broadening awareness that the 'Five Aggregates in us have their roots in society, in nature, and in the people with whom we live' (Hanh, 1998, p.183).

Of course, being neither a therapy clinic nor a meditation hall, techniques for reflection and awareness from these traditions cannot simply be copied and pasted into the classroom context. What is required, then, is exploration into how such therapeutic and meditative techniques that connect work on the self with the wider world may be rendered as pedagogical practices for social justice. In this regard, recent scholarship on the integration into higher education classrooms of 'contemplative pedagogies' – for example, guided introspective exercises, quiet reflection, deep listening, mindfulness, visual and dramatic arts – offer some promise (e.g. Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014; Magee, 2013; Berila, 2016). Whether, and under what circumstances, such approaches may be helpful for allowing well-intentioned egos in teacher education classrooms to die a little in order to become alive to the interrelational threads that bind us to others, remains to be seen.

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