

Challenging Traditional Pedagogy | Text Transcript | The Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence

This is a text transcript for the recorded event “Challenging Traditional Pedagogy” presented by the Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence in the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences (CSAHS). The event was recorded on November 9, 2018.

Carla Rice:

I'm going to keep my remarks really short because while I was the instigator of this co-design process and the course itself, we were all positioned and positioned ourselves as teachers and learners in the class.

And so, these three folks both stepped up and stepped down from the podium as kind of the course unfolded as did I and so I'm just going to introduce you to them and then I'm going to turn the floor over to them.

So on my far right is Raman Bahra and Raman's doing a PhD in Sociology at York. In the middle is Carla, Carla G. That's how we distinguish ourselves in the class. Carla Giddings and Carla is doing her PhD in Geography at Guelph and closest to me is Thomas Sasso and Thomas is working on his PhD in Industrial Relations in Psychology.

So I'm going to turn the floor over to them.

Raman Bahra:

I'm just going to like pull it closer. Hi everyone. Thank you Carla for those remarks. So welcome to all to the lunch and learn event.

We're really excited to be here to share our experience and our graduate course we took with Dr. Carla Rice and the fact that we're here at University of Guelph talking about it, which means a lot to us and this was something we presented at congress at University of Regina this year. So it's really meaningful that we're now on home ground to speak of this course and how much we loved it.

Thomas Sasso:

So before we get started today, it's important that we take a moment to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional lands of the Attawandaron people and more recently, the territory of the Mississauga of the Credit.

We acknowledge the significance of the Dish with One Spoon covenant to this land and off our respects to our Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Métis neighbours as we strive to strengthen our relationships with them.

A land acknowledgement is an important piece of all of our gathering and practises. Not just to say the words in a sense of checking off a box, but taking a moment to reflect on what those words mean and how those words affect how we're gathering together.

And that was a central tenant of this course was really taking stock of who we are and how we were on this territory and on this base and recognising that lots of our existence on this territory comes from

settler colonialism and that through this process of acknowledging our colonialism here and our practises of colonialism, that we reinforce and reproduce some of those systems.

And so by acknowledging the traditional peoples and this land and how this land has been used and taken over time, that it's part of our process of decolonizing and attempting to move towards a space of better understanding, different ways of knowing.

And so acknowledging the traditional peoples, our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities is an important step for us in being able to challenge traditional pedagogy because traditional pedagogy has been colonial in its nature.

Carla Giddings:

So now that Carla has already started to introduce us, but we wanted to give just a little bit more context. So thank you again Carla for opening with that.

As she mentioned, my name is Carla Giddings. I am a second year PhD student in the Geography Department an another piece of context is I'm also an occupational therapist and that's the role that I was working in when this course actually started.

So I'm a regulated health care professional working mostly a mental health and my research interests are looking at experiences of care and belonging through the private sponsorship of refugees.

I also have a very strong interest in feminist pedagogies as well as community engaged scholarship.

Thomas Sasso:

So I'm Thomas Sasso. As previously mentioned, a PhD candidate in Psychology and this is just what I wear on the weekends.

I'm really proudly queer and use the pronouns they and he and so my areas of focus are predominantly in diversity and inclusion studies within workplace context and how can we create more inclusive work and educational settings for individuals who are employed and operate and exist and learn in different spaces. And sometimes I like to segue.

Raman Bahra:

Hello everyone once again. Yeah, I loved your picture so I added a very brown version of me. This is me on the weekends too when I'm partying.

So hello, my name is Ramanpreet Annie Bahra. I go by the name of Raman just to make it easy and then pronunciation "*rum and coke*" for those who like it, or "Ramen" noodles.

I am a second year PhD student at York University in the Sociology Department. I was a visiting graduate student for our course and a lot of my research focuses on affirming the fat body through new materialist thought.

So the sociology of the body and embodiment is something I just explore and I love exploring through affect studies and new materialism.

So we want to begin with sharing our appreciation to Re-Vision for sharing their space and allowing our course to situate itself as a meeting place throughout the term in the Red Lab. Re-Vision is founded and directed by Carla Rice and it specialises in visual, digital and sensory research and art methods.

Re-Vision explores ways that marginalised and misrepresented communities can use art to advance social inclusion and justice by challenging stereotypes.

One of the main ways Re-Vision does this work is through social science research grants which utilise digital storytelling methods to speak back to the misrepresentations and offer new perspectives.

Thomas Sasso:

So we want to outline and start our conversation today this lunch and learn from a place of the garden. And I think the garden is beautiful in lots of ways with its imagery and particularly here at the University of Guelph as we think about being Canada's food university and knowing our history with agriculture.

But the garden has special significance to our community. Those of us who were in this course and the reason where it started from was when we began the course, we said there's going to be certain topics that come up that we can't address right now.

And so we thought, well, let's put it into what's typically called the parking lot and for those of you who may have done facilitation or consulting, the parking lot is usually a place where ideas go to die.

And I think that's an apt metaphor that oftentimes we use the parking lot to silence ideas, to pave over innovation, to pave over difficult conversations, difficult knowledge. I'm sorry if I've just given away everyone's secret to using the park and their practises.

But for our group, we didn't want that to happen. We wanted a special place. A place where ideas could be planted and those ideas had an opportunity to grow. And so instead of using the metaphor of parking lot, we use the metaphor of a garden and it was a piece of paper that stayed up in the classroom the entire time.

Every day when we walked in, when we left, that paper was still there with our ideas planted and through that garden, it was an opportunity for ideas to grow, to be nurtured, to take on a life of their own. And this was a really essential piece because it prevented individuals from thinking about their ideas as being shelved or unimportant or that ideas are static.

Instead, the pedagogical ideology behind it was that our ideas are going to transform as we learn and as we transform in our learning.

And so using the metaphor, of the garden is going to be a place where we continue to grow and a lot of what we talked about today are ideas that had been planted over the year of us spending time together.

And although this metaphor was just used during class, we're almost a year later of this course being wrapped up and that metaphor still has life with us, it still has purpose and it's continued to allow ideas to grow and to be nurtured.

We've harvested some of those ideas, some of those ideas didn't last, but others have materialised and new seeds have emerged and there's a lot of potential that comes from the garden.

So one of the pieces that we want to start off with is recognising that metaphors matter. In our pedagogies, in the ways that we communicate with each other, we need to be thoughtful and mindful as to what terms we're using because that will either allow things to grow and be nurtured or it can result in things being paved over and us losing paradise in that process.

Carla Giddings:

So our course was populated by many individuals and you have many of us here but there were many other wonderful voices that unfortunately aren't able to present with us today, but their ideas, their voices, their presence was really important to the creation of the course.

So we wanted to acknowledge our becoming gardeners who are with us in spirit and some who are right here in front of us.

So we have Hannah Fowlie from English and Theatre Studies, Curtis Holmes from Family Relations and Human Development, Dr. Carla Rice, who you've met already, Associate Professor of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Emma Whitehouse from Family Relations and Human Development and Angela Underhill from Family Relations and Human Development as well.

What we want to do is also acknowledge the beauty and diversity of this group. And while listed here, we see that there's a broad disciplinary scope and backgrounds.

What isn't listed there, all the different lived experiences that were also brought to the forefront throughout the course.

Raman Bahra:

Sorry.

Carla Giddings:

Thanks Raman. Always looking out for me.

So in terms of diversity, we can think about different ways that we were positioned in terms of age, academic experience, we had a combination of masters students, PhD Students and a professor, gender identity and sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, class, family status, religious identification as well as histories of trauma or challenge.

And from this we want to acknowledge that this provided a diversity of different insights and also acknowledging that there would be oversights to that as well.

So there are obviously perspectives that would not be present within our group as well but we are really grateful for the voices that were able to be part of the course.

Thomas Sasso:

We just want to acknowledge that Kaley Trace, whose name is not currently up here was supposed to be one of our four presenters but at the last minute stepped out.

Kaley Trace is a master's student in Couple and Family Therapy and an intricate part of our process as well. So we just wanted to make sure that her name is acknowledged and recognised in this space.

Carla Giddings:

So just to give you a quick outline of the intention for the workshop. We're hoping to give you a sense of the course structure. So how it was actually put together as well as different processes that evolved through the course and the values that we set forth.

We have some key examples from the course that we'd like to share with you as well, as well as discussing some of our post course reflections.

And then at the end we would love to hear your feedback, your questions and engage in more of a discussion together.

Thomas Sasso:

So every time we talk about a garden, it's not just something that's there, it's something that has to be planned out. It's something that's thoughtful, something that has intention behind it.

We need to think about is this the right location for our garden? Do we have the right air and water and sunlight to allow things to grow? Do we want vegetables or do we want beautiful flowers? Do we want something that's more natural or something that's well meticulously organised?

So just as a garden is well planned out and well thought out, we also have to think about how a course is structured and planned out, but who are the gardeners, who are the individuals that are going to go through this process? How will the gardeners time be respected and valued?

So you're going to hear the garden metaphor a lot of times. Because it's a central tenant as to how we think about each stage of development and enact going forward.

Raman Bahra:

Thank you, Thomas.

So most courses generally start on a set date by the university and usually, students don't think about the courses till the first day of class.

And majority of them, or maybe it's just me, we come into the course overwhelmed. There's a sudden panic that I'm already behind and I freak out. This is the lived reality.

But this course was not that.

So in early 2017, Dr. Carla Rice put out a call for graduate students that was shared via emails, social media and institutional listservs.

The call invited folks to collaboratively design a critical theory graduate course that would involve rethinking the human.

So while suggestions for topics were included in the invitation, Carla emphasised that the final course outline would be co-designed by the co-learners and it would have an interdisciplinary and or multidisciplinary focus.

She also made clear that she would be one of the co-learners rather than an instructor. So this really blurred the lines between instructor and learner throughout the development and implementation of the course and challenging typical hierarchies.

And in doing so, we created this really supportive environment where openness was possible and that was very vital for our garden to grow.

I'd like to share a personal anecdote of my interaction with Carla prior to the start of this course.

So for me, this whole experience was nerve wracking and exciting is I'm going to become a PhD student and going from a small university at Wilfrid Laurier to a large institution like York, there was a lot of stressors.

And during my time at Wilfrid Laurier, I was exposed to Carla's work. And at that point, I was fascinated by the thought she was putting forward within fat studies.

And in 2016, I visualised a goal for myself that one day or another I'm going to work with Carla, whether it's a course or it's this project that she's taking on.

So after submitting a chapter proposal for an upcoming collected edition on intersectionality, social justice and fatness, I received an invitation from Carla regarding this course.

And from that moment on, I just knew I had to be a part of this course where I can challenge these normative ideologies around fatness and throughout the first meetings we all met and right away we were connecting, vibing well because we knew what we wanted to do and the type of environment we wanted to form for one another.

But unfortunately coming from York, I love the school but you know I have my problems with them at times. I was told I couldn't take part of this course and get credited for it. My OGVS was declined.

So I went to Carla, I sat her down and I'm like, "I'm sorry I cannot do this." And right then and there, Carla offered me the opportunity to audit the course.

And from that moment, I knew this is someone that I see myself working with no matter what institution I'm at and the people within that course developing and we're still communicating on potential papers that we would love to do together.

And then also helping me mould the type of professor I want to be, the type of classroom I want to create for my students when I do become one.

Carla Giddings:

So you've heard a lot about how it was co-created and co-designed but there might be some questions around, well, how does that actually happen? How do you actually create a course with students and the instructor and all being co-learners together?

So logistically what that looked like was we started meeting in April 2017 with the intention of the course starting in September.

And at our first meeting, what happened was it was an experiential activity that really focused on being able to build connections with one another as well as exploring this idea of what does becoming the human mean.

So Carla welcomed us into the space and we were able to go through different pieces of poetry and quotes and art material and different visuals and then talk about what these ideas meant to us.

After that, our next meeting was in May and that's where we started to figure out what are the values of this course.

What do we want to bring forward? What kind of a space do we want to co-create together?

We talked a lot about these ideas around space and time and not just being on the same trajectory as the standard 12 week course. So this course just wasn't gonna work that way.

In terms of the values that we came up with, we wanted to make sure that it was something that was accessible to everyone. So we had some different agreements about things like no sense so that that could be something that the space felt safe and accessible for everyone.

We also really thought about accessibility in terms of being able to understand the material, but then also being challenged by the material. So we made sure that we were going to present the material to one another in a way that both beginners and experts would be able to fully engage with it.

Another piece that was really important to us was this idea of supporting one another. And so we had an idea of having interdependence as well as this idea of calling in versus calling out.

So people might have had the experience of being sort of called out in a class where maybe they thought that they understood a topic and answered a question and maybe you're told no, that's wrong or you don't get it. So we really wanted to build a different type of culture in this classroom.

So what we did was we talked about this idea of calling in. So if someone didn't understand something or maybe said something that triggered someone else that we would be able to share with one another. When you said that, this is what I thought and trying to get clarity around why someone had thought that and sharing our own experiences.

And I think that this really helped to contribute to this idea of tenderness within the space.

Thomas Sasso:

So one of the first pieces of constructing a course we often think about is, well, what's gonna be on the syllabus and how do we design the syllabus because that's how a lot of our methods teach us that the syllabus is something that then constraints learning, that this is what we're going to cover. And as Carla brought up, that wasn't how we operated.

We want it to be something that was much more malleable and adaptable to our desires and needs.

And so we wanted to also think about whose voices are typically heard in a graduate level course and thinking about what privileges we might be giving to certain types of academic knowledge and certain types of communities over others.

So from the beginning of those summer meetings, we started talking about whose voices aren't heard in academia and how can we centre some of those voices to ensure that we're getting more diverse experiences and learning from different ways of knowing.

So we challenged ourselves to start to think about not just what is the topic of research, but who's writing about it and how is it being written about. So we worked on trying to start from a more de-colonial perspective and decolonizing our knowledge.

One example is that many of us were interested in sexuality, gender, relationships.

And so anyone who does sex and gender knows read Judith Butler. And Judith Butler is one of those names that most courses use. And we thought, oh yes, we need to read Judith Butler. That's part of how our academy has talked about and centred sexuality and gender.

But instead of starting with Judith Butler, let's start with Indigenous voices and indigenous ways of thinking about sexuality and gender. And so we read pieces by Sarah Hunt, Cindy Holmes, Scott Morgenson. We read pieces that came from Roddick's and we were reading poetry and essays.

We were engaging in digital stories and we moved into whole new medias to be able to engage with the knowledge that didn't centre individuals who prominently have a pedestal or have a voice.

And instead, let's talk about and let's learn from communities that can teach us so much more and teach us in ways that we don't hear about typically in graduate education, both at the University of Guelph and in other institutions.

We were really lucky to present this as Raman said at Congress in Regina and at that time, we asked individuals to also contribute. What do you think should be on a syllabus?

And so in that activity, what we learned was that individuals from around the country who wanted to engage in this topic also had other ideas of where we should be learning material from.

That was also coming from the margins, from de-centered voices and we have an entire list of nonacademic ways of knowing and thinking about these topics that were equally as valuable and we're happy to share some of those resources with you for anyone who'd be interested in knowing about what other readings people might recommend.

Carla Giddings:

So building off of that, once we developed our course syllabus, then we structured it so that each person in the group, each co-learner co-gardener, would be responsible for course content per week.

So in this way, it created a sense of interdependence because you would come with the idea that you were going to be a co-instructor for that day but you were also learning.

You would step up and step down in order to allow others to step in and share their lived experience or share their interpretations of the particular material and that way, everyone showed up with the responsibility for having done that preparation work, thinking through, critically reflecting and knowing that they would come and participate.

So that just really fostered this sense of interdependence. You didn't need to come thinking that you had all the answers and were then going to provide that to the rest of the group.

You came having critically reflected knowing that you were meeting with other co-learners who'd done the same and were excited to engage with you.

Another piece that was really important about a weekly layout was to have flexibility. So in this way we were able to accommodate new opportunities that came along.

So Hannah alerted us to a talk that came up by Lee Miracle who is a solo poet, author and activist as well as Janet Rogers who's speaking, who's a Mohawk and Tuscarora writer, poet and activist and as a group, we talked back and forth.

Is this a great opportunity? What do we want to do about this? And we came to the consensus that yeah, let's go as a group.

So we all went together and it was an extremely powerful experience.

Afterwards, we were able to get together and debrief about what this meant, connected to course material and those themes were woven throughout the rest of the course.

Raman Bahra:

So once we have the garden organised, designed and initial logistics arranged, we actually have to plant the seeds in our garden.

This process can be time consuming and there's an immense amount of energy that has to be put into planting those seeds.

You can't just throw them and expect to save time and they'll still grow. You have to nurture them.

So our process and values in the course really demonstrated how we planted the seeds of course content and it was impossible to address all of these processes and values today, but we're going to focus in on certain things that we did in terms of activities and incorporating nontraditional ways of learning.

Thank you.

So as a reference point to our course process and values, this section is kind of going to demonstrate the way we used art and learning. And the key moments that really fostered are learning to become transformative.

So transformative learning within the seminar occurred with the application of thought, race, indigenous, queer and disability scholarship through artful practises.

For example performance art, digital storytelling, painting, poetry like Thomas listed. To better really understand this idea of becoming and rethinking the human.

So we weren't just going in like we're going to rethink the human today. We were actually practising through art.

So Aaron Manny conceptualised this form of work as research creation. An artful practise which honours complex forms of knowing and a form of research that's collective at core.

So in this image show and actually I'll get up and then yeah.

Carla Giddings:

Do you want a mic?

Thomas Sasso:

Yeah.

Raman Bahra:

I can talk loud enough. Can you guys hear me?

Thomas Sasso:

It's for the podcast.

Raman Bahra:

Oh yes, sorry.

So in this image, I call it the collaborative piece.

We had done it on November 17, 2017. So yeah, almost a year later. It was brought to fruition by Carla G.'s mini lecture on bodies in space. And this was basically our initial piece of experimentation with art and theory.

We worked towards unpacking three questions proposed by Elizabeth Grosse. What are bodies? How are they constituted? How to power relations mark bodies?

Carla provided us the material and we individually worked through these questions.

After spending a half hour or so on our pieces, Carla had us debrief on what did we make of those questions that she proposed?

And then at every point, we were always looking for parallels, tensions, contrast. Anything relating back to our garden that we had planted in the very beginning and in attending to each piece, we brought in full circle the topic of the week as we created something that was collaborative and informative of our own bodies and space.

We allow the multidimensionality and complexities of our bodies to materialise into art. And as you can see, this became something that was doing what Re-Vision proposes, social inclusion and social justice through art.

So these are pieces like the Mobius Strip that Carla made. This is Carla's Mobius Strip. There's Hannah's, there's Kaley's. Every one of us is on this board and it became... We made them individually but the moment we put this together, you really showed how collaborative our learning was and how we were learning from each other.

Oh perfect, thank you.

So the first piece up close. This is by Hannah. I mean I don't want to talk for you but I'm just going to do my interpretation. So by all means.

So in rethinking the human, we think of the body as a process, one that's complex and multidimensional. And doing these, we spent time in really reflecting on how we understood our body.

So Hannah's piece here work towards unpacking Cartesian dualism, the mind body dualism.

And for her she always felt that her mind was separate from her body. So she had this division here. Here's her body, there's her mind.

And while explaining this piece, she spoke of this spirit that was also separated from her, something that was not accepted in this mind body dualism that we hear about and we've come to learn.

And that spirit was something that she was reconciling with as she worked through her body, her becoming body.

Being a fat study scholar, to me what I thought was really creating her becoming was her relation to fatness throughout the seminar and we'll show you research creation enabled to Hannah to employ art to present the complexity of not just the material but the way she learned the material through her body, through art, through performance.

This is what I came up with. It's very theoretical, now that I think about it.

So this was my own transition of the construct of the body where it went from like ball politics to the school of delusion, Catari's new materialism. The fun, I tell you.

The normalisation of thinness and whiteness to now just accepting every aspect of my differences, no matter how feminist I have, no matter my brownness or fatness that they're all interdependent, they're all relating together. And exposing this body that has different layers of bodily thinking.

So playing with various fabrics and markers itself sparked a mapping of the body.

One day reclaims the monstrosity that is described as my fatness, my race and by understanding the body as an assemblage with its own intensity points.

So Carla had provided this amazing little scraps of pieces of papers and you can really just see like the different relations between every aspect of the flowers, the scaling here and those were different points that I consider difference interacting with one another without any form of credit to what we were trying to refute the human.

Carla Giddings:

So while there were absolutely moments of insight and coming together and when I look back at this, at what Raman was just sharing with you, it brings up really wonderful memories to think back to all working together and I love that you bring up the piece around that collaboration and that wonderful spirit.

And they're also really tough times when grappling with critical theory as well.

So this is a quote from one of my reflections around difficult knowledges, which I spoke a lot about throughout the course and really worked with and continue to work with as a sessional instructor now.

That's okay, we can switch.

Raman Bahra:

Oh yeah, that was a video and then the audio was behind.

Carla Giddings:

Oh, that's nice.

Raman Bahra:

So in the background of this video, you actually hear Carla saying like there's a lot of difficult knowledge for me.

It was really interesting to watch my process of how I work with difficult knowledge that I do this very turning away. I can be quick to dismiss things.

I can't do Carla's sweet voice but it was really impactful the way she put difficult knowledge and her take on it.

Carla Giddings:

Thank you.

So a piece that really centred for me throughout the course was this idea of difficult knowledge and what is difficult knowledge.

So a definition that I keep coming back to is from a Dr. Deborah Britzman who says that resistance is a precondition for learning from knowledge and the grounds of knowledge itself. And yet this insight, that difficult knowledge may be refused, is painful to tolerate.

The psychic time of learning is one in this, the confronted self vacillates sometimes violently and sometimes passively. Sometimes imperceptively and sometimes shockingly between resistance as symptom and the working through of resistance.

And some of the reasons why this was so important to me was we talked a lot about this idea of learning about versus learning from.

So learning about is where you might take in facts, dates, names, maybe you memorise it like you know, all that information.

And this is in contrast to learning from which is the experience of working through new insights, considering implications and exploring and reflecting on what it means in your own life.

This was particularly salient for me because I was the one who reluctantly and hesitantly stepped into the role to take on reading Deborah Britzman's work very early on in the course and this was work that I had never been exposed to in the past.

So I just saw it on the reading list and thought, yeah I'll challenge myself. I can take this on and then I started reading the chapter and realised that I had a very superficial knowledge about psychoanalysis.

So I very earnestly went about the task in my typical way.

I read the chapter at least three times. I reread the diary of Anne Frank because it was. I did, yes I did.

I looked up all the terms that I could figure out and then felt by the time we came to class, like I know this. I am ready for this. I felt nervous but okay.

I put on my, I know what I'm talking about armour and I went to class and this was a really interesting experience for me to then be surrounded by co-learners where actually it was okay.

It was okay that we were all figuring this out together. It was okay that I didn't have it all sorted out in my mind ahead of time.

And what I realised as I worked through trying to share in the discussion because I had this reflection question that was sort of asking everyone about, so now that we know about difficult knowledge, how can we sort of sidestep this whole resistance piece? And that's what I had this embodied experience about this is what learning from is.

This is the actual experience of rolling with resistance and being in it.

And what was really powerful about it was that I was in such good company to do it.

Raman Bahra:

And with that we bring upon our best value of pedagogy of tenderness.

So when confronting the self and really grappling with difficult knowledge as Carla has so wonderfully described, what formed in our graduate seminar was a pedagogy of tenderness.

Becky Thompson defines us as an embodied way of being that allows us to understand, to listen deeply to each other, to consider perspectives that we might have thought way outside of our own worldviews, to practise a patience and attentiveness that allow people to do their best work makes room for emotion, offers the witness for experiences people have buried or left unspoken, welcomed silence, breath and movement.

Emotions that came pouring out of the intertwining of intersectionality, self reflectivity and vulnerability as Carla R always talks about, within the space all these emotions were accepted and invited to the table.

From the initial meeting after the call for interested students to the last class where we celebrated our community and our garden, we created room for intimacy and vulnerability to emerge by coaching each other into habits of deep listening.

In doing so, we formed this emotional curriculum of multiracial feminist pedagogy. This emotional curriculum encapsulate our body of knowledge which is a combination of our bodies and the knowledge each of us collaborators hold.

We shared our stories relating back to the material and invited each and every one of us to take the initiative to talk about how we felt in that moment of grappling with difficult knowledge or just in terms of self reflectivity or just whatever comes to mind when reading a certain piece.

And it's really how does practising interdependency between one another, a space that built this ethics of care and community between students and teachers, or no, co-instructors and co-learners enabling our becoming to always be in a process emergent and really fluid.

All of our bodies were relational in this course and what this did was offer us a different way of thinking, a different way of knowing and relating to one another and our environment along with this step towards attending to the ways our bodies materialise in this counter narrative that we're trying to work towards.

A pedagogy of tenderness was most evident during moments I like to call our tear jerking moments.

So we would actually almost start crying and silence was there and at times we didn't have the words to really express what we were saying and we were okay with that silence with moments of just us tearing up. Like we'll let you have that moment. and then if you want to share with us how you feel, by all means and if not, that's totally understandable.

And those moments were the ones, the way that we were watering our garden by challenging ourselves to deal with powerful emotions confusion, shame, fear that are woven into our histories and subsequently fostering a space filled with trust and intimacy between us co-learners. In such moments, we were learning not just from the difficult knowledge leaking through us or the text, but we were learning from emotionality from one another.

In recognising emotions, we saw the way it fostered engagement with difficult knowledge and discussion that's very valuing exponential knowledges.

Even if that like I said, it was quiet, that's okay. We didn't dismiss that silence as a parking lot. An idea going into the parking lot.

We just thought it's the air that's just around our garden, fostering it,

Thomas Sasso:

So traditional pedagogies typically have a neo liberal framework and what that means is that it often reinforces competition.

It reinforces these ideas of profits and independence and that was something that we actively wanted an alternative to, this pedagogy of tenderness, this vulnerability, this interdependencies that we were creating and that we are fostering and celebrating were a radical challenging of neo liberal practises.

And so it allowed us to find places where we could support one another, but that we could also call each other in if we found that one of us was taking up too much air and taking up too much space, we could carefully and kindly and compassionately call us in and say, can you recognise that you're taking up a little bit too much space Thomas? The rest of us want to talk.

You can hear those voices still.

But this forced us to think critically, to think deeply and most importantly to think compassionately with each other, which challenges neoliberal pedagogies that are so fundamentally traditional in how teaching is happening.

And another way that we decided that we were going to be radical and challenging the pedagogy was in how we were assessing and measuring.

So maybe Byron for that next talk on programme evaluation, this might come into play.

But it's the idea that one rubric isn't going to fit everyone. So our final assessment piece could be completely independent.

Each person come up with how they wanted that knowledge to be shared and communicated. How that learning took hold.

Maybe you want it to create your own digital story. Maybe you want it to create artistic pieces. Maybe you wanted to write a paper but allow individuals to share that knowledge in different ways.

And through this process, we ended up reducing the impact of grades. We weren't being compared to one another. One person didn't have to lose for the others to succeed in our classroom. It wasn't a matter of us trying to look the best or be the most professional or be able to get the 98% which will get you the SSHRC.

It was more about how do we have autonomy to learn this content, engage in this content and prioritise this space and our values. And what we found through that is it empowered all of us.

We were more autonomous as a collective and we are more autonomous in our own learning process than we would be with a formal structure.

And that was something that none of us had experienced in other graduate, undergraduate courses regardless of our disciplines.

Carla Giddings:

So after a semester of carefully tending to the garden, to extend that metaphor, it was time to harvest what we had worked so hard to grow.

Raman Bahra:

That's me taking up space.

Carla Giddings:

So I'd like to walk you through just one of the final assessments as Thomas was mentioning. There were lots of different ways that people chose to integrate all the material over the course.

And so for me, I was really surprised to be able to get back in touch with some explorations with art.

So Carla Rice had encouraged us to experiment with art and when I first started the course, I thought I do not know what that could possibly look like. I really wasn't sure about that, but I figured it would probably unfold, maybe I would write a paper and it would be fine.

But as we worked through the course, something that came forward for me, was I reconnected with encaustic mixed media.

So encaustics are, it's like melted beeswax with different pigments in it, so different paint. And then you need to apply different layers of it and then set it in heat. So usually with a blowtorch. And then you create different layers and you can embed different objects within it. You can scrape away, you can just completely start it again.

So this was something that I thought, well maybe this would help me grapple with some of the different theoretical elements that we've been working with throughout the course.

So this was the first one that I went through and I'm not going to go through my reflections and critical analysis of it. Though I did bring the art pieces and they're there and you're welcome to look at them and touch them and smell them. They smell like beeswax, they smell really great and you're welcome to read the reflections as well.

But what I would like to do is walk you through some of the process pieces for one of the pieces.

So this was an art piece that it took me about two weeks to make. I kept going back. I wasn't really satisfied with it and I think part of what was happening was it was very much a reflection of where I was at in the course.

We had just started to talk about new materialism and then we moved into the post human.

I found the topics, I found the theories really complex. I found them difficult to work with. I felt confused, I felt frustrated at times and what this course allowed and what experimenting with art allowed was it allowed some space in order to work with that.

So instead of having a, oh no, it's a deadline. Get that paper in and just throw some quotes in that sound good, I was able to actually work with, well, what do these theories actually mean and why is this so difficult for me to work through it?

So what I do want to share with you is a quote from a reflection that I wrote where I said that what I've discovered in myself through experimenting with artists, how powerful and playful the creative process can really be.

I felt as I fused each waxy layer onto another, the colours mixing the medium going in new and unexpected directions, the voices, experiences and stories of my co-learners unfolded in new layers.

I felt contentment as ideas began to emerge and settle.

Raman Bahra:

So that is just a little video that I had made when Carla presented.

Thomas Sasso:

We'll take that out on this part so you can talk.

Raman Bahra:

Yeah. No, no, but basically the excitement that we all had to see Carla's work on the site and I hope you guys do take the time to look at them.

I added two pieces of my own inspired by Carla's work. Like til now, I'm still inspired by that third piece, which is my favourite.

So Carla's last piece really exerted this lively matter to me.

As I held it in my hands and took these images and videos, I felt the liveliness of matter opening up potential to its interrelationship with me.

The movement and intensity that came with a touch of wax, seeds, twigs really brought forth a different type of animacy within me and with the others.

We couldn't stop oohing and aahing over this piece and that was basically the sound recording. You can hear the oohs and ahs. And I just want to really professionally capture these pieces.

But what was interesting to me was the addition of seeds and I think that really did bring full circle our idea of the garden. How those seeds that we had planted in the summer meetings throughout the course were now in a final assessment piece by one of our collaborators.

And it really engage in this dialogue with not just us but with the material and how we've really bodily learned everything through art and within that space and it didn't stop there. Like I said, the art full practises really have shifted in terms of the way we practise today.

I've done a piece from six months ago in March. So it was like halfway point after the course and now the second piece is from a here and it really did show the way this idea of transformative learning occurred for me.

And for our co-learners where our relation and place wasn't just in that space that we were occupying in the Re-Vision lab.

It went further than that. It was online and it still is happening today, a year later.

Going beyond this idea that we're all related no matter what, as individuals as animate things or non animate things.

That's quoting Kim Tallbear, we are all related and that's really important to think about and that was I think, something that's stuck with us throughout the whole course, the way we are all related in terms of our own life histories and with the area that we surround.

Thomas Sasso:

I think one piece that really makes this course stand out very differently than the many other graduate courses is that we're still talking about this course a year later and I don't know, for those of you who've been a long time since you've taken a course, some of you still are.

It's pretty rare to be spending that amount of time and to have that much desire to want to still have shared space and time with each other.

And so, following the course at the end of the course and at various durations, we've asked individuals to reflect on the process of this course.

What were the takeaways? What were the pieces that meant the most? What was so different about this course than any other you've experienced?

So the ideas that I'm sharing now are not just mine. They come from all of the co-learners who were part of the course.

And so some of these pieces that really stuck out is by using reflexivity, we became this coalitional force to be able to understand ourselves and each other and to more creatively assess privileged and non-privileged within academic space and in knowledge and in learning.

And how do we challenge some of those pieces of privilege and oppression to blur the boundaries and to really move beyond a term interdisciplinary, but to actually enact interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. And what does that actually look like in a learning process and in a room?

To be authentic and vulnerable with each other and to do that in a space where so often we are forced to be competitive and to be wondering how we can one up the other person.

It forced us to slow down learning and to appreciate slowing down learning and the value of slow learning in a time and place which says we need to be out of here by this time and maximum duration policies. Looking to you, Ben.

What does that mean?

We're going to make this political.

And that interdependence can be a strength in this collective process.

That subjectivity is not a lack of critical ability. That subjectivity is where knowledge emerges and that the potential to acknowledge raw emotion as a place of new learning and appreciating different types of learning.

And through that, exploring those difficult topics, going through those challenging moments to really challenge ourselves to explore things that we wouldn't be exposed to otherwise.

And we kept these conversations going.

We went to Congress, we're presenting here. We have 1001 more ideas about how these sort of pedagogical approaches can be embodied in other places and benefit so many others.

I think that's a space that we need to privilege and prioritise because it happens so rarely.

Raman Bahra:

So months after departing from the course, I decided to spend a night painting to ponder on a question, Carla Rice had asked Carla Giddings. Do you have a different relationship with the material through art?

As someone who enjoyed the self reflexive portions of our sessions and miss having those moments in current courses, that's why I always find myself coming back to this course.

I came to realise how self reflexivity and painting changed my relationship to material. And the question of my own rethinking of the human after this course, have I really rethought the human and my own understanding of it with my body?

So the piece on the slide, so the image here, but you can actually see it, I call it intersectional assemblages and it illustrates and practises a combination of Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberly Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality and Jasbir Puar's assemblage theory.

And the words there, race, fat, gender, sexuality, disability are differences that are representative of our coalition of different events, encounters and relations along with our own combined sense of vulnerability that I feel as a fat South Asian female body.

And reminiscing on Carla Rice's lecture where we explored this intertwining of intersectionality, self-reflexivity and vulnerability, my own body knowledge became an artful ecology of practise, the research creation.

And the movement of painting and letting my fatness take space on canvas and in the physical sense, I was interacting with inanimate object, the canvas, the material. Just the ideas of how everyone impacted my understanding and my life til this day produces very vitality of its own and assemblages with each layer unfolding.

This is how I felt when the sensory was engaged with the previous pieces Carla had made and shared in the group. I felt that the assemblages of my co-instructors and learners continued to hold presence in my current assemblage.

So our art shared vulnerability, which had this idea of shame and joy. In the sense that there's this pain in being disruptive but being disruptive in that way is freeing as well.

The relation to the material change when we engage with an unmet medical way or form of embodied writing or painting.

It allowed to see how learning itself is a process, we're doing learning. We're not just there to just learn and leave.

We're actually making this a process of our own and it changed in terms of creating more meaningful and tactile relationship between the material and my body.

And I credit this to our seminar. In allowing emotionality within the classroom, learning changed completely.

This painting is symbolic of how I look and feel. A body that is no longer following a coerced knowledge of thinness, whiteness or sexism inside and out. It goes beyond that.

It's leaking through and it's very messy ways and as Mia Mingus says, it's magnificently ugly.

If you would like me to speak on this, we would like a discussion so I can always talk about these paintings on the side with you.

Thomas Sasso:

We think it's important that we offer some recognition. This experience that we had wouldn't be possible without many individuals and many systems in place.

So we want to take a moment to acknowledge the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences and in particular, Dean Chapman for supporting our ability to go to Congress, present this nationally.

This was an opportunity that none of us had expected or thought was possible and the College was so supportive of advancing student voices.

We want to thank this hub for thinking that there is value in sharing this and seeing the value in sharing this.

We wanted to thank the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition for offering this course. This again is not something that is typical in a lot of disciplines, but this department has seen the value through it.

We want to thank everyone at Re-Vision who was a part of this process from the beginning to the end and still continues to be. And so to all of the staff and members, we are immensely grateful and want to thank Dr. Carol Dauda as well.

Carol has been an absolute champion for making this opportunity happen and for seeing this occur. So Carol could not be here today but we are forever grateful to her for the faith that she sees in the students.

Carla Giddings:

So we've taken you on a tour of the course and shared with you the garden that we co-constructed and tended to and that may fit for you.

That may feel exciting or you might have a different vision of what a garden might look like and that's all right too. So we would really love to hear about some different ideas that came forward for you.

If you have questions and we just really love to open it up to what you thought of it and different ideas you want to bring forward.

Thomas Sasso:

I'll come around with a microphone so that we can get your questions in a podcast but it won't get your video. So it's just your voice that we're looking for.

So any comments or questions at this point that we can start to address?

Questioner:

I'm thinking on my own experiences as a grad student and I remember feeling that graduate seminars were completely different from undergraduate courses and that the experience was very different.

And I guess I was wondering during your presentation whether it would be possible to have some of these concepts, this challenge of traditional pedagogy in an undergraduate class and what those challenges would be.

So how could undergraduate students be co-instructors, co-learners? How do we rethink the rigidity of a syllabus?

A lot of the key points you talked about and I wonder if any of that came up in your discussions.

Raman Bahra:

Thank you for that.

I guess I just have a little. I've been trying to take this course into the course I TA for at York, so it's a law and society course.

So I have a lot of students who want to be lawyers but they don't really, they lack in the critical thinking skills and majority of my tutorials are kind of spent on like let's go through the material and how you interpret it in your own way.

Don't regurgitate back what the author is saying. I want to learn about what you have to say and something I've been practising with them is the idea of mind maps and having a really engaging discussion.

So in having these mind maps being created as we go through the main lecture or discussion on the board, they're able to really change the way they think about the material the way they're learning. So that's something that I'm practising with my class.

Carla Giddings:

Thank you for that and thanks for your question.

I'm currently a sessional instructor and I am teaching a third year geography course and so there are elements that I would love to bring in.

Something that we do is at the beginning is sort of setting the stage in terms of different values that we want to bring forward in the course in terms of how we're going to relate with one another and then being able to remind every one of those particular values. We do a lot of small group work to then try and build smaller communities within a larger context.

Something that I'm really grappling with and maybe someone has the answer which would be great, is I find it challenging around, there's a different level of investment I think when you're not part of co-creating a course.

So I design the syllabus and I need to get that in ahead of time and I need to have all the readings ready to go for people.

And so I ask students for feedback about each of the readings. Like if they read it, what they thought about it, if they would suggest a different reading instead.

But by the time that feedback would come in, that would be the next year, which might not be applicable to that different group of students.

So I do find that really challenging around the level of investment that people might have when they know that they are not as much a part of creating what's going into the course.

I mean, I think there are different ways that you can draw students into smaller ways but the foundational like design of the course I would love to hear people's ideas about that.

Thomas Sasso:

I would also may be mention that University of Guelph is really fortunate to have the first year seminar programme and Dr. Jacqueline Murray, Dr. Alastair Summerlee and the way that they designed their first year seminar programmes was very much around students constructing their learning.

I think it was a bit of a different approach with his case study base.

So I think there are ways, but part of that is those seminars are often you nine students up to 18 students. Ours was a class of nine, 10 co-learners and so I think class size is very much a factor in some aspects of vulnerability, authenticity, some of those values but I still think there's lots of ways that we can incorporate different components too.

Hannah Fowlie:

I just want to add to that.

I was a student in the class and I found, I think you really touched upon it and said it so well. It was in the doing, not so much for me it wasn't so much about picking the learnings or co-creating. It was even experiencing in the moment, reading and having conversation and then being able to interpret it in the way that I wanted to.

I mean I wrote a monologue, I wrote poetry and there was a tenderness in the way that it was received but it also really helped me to learn, really, really do the learning and I think you've spoke about that.

It was quite a different feeling to embody the learning that way and to be able to share it.

So I was wondering if students might be able to interpret what they're learning in the way that they see fit for themselves. They don't necessarily have to pick what they're reading, but how they respond to it in a practise based.

I mean, one of the things that I continue to learn from Dr. Rice is that story is theory, art is theory, practise is theory and we don't necessarily need to impose something on it to make it legitimate that the doing of it is where we learn.

Thomas Sasso:

Thank you, Hannah. Other comments, questions?

Raman Bahra:

Sorry, I'm just going to say we do have Hannah's monologue performance. So for anyone interested to see, we have audio clips but we would love for an engaging discussion.

Questioner:

Hi, your class sounds dreamy. Like dreamy like it sounds magical and it's making me think of one magical class I have where someone showed up with food one day and then we started bringing food and then it transformed into this like beautiful thing.

And I was talking with an upper year grad student who had taken that course previously and they're like, oh yeah, our class was nothing like that.

So I'm wondering about year over year, like were you just a particularly dreamy group? Is it what always happened? Is it always magic or was it extra this? Do you know what I mean?

And I know that's more than maybe you can answer but I'm curious if anyone else who's present can reflect.

Meg Wilson:

It's really just as dreamy honestly. Yeah.

What week are we at now? Week nine. Week 10, yeah.

So I would say these kind of experiences are so valuable and as a current student, I'm so grateful for it and I just want to echo a lot of what you said.

It's actually really weird when I wrote my reflection, I did so much of this garden metaphor as well because we're also using the garden and the garden still continues to live.

We have replanted the garden and we'll probably have a different harvest but I totally resonate with all of this kind of metaphor work that you did in those presentations. So like, amazing, great job and thank you so much.

Other course member:

Sure.

So yeah, I think that like it seems to be a trend that it's a very dreamy course, but it's very much built around and built by people in the course. So although we resonate with a lot of stuff that you guys talked about in a lot of ways, our course is very unique as well which is really interesting to see.

I think one of the biggest things is that and that you guys also kind of touched upon is that there isn't that competition or pressure involved in the course. So this is like, I think a course I've been the most engaged in ever and I think the level of engagement of everybody else in the course is just as high.

But the stress and the pressure that you get from being in university and issues around mental health, anxiety, things like that, I don't see that. Like the course kind of spurring that on in a lot of ways.

This course is very involved and I've learned the most from it but it's been the least stressful and I still, at times I'm like, why am I not stressed out? I should be so stressed out about this. We're facilitating next week and I'm not stressed out about it at all because I know that I'm responsible for coming into the course prepared and ready to engage but I know that everybody else there is going to do the same.

So it's really everybody coming together and nobody's gonna look at me and think, why don't you know this? You're not smart enough.

They're going to be like, let me help you along and it's like very iterative, which I think is just the coolest thing. And if everybody could kind of have these experiences in university courses, I think like the university experience would be drastically different.

Carla Rice:

I think something that I'm noticing that's different in this class is like one of the main.

Well in reading people's reflections and in sort of the midterm point, one of the things that I see people grappling with across projects and across entry points is this idea that we need boundary so we need some constraints around what we learn and some kind of structure.

But while that structure also limits what is possible to learn and constraints people's freedoms, it's also the conditions of possibility for learning. So there's this kind of paradox emerging that is really interesting across people's reflections.

Questioner:

I just had a quick comment just to say that it seems like this sort of approach really sets you up for lifelong learning and I guess a followup question would be now currently in your professional day to day, how has your perspectives changed with professional learning and that sort of thing?

Raman Bahra:

Do you want to start with that?

Thomas Sasso:

Sure, I can start.

It's transformational in terms of where I am now and where I was before.

I come from very positivist disciplinary background, that this course completely rejects in a lot of ways in how we think about knowledge, which just my mind.

And so now it's changed how I'm writing my dissertation. It's changing how I teach my courses in management and in psychology.

It's embedding vulnerability with boundaries in all of these other courses in ways that I engage with seeing the students in this room as co-learners and co-instructors and even in, I had a course 550 students and even in that large of a class, I saw all of them as co-instructors, something to teach me and each other.

And so it changed how that was happening.

So I think this course has long implications of ripples in both my practise but also in my own learning and education.

Carla Giddings:

I think that's a really great question.

I think for me, while the ongoing learning, that piece is really important to me. It's something that's been really strong and embedded in me for quite some time. So it's absolutely kept me engaged in that way.

It's also really helped to inform my ideas around critical pedagogy and feel like I think what's been more important for me has been the development of community around these ideas about critical pedagogy and feeling like I have all these amazing people that I can chat with about this and who get it.

So for example, for one of my final assessment pieces, I redesigned some of the components of the course that I'm teaching now and I got feedback from Carla Rice and from Hannah about that.

So I was really interested in starting to decolonize and really thinking through what would that actually mean in this course and that feeling like, oh my gosh, this is a huge undertaking but then also thinking through, well, I have really amazing people around me who were also really interested in this and care about this and passionate and extremely knowledgeable.

Just maintaining these connections and continuing to learn through these connections with others.

I mean Thomas came and gave a guest lecture in the course as well.

I think what's been more important for me has been to continue to foster those really important connections and learning through those experiences and relationships.

Raman Bahra:

I know with me, I come from a different environment as an institution. So it's been a struggle in terms of bringing what I've learned here into my graduate courses or in the course that I TA for.

I definitely miss the vulnerability and the tenderness that we engaged in with one another and we still do to this point. So I try to bring that into the courses I TA for because to me that's my space that I can kind of mould and help students really think of learning as a process rather than something like about and the whole idea of calling in.

So there's practises I've kind of done is that if you cannot speak up during discussion or whatnot, you can always come speak to me later or find yourself writing a reflective piece on one of the readings of the week and not as a way for them to engage with the material. And I also encourage them to think about their own life histories.

A few of my students are racialized and we're talking about racial profiling.

So within that space, I always say if there's anyone who wants to share an experience that you've had, by all means because that is a learning point for everyone no matter where you are in life and in an academic position.

So it's all about learning from one another. It isn't about me. I'm your instructor for today and you must hear me out and follow what I have to say.

It's more like really creating a dialogue with one another on how do we understand this material because everyone has a different way of interpreting material.

And even if they don't have the time to finish a piece of reading, that's okay because reading material that's inaccessible is difficult at times. There's theoretical pieces that I have to read day to day and I have to spend a good week on it before I can completely grasp it.

So I tell them that it's okay if you cannot get it right away because I'm pretty sure I don't at the same moment and I'm also struggling with them.

Thomas Sasso:

So we want to thank everyone for joining us today. We want to save time.

So we're going to wrap this up, invite you to come and look and feel some of these pieces to be able to enjoy whatever food the students haven't taken and to come speak with us if you'd like.

So thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to everyone. Thank you for all who made this possible.

We really do appreciate this.

[End of transcript]