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Courageous and compassionate teaching: international reflections on our responses to teaching geography during the pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on what we learnt about teaching geography during the COVID-19 pandemic. We interrogate how we, as geography educators working in different contexts, navigated the novel teaching spaces created during the pandemic using two key registers; courageous and compassionate pedagogies. Our premise is that understanding in more nuanced form the approaches we took to creating courageous and compassionate education during the pandemic may help geography educators to thrive when delivering future-facing education. Our approach was to write and share vignettes of our pandemic teaching upon which we (asynchronously) collectively reflected; creating emergent themes described in this paper. This approach to structured peer learning derives from our commitment to education as a collective endeavour. We argue that the disruption caused by the early pandemic required geography educators to focus attention explicitly on areas previously taken as given. Geography educators slowed down by: (1) recognising educator and student embodiment in a novel context; (2) prioritising listening, acknowledging and sharing with students; and (3) paying attention to and respecting difference amongst learners and colleagues. We propose that consciously adopting these approaches will support geography educators and their students in rapidly changing circumstances across educational, employment and climate contexts.

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Courage; compassion; embodiment; listening; pedagogic resilience

Introduction

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid shift in the modality of course delivery for many higher education institutions from predominantly face-to-face delivery

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to remote online teaching and learning to implement social distancing protocols (Bartolic et al., 2022; Crawford et al., 2020). There was little time for campus-based educators, used to face-to-face teaching, to conceptualise what this sudden shift to mass education online would mean for their practice, or the impacts it would have on the fundamentals of student learning in this mode. As the pandemic persisted, educators and students experienced impacts caused by social isolation, unequal access to technology and resources, economic distress, and concerns over health and wellbeing (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Quintiliani et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2021).

The sudden, yet prevailing, disruption for many teachers and students caused by the pandemic turned the learning spaces of higher education into what have been termed pedagogic borderlands; unfamiliar territories whose novelty and ambiguity offer challenge to students and academic staff alike (Hill et al., 2016). Borderland spaces of learning are liminal, operating as transitions between secure knowledge and alternative understanding (Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011). They challenge staff to consider anew their pedagogic approaches, identities and relationships. Entering these spaces creates a sense of displacement and disorientation for teachers and students, resulting in initial discomfort and uncertainty as they encounter the vulnerability of "not knowing" (Thomas, 2010). But borderland spaces of learning are also un-prescribed and permissive, allowing new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking and practising, and presenting opportunities for staff and students to appropriate and enact creative possibility (Askins & Pain, 2011). This makes such spaces potentially transformative for teaching and learning (Mezirow, 2000).

In this article, we seek to understand how geography educators navigated the pedagogic borderlands of the pandemic using two key registers; courageous (Gibbs, 2017) and compassionate (Vandeyar, 2013) pedagogies. Our paper is informed by multiple commitments. First, whilst we shared a commitment to courageous and compassionate pedagogies (see "Our process" section of this paper), we wished to collectively construct what this meant for geography educators more widely during a time of disruption, to help us understand in more nuanced form what these registers could offer our understanding of future practice as a disciplinary community. Second, we believed the pandemic disruption had much to teach us and we needed to review, discuss and learn, rather than rush "back to normal" (however appealing that may at first seem). Thirdly we were concerned that if we did not explore what pandemic pedagogies mean collectively, we would be in danger of exacerbating the mantra of education enhancement which implores "just do more and do it faster" (Kinchin et al., 2016, p. 4), resting on educator-exploitation. Our premise was that collectively reflecting on how we navigated the pedagogic borderlands of the early pandemic might provide insights which can help us address the challenges we are still facing with our teaching, such as the need "to embed equity, equality, diversity and inclusion" in geography education (Quality Assurance Agency QAA, 2022, p. 4) and to ensure accessible (Guasco, 2022) and decarbonised fieldwork (Royal Geographical Society with IBG, 2020). We posit that we can deepen our understanding of "good" geography education (Hill et al., 2019), irrespective of context, carrying our new awareness into future teaching practice.

We begin by setting out what we mean by courageous and compassionate pedagogies. We then set out the process by which we reflected on, and tried to make sense of, our diverse experiences of working as geography educators during the pandemic using these

two registers. We draw out the themes that emerged from this process before discussing their wider lessons.

Courageous and compassionate pedagogies

We view compassionate pedagogy as students, and their teachers, recognising distress and/or disadvantage to themselves or others and committing to take action to reduce it (Gilbert, 2016; Vandeyar, 2013). Compassionate pedagogy is a relational and agentic approach in which teachers and students commit to explore and share excitement, insight and passion, alongside vulnerability and fear (Arai & Tepylo, 2016). Compassionate pedagogy focuses on affective, intentional and motivational aspects of learning (Jazaieri, 2018). It requires a willingness to acknowledge learners holistically, with lived embodied experiences and emotional, moral and cognitive agendas (Hill et al., 2019). Compassionate pedagogy thereby means engaging with the affective as well as the cognitive domain of learning.

Compassionate pedagogy embraces the idea of hospitality (Lashley, 2015; Nouwen, 1975), where teachers relate to students in ways that are welcoming and attuned to them as individuals, with the aim of helping them to feel comfortable enough to learn. Hospitality is about listening openly and allowing people to be themselves in a free space, it is "about inviting guests into our world on their terms" (Nouwen, 1998, p. 78). An hospitable and compassionate pedagogy argues for geography academics to engage in dialogue and active reflection with their students to create meaning together. Through the process of sharing insight, students become open to taking risks and being vulnerable, and this generates the potential for change. Students feel welcomed, recognised and valued, and their aspirations to learn are encouraged and facilitated.

The online pivot of the pandemic offered the potential for "brave spaces", a term borrowed from the social justice education literature (Arao & Clemens, 2013). These spaces again draw attention to the active engagement and agency required of students in spaces intended to support learning and they require the teacher to balance risk with affirmation in novel environments. And we must not forget that geographers are often striving for this equilibrium in a context of "pedagogic frailty" (Kinchin & Francis, 2017; Kinchin et al., 2016). This is a situation in which educators find the cumulative pressures of academia inhibiting their capacity to change practice in response to an evolving teaching environment, leading them to maintain conservative and often authoritarian pedagogic approaches. Being courageous means challenging ingrained practices and tropes, but pedagogic frailty can curtail brave teaching and learning practices. Since the beginning of the pandemic, geography academics have faced multiple, and sometimes competing, demands from their institutions, students, the media, government, and regulators. In the face of diverse expectations there may a temptation to play it safe.

In short, the COVID-19 pandemic presented geography educators with a challenge and an opportunity to model the discomfort of learning that we routinely ask of our students and to use the affordances of new spaces to build inclusive cultures of learning. Courage, compassion, hospitality and taking care to support the transformative learning of all students are needed now more than ever. In this article, we reflect on how we tried as group of geography educators to enact courageous and compassionate pedagogies as

best we could during what, for most of us, were unprecedented times. We aimed to understand more deeply the positive benefits of consciously adopting these pedagogies to help the disciplinary community to thrive when delivering future-facing education.

Our process

This paper draws on experiences and reflections as they were expressed and explored through our discussions and writing as co-authors. These discussions emerged from our need for peer learning and support during the pandemic, whilst the paper solidified our commitment to continuing to share learning from these experiences. As such, our process represents our attempt at a structured and inclusive way of organising and sharing our peer learning during a time of crisis.

Our discussions emerged in an international geography education community developed whilst writing the *Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Geography*, a 34-chapter collaboration between more than 50 academics from nine countries (Walkington et al., 2019). In writing the final chapter, four principles were distilled from this collective international hive mind (Dyer et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2019), which we proposed would provide solid foundations for the future of Geography in higher education:

(1) entering pedagogic borderlands;
(2) embracing partnership working;
(3) acknowledging the whole student (which includes embracing compassionate pedagogies); and
(4) adopting courageous pedagogies.

However, in the summer of 2020 the very idea of solid foundations for teaching, learning, and assessment practices seemed to have been challenged by a need to rapidly respond to uncertainty, and to the disruption to traditional forms of face-to-face student-teacher interaction, in-person fieldwork and practical classes.

The discussions which lead to this article were prompted by three questions, informed by our four principles but which were oriented to thinking about the collective challenge to build an understanding of pedagogic resilience with a practical focus (Dyer et al., 2020). We asked:

(1) How might we navigate disruption to create learning spaces as pedagogic borderlands in the coming academic year?
(2) What does it mean to be hospitable as educators?
(3) How can we be courageous as educators?

As three lead co-authors, we came together again in August 2021 at the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference, facilitating an online workshop and paper session on the theme of courageous and compassionate pedagogies. During the workshop, we discussed how to facilitate our desire to continue and deepen our learning through dialogue. We decided to write vignettes about our education practice during the pandemic as a means to create space for individual reflection following the workshop and to produce something which could be shared asynchronously and discussed collectively. Our vignettes described the context in which the author was working,

their intent and a description of the practice they were highlighting. They were intended to structure reflection and support our group peer support and exploration. Vignettes are not reproduced in publication. Instead, we describe them and include some brief quotations. We do not draw on student material nor feedback in this paper either, only representing our own perspectives, and as such ethical review and consent processes were not undertaken (Blazek & Stenning, 2022). The authors set out challenges they had experienced, both unforeseen and anticipated, ways in which their practice changed, and they summarised outcomes and reflections.

The authors of the vignettes derive from three national contexts: Singapore, South Africa, and the UK. In all cohorts our students experienced differential access to satisfactory learning environments (either in terms of access to digital resources and platforms and/or space to work). Across our national contexts there is a stark difference in digital resources. In the South African context, there were no synchronous lectures as most students did not have data or devices in order to make that possible, and most could only work on their studies at night due to data bundles being more plentiful during night time hours. This contrasts with experiences in Singapore, where students had routine and pre-existing access to digital platforms and shared expectations about ways of working online. The courses referred to in the vignettes had cohorts from 22 to over 400 students and included introductions to Human Geography and Geographical Thought, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) workshops, and a geography module in a multi-disciplinary department. They include examples of key disciplinary pedagogies, such as fieldwork, and teaching core geographical concepts and skills.

As a team of nine authors, we have collectively reflected on these vignettes, and the dialogue which preceded them, as a means by which we can make sense of, and take forward positive aspects of, the experiences of teaching geography during the pandemic. We are not seeking to obscure their differences nor to assume they are by any means representative of the wider diversity of teaching geography during the pandemic. We are moved, though, by our common belief that collective learning about teaching through the pandemic is both possible and desirable.

Findings

The vignettes are a moving record of the enormous professional and personal responsibility educators took on during the height of the pandemic along with the fraught negotiations between care for self, our families, colleagues, and students. They remind us of the extraordinary work that was common place. Reviewing recurring aspects within the vignettes demonstrated the nuances of how geography educators enacted courage and compassion in their teaching through adopting slow pedagogy. They:

(1) recognised educator and student embodiment in new contexts;
(2) prioritised listening, acknowledging and sharing with students; and
(3) intentionally encountered and navigated difference

The three themes arose iteratively through ongoing discussions, and are now reflected upon in turn.

Theme 1: recognising educator and student embodiment

A clear theme that emerged from our educator vignettes was that of centring embodiment as fundamental to compassionate teaching. This might seem counterintuitive. However, as we found ourselves teaching online, in learning spaces that we experienced at first as disembodied, our attention was called to embodiment, first as an absent presence and then as a strategy for compassion. We feel this signals a move from the primacy of "The Student Body" to that of the embodiment of learners.

Remembering pre-pandemic spaces

Memories of pre-pandemic teaching spaces framed our reflections of teaching during the pandemic. As educators who have mostly taught in lecture theatres, seminar rooms and computer labs this is perhaps inevitable. Teaching had meant "busy", "lively and fast paced" workshops, and/or a lecture theatre with 400 students "focusing their attention on the lectern". We had developed the skill of "reading the room" to elicit feedback on how a session was going. In doing so, we were reading student bodies to learn how a class was progressing; crossed arms and frowns suggested disagreement or confusion and the need to clarify or invite questions; staring into the middle distance indicated disengagement and the need to change pace or tack. No longer having a room to read felt like teaching without one of our senses. Instead, we found ourselves observing computer screens of blank squares, where students had their cameras off in a video call, or tiny windows occupied by heads and shoulders, offering glimpses of home turned into work spaces. Alternatively, we saw lines of text in online forums or group chats. Text, devoid of tone of voice, could feel incredibly difficult to interpret.

Whilst online teaching and learning had at first seemed disembodied, our bodies soon made their presence known. Remote teaching had a physical cost. Engaging online was exhausting; our eyes tired after looking at a screen for too long; our backs were sore from sitting down too much. We had not realised how important moving between teaching spaces and offices- were to our days. We missed standing and walking both between and within teaching spaces. As the pandemic went on, where we found ourselves teaching in-person, the physical spacing of people and the personal protective equipment we were wearing meant that we still experienced discomfort and a dissonance with our memories of in-person teaching. The stark difference between the memories and the situations we found ourselves in called our attention to previously taken-for-granted aspects of embodiment. As an example, one vignette contrasted the memory of teaching GIS in computer labs with a newly flipped online format. Pre-pandemic, 40 students worked for two hours through pre-prepared learning materials with staff on hand to help answer questions and give formative feedback. The approach resulted in busy, loud sessions. Educators moved quickly around the large room answering students' questions. Whilst a busy classroom can be a relief to an educator, we reflected that, it may also be experienced as an uncomfortable, overwhelming, or hostile space by some students. Once the GIS teaching was flipped, the focus of the sessions was on solving issues and answering technical questions as well as to offer formative feedback on work as it progressed towards submission. Students needed to join the online sessions with questions to resolve and work to present to the tutor for "feed-forward". Faculty members had to trust students to engage with the learning resources independently and come to online sessions having

attempted the tasks. Whilst for the majority of students this worked well, dialogue was limited if students arrived unprepared. The new structure was a pragmatic one but the educator realised this structure gave students far more autonomy over their own bodies and time, and the ability to manage the constraints they were experiencing during lockdowns.

Another of our vignettes contrasted the memory of lecture theatres with asynchronous online teaching. Pre-pandemic, the author of this vignette purposefully taught in a way that disrupted the disciplining architecture of the lecture theatre on learners' bodies. In a space that was established to compel students to look toward the lecturer, taking information from the "expert" in front of the class, this educator's teaching practice had centred student attention on learning from peers, the whole cohort building a collective understanding through feeding back on paired discussions. Students were then prompted to critically engage with space as a disciplining technique. Teaching online, in this case asynchronously, the physical spaces that students were occupying as they learnt could only be imagined. As such, they were lost as a resource for structuring learning. These were often already uncomfortable and disrupted learning spaces and so our job was to provide clarity about expectation and to be hospitable. Pandemic teaching, then, required us to teach with more openness [flexibility] to how students were occupying space.

We also felt our students had lost the informal learning spaces engendered in embodied meetings, such as conversations with the person they sit next to in lecture or stand next to as they wait to go into a lecture theatre. We could not just assume information would be shared between students or students would meet others in their cohort. As such, we were not simply taking our teaching to a new venue, we were embarking on a completely new way of interacting with our students, with our material, and with the way that we teach and students learn.

Both of these examples demonstrate student bodies in learning spaces as an absent presence for us as educators during the pandemic. They were no longer available to our evaluative gaze. Instead, we were left to imagine the people behind laptop cameras and mobile phone key pads; what they were doing, where they were, and who else might be in their space. The "student body" is a term traditionally used to name a collective of students – indistinguishable, but knowable. During the pandemic, it was impossible to ignore that a singular "student body" is a fiction. This disruption then became an opportunity for more compassionate approaches, which centred on the experience of being an embodied learner. These examples typify how teaching during the pandemic called our attention to how uncomfortable learning environments can be. Entering pedagogic borderlands reminded us that education rests on navigating a balance between comfort and discomfort for embodied learners and their teachers.

Recognising embodiment as a strategy in compassionate pedagogy

A theme of embodiment, linked to emotional wellbeing, emerged in our discussions and vignettes. In situations where many of us had very limited opportunities to get outside, it became common for educators to remind students – and each other – to take breaks from screens, to stand up and stretch, to go outside when possible or open a window and breathe deeply. One of our educators described using mindful exercises with their students. They began synchronous sessions with a multiple-choice question about how

they were feeling. During sessions, the educator engaged students in a 10-minute virtual "loving-kindness" meditation to centre wellbeing (this was during a lockdown). The sessions ended with a closing question-and-answer session. One student's question made the educator think by asking how he was feeling, an observation which demonstrates that caring teachers draw forth a caring attitude from their students.

In another example, one of our geography educators asked students to post a photo of "Spring where you are" on an online message board prior to a first synchronous class. This served as a low-stakes task to support engagement, a chance to get used to the software, a prop that was used as an early icebreaker. The hope too was that students would take time to notice the natural world springing into life and this slowing down and appreciating would support wellbeing. Indeed, the message board was covered with images of early leaves, shoots, and buds.

The vignettes demonstrated that, as geography educators, we were able to creatively engage with our own and students' embodiment as a teaching resource in online distributed spaces. We would probably have been wary about asking our students to bring something to an on-campus class, fearing many would forget or our request might not be practical. In synchronous online classes, however, we could ask students to show an object relating to a topic or question. The chance to make things seemed really powerful at a time when many students were spending much time on screens and so we set tasks using objects students may have around their homes (lego, milk cartons, straws, even paper and glue). In another example from our vignettes, an educator set students the task of making video tours for other students on the topics of the meaning of home and a walk in nature, prompting students to take a short walk to a park, along a mountain trail, or around their neighbourhood engaging with module themes corporeally and affectively.

Theme 2: listening, acknowledging and sharing with students

The vignettes had a common theme of pandemic and post-pandemic pedagogies requiring increased attention to each other as teachers and learners. This was manifested through a desire for increased opportunities and time for listening to, acknowledging and sharing experiences.

Listening as part of hospitality

The vignettes highlighted a recognition of individual learner needs, with an emphasis on intentionally creating a hospitable online learning environment. Recognising that students may be accessing lectures and seminars online from a range of locations (globally) and on a range of devices, this included a pedagogy to help students feel comfortable in their learning, fostering connections between learners. This hospitality in virtual space was focussed on creating spaces for students' voices to be heard. Being able to break into smaller groups in order that each student had the chance to speak, share ideas, listen to others and reflect was fore-fronted, with content-rich delivery presented in ways such that students could access material asynchronously and in advance. The pivot to online learning was associated with flipped learning to reduce content delivery away from the precious times during which staff and students could meet.

Module introductions became particularly important. Recognising that many student cohorts had lacked opportunities to get to know each other during the pandemic through fieldwork and informal class-based learning as a result of the shift to online sessions, we found ways to deliberately foster connections and build relationships within cohorts, and to help students find the confidence to bring something of themselves to their learning. Asking students to introduce themselves in advance online, posting pictures and short introductions, for example why they chose the module, enabled module leaders to get a sense of who they would be teaching, and students to match faces to names and get a sense of others on the module. Explaining the importance of group discussions and urging students to "Be brave and be kind!" – brave in contributing, and kind in creating a setting where others were able to contribute and be listened to, acknowledged this balance between courage and compassion.

One vignette began with an introductory session asking students to introduce themselves using an object or image of their own heritage as a way of clarifying the diverse interpretations of the concept of heritage. The learning period was therefore extended to preparation time for students to get materials together and start thinking about the concept and module before the first session. They arrived prepared to share and had to show their objects by turning on cameras or screen-sharing. Images of the objects were added to the Virtual Learning Environment in order that students catching up online afterwards could view the group photo album, in addition to being able to watch a recording of the session. For some students, the preparation phase contributed to a positive sense of anticipation as they chose their object. For students with little to do in lockdown, and their curriculum being something of a lifeline, students reported a sense of having enjoyed being challenged to think about what heritage meant to them through personal representation. Once teaching began, time was given to hearing from students in pairs or threes before sharing with the whole group. In the session, a summary of what is understood by heritage in the literature drew on students' own examples and made connections to ideas which would be returned to as part of the course.

Another novel introduction was quite literally based in listening, as the teacher played music to the students. Playing Bob Marley's (1979) *Babylon System*, with the opening lines on a slide, the teacher encouraged students to listen collectively. During the rest of the module a collaborative "#GeoThought Playlist" was developed. The seminar session each week began with a song connected with the theme in focus that week, provided by students. During the sessions, students had time to share and discuss their own ideas, and to make their own connections. This approach was also developed in the hope that the songs would offer a source of prompts; reminders of key characteristics, uses and/or critiques of the concepts covered in the module.

Strengthening student-teacher relationships through dialogue

In listening to students, the teacher-student relationship was strengthened. One teacher described this as a "sea-change, a completely new way of interacting with students, content and pedagogy". As educators, we slowed down to reflect on what we wanted from our teaching. The pedagogy of slowness allowed us to focus on the end-goal of teaching (both in content and in practice). As the text in one vignette noted: "*In a module on foundational concepts in human geography the focus is squarely on relationships:*

human-environment relationships; society-space relationships; and the relationships that we have with each other as a class and the environments in which we live every day." The intent in pursuing a "more human" geography was inspired by Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018, p. 983) who remind us that:

> Being "slow" is about attentiveness, deliberation, thoughtfulness, open-ended inquiry, a receptive attitude, care-fullness, creativity, intensity, discernment, cultivating pleasure, and creating dialogues between the natural and social sciences.

In order to slow down teaching on the module the gaze and attention of students was turned away from a lecture format to a dialogue with peers. By starting each session with the key word(s) or concept of the week, shared in the three most common languages of the student cohort (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), students were asked to consider the word/concept in their language of choice, and reflect for a minute on what it meant to them individually. After this intentional slowing down and reflection, students took turns sharing their viewpoint and listening with a partner. This process helped to foster structured dialogue and allowed students to voice their understanding of concepts with each other, across several languages. It was also an opportunity to have a relationship with each other in the class. Pairs then shared their results with the entire class. The class could then articulate word(s)/concepts and use that knowledge in combination with theory from set reading(s) to gain a shared understanding.

The vignettes also highlighted a difficulty with managing remote dialogues. With some students only being able to access material at restricted times, ongoing contributions to online discussions could be challenging for faculty to manage. Although technology had advantages in democratising time and attention for students, it also presented profound issues in terms of students being able to connect to access their learning opportunities. Synchronous sessions, in particular, can enact a pedagogy of privilege that reaffirms systemic inequities unless educators sufficiently account for the time and access constraints that students face. Slowing down learning was a compassionate response to this, allowing students to engage with and reflect upon materials at the times and in the places that most suited them.

Sharing through fieldwork

Fieldwork was not solely virtual, working through online resources, it also included going outside to make observations individually and report back. Contact with the locality under Covid restrictions offered a new sense of value for engaging in everyday places with fresh eyes. The immediate locality became a focus of renewed interest under closer inspection. Collecting data and observations and sharing these allowed students to work individually and safely but create a series of shared observations. Sharing data that had been processed individually, but analysing it collaboratively using online tools to answer a research question, provided opportunities for authentic enquiry. Students were dependent on each other's data, making them accountable to each other, in order to answer the question. Some teachers still ran week-long field classes online, with students working in groups on research projects, even though travel was impossible. Trust was vital for this to work.

Teachers listening to other teachers and sharing their pedagogy

The vignettes focussed on listening and sharing as fundamental elements of taught sessions during and post-Covid. Alongside a greater emphasis on listening to students was a commensurate desire to listen and share with colleagues accounts of their teaching practice. Finding out what worked for colleagues, how students were engaging (or not) and the barriers being encountered, provoked an authentic interest in sharing pedagogies to encourage student voice and engage students in unfamiliar territory.

In a time of grounded flights and cancelled student exchange, connecting online with students in other countries provided us with an opportunity for novel learning between faculty members. Collaborative responses amongst networks of colleagues led to examples of courageous pedagogy through leveraging existing global networks to create cross-cultural exchange opportunities for students. In an example connecting staff and students from Singapore, Japan and the USA, online meetings allowed students to share and discuss readings and to reflect in breakout spaces made up of cross-cultural groups. This collaborative pedagogic approach felt courageous because educators opened up their practice to scrutiny across a range of colleagues in different countries and institutional contexts. Sharing teaching practices, syllabi and expectations, faculty put their own students in new territory.

Theme 3: encountering and navigating difference

(Re)considering identity and power

The disrupted educational environment generated by the COVID-19 pandemic prompted colleagues to consider identity in a less tacit, more tangible and more differentiated manner. Greater attention was given to identity and how this might play out in less corporeal learning environments, in terms of the diversity of learners in their cohorts and in relation to power dynamics. Physical classrooms often materialised power in the form of the teacher as expert at the front and the students sitting regimented in lecture theatres or at their own desk. Whilst cognisant of the need to be present for students within online spaces of learning, our vignettes demonstrated a desire to decentre ourselves as experts, drawing upon the affordances offered by a variety of learners in social constructivist learning. Across the vignettes, we acknowledged, for example, diversity in terms of accessibility to the internet and associated technology tools, home and family circumstances, learning styles, culture, language, values and ideologies, prior educational experiences, and levels of self-regulation and self-efficacy. Online learning allowed us to see our students more fully as holistic individuals, often in their home contexts, immersed in their daily lives, being present in learning through remote connection whilst sometimes simultaneously enacting other facets of their identity such as child care. These more obvious expressions of self and difference in students, imposed on learning environments without choice, actually prompted a more relational pedagogy, encouraging us to engage positively with difference as a resource to develop student knowledge and understanding.

Facilitating diverse student presences

Across the vignettes, there was a clear sense of tutors inviting students to be present in their learning, to be active agents contributing the benefits of their lived experiences to the development of collective understanding. Choosing to teach generic material in foundation courses such as an "introduction to human geography" through themes like "community", "heritage" and "sense of home" allowed teachers to link directly to students' lived experiences, including their localised experiences of the pandemic.

Two vignettes described the substitution of large computer-based GIS workshops with small "flipped" tutorials in which students undertook work prior to meeting online, preparing questions and seeking dialogic feed forward, and developing shared understanding of content. Students on these units commented that the sessions felt more personalised and tailored to their individual needs. The more intimate and slower progress of the tutorials welcomed students into the learning journey, wherever they were along the route, and acknowledged them as individuals. The tutor also noted, however, that this had ramifications with respect to increased time invested in delivering multiple small group sessions.

The vignettes suggested that "committed impartiality" is central to courageous and compassionate teaching. As one of our educators commented: *"We often have to reveal who we are as teachers (in terms of values and opinions) in order to bring certain topics to the fore. Students are very curious as to their lecturers' opinions on controversial topics. It makes us more human to disclose our opinions."* We acknowledge, nevertheless, that while "brave" educators may be willing to share, pressuring students to disclose their own situations or opinions, when they might be uncomfortable doing so, should be avoided.

Harnessing diversity to deliver more effective pedagogy

Our vignettes revealed that as geography educators, when we taught online, we tended to acknowledge more candidly and harness the diversity in our own and wider student cohorts. This was heightened when adopting novel learning approaches. One of our geography educators, for example, in an act of courageous pedagogy, brought together students from Singapore, Japan and the USA in a unit to foster cross-cultural exchange. In an online environment, the students discussed readings and shared personal reflections on module themes. They also collaborated to produce a small group video assignment in which they each took a "Walk in Nature", analysing their encounters individually and then via discussion with one another across differences, ultimately sharing the finished videos with the entire class. This prompted the students to apply course ideas to their own lives and to experience something of the everyday lives of others.

However, a challenge arose in the unit due to cultural differences. The educator noted *"I did not foresee the wide cultural gulf that exists between student approaches to assessment"*. As soon as the students were informed of their assessment groups, the students from Singapore reached out to their American and Japanese peers with ideas about how to proceed. In some cases, these emails were met with days of silence. For some students, the lack of response was emotionally painful. One student noted that the unit had been enjoyable but the assessment had filled them with "dread" due to unresponsive groupmates. The tutor noted he had not considered the different approaches students in different locations might take to their assignments: how quickly they would work, how frequently they would communicate, how much they would care (or not) about doing it

well. The tutor noted that we can design a syllabus, but once we introduce unpredictable external elements of students with different cultural backgrounds and learning expectations, we cannot anticipate the outcome. He did note that he would co-create *"a list of expectations, which would become the starting point for negotiating expectations with the next groups"*. The pandemic has heighted our awareness to cultural sensitivity and how working with diverse students can build curricula and assessments that are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Engaging in meta-cognitive conversations

The vignettes demonstrate that it is important for us as geography educators to have meta-cognitive conversations with one another and with our students about learning and assessment processes in higher education. These can help to manage students' expectations, clarifying how they are progressing and uniting groups in a collective learning endeavour built on trust. One of our vignettes, in particular, noted the need to have the courage to *"expose ourselves as teachers to our peers and our students"*. The sudden pivot online, emerging into digitally enriched approaches post-pandemic, have placed us as teachers with our students in the pedagogic borderlands, where our identities, our ways of doing and coming to know, are challenged and exposed, requiring us to be flexible and brave with our teaching and learning. Without us being courageous and compassionate enough to introduce this environment as a space of opportunity, a space that offers transformational learning even though it will be experienced emotionally as well as cognitively, our students may shun this space rather than immersing themselves within it for personal and collective growth. We must be vulnerable enough to foreground, discuss, and work together to enhance the processes that take place behind the scenes of education in order to deliver an effective future-facing geography education.

As one of our educators reflected in their vignette, as they shared with students their expectations for the teaching environment at the start of a module, *"conforming collectively to academic ways of doing might stifle students' individuality, curiosity, and perhaps their confidence in who they are"*. The pandemic has offered us insight into how we can take forward more relational and liberatory ways of teaching and learning, in which learners bring themselves as whole individuals to learning, tutors acknowledge and respond positively to individual differences, and more transformational educational environments are created for a diversity of learners.

Discussion

Analysing the narratives in our pedagogic vignettes through the lenses of courage and compassion has led to insights that we offer to the higher education geography community. Navigating pedagogic borderlands created by the pandemic was achieved through the conscious foregrounding and adaptation of existing pedagogic approaches, those we would have broadly recognised as "good" education pre-pandemic. The vignettes demonstrated that geography educators worked to resist pandemic pressures to simply do more and faster, which could have led them to experience pedagogic frailty (Kinchin & Francis, 2017; Kinchin et al., 2016), and instead adopted slow pedagogy (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Hartman & Darab, 2012), to recognise educator and student embodiment in a novel context, to prioritise listening, acknowledging and sharing, and to encounter

and navigate difference and power to foster deeper understanding of ourselves and each other.

We saw in our vignettes a greater sensitization to and enactment of pedagogies of care and compassion in online and blended teaching and learning environments (agreeing with Mehrotra, 2021; Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021; Vandeyar, 2021). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, pedagogical care was often eschewed in higher education (Keeling, 2014), as its commodified nature tended to replace the cultures of care, collaboration, diversity, equity and inclusion (Motta & Bennett, 2018). With the emergency pivot to online learning, however, compassionate pedagogy emerged as important for educators to generate engagement, belonging and learning in fully digital and flipped classrooms (Burke et al., 2021; Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021; Rabin, 2021) and in higher education more generally (Bovill, 2020; Felten & Lambert, 2020; Kinchin, 2022). Our vignettes demonstrated an awakening in our geography educators of the "lived experiences" of students in their individual material contexts. They recognised how inequalities were being produced through the relations of bodies, spaces and materialities, striving to develop more inclusive educational spaces where all students could feel a sense of caring and belonging. This resonates strongly with relational pedagogies and pedagogies of mattering, where "educationally engaged human relationships are entangled within the spaces, places, contexts and environments with which they occur" (Gravett et al., 2021, p. 1). Geography educators positioned meaningful relationships with and between students as fundamental to effective teaching, exploring ways of fostering physical connections, authenticity and responsiveness. Concerted attention was paid to situated practices, more mindful of the corporeal nature of learners and their contexts.

The vignettes and conversations have demonstrated that in the context of a post-pandemic world, with ongoing insecurity and anxiety, we need to configure inclusive learning environments that offer security to learn. We have become more aware as geography educators of the need to respect the embodied and emotional experiences of students, and to consciously welcome difference as a positive force in guiding learning design. The disruption of the pandemic has taught us that to achieve this we would do well to consciously exercise hospitality, to explicitly welcome all students into their learning, more so than we have ever done. We can adhere to Oden's (2001, p. 14) definition of hospitality not as a singular act of welcome but as "an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning", offering a "relentless" welcome (Felten & Lambert, 2020), particularly to those individuals who do not feel "at home" in higher education. One way to achieve this is to share and model our own vulnerability to learning, as we did during the pandemic, and we would be wise to continue expressing this honesty in future.

Exercising compassion and hospitality, and engaging in meta-cognitive conversations, entrusts educators to be open, welcoming and generous, with the aim of helping students to learn through active contribution. But there are challenges to implementing these pedagogic approaches. Firstly, they require emotional labour, the "effort, planning and control needed to express … desired emotions during interpersonal interactions" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987). We need to value the role compassion and hospitality can play in learning, but be wary of valorising it. We know from the hospitality industry that workers can experience precarity and insecurity themselves, yet still be able create

a feeling of welcome. We recognise too that this type of work is systematically de-valued. It will be important to vocalise and make visible hospitality and care not only as pedagogy but also as labour, not least because we need to be attentive to who does this work and for what reward (Dyer et al., 2016). Secondly, compassionate and hospitable pedagogies take time and staff workload, and institutions need to recognise the extra time it can take to develop more personal and deeper learning and relationship-building between staff and students. We have to ensure that as geography educators we do not provide too much support, potentially leading to a therapeutic culture and omitting to exercise self-care (Gravett et al., 2021). Thirdly, it is important that geography educators receive appropriate institutional resource, support and reward if they, and their students, are to flourish and secure the most positive performance outcomes through delivering compassionate and hospitable pedagogies. Fourthly, the pedagogic approaches our educators adopted during the pandemic fore-fronted a need for students to come prepared and to focus on their learning rather than seeing individual lectures as events in isolation. This required us to trust our students to engage with their learning, with support provided through meta-cognitive conversations.

As geography educators we will also need to exercise courage. Delivering a future-facing education will mean facing multiple, sometimes competing, demands from institutions, students and their families, the media, governments, and regulators. We will need to decide which actions are courageous and which are foolhardy, making assessments about the risks and the costs of courage. Our vignettes point to the importance of exercising courage as a collective, rather than an individual, endeavour, one wedded to a care for each other and for our students. Consciously adopting elements of courageous and compassionate pedagogies, however, will support geography educators and their students in rapidly changing educational, employment and climate contexts.

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Sarah Dyer, Jennifer Hill, and Helen Walkington conceived the project, designed and presented provocations and writing templates which created a call for vignettes from an international team of contributing authors. The manuscript was written by Sarah Dyer, Jennifer Hill, and Helen Walkington with contributions from all co-authors.

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