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Vulnerability: Self-study's contribution to social justice education

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Teaching, as a social justice project, seeks to undo and re-imagine oppressive pedagogies in order to transform teachers, their students, and the knowledge with which they work. In this article, I argue that self-study can contribute to social justice in a number of ways by, for instance, making the sometimes limiting norms that frame teaching and learning visible; inviting my own vulnerability through peer and student reflections and feedback, and noticing the important relationship between ontology and epistemology in teaching and learning. One means to avoid the narrow way in which self-study might apply to only one person's practice is to use theory to legitimise it and make it more broadly applicable. In this study, I use Judith Butler's ideas relating to vulnerability in order to explain the way in which my teaching and learning is framed and to show how normative frameworks that define teaching can be expanded to be more inclusive. I use excerpts of peer and student feedback in order to demonstrate how vulnerability, reconfigured, can lead to powerful new knowledge.

Keywords: Vulnerability, social justice education, Judith Butler, self-study

Introduction

Post-apartheid universities are challenged by the opportunities and responsibilities associated with the power they have to influence how people understand and perform their humanity. How I experience and make sense of teaching is partly related to how the university, the discipline and the departments, in which I work, facilitate and frame teaching and learning, and how students, particularly first-year students, come to know themselves is also related to these frames. I argue that how we work with these frames is affected by how we think about vulnerability. I am interested in conversations that disrupt and transform enduring legacies of oppression and

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authority. To this end, this article works with some ideas and practices of social justice education. Through a self-study of my teaching, and using a theoretical lens adapted from the work of Judith Butler, I developed two themes that emerged from this engagement: the connection between the ontology and epistemology of teaching and learning in self-study as praxis, and vulnerability, and the violence and possibilities of non-convergence. I conclude the article with examples that engage these themes.

Context

I teach mainly in the humanities extended studies programme at Rhodes University, and this shapes my imagination regarding the notions and practices of social justice, inclusion and transformation. Part of the discourse concerning the students who attend this programme is that they are at risk, and vulnerable, especially in the small, elite, colonially conceived Rhodes University. Boughey (2010: 11) described the programme as "a vital part of the university's goal of widening access to include learners with potential, from a more diverse range of educational, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, whose disadvantaged backgrounds may have hindered their school leaving performance". The recent important Council on Higher Education (CHE) report of the Task Team on Undergraduate Curriculum Structure (2013) claims that extended programmes are "the only intervention thus far that has been designed to offer a systemic solution to the systemic problem of the articulation gap" between schooling and university in South Africa, and "[t]heir purpose is thus similar to that of the broader structural reform. Thus, experience gained from the extended programmes is a key consideration in the case for modifying the curriculum structure" (CHE, 2013: 71, 72). The programme in which I teach is specifically designed to expand the frames of what it is to be a student in order to transform not only the student, but also the university that houses them. I also base my claims on experiences in teaching a module on feminism for Sociology I students.

As I claim to be working towards social justice education, then one possibility of self-study is to liberate myself, the students I teach, and the knowledge with which we work from norms that might limit and oppress, or 'alienate'. As Mann (2001: 8) argues, "critical work must be done in order to examine the conditions which might promote alienation; and that any changes towards eliminating the student's experience of alienation within higher education would be radical and not cosmetic". This resonates with bell hooks's (1994: 11) famous proclamation that "[T]he class room remains the most radical space of possibility" – not only for students, but for teachers too. In South Africa, where assimilation or alienation continues to be framed in ways that evoke previous systems of privilege (CHE, 2013: 39-53), a key aspect of self-study as a contribution to social justice is to recognise norms and make them visible in order to expand and transform them to be more inclusive.

Why self-study and praxis? Relevance and tensions

Self-study has been described as a way to improve teaching practices and develop professionally (Cardetti & Orgnero, 2013: 252). This study uses my own practice, not only as descriptive data, but also as challenging normalised teaching practices, "working toward greater congruence between intent and action" (Berry & Russell, 2013: 201). As a social justice educator, my self-study aligns my intentions for social justice with my practice that "always exists in a space between the self and the others engaged in our practice, between history and autobiography, between teaching and research" (Pinnegar, Hamilton & Fitzgerald, 2010: 5). The complicated challenge is to be present in the teaching encounter, while finding the distance from it in order to reflect on it and transform it where necessary. Pinnegar *et al.* (2010: 5) explain that the purpose of self-study "is to develop understanding of practice that then turns back on itself to be useful to both the self-engaged in the practice and others who are practitioners". Self-study is an important tool for noticing and disrupting classroom norms that render some students, lecturers, or knowledge invisible or marginal. It informs how I should adapt or expand the norms to become more inclusive and, in so doing, contribute to social justice pedagogy.

This engagement with my own practice is a way to connect the ontology and epistemology of pedagogy, in that I scrutinise my own 'being' as a teacher in order to transform what and how I know, and vice versa. I strive to access these perspectives using qualitative methods of interviews, auto-ethnography, as well as peer and student observations and feedback – to illuminate unvoiced individual experience in order to recognise and clarify ways of being, doing, and acting (ontology) that generate or inhibit knowing and knowledge (epistemology). As Pinnegar *et al.* (2010: 1) argue, self-study's "claims for trustworthiness are based in ontology rather than epistemology", choosing dialogue [between teacher, peers, students and knowledge] over scientific method as its empirical grounding. Not everyone agrees with the validity of using these kinds of research methods. For instance, Alvesson (2003) warns that users of these methods sometimes naively claim to capture experience, while, in fact, they might merely allude to a reality which is constructed by the researcher and researched, following guidelines established by research traditions. He suggests a number of ways to overcome this, particularly where the researcher is an insider (as I am in self-study research). Alvesson (2003: 189) emphasises that "the researcher needs to engage in an ambitious struggle with his/her personal and cultural framework", and arguably this is part of my challenge as a teacher who was educated under apartheid frames, and is also oriented towards social justice.

Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy and Stackman (2003: 165) claim that, when self-study is undertaken to "advance theoretical knowledge, they [faculty members] connect their work with existing knowledge and theory in the field, engaging in 'praxis' that is the core of knowledge creation". Furman (2012: 203) argues that praxis is central to social justice leadership in education, and defines praxis as involving "the continual, dynamic, interaction among knowledge acquisition, deep reflection, and action …

with the purpose of transformation and liberation". Freire (cited in Furman, 2012: 202) aptly describes praxis as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality". As Alvesson (2003: 189) suggested though, the "ambitious struggle" that is necessary in this endeavour includes noticing my own biases, and working with my own vulnerability as I expose particular moments for particular ends. Knowledge creation that is oriented towards new understandings and experiences of social justice, rather than the reproduction of 'unjust', selective knowledge, involves shifts in how I think and know, as a teacher, a learner and writer of this article. Applebaum (2004: 65) argues that "change is possible because of the instability of symbolic and discursive norms", suggesting that the ideas and practices of both social justice and teaching and learning can and should be expanding as we perform and think them. This expansion is arguably a fraught process that involves the potential loss of sometimes dearly held beliefs about me or my environment. However, I do research into my own practice, because I want to learn from it in order to improve how I think and perform my teaching.

Self-study as praxis, then, is where epistemology and ontology meet, unfold and inform each other. An aspect of self-study that I use in this article is soliciting feedback from peers and students in order to evaluate, affirm and transform my ongoing practice. The methodology of using my own practice and of choosing which aspects to emphasise for which ends makes me potentially vulnerable to both the scrutiny of my peers and my own self-protection and bias – which is possibly a 'melancholic' response to vulnerability (as will be explained). The article demonstrates how this potential vulnerability, and loss of self, can be a "resource for politics" (Butler, 2004 a: 30).

Vulnerability in self-study

Self-study's tools of peer and student feedback necessarily induce vulnerability. It is a way of recognising the effects of the relationship between my ontology and epistemology as a teacher, in relation to other teachers, students, structures and theory and, in so doing, I expose myself in a process of theorising my practice and practising my theory. How I relate to 'vulnerability' will determine what I choose to expose for what ends. In the process of writing this article, I have grappled with the defences I put up in order to protect my vulnerability. This has meant that I also need to be aware of my power and how I use it. Mann (2001: 17) argues that "we need to be alert to our own positional power, and the complex relations of power that exist within the educational and teaching/learning processes". In researching my own practice, I am encouraged to explore how others are affected by my teaching in order to understand it and change it, if necessary. I am also compelled to explore my own reactions to vulnerability and to find its transformative value.

Berry (2010: 23) insists that, for engaged pedagogy (through the practice of critical race feminism), vulnerability must be mutually experienced by teachers and students, and it needs to encourage "the integration of students' lived experiences in the curriculum". Keet, Zinn and Porteus (2009: 110) agree, claiming that "[c]entral to 'mutual vulnerability' is the pedagogical process that allows teachers and other authority figures to open up and render their frames vulnerable for learners and students to risk their full participation in the pedagogical transaction". One way to ensure that I and my students, and peers, continue to learn from each other is by opening up my practice to the honest feedback of others. This is a risky process that can not only destabilise how I know myself, but also disrupt the balance of power inherent in how teaching and learning are framed, and how I relate to other teachers and my students. This vulnerability, I argue, is a powerful possibility for transformation and re-imagining a just pedagogy – not only to the teacher engaged in self-study, but also for teachers and students as they navigate the knowledge project of the university. Berry (2010: 19) speaks of ways in which students and teachers are sometimes "smashed" by their educational contexts, in the clash between who they are, and what is recognised as legitimate in the institution. Butler (2004 b: 224) argues that our "established conventions" are not ever broad enough to nurture all versions of individual within any one culture, let alone between cultures, and they should be "expanded to become more inclusive and more responsive to the full range of cultural populations". Soliciting peer and student feedback is thus a way to make myself vulnerable in order to expand how I think and act about teaching and learning, and social justice.

Judith Butler: non-convergence, vulnerability, melancholy and mourning

Being a teacher who uses self-study and praxis to further the aims of social justice, part of my mission is to respond to where there is a clash of cultures, and the spaces of 'smashing'. Butler (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 37) argues that "the task of the postcolonial translator … is precisely to bring into relief the non-convergence of discourses so that one might know the very ruptures of narrativity, the founding violence of an episteme". This idea has become a kind of leitmotif or principle of my teaching and thinking. When there is a clash of cultures, for instance when students or teachers imagine themselves to be marginal to the prevailing norms, there is the opportunity to create new knowledge as one carefully considers the reasons for the clash. As I teach in a programme that aims to be more inclusive of students who were previously excluded from university access, I need to be aware of ways in which the legitimate intention of social justice in this sector is undermined by practices that entrench the marginality of some. As a lecturer in this unit for extended studies, I also navigate my own marginality: I teach only first years, in a university that seems to value research and postgraduate supervision more highly than undergraduate teaching. There is also a 'non-convergence', in that I am a late-entry academic, having

obtained my Masters and access to academic career as lecturer at the age of 50. I have gaps in my theory, compared to the apparently seamless paths of colleagues who have immersed themselves in their fields from an early stage. These aspects of non-convergence make me feel vulnerable and marginal, and I seek to transform this vulnerability into productive knowledge which will transform my sense of self and legitimise my teaching practices.

Vulnerability is a lens through which to transform knowledge frames – for instance, the frames, norms and knowledge concerning teaching and learning – by bringing together ontology and epistemology. Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007: 682) claim that "knowing is inhabited; we cannot step outside it. But it is also transformative – it can change who we are". So, when I engage ontologically with my students and peers – by opening up my practice for their honest feedback, and by engaging with this feedback theoretically and in practice – we are able to transform how we relate to each other, to the university, to theory, and how we understand vulnerability. Where vulnerability is constructed as weak, where it is not valued and nurtured, risking it requires a level of courage or abandon. Arguably though, when it happens, vulnerability is that moment of recognition when transformation is possible, and it provides access to powerful knowledge. As I open myself to the critique of peers and students, I not only develop the capacity to employ vulnerability in order to learn new things about myself and my students, but I also develop ways to facilitate this kind of important learning to my students.

Butler's engagement with vulnerability is particularly useful as an analytical tool in self-study. It provides a way to reconfigure vulnerability into strength, by recognising it differently. I consider the knowledge project of universities as one that inevitably involves loss. In order to know new knowledge, we are sometimes required to let go of knowledge we already have. This loss, which is part of an epistemological process, has ontological effects – we experience the loss of who we were, or of who we might have been without knowing – and it can be violent, especially when deeply held and fundamental ideas about ourselves or the world are challenged. Melancholy, as explained by Butler, is a refusal to face the vulnerability and loss and deal with it, but instead this potential 'loss' is incorporated into the idea of self where it remains unchanged, and infuses our lives with its presence as a fear of vulnerability. Butler (2004 c: 159) describes this as "the suppressed alternative to mourning". In this scenario, I could experience my own marginality and vulnerability with fear. I would be hesitant to open myself to the critique of students and peers, and unable to learn new things about myself. I would retain my marginality defensively, and reproduce it. Similarly, if my students were not encouraged to experience, own and work with their vulnerability, they might also retain their sense of marginality and merely reproduce what they think is expected of them. They would be unable to experience transformation from being vulnerable students 'at risk', to emerging scholars with important insights.

Mourning, the other response to loss, is that destabilising process whereby we acknowledge loss, and are not certain who we are because of it. The vulnerability that comes with this knowledge is perhaps always with us; however, in mourning, vulnerability is recognised, and arguably, in social justice education, this vulnerability is protected and legitimised. Reflection is one way to mediate loss and vulnerability, and in the instances illustrated below it can be viewed as a kind of mourning. Mourning acknowledges loss, and it also acknowledges that we do not know who we are without that which is lost; thus we proceed with a level of uncertainty.

Butler (2004 a: 30) asks us to consider the possibility of turning loss, vulnerability, and grief into a "resource for politics". In the mourning/melancholy matrix, melancholy occurs when loss (or vulnerability) is 'solved' rapidly in order to restore former order. But this entrenches a fear of, and a refusal to accept it, so that the power which emerges from this configuration is always a melancholic fear of vulnerability. If mourning takes place, it means the loss is given up, and vulnerability is recognised. This, argues Butler (2004 a: 30), "is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself", leading to that fruitful place where we "might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others … from where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kind of violence we have suffered". A way forward through the colonial and apartheid legacies, which continue to inform the statistics and demographics concerning who is admitted and who succeeds at universities, and how success is measured, is to consider those moments where those who suffer the violence of non-recognition aspire to be recognised. These moments provide the opportunity to destabilise the centricity of the norms which limit them, and legitimise vulnerability as the possibility for new epistemology.

Practising vulnerability through peer and student feedback

Soliciting peer feedback for the purpose of self-study is a way to make oneself vulnerable in relation to the other. With the theoretical orientation used earlier, this vulnerability can be reconfigured to become a useful way to transform self. Self-study is a way of engaging pedagogy and, as Berry (2010: 23) explains, it "provides spaces for my vulnerability to be present and able in the context of curriculum. By understanding this, I also understand that my students bring all of their experiences and knowledge into the classroom". If I am willing to open my practices to peers, with a clear understanding of what I am seeking, I am also willing to risk vulnerability in order to know myself and my students in new ways. To illustrate: I teach a feminism course to Sociology I students, and I asked a peer (an academic colleague whose Politics I classes I attend with my students) to observe my teaching and to provide feedback on whether and how I worked with vulnerability in the class. Ironically, in the light of this testament to working with my own vulnerability, I selected this peer, because I know, like and respect her, and we share many pedagogic values. Thus, I

acknowledge the way in which I protect myself from critique and vulnerability by selecting a peer with similar values. I seek aspects of non-convergence in order to find the new knowledge that can transform my sense of marginality as a teacher. I consider this peer to be smarter than me, more intellectually engaged than I am, with a younger, stronger and more immersed political philosophy. I have attended her course on International Relations with my extended studies students, and every lecture she gives has the structure and engagement of an excellent journal article. I solicited her feedback in order to work with aspects of my vulnerability, because I trust her perspectives.

As the peer noted in the introduction to her feedback report, feminism, which works with ways in which our lives are historically and systemically structured by patriarchy and the ongoing oppression of women, is one of those knowledge spaces where non-convergence is necessary and where transformation and social justice are possible. She commented:

> *I was also glad to attend [these] classes because I've found that the one or two lectures that I'm able to dedicate to feminist theory of International Relations to be one of the most daunting as students appear more resistant towards feminist theory than other theories I introduce them to (Siphokazi Magadla, 2013).*

Because the peer was oriented towards what I was trying to achieve with my class, her insights are valuable not only for what I already know, but also to facilitate the process of mourning, and letting go of ideas that limit me. Pinnegar *et al.* (2010: 4) argue that "[w]hen we are clear about our purpose it gives us strength in attending to matters of trustworthiness and merit in conducting the research and writing it up for publication". In the first instance, the peer noticed a prevailing norm in our classrooms, and articulated this in a way that resonated with my own sense:

> *I am often simply enraged at the thoughtlessness of some of my academic colleagues in the classroom especially in terms of being aware that the examples we use in class determine our own racial, sexual and class orientations. In this university those examples often reflect a white, male, middle class, heterosexual view of the world (Siphokazi Magadla, 2013).*

Our shared ideas of gendered, classed and raced norms that operate in many classrooms are thus made visible. She goes on to notice ways in which my teaching circumvented this norm:

> *It was a positive experience to see that Corinne thought deeply about the examples used in class, which were provocative moving from examining the politics of the masculinities that shaped the Marikana massacre[1], to the slutwalk[2] national debate of 2011 which shaped much of our student debate here at Rhodes, to even examining the lack of women professors at Rhodes which really helped students to recognise the workings of gender at our university today (Siphokazi Magadla, 2013).*

In this instance, Siphokazi notices the non-convergence of norms between what is usually done and what was done in this particular class – disrupting the *status quo* and challenging established comfort zones. I already knew this about my teaching,

but she helped me understand the value of this method. This non-convergence, using provocative examples which locate my own politics, can induce vulnerability, in that it goes against the grain of what students are used to, and what colleagues might legitimise. Siphokazi provides insight into how working in this way can be transformative:

> *This level of engagement with students requires a high level of vulnerability on the lecturer which is why I suspect most academics choose the easier less involved examples, but Corinne's ability to locate herself honestly as a feminist at Rhodes was both a provocative and a vulnerable move I would argue. It was provocative in the sense that often especially at the undergraduate level there is pressure for lecturers not to put pressure on students to choose a particular worldview meaning that our job then is simply to give our students the 'menu' of knowledge making as shaped by different theories without making suggestions on which 'item' in the menu we would actually prefer for ourselves. It was thus provocative for Corinne to choose to challenge this order of business and locate herself as a feminist theorist and activist. It was also a vulnerable move because it allowed students to challenge her on how she makes the transition from the theoretical to the empirical. For me it is exactly this provocativeness and vulnerability that made this course most enjoyable for the students. Right in front of them was a woman 'doing' the work of feminism while at once making sense of the discourses that shape feminism today! (Siphokazi Magadla, 2013).*

Siphokazi's reflection on my teaching provides me with the means to notice my own vulnerability in ways I had not considered, and to reconfigure vulnerability as powerful. The opportunities presented to me to expand my frames of how I think about my teaching, by the endorsement of someone, whose pedagogic and political ideas I value and respect, are far greater than perpetuating ideas about my marginality.

A further example of peer feedback was solicited to legitimate my teaching methods and philosophy. This involved a process that began with student feedback. Student feedback is not only an opportunity to critique a course or lecturing style, but also a way to provide insight into who they are – which, I argue, is also a contribution to social justice education. Student feedback highlights the tension inherent in vulnerability, and encouraging students to make themselves vulnerable is a task with enormous risk. If students do not feel sheltered, their feedback will be self-protective. Arguably, every time a student writes a test or assignment, s/he makes him-/herself vulnerable, but this vulnerability is not necessarily recognised, leading to a melancholic fear which inhibits learning. Modelling vulnerability and demonstrating to students that openness is one way to keep learning new things can encourage students to take similar risks. I tend to regard student feedback as a process of inverting the norms in the classroom, creating a scenario where students have power over me as a teacher; this could increase my vulnerability. By encouraging students to be honest in their critique of my teaching, I am inviting new knowledge about who I am in a way that can disrupt the power I have. However, when my own vulnerability has been demonstrated openly in class, feedback can also demonstrate ways in which students could viably use the opportunity to make

themselves vulnerable too. Student feedback can reveal the struggles that students are experiencing. For example, this student's feedback to me revealed her aspirations at the start of the year: "If only I could understand whatever is being taught to me and the way things are done here and also adapt easily then things would be great" (Student 1).

This articulation shows perhaps a desire to be assimilated into the epistemological project of the university, and it was a clear indication to me to ensure that I make learning visible in class. Spelling out the steps that are required in order to reveal the hidden norms that frame teaching and learning in this institution would allow students epistemological access, and it might also involve noticing where normative frameworks (of the course or of the student) clash. I solicited student feedback at least twice a term for exactly this purpose. However, I was concerned as to how I could make sure that the methods I used in response to student feedback were pedagogically sound. I could, melancholically, refuse to accept that my methods might not align to my social justice intentions, always fearing that vulnerability. Or, I could face my vulnerability, by inviting peers, who are immersed in the theory of teaching and learning, to critique my teaching methods. I invited esteemed colleagues from the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) to seek ways in which I engaged students actively in class, and whether I was addressing their learning needs. They provided the following generous feedback, affirming that I am working towards accepting the challenge from the student above:

> *Your stance as a teacher is developmental as well as socially critical. You taught in a way that not only made students aware of how to engage with the subject matter, but also how what you were teaching related to the field of sociology. We have not often sat in on a class where developing students' metacognitive abilities and their awareness of how their discipline 'worked', was taught so deliberately and expertly (Prof. Lyn Quinn and Dr Jo Vorster).*

Once again, I invited my own vulnerability and found that this was an affirming and productive space for learning something new about myself. This opportunity to let go of previous doubts about myself opened up a way to renegotiate my own vulnerability and marginality.

Working in this way with vulnerability does not necessarily sit well with everybody. I asked students in an extended studies class (which has between 25 and 40 students), in which we were unpacking an aspect of their Sociology I module on socialisation, to write an honest reflection on what had socialised them to be who they are at present. The task had a twofold intention: to apply the theory of socialisation to their own experiences, and for me to get to know them better. Student 2 concluded her reflection as follows: "I have revealed enough – too much actually. Please don't remind me of this note. I am only telling you this because you and I have something in common. I just wish I could be as brave as you about it".

This very personal reflection was illuminating for me: it showed that my own modelling of vulnerability (by perhaps over-sharing my own experiences, noticing

and articulating my bias as well as demonstrating ways in which power can be shared in the classroom) can become a tool for students' self-reflection. However, not all students are comfortable with, or ready for this experience. In a follow-up interview, the student concerned was able to experience how I worked with her vulnerability – by "identifying with suffering itself" (Butler, 2004 a: 30) – allowing her to adhere to her story, but recognising that we all have stories, and that this knowledge can and should affect the respectful and empathic way in which we relate to each other.

Another example helps to illustrate further the variety of student responses to a teaching activity that induced vulnerability. I facilitated a class discussion/debate in the extended studies class. It was an opportunity for me to reach those dearly held beliefs that sometimes work against transformation (in me, and my students). It was a way to engage with these in the more sheltered environment of a class that I see daily and work with in different ways to the Sociology I class (which is a bigger group of up to 500 students). After a particularly heated debate, in which students had argued with each other about the role of women (triggered by the feminism lectures in Sociology), I asked students to write a reflection on the class as a way to resolve the volatility of the debate and to mediate the vulnerability which, I thought, they had experienced during their heated discussions. I present selected aspects of three of these reflections for discussion: "I was outraged, but because I didn't want to be emotional I chose not to be that involved" (Student 1). This response shows perhaps a melancholic version of dealing with vulnerability: outrage, but disengagement. This could be considered to be a lost opportunity. However, it taught me something: I could be more careful when having these kinds of evocative discussions in class, that some students might need more or different kinds of mediation during these debates in future.

The two other reflections show that students risked their own vulnerability in order to learn new things, to let go of loss or fear of loss, and to expand their knowledge frameworks:

> *The discussion was tricky, heated and sticky. It made me understand different aspects of the discussion and through that, it expanded my way of seeing things (Student 2).*
>
> *We have different backgrounds that influence our beliefs at some point we are challenged by our personal thought and emotions that make it difficult to accept other views. I've learnt that it is important to listen to what people have to say and try reflect on it in our contemporary lives and in some way or another decide what is best to base your life on. Learnt a lot thanks (Student 3).*

The intense classroom debate provided me with the opportunity to deal not only with the specific topic, but also with how we learn new things. Inviting students to write reflections on the class was an important way for them to mediate their own vulnerability, and for me to work with it in class in order to transform it.

Conclusion

When self-study works with vulnerability to one's peers, to students, to new knowledge, to loss of dearly held beliefs and to stories, it has the potential to continuously inform teaching practice and expand the norms that frame them. When social justice is the end to which we teach, feedback from students and peers on a regular basis is an important and meaningful aspect of our practice. Achieving social justice is about making the norms visible, and expanding the possibilities for teachers and learners. As I have shown, this normative expansion is an ongoing possibility when the relationship between a teacher, her peers and students encourages vulnerability, and, "[It] is to solicit a becoming, to petition the future always in relation to the other" (Butler, 2004 a: 44).

Endnotes

1. From 11 to 16 August 2012, a wild-cat strike at the Lonmin mine in Marikana, South Africa, led to the deaths of 44 people, including 34 protesting miners shot by police on 16 August. The tragic event was called the 'Marikana massacre' and led to a Commission of Inquiry which is still in progress.
2. The 'slutwalk' became an international protest that started in Canada in April 2011. The protest was provoked by an address by a policeman at a York university, where women were told not to dress like sluts, to avoid being raped. A 'slutwalk', attended by a number of Rhodes students, was held in Grahamstown, South Africa, in November 2011.

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