

Let's slow it down- re-imagining life orientation education in higher education¹

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a paradigm shift in teaching and learning within the context of neoliberal universities that increasingly emphasise the commercialisation of knowledge, student throughput, and performativity. Drawing from the conceptual framework of the Slow Movement, specifically Slow Pedagogy, this article argues that teaching-learning in higher education should not be merely assessment driven, nor simply a technicist activity facilitated irrespective of context. Teaching differently, or against the grain, implies humanising the curriculum and creating time and space for brave and courageous conversations that are empathetic and reflective, with the possibility of being transformative. Talking circles are an indigenous pedagogical approach that serves a decolonial agenda by promoting situated relatedness, respectful listening and reflective witnessing. The relationality enabled by this teaching-learning methodology presents the possibility for a sustainable and transformative education system. Two academics from higher education institutions in South Africa present and discuss vignettes of their observations and experiences facilitating Life Orientation in this way. This teaching praxis is both reflective and reflexive.

Keywords: decolonisation; life orientation, Slow Pedagogy, Talking Circles, Teaching Praxis

INTRODUCTION

In a neoliberal university setting, the approach to teaching and learning is marked by performativity and a growing emphasis on student participation and productivity (Nussbaum, 2010; Kidd, 2021; Mahon, 2021). When embracing neoliberal principles, higher education institutions may see consumers more than learners. Maldonado-Torres (2007) argues that one of how colonialism persists is reflected in the criteria used to evaluate academic performance. Teaching primarily to assess perpetuates this pattern. This stance contrasts starkly with humanistic and critical teaching philosophies, which perceive learning as situated within a nurturing and compassionate environment. Berg and Seeber (2016) urge an approach to

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scholarship in higher education that honours ethical, intellectual, and pedagogical values and is resistant to the corporate university. A university education should function in a way that contributes to a flourishing democracy, providing a love of learning, self-expression and self-creation that finds inclusive expression (Llanera & Smith, 2021). Bearn (2000) refers to this as a University of Beauty that is characterised by pointlessness, in the sense that there are countless points that should be explored. In such a scenario, pedagogy is improvised with both lecturer and student engaged in interactions that do not delineate whether the lecturer or the student is enabling learning to take place (Le Grange, 2020). In this context pedagogy is imagined differently.

This article promotes an inclusive and transdisciplinary approach to knowledge production and dissemination within the framework of post-postmodernism (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010, 2015; Abramson, 2015; Žižek, 2017). Post-postmodernism has emerged as a response to the limitations and contradictions of postmodernism. The article emphasises embracing diversity, difference, and relationality while questioning oppressive structures. It advocates for sincerity and authenticity and a balance between idealistic aspirations and a pragmatic understanding of the challenges we encounter as human beings (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010, 2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - SLOW PEDAGOGY

Drawing from the conceptual framework of the Slow Movement that started in the 1980s in Italy (Petrini, 2001), Slow Pedagogy (Holt, 2002), or eco-pedagogy, is rooted in thoughtfulness, values, and intentionality. Contrary to its name, slow does not refer to reduced speed but instead emphasises the depth of engagement (Berg & Seeber 2016; Collet et al., 2018; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2018), requiring thoughtful and attentive interactions to generate new meanings. Slow pedagogy emphasises what matters and what is meaningful rather than what is convenient or economically efficient (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2018). It is not unproductive but differently productive (Ulmer, 2017), focusing as it does on the curriculum as lived (Pinar, 2015). It encourages pausing or dwelling in spaces for more than a fleeting moment, providing the opportunity for a thoughtful, value-driven, intentional approach to education.

Slow Pedagogy as an approach to teaching and learning emphasises a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the subject matter. A slower pace, more reflection, and a greater focus on dialogue and collaboration between students and teachers characterise it. It aims to create an environment where students can think deeply about the topics, they are studying rather than simply memorising and regurgitating information. It is often contrasted with fast-paced, standardised forms of education that prioritise efficiency and productivity over deep thinking and understanding. Students are encouraged to slow down, take their time, and truly engage with the material they are studying, simultaneously developing critical thinking skills. Slowing it down can help students develop a deeper understanding of the world around them and a greater sense of agency and empowerment in their lives.

Going beyond the boundaries of individual course modules, this approach opens the possibility of re-imagining education, with profound implications for personal, professional, and societal spheres. Acknowledging the significance of the lived curriculum and endorsing a decolonial agenda, slow pedagogy actively challenges conventional teaching and learning methods. Often

described as teaching against the prevailing neoliberal and colonial grain (Batchelor & Sander 2017; Reyes et al., 2021), Slow Pedagogy employs teaching and learning strategies that have the potential to foster transformative classroom praxis (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Quinlan, 2014). In contrast to classroom practices that are driven by technical outcomes, praxis emphasises reflection (deliberation rather than superficial acceptance) and reflexivity (contemplating the practical implications for potential changes to inform new attitudes and practices). It promotes a pedagogical approach centred on the participants' well-being, transformation, and healing (Batchelor & Sander, 2017).

Talking circles as an embodiment of slow pedagogy

In response to the increasing recognition of the need to incorporate decolonial practices into educational settings (Battiste, 2013), there has been a growing adoption of indigenous pedagogies and methodologies to address the enduring impacts of colonisation on the field of education (Kimmerer, 2021). It is incumbent upon educators to engage in this transformative work while remaining conscious of their positionality and acknowledging how privilege has been shaped by historical colonisation and other power dynamics influenced by their personal experiences and histories.

Indigenous pedagogies and methodologies serve as tools for re-evaluating the elevation of certain knowledges over others (Kovach, 2009) and strive to offer alternatives to the conventional educational practices that dominate higher education. Within indigenous methodologies, one notable example is using talking circles to foster communication, comprehension, and learning. These circles represent an alternative pedagogical approach that encourages individuals to actively listen to various viewpoints and perspectives, even those that may diverge from their own (Kaminski 2011; Di Lallo, Graham & Arian, 2018).

Talking circles are a form of communication and group process used for centuries by various indigenous cultures worldwide. While talking circles have historically been used in indigenous settings, more recently, they have been adapted and utilised in non-indigenous contexts as a powerful tool for communication, community building, and personal development (Barkaskasi & Gladwin, 2021). Pedagogical talking circles provide supportive spaces for participants to engage in reciprocal and relational learning. They successfully decolonise Eurocentric educational systems by centring indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies, highlighting indigenous ways of knowing and being (Barkaskasi & Gladwin, 2021). Students are offered a safe space to feel supported while expressing themselves about challenging concepts, topics, or histories (Zizka, 2017). As suggested by Kovach (2021), this methodology is built upon relationality, emphasising the process of meaning-making among groups rather than as isolated individuals. It prioritises knowing one another. The roots of oppression, such as othering and binary oppositions, are challenged by creating meaning through relationships rather than individualistic paradigms that reinforce hierarchical power. Relationality is foundational to decolonising and indigenising education (Braidotti, 2019). Pedagogical talking circles establish relational and educational spaces that encourage trust, empathy, awareness, support, and, ultimately, transformative change (Cote-Meek, 2020).

Numerous effective approaches to conducting talking circles have been identified in the literature (Granillo et al., 2010; Haozous et al., 2010; Kaminski, 2011; Wilken & Nunn, 2017;

Zizka, 2017; Brown & Di Lallo, 2020). However, this article specifically focuses on the utilisation of talking circles that are rooted in three core principles: situated relatedness (Johnston, 2018), respectful listening (Johnston, 2018), and reflective witnessing (Clark, 2016; Hunt, 2018). Situated relatedness necessitates that all participants within the circle consider and remain mindful of their unique lived experiences and how these experiences inform their perspectives, particularly concerning other individuals in the circle who may bring different histories and life experiences to the conversation. Respectful listening represents an active practice that requires individuals to concentrate deeply on the words and intentions of the speaker while quieting their internal reactions and responses that may disrupt the communication process. This practice allows the listener to create a genuine space for the speaker and their viewpoints, devoid of judgment or defensiveness (Gladwin, 2021).

Moreover, respectful listening fosters compassion and empathy by acknowledging another person's subjectivity within an extended temporal and spatial context. Reflective witnessing encourages participants to hold space for an individual's perspectives and subsequently reflect on the emotions and thoughts that may emerge from engaging with someone sharing their lived experiences. Employing these principles, talking circles provide a safe and respectful space for individuals to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without interruption or judgment and to listen deeply to others. They offer a supportive environment where participants can explore essential topics, gain new insights, and strengthen connections with others.

METHODOLOGY

In response to the imperative to decolonise teaching and learning (Pardy & Pardy, 2020) and embody the concept of Slow Pedagogy in higher education, two academics from two different higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa (SA) implemented talking circles (Chilisa, 2012) in their respective Life Orientation classes. Life Orientation is a subject that was introduced to South African schools by the Department of Basic Education at the beginning of the democratic era (Department of Education, 2011). It aims to teach learners knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to prepare them for the challenges associated with playing a meaningful role in a democratic society.

This article delves into the role of talking circles in promoting a slow pedagogy approach within the context of Life Orientation, thereby reshaping power dynamics within an educational system historically rooted in colonialism. Grounded in an ethic of care, these circles provide students with a figuratively dignity safe space, as defined by Callan (2016), where individuals can engage without reasonable anxiety about being treated as inferior, ensuring that all contributions hold legitimacy. Furthermore, this space also embodies the concept of a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013), where participants are encouraged to challenge their pre-existing beliefs, often deeply entrenched in prejudices. Talking circles foster opportunities for reciprocal exchanges, which are characterised by tolerant and empathetic understanding. As Barton and Garvis (2019) described, an empathetic approach involves comprehending and responding to others with a heightened awareness of their perspectives and concerns, recognising their significance. This approach is infused with Mbigi's Collective Fingers Theory (1997), which empowers participants to voice their lived experiences and agency. According to Ramphela (2012, 2017), the act of sharing personal stories holds immense potential for promoting healing and empathy, establishing common experiences, and acknowledging both

strengths and weaknesses. It facilitates an inclusive and collaborative environment within social contexts like a university, where individuals can actively address and resolve issues.

In each higher education institution (HEI) classroom setting, the participants sat in a circle or, in some cases, more than one circle. The circular formation represents equality and the absence of hierarchy. Typically, within the circle, a talking piece, such as a stone or a feather, is passed from person to person, granting the holder the exclusive right to speak (Granillo et al., 2010; Haozous et al., 2010; Kaminski, 2011; Wilken & Nunn 2017; Zizka, 2017; Brown & Di Lallo, 2020). This structure ensures that each individual can be heard, preventing one person from dominating the conversation. However, we did not employ a symbolic talking object in our implementation of talking circles. Instead, we facilitated the process, with participants consenting to participate in the talking circle. In both institutions, ethical clearance was obtained (UKZN - HSS/0297/017; UP - EDU101/19).

Vignettes

We present two vignettes of talking circles in Life Orientation in higher education. It is important to understand the vignettes as a form of literary non-fiction, capturing the affective qualities of specific tangible moments. In the realm of research on sensitive topics, Gourlay et al., (2014) assert that vignettes, which are short stories depicting observations and experiences, can wield significant influence. They are focused creations that lack explicit boundaries (Eloff, et al., 2023). Vignette methodology presents an innovative phenomenological framework for empirical research in educational settings. They are developed based on the researcher's comprehension of the participants' lived experiences (Agostini, 2015). Once crafted, vignettes serve as the primary source of analysis in phenomenological research (Schratz, Westfall-Greiter & Schwarz, 2014; Agostini, 2015). They depict the critical subtleties at play during courageous conversations on themes in Life Orientation; the vignettes specifically focus on themes such as othering and consent. When crafting the vignettes, careful attention was paid to poignant elements such as the atmosphere, facial and bodily expressions, and the tone of voice exhibited by the students. These nuanced details served as the foundation for constructing the vignettes.

Both colleagues wrote and analysed the vignettes retrospectively. Vignette 1 emanates from the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). BEd Honours students participating in Vignette 1 focused on inclusivity and othering. All the students are South African citizens. Aware of prevailing aggressive attitudes by nationals towards non-South Africans, particularly those from the African continent, the talking circles focused on xenophobic attitudes (Jarvis & Mthiyane, 2022). Visual clips were employed as catalysts for discussions, each illustrating instances of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The first clip depicted migrants being accused of various transgressions, including job theft, criminal activities, involvement in prostitution, and illegal drug trade. The prevailing sentiment conveyed in this clip was a call for punitive measures against the migrants. The second clip captured scenes of xenophobic violence, featuring migrants facing aggressive threats and demands to return to their countries of origin. In contrast, the third clip delved into the possibility of learning from and engaging in collaborative efforts with skilled migrants.

Vignette 2 emanates from the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, involving third-year BEd students as active participants. The vignette revolves around sex and sexuality

education, which was introduced after a comprehensive exploration of human rights education and democratic citizenship during the preceding semester. The intention behind sequencing these topics was to prompt students to approach sex and sexuality education from a human rights perspective. The classroom discussion revolved around the media uproar reported by News24 in 2019 (News24, 2019), centring on the contentious comprehensive sex education curriculum. Students were encouraged to engage with and comment on the criticisms and opposition to the curriculum, particularly from parents, community groups, and religious organisations. Furthermore, the conversation involved sharing recent teenage pregnancy statistics in South Africa, underscoring an ongoing crisis.

In the vignettes, confidentiality is upheld by anonymising personally identifiable data using pseudonymous identifiers (Bhandari, 2021). Once the vignettes were crafted, they became the primary data for phenomenological analysis, a process referred to as vignette reading (Eloff et al., 2022). In reading a vignette, we engaged in the experience as readers, adding layers of understanding to what is given and highlighting the experienced phenomena. Vignettes support the notion of slow pedagogy by pausing to consider the lived experience relationally and reflectively (Braidotti, 2019). We are mindful of the limitation that although vignettes are filled with depth and emotion, they do not necessarily fully encapsulate all the elements of experiences (Erfanian et al., 2020).

Talking Circles reflected in vignettes

The vignettes are presented and then read.

Vignette 1

Seated in a talking circle, there was a buzz when the participants were asked to respond to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' with specific reference to migrants. The atmosphere in the class became tense, with most of the class expressing distinct xenophobic views, using 'us' and 'them' and 'we' and 'they' in reference to migrants. Voices were raised, and the tone was disdainful and aggressive, using even the derogatory term '*amakwerekwere*'. Thabile's response was reasonably representative of the overarching sentiment:

[M]ost of them [migrants] are here in SA illegally, and others, their passports being expired. They have occupied most buildings of an area, selling drugs, making South Africa's women prostitutes. Killings and crime rate reportedly have increased.

Zanele was eager for her turn to contribute to the conversation, saying she is unhappy with migrants living in SA. She vehemently stated that since the arrival of migrants,

... the unemployment rate increased in our communities. Local employers, particular Indians, are no longer interested in employing local South Africans but are employing migrants because they are cheap to hire.

After several participants made additional contributions in the same vein, the participants watched video clips depicting violence against migrants and video clips illustrating legal immigrants' challenges. They also listened to the audio-recorded testimony of a Rwandan refugee living in SA. This powerful disrupting testimony brought the lived experience of a migrant who is now a legal immigrant virtually into the classroom space. The mood started to

change as the participants' facial features, by and large, began to soften, and their body language was less tense. They began to adopt a more reflective and empathetic response. Bongani, visibly moved by what he had seen and heard, recounted what had happened to his friend's father, a legal immigrant, who had his clothing shop raided. He was left destitute. Lindo said that some people where he lives 'took it into their own hands to break in and demolish migrants' shops and stole stock and gave them a beating'.

Jerome, who had been listening attentively to the conversation without contribution, raised his hand and commented on the role played by social media in promoting the polarity that underpins xenophobic attitudes. He said:

Social media has a power to influence a community whether the report is valid or just a propaganda. This then creates an image or conclusion about what is being said in a report, video, or magazine about foreigners. I have seen many videos circulating on social media where foreigners being involved on many evil acts...this has then led me not trusting foreigners anymore, especially African foreigners.

Other participants acknowledged his input as valid by nodding and making affirmatory sounds. Amanda concurred and added that social media seldom, if ever, records any positive contribution made to South African society by migrants. She said:

...[t]he media always projects us with what we seek for, to feed our mind set. We always seeking someone to blame with regards the challenges we face and not own up to our own mistakes. For example, the media will show us the drugs trafficked by a Nigerian to South African borders but will not show you the number of foreign doctors who [save] lives in our hospitals and clinics.

The participants then questioned what caused xenophobic attacks. A few participants concluded that a probable cause could be that South Africans see migrants as hardworking and are jealous that many immigrants succeed in business. Amanda said that, in her opinion,

migrants are equipped with skills that us South Africans do not have. They are cognitive well-developed and they can turn what we consider as trash into a product...they seem to be doing well for themselves because of the long hours they put in their work.

Participants were encouraged to imagine stepping into the shoes of a migrant and, by doing so, reflect on the plight of many migrants. Zanele, in particular, was visibly affected and shed tears. She concluded that, ultimately, 'we are all foreigners somewhere'. Participants initially held attitudes started to shift. Led by Lawrence, they came to the collective opinion that people do not always leave their countries to engage in illegal activities in SA.

Vignette 2

On a chilly winter morning, a group of third-year BEd students gathered for a lecture on sex and sexuality education. As the module's lecturer, I prefer facilitating topics in Life Orientation through conversational methods. To create a more personal and inclusive atmosphere, I positioned myself in the middle of the class, and the students rearranged their seats to form a circle around me, fitting for the sensitive content we were about to discuss. Before delving into

the day's topic, I provided a brief overview of our previous lecture, which focused on teaching sex and sexuality education from a human rights perspective, building on the concepts covered during the last semester concerning human rights education and citizenship. The class was brimming with anxious excitement as students joked and laughed, showcasing their anticipation.

To kickstart the lesson, I asked the students about recent news on sex education, prompting Tshepo to raise his hand and say: 'Mam, I read that people are very angry about the Comprehensive Sex Education Curriculum'. Acknowledging the relevance of the topic, I inquired if others were familiar with it, to which some heads nodded in agreement while others looked unsure. Melinda voiced her perspective, saying,

...people are conservative, especially our parents. They never talked about these things to us, and I think they are scared that discussing sex with kids will make them curious, and they might try it out for themselves.

A few heads nodded in agreement, showing consensus. Curious to gauge their thoughts further, I asked, 'Do you really think that teaching kids about sex will make them have more sex?' Responses were mixed, but the overall engagement in the group seemed to increase. Even those who seemed disengaged earlier were now paying attention. Jamie raised her hand and expressed her concern:

Mam, I don't think we can teach kids things that their parents are not in agreement with. I don't want to lose my job by insisting on teaching things to kids that their parents are not comfortable with. Seeking input from the whole class, I asked, "Do you think you will be able to accommodate everyone when you teach sex education?"

Some students replied with a straightforward *no*, while others remained quiet. Tshego chimed in with her perspective:

I think if we look at the number of girls in school that are falling pregnant, we can't be nervous about teaching kids about safe sex. Some of these girls are as young as eleven or twelve. I see the girls from my village, they are ignorant, and that gets them into trouble. We need to also protect them by teaching them, right?

Her viewpoint triggered a response from Sibusiso, who interrupted, saying,

I see them walking in the streets here in Sunnyside. But girls are in trouble because they are promiscuous, ne? It is not because they know too little. It is because they know too much!

His statement sparked strong reactions in the group, prompting Nene to speak up:

Mam, I have to disagree with Sibusiso. That is such a male thing to say. Turning to him, she continued, so tell me, Sib, these girls of eleven and twelve that are so promiscuous and getting pregnant, are they doing that by themselves? Because the last time I checked, it takes two people to make a baby, hey?

The group laughed, expressing both agreement and disagreement. Charlotte raised her hand and contributed:

Nene, don't forget the girls who fall pregnant, who then have to be taken out of school and face societal ostracisation. They are pressured into raising their babies, and what happens to the dad?

Several voices declared loudly: 'Nothing!' Bongiwe shared her perspective:

I don't think we can allow parents to dictate what we teach kids. Some parents don't even know themselves what is going on in this area. They just avoid the topic, and then when their child gets pregnant, she is blamed for all sorts of things.

The class showed audible agreement. Peter raised his hand and added:

Mam, I agree with what Bongiwe just said. When I was at a school in the city centre during WIL [work integrated learning] earlier this year, I had to teach a lesson in sex education to Grade 9 learners. Mam, it was terrifying, to be honest. These kids had questions about things I knew nothing about. Eventually, I persevered and tried to teach a good lesson on safe sex and using a condom correctly. The learners were laughing and whistling, and it was a crazy class, mam. But then, at the end of the lesson, one girl put up her hand and asked what she must do because she has a boyfriend who is pressuring her into sex that she does not feel ready for. Mam, at that moment, I realised that sex education is about more than just sex; it is about helping kids be safe. It is about consent. After that, I never looked at it the same again.

As his words sunk in, a shift occurred in the classroom, leaving everyone silently contemplating the significance of the discussion.

Vignette reading

The vignettes present distinct experiences that highlight the individuality of personal participatory encounters. In contrast to the technicist nature of neoliberal education, which prioritises measurable outcomes and efficiency, the vignettes underscore the importance of considering lived experiences within relational contexts. Teaching against the grain, aligning with the principles of Slow Pedagogy, offers valuable opportunities to delve into meaningful explorations of the issues considered in the vignettes. Although critical issues (namely othering and consent) form the vignettes' substance, this article employs talking circles to engage students in empathetic and reflective dialogue within a metaphorically safe space. Over time, they felt increasingly comfortable expressing themselves openly, free from marginalisation or academic failure concerns. This transformative teaching-learning approach supported a decolonisation of the learning environment. This is characterised by teaching against the grain, focusing on student agency in participation, and a willingness to challenge prevailing societal discourses, necessitating courageous conversations that are both reflective and reflexive.

In Vignette 1, the talking circle created an ideal setting to explore the concept of othering, explicitly concerning the othering of migrants. Following the talking circle interaction captured in the vignette, further discussion revealed to the participants that the historical foundation of

colonialism is built upon a process of othering. The participants recognised the significance of delving into the dichotomy between those who engage in othering and those who are subjected to othering. The talking circle provided a relational and potentially transformative platform for them to deepen their understanding of this issue. Within the safe space of the talking circle, participants felt comfortable enough to open up and share their personal stories. This created possibilities for a shift in their attitudes. As they considered stepping into the shoes of the other, they began to reassess their previously held viewpoints, which social media narratives had primarily influenced. By the end of the interaction, there was a shift from the initial tension and aggression, which had led to the identification of migrants derogatorily as '*amakwerekwere*' (Kinge, 2016; Ngwane, 2016). It became evident that anecdotal accounts and social media portrayals, rather than their own lived experiences, had shaped the perspectives of several participants.

Vignette 2 presents examples of prevailing notions concerning sex and sexuality, shedding light on predominant myths, patriarchal constructs that perpetuate the oppression of women, and the crucial issue of consent. The discourse surrounding the implementation of a comprehensive sex education curriculum reveals a notable division of perspectives. Those adopting a more conservative stance tend to avoid discussions, often resorting to victim-blaming to rationalise teenage pregnancy. A key finding is the significant influence of individual students' background and upbringing on their perspectives regarding sex education. The prevailing cultural and religious ideals are evident among some group members. One notable factor fostering a change in mindset for specific individuals is their exposure to schools and the classroom environment that confront the stark reality of social ills such as rape and abuse. Additionally, the openness to accommodate diverse viewpoints and opinions provides a potential catalyst for transformative shifts in attitude. The classroom interaction foregrounds the importance of addressing the multifaceted nature of sex education, recognising the impact of cultural and religious beliefs, and fostering an environment that encourages empathy and openness to diverse perspectives.

The analysis of both vignettes reveals principles of situated relatedness, respectful listening, and reflective witnessing (Clark, 2016; Hunt, 2018). In Vignette 1, the participants engage in a dialogue within a talking circle (Chilisa, 2012), fostering a sense of connectedness while discussing who their neighbours are concerning migrants. Initially expressing xenophobic views, they transition to a more empathetic response as they watch videos and hear testimony about the struggles migrants face. Respectful listening (Johnston, 2018) is evident as they share their diverse perspectives and emotions without interruption, allowing for a collective exploration guided by the facilitator. The principle of reflective witnessing emerges as the participants' attitudes transform, critically examining their initial assumptions and stereotypes. In Vignette 2, though explicitly situated relatedness is not evident, the students forming a circle and engaging in a conversational approach convey a sense of connectedness during the discussion on sex education. Respectful listening is apparent as students share their views and experiences, facilitated by the lecturer, promoting open dialogue and considering diverse viewpoints. Reflective witnessing is present as students shift from disinterest to active engagement, exemplified by Peter's realisation about the broader importance of sex education beyond mechanics. The class's silent contemplation showcases introspection and reflection. These principles fostered inclusive and transformative learning environments, enabling the

participants to examine their beliefs and perspectives critically and better understand complex social issues, expressing their views without judgement or defensiveness (Barkaskasi & Gladwin, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Slowing down the educational process creates an opportunity to engage with what truly matters, leading to possible sustainable and transformative outcomes (UNESCO, 2018). This transformative potential extends to healing a fractured society by fostering understanding, reducing prejudice, and promoting tolerance (Chidester, 2008) while upholding all individuals' dignity and human rights (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Such transformation can have lasting effects beyond the confines of a module, influencing personal, professional, and social spheres, starting from the classroom and extending to the broader community. Pedagogical talking circles embody the principles of slow pedagogy, providing spaces for sharing ideas and perspectives, whether similar or divergent, with a deliberate commitment to meeting each individual at their point of learning. These circles are one example of many that educators can use to decolonise their pedagogical practices. They offer a respectful avenue for integrating indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, ontologies, and pedagogies, leading to transformative learning experiences and a shift in teaching approaches (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Quinlan, 2014). Educational talking circles are a praxis-based approach (Jarvis 2021, 2023) that nurtures relational learning environments (Braidotti, 2019). They empower students to voice their perspectives and contribute to a lived curriculum that is contextually relevant, fosters consciousness-raising, and is critically informed, all in alignment with a relational ontology (Braidotti, 2019). As demonstrated in the presented vignettes, teaching against the grain by slowing it down proposes a paradigm shift within the teaching-learning context towards a more humanising curriculum that serves a decolonial agenda and creates space for transformative conversations.

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