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Caring for authors and activists in the classroom:
An activist-caring teaching approach

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Abstract

Neoliberal capitalist intrusions into university classrooms are pervasive, incessant, and pernicious. How we perform and enact care in classrooms is shaped by this prevailing ideology. However, its ideological and material reach is not absolute. Using insights from radical pedagogies, militant ethnographic, and narrative approaches, I reimagine and reconfigure care in the classroom by implementing an activist-caring teaching approach. I discuss the ways in which I practice and perform a relationship of care to writers and activists whose work and struggles I teach in my classes, struggles of resistance, emancipation, and revolution. Specifically, I lay out my own classroom strategies that enact this relationship, interactions with people some of whom are dead and many of whom I have never met. I argue that this is important for the practice of solidarity and radical notions of care and offers a novel way to resist and refuse neoliberal intrusions into university teaching spaces.

Keywords: activist-caring teaching, critical and radical pedagogies, militant ethnography, narrative approaches, radical care

In the midst of the ravages of climate change and impending environmental catastrophe, while the COVID-19 pandemic still rages, and as neoliberal capitalism exacerbates income inequality and devastates global prosperity, discussions around care – what it means and how and where it is actioned – have again become a pressing intellectual concern (Chatzidakis, et al., 2020; Hobart & Kneese, 2020; The Care Collective, 2020; Woodly, et al., 2021). As this special edition is testament to, 'Care, in all its permutations, is the buzzword of the moment' (Chatzidakis, et al., 2020: 889), care has indeed 'reentered the zeitgeist' (Hobart & Kneese, 2020: 1). Given this interest in care and my role as an academic teaching 600 plus Politics and International Relations university students each year, for well over a decade, in this paper I unpack my own understandings of care as a concept, and care as a practice, with an eye to how that might play out in my classrooms. Critically, however, rather than speak of care *for students* as many have (importantly) done before (see Stallman, 2010; Crawford & Johns, 2018), I instead reflect on the

ways in which I practice and perform a relationship of care to writers and activists whose work and struggles I teach in my classes; works and actions that seek to change the world for the better, through struggles of resistance, emancipation, and revolution. Specifically, I lay out my own classroom strategies that purposively enact this relationship, an activist-caring teaching approach with people some of whom are dead and many of whom I have never met.

My paper begins with a discussion of care and locates it as empowering, emancipatory, and a core component of our humanity. I use this engagement to find ways to operationalise care as a relationship to enact in my classrooms. Identifying that care is also beholden to its socio-political context, I touch on how neoliberal capitalism and care play out in the university context. For the purposes of this paper, I see neoliberal capitalism as an economic, social, and political paradigm and ideology, involving the deregulation of markets, the privatisation of government entities and the defunding of public institutions like in health and tertiary education, aggravating and intensifying economic and social inequalities. Contemporarily, it manifests in the (re)production of hyper-individualised, competitive, and entrepreneurial subjects. Taking as my starting point that neoliberal capitalism is pervasive and intrusive within university classrooms (Connell, 2019), I then look to reenvisage care, to reclaim care, to see care in a different way – in a way that practises a relationship of care to authors and activists. Informed and framed by my research experiences with ethnographic and narrative approaches, as well as with radical pedagogies, I offer some strategies that I use to actualise this relationship in tutorials, seminars and lectures, examples that modestly interrupt neoliberal capitalist intrusions into how we perform care in our teaching spaces. I finish by locating my activist-caring teaching approach alongside other forms of more liberal care that I feel obligated to enact towards students and ruminate on these tensions.

So how do people *do* care?

Ideas around care are historical, nuanced and situated. Care's meaning is in constant flux (Chatzidakis, et al., 2020) because it is constructed and formed by its social, cultural, political and economic contexts. It is given substance by morals and ethics, religion, and ideologies, and critically, care is fashioned by its actual practice. That is, notions of care play out in our everyday engagements with each other and the world around us, and it is through these interactions that meaning is shaped. They have been loosely theorised as relational interactions in the moral philosophical works of Smith (2014 [1759]), in his discussions on sentiment and sympathy, by Hume in his discussions on compassion (1985 [1740]), and in Foucault's (1978) ethical conceptualisations of care.

But to shape my specific practices of care in the classroom, and outlined within the following discussion, I specifically draw on other influences. To start, I take from Fanon (2018) the powerful notion that care is a critical component of humanity, where to care for someone is no less than to try and prevent their death and to keep them alive. From Lorde's (1988: 125; Ahmed, 2014) work I understand self-care as a radical act of 'self- preservation' and 'political warfare', and my classroom practices are also shaped by Nodding's (1984) influential studies in the mid-

1980s, where care speaks to a relational and experiential understanding ultimately informed and shaped by morals, ethics and gendered encounters. And from Mayeroff (2013 [1971]) and Chatzikadis and co (2020), I deploy aspects of their engagement with care which they see as an essential aspect of human growth and actualisation. Finally, from Tronto (2013), I use their consideration of care for ourselves and for others – seen as the apogee of human values, and action their concerns that these values should imbue all aspects of our political lives. In all these accounts, care is empowering, emancipatory, and a core component of our humanity, themes that frame activist-caring teaching.

Connected to this theoretical framing of care, my activist-caring teaching approach also draws inspiration from the way care manifests tangibly in nominally progressive spaces – in the actual *doing* of care. This includes the way care for the environment and resistance to climate change is informed by left-wing praxis and direct action, that may involve sabotaging critical infrastructure to the coal industry (Visontay, 2021) or occupations and sit-ins of ancient forests (Alberro, 2018). I am equally motivated by approaches to care that are decolonial and anti-colonial and sit alongside designs and programs of solidarity actions (Butler, et al., 2020), and Indigenous notions of care for Land and care for Country that may play out as a physical engagement through sustainable forms of land management, and concurrently may speak to an entire way of knowing and being underpinned by an Indigenous ontology (Suchet-Pearson, et al., 2013). In my engagement with care, I also rely on the ways in which care has been described in aspects of abolitionist thinking and practices in the ongoing struggles against the prison industrial complex (Anon, 2008), and the way care manifests as commitments to pre-figurative politics and mutual aid in violent struggles against fascist cadres (Apoifis, 2017a). My activist-caring teaching approach is inspired by these forms of direct action and enactments of care.

But given these idiosyncrasies, and that care is evidently beholden to the geo-political milieus from which each manifestation springs, it is unsurprising then that care is burdened by other forces when applied to education, and more specifically within the classrooms of the modern university. Care in the university is given meaning by a powerful bundle of discourses, representations, material conditions and practices, and, of course, ideologies.

The Modern University

In their powerful and savage expose of the modern university, the *Research and Destroy* collective declare that the 'modern university has no history of its own; its history is the history of capital' (Research and Destroy, 2009: 9). Seen this way, universities are breeding grounds for a bunch of students to be upskilled and sent out into workplaces to replicate and reproduce capitalist relations as self-interested competitive entrepreneurs, and incubators where such systemic world views are nurtured reenforcing their hegemonic status. For the most part, irrespective of local traditions, histories and geographies, universities to varying degrees serve a shared function; they are a factory (Harney and Moten, 2021), a relationship, and a space, that nurtures a capitalist mode of production characterised by the structural divide between capital and labour. For its critics, universities are governed by individuals who subscribe to a malicious

ideology exalting limited government involvement in the market, alongside rabid competition, deceitfully maintained by perpetual, punishing and prolific government intervention that props up capital. Today, neoliberal capitalism underpins the modern university's functions (Connell, 2019).

And where neoliberal capitalism lurks, colonialism prowls (Loomba, 2015). Indeed, throughout the world, universities are the lackies of the colonisers. With few exceptions, their historical and contemporary function to that end has been and still is, as an educative apparatus supporting the material conditions that enable and legitimise multiple forms of colonialism and, as perversely, a practice of legitimating these regimes of knowledge in 'western' knowledge claims and hierarchies (Smith, 1999). The university ratifies material and discursive power structures that help to maintain colonialisms across the world, manifesting most violently in today's settler-colonial states. As Connell writes the university is a home and sanctuary for 'outdated pedagogy, exploitation of young staff, distorted and even faked research, outrageous fees, outrageous pay for top managers, corporate rip-offs, corruption, sexism, racism, and mickey mouse degrees' (2019: 8) amongst other malevolent outcomes.

These forces shape the way care is enacted in the classroom[1]. Care has long been co-opted by the university's neoliberal logics to mean a particular version of liberal care. Care for students in the neoliberal university is imbued with market-based logics, accessible to a select few students, optional to students as they see fit as flexible 'opt-in opt-out' consumers. These forms of liberal care at their core rely on exclusion. Woodley et al. note that 'such forms of liberal care are driven by limited moral sentiments such as sympathy, pity, or compassion, which create hierarchies by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving individuals' (2021: 916), where care is restricted to citizens and individuals more *deserving*. Likewise, care is vocationally driven, where the measure of pedagogical outcomes and 'successes' includes the employability of graduates in capitalist, racialised, gendered and class-based workplaces (Connell, 2019). As Troiani and Dutson argue, 'Students are pushed and trained to become competitive, productive, entrepreneurs that are highly employable and quick to contribute to industry markets' (2021: 6) and this is how we are instructed to care for our students, a care that speaks to their employability within the neoliberal capitalist system. As a result, this impacts the types of knowledge delivered in classrooms and the types of relationships we foster within our teaching spaces. Caring for students means helping them get jobs, teaching them to get jobs, often at the expense of teaching creativity, slow-learning, and teaching conflicts and complexities. Moreover, neoliberalism produces more than just a work-ready entrepreneurial subject but increasingly one that is figured in terms of flexibility, agility, and individual responsibility. Classrooms are disciplined in accordance with this prevailing ideology. But none of these observations are new. Indeed, when Connell poses the question in the *Good University* 'Do we need universities at all?' (2019: 8), it is hard not to think they are beyond reclaiming.

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[1] Thanks to Dr Astrid Lorange and Dr Andrew Brooks for their helpful and poignant contributions to this section.

Yet, if universities are informed by prevailing ideologies and material conditions, they can also be shaped by resistance, counter-ideologies, and counter-hegemonies. Neoliberal capitalism's reach, while pervasive, incessant, and pernicious, is not absolute. Like Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias, I see the university as 'an interlocking system with multiple power and counterpower networks flowing through it' (2007: 124). And herein lies the space for resistance. Care in the university, conceived differently, can be powerful. Care can be about teaching struggles against forms of domination in society, be they based on gender, ethnicity, capitalism, sexuality, the state or other hierarchical systems. It can be about teaching mutual aid and solidarity and the importance and value of a human society built on cooperation (Goldman, 2009 [1910]; Malatesta, 2009 [1927]; Bakunin, 2010). Care can be commitments to an ethos of pre-figurative politics that plays out in classrooms. And through classroom practices that centre activist knowledge, collective struggles, and partisan affiliations, we can push back against neoliberal designs of students as subjects conceived as hyper-individualised, competitive, and entrepreneurial. Given that 'care as political warfare has a long genealogy' (Hobart and Kneese, 2020: 1), I argue that it is worth continuing this struggle in the classroom.

So, to do this, in the remainder of this paper, I reimagine and re-enact care away from a central focus on liberal forms of care for the student (as the recipients of care), and instead enact a care that is focused on authors and activist who are resisting and refusing oppressive regimes. I view an activist-caring teaching approach as a form of direct action whereby my solidarity with these authors and communities plays out in the classroom as relationships of care; ones that are empowering and emancipatory.

Care in classrooms

To action a relationship and practice of care towards academic and activist communities in my classrooms (an activist-caring teaching approach), I deploy a mixture of methods relying on different traditions that I have learnt during my own research and participation in social movements, and in more radical teaching spaces experienced alongside anarchists and anti-authoritarians. I use these approaches to enact a relationship of care for activists and academics whose insights are produced from within communities resisting and refusing capitalist, colonialist, racist, sexist, homophobic and ableists intrusions, amongst others. These classroom practices are both theoretically and practically informed.

The first approach entails locating activist and academic insights within the context of where and how they were produced. Insofar as activist wisdoms may be transferable to different geographical contexts and across struggles, I see it as critical that in the first instance, we stress that activist (and academic) knowledge is contingent. And then, in classrooms, I actually tell these stories of contingent located knowledge. When I teach an author's works or share stories of a particular struggle, I stress and provide context. I do this as a way of enacting care to that author and their communities. This approach to providing richness, depth, and context to insights, to show respect and care for people, is firmly located within the traditions of a host of politicised ethnographic and participatory-action processes (Juris, 2007: 164–165; see also Casas-Cortes, et

al., 2013). The richness of detail, the in-depth localised knowledge, the attention to nuances and subtleties when producing ethnographic research is a core component of a research strategy that seeks to elucidate some of the complexities within an activist or militant space and do justice to, and show respect to, the communities from where this knowledge derives (Juris, 2007; Graeber, 2009).

Equally important to this tradition is attention to the way located knowledge is disseminated in research. The *graphy* aspect of ethnography alludes to this, that we pay attention to how we produce *and* present information in the writing up stages of our studies. And while ethnographers have moved away from simply writing up their co-constructed observations, to include film and dance and artistic presentations, ultimately ethnography holds true to the concern that the way in which we talk about people and places matters. Great depth, richness, and integrity is core business.

More acutely, I have worked with militant ethnographic approaches that take this a step further. Militant ethnography (Juris, 2007) is ethnographic research conducted from the belly of social movements, its militancy coming from its vigorous pursuit of, and dissemination of, localised often partisan insights (Apoifis, 2017b). This dissemination aspect is critical – sharing knowledge about the logic and practices of activist networks in academic and non-academic forums. This is scholarship that lays bare the researcher's explicit investment and commitment to the struggles at hand, one that repudiates the notion of a 'neutral' or objective observer in the social sciences (Russell, 2014). In doing so, it offers a different understanding of care and the way we conceive of our relationships with our research communities. To show care in militant ethnography towards activists, we need to step up and participate in movements, to work openly with activists and coproduce knowledge of value to social movement activists. And practitioners of militant ethnography need to commit to the work's dissemination in a host of locations, in multiple forms. Ultimately, and purposively, the division between movement actor and academic is collapsed while a commitment to research integrity is maintained through academically rigorous research methods (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013).

It is these lessons that I bring to my classrooms. I share meticulously constructed activist (often) partisan insights in my classrooms, to practice a relationship of care to the activist communities from which this knowledge is sourced. By consciously embedding this knowledge, a caring approach shaped by partisan intimacy, I am actioning the sorts of political notions of care Hobart and Knees (2020), Lorde (1988), Tronto (2013), Chatzikadis, et al. (2020), and Fanon (2018) are variably alluding to in their work, where care is emancipatory, care is empowering and care is a critical component of humanity.

Somewhat connected to the first, the second approach informing my practice of care towards academic and activist communities in my classrooms comes from the storytelling traditions of Indigenous research methodologies (Atkinson, 2002), ethnographic traditions (Mead, 1977; Graeber, 2009), western phenomenology (Bachelard, 1964), and sociological (Frank, 2000) and psychotherapy (Rogers, 1990) traditions. While your classic social science approach to presenting knowledge tends to use cut up quotes, disembodied fragments of knowledge

rearranged and reshaped into discrete offerings (and yes, I certainly have done this myself and even do so in this article), other approaches present a longer form engagement and presentation of located insights, throughout their work. It is these insights I bring to my classroom.

Recently my co-authors and I have been using such an approach in our presentation and dissemination of curated stories about the experiences of Aboriginal sporting coaches in Australia (Marlin, et al., 2020). Presenting long form stories, rich in detail and nuance, invites the listener into the experience, to become familiar with the complexities of life, of struggle, of resistance, of subjugation and emancipation. Eualeyai and Kamillaroi academic Behrendt describes this ancient tradition of storytelling as 'our most instinctive and human form of communication, of teaching, of persuasion, of validation, of healing, of transformation' (2019: 176), often revealing to a whole new audience, critical insights into otherwise difficult to access experiences. In the classroom I take these insights and present longer form stories to encourage a sort of learning through listening, an approach where rich details are presented about the experiences and contexts of the academics and activists, so that we stay close 'to the warmth and fire of their words' (Marlin, et al., 2020: 9). While novella-like approaches to teaching, to lecturing, to presenting rich information are not uncommon, my approach does this out of care for the activists and academics in the first instance. I practice an activist-caring teaching approach by presenting in class in great detail, their words and lived experiences, inviting students to experience these things with closeness and intimacy (albeit an intimacy mediated by physical and emotional distance). This methodology, when enacted in the classroom, actualises Nodding's (1984) approach to care as relational and experiential by fostering empathy and responsiveness in student-listeners, while practicing a relationship of care to the writers and activists discussed in class.

In order to care for the text and to practice a relationship of care for the communities producing these observations, I try and give as much context and insight *around* the conflict or issue, as possible. For example, when I am teaching a particular author's work, I work hard to locate the author and text within their historical contexts. For example, in my first-year course with 350 students, we engage with Frantz Fanon and in particular Chapter 1 of his The Wretched of the Earth [*Les Damnés de la Terre*], *On Violence*, which begins 'National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression, decolonisation is always a violent event' (1961: 1). During that lecture and in class, I provide rich detail about where Fanon was from, his studies, his positionalities, masculinities, and that this work was written in French titled *Les Damnés de la Terre*, a line from the socialist anthem, The Internationale. We go into detail of his support of the Algerian revolution and role in the *Front de Libération Nationale* – FLN. We talk about his homelands in French West Indies and Martinique, locate them on a map and discuss its pre and colonial history, with a heightened focus on French colonialism. I talk of his other works, in particular *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), because sometimes it is important to have an author's work sit alongside their other works to show how ideas develop. We see images of Fanon. And I accompany this work with a VideoScribe a co-produced stylised video animation that further

contextualises his work (UNSW eLearning, et al., 2018). The intense detail in this approach is arguably crucial to any successful teaching of academic works and authors. However, and critically different here, the selection of what aspects of these works to accentuate and to bring to the classroom is regulated by a relationship of care towards the activists and their struggles, imbued with a partisan intimacy towards the work, the likes of which are practiced in militant ethnographies.

For activist communities and activist struggles, I follow a similar approach. When discussing activist and resistance spaces and communities that reconfigure and flatten organisational structures while engaging in militant struggles, be it on unceded lands on the Australian continent, or resistance in Chiapas, Rojava, Aceh or Athens, I practice care to these communities by presenting to students a wealth of nuanced insights from these communities, alongside partisan and rigorously produced and sourced insider knowledge. This means in practice providing audio, written and visual cues, from different perspectives within these spaces, using a host of different sources. I rely on my connections in these spaces, grounded conversations to shape these contexts, enriched with audio interviews with militants and activists. I use maps in native tongues alongside 3D online maps to provide a sense of the geography and topography of the location of these communities, as well as other information that teaches the context of struggle, like the spatialities of their cities and towns. I speak to activists within the space (and read and listen to their words), and then build a rich background of the history of their struggles, the infighting and internal tensions alongside unity and cohesion, and my students learn of these narratives. We talk of colonialism and class, violence and intersectionality, all grounded stories that come directly from community themselves[2]. And, where possible, I live stream activists from these communities directly into the classroom, which adds even more context and depth to these narratives, plus the added layer of discussions around security culture, payment for services, and communication methods. While beneficial to the general education of students, this intense depth of information carefully crafted into a narrative that tells a particular story from the heart of these communities, enacts, and practices a relationship of care. In their work on radical caring politics Chatzikadis, et al. (2020: 893), argue that 'Only once we acknowledge the challenges of our shared dependence as human beings—our vulnerability and irreducible differences—can we work to ensure we build and maintain the resources necessary to promote the capabilities of everyone'; an activist-caring teaching approach manifesting in this specific classroom practice tangibly actions this call.

The third approach is shaped by my research interests in ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork and my readings and applications of radical pedagogy, specifically their engagement with positionalities and reflexivities. Political reflexivity is a critical component of contemporary progressive research (Willow and Yotebieng, 2020). Awareness of how our personal experiences, bodies, ethics and materialities inform and mould our research (Said, 1978; Davies, 1998; Smith, 1999) is recognised as key to producing and co-producing insights that show how complex

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[2] In second and third year classes, I teach the methodological approaches that I deploy to collect these stories.

power structures marginalise, oppress and liberate people (Haraway, 1988). 'Good' research is attentive to these concerns and great harm can occur if we neglect them (Smith, 1999).

In much the same way as attention to positionalities and reflexivities are key to creating purposeful and productive research (Collins, 1986; Davies & Harré, 1990; Harding, 1991; Smith, 1999; Juris, 2007), (in the sense of challenging sites of oppression and marginalisation while also celebrating moments of resistance, refusal and revolt), helping students understand the importance of positionalities and reflexivity is a pressing task too. Attention to the transformative potential of unpacking student (and teacher) positionalities in classrooms, while encouraging reflexive engagement with academic literature, has a long and radical tradition within critical teaching spaces (Freire, 2000 [1970]) Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994;). Guiding students through complex material by getting them to think about who they are, their material conditions, where they are from and the things that they've seen, has been shown to help primary, secondary and tertiary educated students thrive academically (Carter, 2000). Critical consciousness, activist teaching, critical and feminist pedagogy are all concepts that while distinct in their focus and traditions (Taylor, et al., 2000), are largely synonymous with helping students identify systems of power, and where they sit within these structures, so that they can antagonise oppressive structures and change lives (Hart, 1990; Hayes, 1994; hooks, 1994; Sheared, 1994; Welton, 1995; Shor, 1996; Freire, 2000 [1970]; Rahman, 2010; Brookfield, 2017 [1995]).

While these pedagogies tend to be associated with students from lower socio-economic status locations and historically marginalised communities (El-Amin, et al., 2017), critical pedagogical approaches may also work for so called privileged students in helping them recognise their place within hegemonic power structures – and transforming white consciousness (Allen & Rossatto, 2009). More recent literature in the past two decades has shown the importance of extending attention to the positionalities of teachers, and the ways in which these concerns also frame learning. Taylor and co, alert us to the importance of engaging with the positionalities of both teachers and students 'to examine how race (and other) power relations shape teaching and learning' (Taylor, et al., 2000: 2). These interplays can be located within a particular political tradition of activist-teaching but also, critically, they speak to notions of care albeit student focused (see Lorde, 1988), and a care that is grounded in human growth and actualisation, the likes of which is embraced in Mayeroff (2013 [1971]) and Chatzikadis and co's (2020) scholarship. I take this wisdom and reconfigure it in the classroom.

Given the importance of embedding and teaching strategies regarding positionality and reflexivity for student development discussed, I have been working on strategies that encourage students to better understand the emotionality of political interactions. I do so for the purposes of fermenting a space where uncomfortable or unfamiliar ideas can sit with the listener, in a way that encourages students to better listen to, hear, and receive these narratives. I practice an activist-caring teaching approach by preparing my students to receive these stories, these long form collections of located politicised knowledge. I want to help students understand who they are and where they sit within the knowledge production process, so they may better receive confronting insights that challenge their worldview, like that of arguments for militant resistance

to oppression. The underlying agenda here is to practice a relationship of care with academic and activist communities by preparing students to receive these insights. Insofar as I use a bunch of reflexive approaches throughout my courses such as assessed reflexive writing pieces and oral presentation, it is my use of sound and noise antagonisms that I showcase here.

This repertoire of practice uses sound and noise to antagonise students, so they experience in-group and out group sensations. After consultation with a colleague working in trauma counselling to avoid questions that explicitly may cause harm, I designed a list of questions that are posed to the cohort in my larger lectures of 300 plus students. Before commencing I give students the opportunity to opt out of the activity and leave the space if they desire and have support services available for students if required. Then, I invite students to close their eyes and I ask them whether they agree or disagree with respective political sentiments. If they agree with the statement – they are to yell out 'yeah(!)' as loud as they can, while clapping their hands and stomping their feet. Students are met with a wall of sound on some issues, a trickle of affirmation on others, and all the in between, while experiencing for themselves where they are positioned within the majority sentiment on any given issue. The statements are often quite simple and designed to evoke an emotive response, they are provocative by design. Statements include: Meat is murder; Colonialism worked well; America under Trump prospered; Brexit was shaped by racism; Australia is on stolen land; Murdoch is a source of evil; Capitalism is the best economic system; and, political violence is sometimes a necessity.

As a social movement participant, scholar, and ethnographer, I have spent much time in the midst of hectic riots and protests. In this activity I am trying to modestly convey what that feels like – both when you are in agreeance with the activist position, but also when you are watching the protests and disagreeing with their actions from the side. I want students to hear the roar of support for a position and then reflect on where they sit within those interactions, not just as individuals but as actors sharing a space, a collective experience, and in doing so, modestly antagonise the neoliberal constructions of the student as a hyper-individualised, work-ready capitalist subject. After the activity we reflect on these experiences and students speak of their appreciation of what it might feel like to be connected or alienated from political power. We then talk about what it might be like for activists, and how these encounters might help them listen more closely to their words.

Given the author and activist insights that I am bringing to the classroom are often very new to the students, I want to practice a relationship of care with these communities by training students to better understand what power feels like, in this simple activity. And while students may ultimately reject the activist knowledge I am presenting, student feedback overwhelmingly reflects an appreciation of the importance of understanding one's relationship and proximity to political power, even in this artificial environment. An activist-caring teaching approach needs to not only focus on the quality-presentation of located insights and wisdoms, but it also needs to create an environment where these insights may be better received. I suggest that this sound experiment serves to forward this agenda alongside the other strategies discussed.

The Tension: A conclusion

With care understood as empowering, emancipatory, and a core component of our humanity, in this paper, I offer an activist-caring teaching approach supported by a suite of practices that I use in my classrooms to modestly interrupt neoliberal capitalist intrusions into how we perform care in our teaching spaces. Buoyed by radical pedagogies, militant ethnographic and narrative approaches, I reconceive the very notion of who and what can be a recipient of care in the classroom (in my partisan affiliations and stories that centre activists and their communities), by compelling students to experience a collective association and connection to politicised content (like in the sound experiment). Such strategies that provide social, historical, and political contexts, and contingent located knowledge, may appear common enough as purposeful teaching practices. Yet my contribution to contemporary pedagogical discourse is an activist-caring approach that features partisan intimacies and solidarities, specific strategies underpinned by an application of caring principles that are emancipatory and empowering. These teaching practices are shaped by my relationship with and understanding of political notions of care.

Insofar as I aim to reconceive who and what is the recipient of care in the classroom away from students per se, students inevitably figure (albeit implicitly) within the teaching strategies discussed. They are, of course, the recipients and the receivers of these teaching practices. That said, an activist-caring teaching approach also fosters empathy and ethical responsiveness in students, inviting students to reconfigure their own place in the classrooms by helping them cultivate their own relationships of care to the authors and activists whose ideas are being taught in class[3]. Activist-caring teaching pushes back against the neoliberal constructions of students as necessarily clients, hyper-individualised and entrepreneurially driven.

While framed by an activist-caring teaching approach, I nonetheless design and deliver this content in a neoliberal institution, as a paid employee of the very institution I critique. There is obvious tension then. While I advocate for and enact modest forms of resistance in my teaching spaces, being a teacher in a neoliberal institution in a neoliberal capitalist society does require, arguably, some attention to liberal forms of care. I want my students to get jobs after university, I want them to be financially secure, and I want them to have fulfilling lives on their terms. Aspects of my course content assists them in this regard. I teach them workplace skills (like writing policy briefs and media articles). I connect them with my networks in government and non-government organisations, in public policy spaces and in party-political spaces. In doing so I am reinforcing liberal expectations of 'education for vocation', alongside liberal notions of caring for students. And, as much I would love for them all to be out there smashing injustices, I am fully cognisant of the fact that most of my students will pursue different careers. The students at my university end up as judges, politicians, lawyers, public servants, as NGOs, and academics. Indeed, former students already hold these positions and I assist them to reach these aspirations by providing them an education that helps them to this end. I am, whether I like it or not, in many ways helping to produce the next wave of productive workers under capitalism. My attitudes and practices of

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[3] Thanks to Dr Demelza Marlin and Associate Professor Mary Zournazi for their poignant contributions to these discussions.

care in the classroom have been partly disciplined by the prevailing neoliberal capitalist hegemony.

At the same time, an activist-caring teaching approach manifests a different caring relationship in the classroom, one that resists these intrusions. It offers teachers a way to reconceive and reimagine caring relationships in the classroom, allowing us to practice solidarity and mutual aid with activists by caring for their words, their ideas, their actions, and knowledge in our classrooms. And an activist-caring teaching approach in turn offers students a way of thinking about their own education with a certain kind of critical tension in mind, especially after they leave university, one that compels students to think of how different approaches to knowledge, politics and care problematises what the university is and does. By centering these insights, by practicing care towards these communities, an activist-caring teaching approach offers modest opportunities to resist neoliberal ideological incursions and the commodification of education in certain discrete spaces within the modern university.

Author Biography

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