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Practicing an ethic of discomfort as an ethic of care in higher education teaching

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Abstract
In this article, I address the issue of how we can instil pedagogical practices in higher education with ethical and political significance so that the hegemonic rationalist epistemology of educational development is interrupted. To do this, I take up two recent streams of response to this challenge; one focused on *care* and the other on *discomfort*. Illustrating the tensions and possibilities that the notion of the 'ethic of care' and 'ethic of discomfort' may have in discourses of educational development is the focus of this article. In particular, the following three questions structure my discussion: What are the contributions and limits of the ethic of care in exploring issues of educational development in our contemporary globalised world? How can the scope of care and caring teaching be extended through an ethic of discomfort? Finally, what are the implications for educational development of such a reconceptualization of care on the basis of 'pedagogies of discomfort'? To approach these questions I first consider some theoretical conversations regarding caring teaching in (higher) education, pointing out the possibilities as well as some limitations. Then I discuss the reconceptualisation of caring teaching in higher education on the basis of an ethic of discomfort. Following this, I lay out some implications for educational development and teaching in higher education and answer the question of how a reconceptualised ethic of care through discomfort can contribute to reconsidering mainstream perceptions of and pedagogical practices in higher education.

Keywords: ethic of care; ethic of discomfort; pedagogies of discomfort; higher education; educational development

I recently revisited Mark Hobart's edited book from 1993 titled *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*. In the introductory chapter of this collection, Hobart provides an interesting genealogy of the notion of 'development'. Sociologists and anthropologists, Hobart tells us, have long been critical of attempts to articulate development in purely rationalist terms, namely, as a process of growth that is grounded in presuppositions of systematic management of new knowledge and skills. Shifts in higher education in recent years around globalisation, neoliberalism and the discourse of specialised knowledge and high skills remind us of how the notion of 'educational development' itself—understood in general, as the systematic pursuit of the improvement of teaching in higher education—is also

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couched in the language of development[1]. My aim in this paper, however, is not a comprehensive critique of the notion of educational development, but rather to argue for the following: To the extent that "improved teaching" is squeezed into categories of growth and progress grounded in discourses of teacher competences and behaviours—without instilling the practical demands of teaching life with *ethical* and *political* significance—then our efforts will unwittingly be caught up in a blind reproduction of hegemonic forms of educational development and monolithic notions of "improved teaching" in higher education.

Ethical conversations of course are already taking place across many fields in education—educational philosophy, sociology of education, anthropology of education and so on. But this state of affairs does not necessarily ensure that higher education institutions function or teach ethically or responsibly, or even that we can easily determine what that might mean (Popke, 2006). At issue here is a common challenge of ethical thinking and how we bring it to bear upon our educational policies and our universities regarding educational development. As Emmanuel Levinas, one of the most well-known philosophers, said about ethics:

> [E]thics cannot itself legislate for society or produce rules of conduct whereby society might be revolutionized or transformed... [ethics] hardens its skin as soon as we move into the political world...—the world of government, institutions, tribunals, schools, committees and so on. But the norm that must continue to inspire and direct ... [this] order is the ethical norm of the interhuman. (Levinas and Kearney, 1986: 29-30)

In this paper, I want to take up the issue that Levinas highlights and situate it in the context of teaching in higher education, asking specifically how we can instil pedagogical practices with ethical and political significance so that hegemonic and rationalist epistemologies of "educational development" and "improved teaching" are interrupted. To do this, I want to take up two recent streams of response to this challenge; one focused on *care* and the other on *discomfort*. Illustrating the tensions and possibilities that the notion of the "ethic of care" and "ethic of discomfort" may have in discourses of educational development and teaching in higher education is the focus of my paper. My endeavour is situated in the growing field of "scholarship of teaching and learning" in higher education, which is distinguished from other forms of higher educational development in that it involves systematic and critical reflection (e.g. research and scholarship) on the process of teaching

[1] As a reviewer points out, it is important to acknowledge here that the term "educational development" is used in related but very specific ways in higher education. There are, for example, several universities, especially in the UK and Australia, and with slightly differing nomenclature, in South Africa, with educational development units whose task it is to develop or raise awareness about teaching. Such units are often at the mercy of institutional or systemic dynamics and thus approaches to teaching in higher education may be in part constrained by the way the role of the university is understood and by whom, and most particularly by the new controls and mechanisms introduced through policies and such bodies as quality units, audit committees, governments and their legislation. Institutions have become far more involved in scrutinising and monitoring teaching, as well as providing support in the form of training (see Leibowitz and Bozalek 2016). The whole practice of educational development has changed its nature and in its mainstreaming has been partially co-opted into the systemic process, yet its discourse is often at odds with institutional language. The history and positioning, as well as the functioning of educational development, is neither simple nor straightforward within higher education institutions. I am indebted to this anonymous reviewer for suggesting that the above ideas be acknowledged at the outset of this paper.

and learning (Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2016). Through the juxtaposition of caring and discomfort, this paper hopes to make a contribution in theorising an approach to teaching in higher education that critically examines the very real conundrums that face teachers in relation to their own affective responses, and to the power dynamics that govern educational relationships.

In particular, the following three questions structure my discussion: What are the contributions and limits of the ethic of care in exploring issues of educational development and teaching in higher education within our contemporary globalised world? How can the scope of care and caring teaching in higher education be extended through an ethic of discomfort? Finally, what are the implications for educational development and teaching in higher education of such a reconceptualisation of care on the basis of what Megan Boler and I call 'pedagogies of discomfort?' (Boler, 1999; Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas and Boler, 2002; see also, Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012). To approach these questions I first consider some theoretical conversations regarding caring teaching in (higher) education, pointing out the possibilities as well as some limitations. Then I discuss the reconceptualisation of caring teaching in higher education on the basis of an ethic of discomfort. Following this, I lay out some implications for educational development and teaching in higher education and answer the question of how a reconceptualised ethic of care through discomfort can contribute to reconsidering mainstream perceptions of and pedagogical practices in higher education.

Theoretical conversations regarding caring teaching in (higher) education

Literature review

Attention to caring since the 1990s (Dance, 2002; Gilligan, 1988; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Thompson, 1998; Rauner, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999) emphasises its importance in teaching, learning and the student/teacher relationship. Caring, writes Nel Noddings, one of the most recognised and well cited scholars of caring in education, 'is the very bedrock of all successful education' (1992: 27) and caring can transform education at all levels, if it becomes an integral part of teaching and learning. Caring requires teachers to elicit and listen to how students are feeling, to evaluate their purposes, to help them to engage in self-evaluation, and to help them grow as participants in caring relations (Noddings, 1992). This orientation suggests that caring teachers exhibit an array of practices and behaviours underpinned by a relational approach to pedagogy that puts pedagogic bonds at the centre of teaching; this relational approach is translated into specific pedagogic actions such as good planning, rich questioning and dialogue techniques, high levels of aspiration and expectation for all students, and good organisation in class (Walker-Gleaves, 2010).

However, as Walker and Gleaves (2016) point out, most research in the area of caring teaching has almost exclusively focused on elementary and secondary classrooms. Noticeably lacking from the caring literature is research focusing on the application of caring theory in higher education (Larsen, 2015). Although there are very few studies on caring teaching in higher education, such studies repeatedly suggest that caring teachers and caring classroom

environments are critical to student learning and lead to positive learning outcomes. More specifically, these studies suggest that caring teachers in higher education exhibit a number of "exemplifiers" in their practices that include: verbal expressions of care, nonverbal expressions of care, knowing student names, displaying care and concern during office hours, making an effort to get to know students, creating interesting and applicable lessons, addressing student concerns during class, and the existence of a "feeling of care" (Larsen, 2015). Similar exemplifiers of caring teaching in higher education are also outlined by Walker and Gleaves (2016): listening to students, showing empathy, supporting students, giving students appropriate and meaningful praise, having high expectations of work and behaviour, and showing an active concern in students' personal lives.

In their most recent study on caring higher education teachers, Walker and Gleaves (2016) assert that pedagogical care in higher education manifests itself at several different levels and in various ways. These authors suggest a theoretical model from the teachers' perspectives that outlines four different ways in which teachers' caring practices are manifested: a relationship at the centre; compelled to care; caring as resistance; and finally, caring as less than. As they explain:

> The caring teacher as someone who holds relationships at the centre of their encounters with students is accordingly placed at the centre […]. The elements of caring teachers as resistors of discourses, institutional policies, damaging emotional labour, and teachers as unwilling recipients of the impact of being agents of care, surround the relational core, and act as a barrier through which the compulsion to care actively breaks through. (74)

Walker and Gleaves' (2016) integrative model of the caring teacher in the higher education environment highlights two important elements that are theoretically important in exploring caring teaching in higher education: personal impediments that result from confusions over teachers' roles or feelings, and structural impediments these teachers interpret as boundaries in their efforts to operationalise care in a higher education environment. In other words, university caring is a function of personal belief and institutional philosophy. Unlike research on caring teaching in primary and secondary school classrooms that shows how teachers "choose to care", explain Walker and Gleaves (2016), the evidence from caring teaching within higher education suggests that structural and institutional elements seem to feature much more strongly, damaging teachers' efforts to enact caring teaching.

Theoretical issues

As noted in the discussion so far, caring might imply different things to different theorists and is often interpreted through perspectives that ignore the structural (e.g. social, cultural, racial and gender) context in which caring is enacted (Zembylas, Bozalek, and Shefer, 2014). Hamovitch (1995: 3), for example, rejects assumptions about uniformity in the interpretations of caring and raises the question: 'Who is going to be doing the caring, within what context, based on what assumptions about why it is that students are in need of caring?', he asks.

Caring then 'is a symbolic concept charged with multiple political, social and cultural meanings' (McKamey, 2004: 6). In order to disentangle the meanings that scholars use the term 'caring' and the underlying assumptions of such meanings, McKamey (2004) suggests that there are three theories of caring; these theories are briefly discussed below, particularly in relation to their applicability in higher education.

First, the *caring teacher behaviour theory* locates caring in teacher behaviours and asserts that there may be causal relationships between teacher caring behaviours and student outcomes. The underlying assumptions of this theory emphasise that there are a finite, measurable number of caring teacher behaviours; that is, if teachers do certain things (e.g., increasing student-teacher interactions; tutoring; listening to students; asking questions about personal life; recognising that each student is unique), then academic outcomes will be improved including increased student motivation, resiliency, engagement and increased attendance (e.g., see Ferreira and Bosworth, 2001; Larsen, 2015; Teven, 2001; Walker and Gleaves, 2010). However, as Walker and Gleaves (2016) assert, there is not enough evidence yet in higher education whether actually certain behaviours and practices are associated with improved academic outcomes.

Second, *the caring capacity theory* locates caring within the capacities of people and communities; this theory assumes that educational institutions and/or communities have the capacity and the obligation to provide caring contexts for students who lack caring experiences in their everyday lives. As McKamey (2004) explains, this theory is based on the notion that caring capacity is something that can be developed over time, and that it is something which students/teachers/communities can transfer. This theory may be the least relevant to higher education, given the institutional structures outlined earlier. Although the role of teachers in higher education is moving quite rapidly towards a more "teacherly" practice, nevertheless such a role would not be perhaps one seen by most academics as theirs to fulfil. However, there are significant implications of the caring capacity theory for higher education such as, for example, turning our attention to the development of the independent learner—which is central in the higher education context—as a form of caring that is manifested through cultivating certain capacities (e.g. modelling; questioning techniques). This issue is particularly important for higher education, if one juxtaposes different manifestations of caring teaching with neoliberal understandings of "improved teaching" grounded in discourses of teacher competences.

Finally, the *caring difference theory* locates caring within different social groups and explores the differences in the ways that social, ethnic, class, and gender groups express caring. The underlying assumption of this theory is that an '(authentic) caring orientation is (cultural) and informed by race, class, or gender. Denying someone's orientation is denying someone's identity' (McKamey, 2004: 9). This theory addresses issues of power relations and seeks to empower students by attending to their personal lives, their cultural traditions, their gendered orientations and their communities (e.g., see Rauner, 2000; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). The implications of this theory for higher education include the idea that universities, if they really want to care for their students, must reorganise their curricula and teaching practices in order to recognise people's different learning orientations. This is not irrelevant, for example, with recent discussions on "decolonising" the university by

dismantling the various forms of imperialism (e.g. curricula and teaching practices) that perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of peoples (Mbembe, 2015).

Each caring theory has important limitations that need to be acknowledged; these limitations reiterate the notion about the multiplicities in the meaning of caring. The caring teacher behaviour theory is somewhat deterministic in its assertion that students will benefit from conforming to universal, caring norms. In other words, this theory does not account for diverse (cultural) conceptions of caring. There is evidence, for example, that teachers' caring based on white, middle class conceptions of caring can oppress students of colour or diverse cultural background and thus caring might not always be beneficial (Hamovitch, 1995; Mbembe, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). As McKamey (2004) points out, rather than questioning the meanings of different interpretations of caring, studies that are based on caring teacher behaviour theory view different elements of caring as variations of a universal theme (see also Walker and Gleaves, 2016).

The caring capacity theory has limitations in terms of relying on a deficiency model, that is, people and communities are considered deficient in caring and thus their caring capacity has to be cultivated on the basis of lists of competences (McKamey, 2004). Implicit in this assumption is the notion that some interpretations of caring (i.e., those expressed by teachers and their institutions) are superior to those that students carry with them. 'While well intentioned', writes McKamey, 'this assumption of deficiency serves to pathologise students who do not fit into the norms and might have difference expectations of idealized and re-visioned educational, racial, or gendered institutions, and seeks to change students to fit into idealized norms' (20). In an effort to "develop" the habits of caring norms for these students, this account devalues the capacities and qualities of caring that exist within students. This theory also ignores issues of power relations and who decides the social values expressed by teachers and students alike. In other words, this theory, just like the previous one, does not indicate how such a different position vis-à-vis teacher and student might affect how caring or caring pedagogies might be considered.

Finally, the caring difference theory falls into the dichotomy that generally challenges theories of multiculturalism, namely, in focusing on differences, dichotomies between "us" and "them" (e.g., Black/White, male/female) may be perpetuated and the prospects for unity may be unsettled. In other words, while this theory celebrates differences, it re-establishes cultural and social divisions (McKamey, 2004, Zembylas et al., 2014). For example, despite the considerable contribution of relational feminists (e.g., Noddings and Gilligan) these writers have been criticised for assuming that women naturally have such values and ways of thinking (although British literature on caring has taken a different direction from that of relational feminists, see Acker 1995). At the same time that women's ways of knowing are legitimised, the meanings of being a "woman" are limited. In other words, such a conceptualisation risks essentialising women into a static category. Examining this tension is particularly significant especially given claims about the feminisation of higher education in the UK (Morley and Lugg, 2009), and in particular the tensions between pedagogic structures that purport to support and nurture diverse student of bodies, but in doing so have a negative impact on women's research productivity (Walker and Gleaves, 2016).

However, in light of critiques of White feminist conceptions of caring, the theory of caring difference prompts further exploration about the relationships between identity

formation, educational context, and acts and interpretations of caring. Thus, McKamey (2004: 43) suggests a fourth theory, which she calls a *process theory* of caring; this theory raises 'questions about the tensions, relationships, and interconnections between identit(ies), context, and expressions of caring'. Along similar lines, Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006: 413) call this a theory of *critical care*, 'a term that captures the ways in which communities of colour may care about and educate their own, and their intentions in doing so'. While other theories of caring focus on what teachers and educational institutions need to do in terms of caring to improve academic outcomes for students, this theory engages in a deeper exploration of the complexities in the meanings and enactments of caring teaching in different educational institutions. As Walker and Gleaves (2016) also emphasise, it is important for research to be situated in different educational institutions with different academic and social aims and missions, and seek to elucidate the relationship between institutional policies and (caring) teaching practices.

Critical care theory acknowledges the 'politics of caring' (Valenzuela, 1999) in the ways that caring has been defined within particular sociocultural, gendered and economic contexts. Caring is not understood as something necessarily beneficial or something that teachers do largely voluntarily, but caring can produce tensions and conflicts because of the expectations attached to different students (see also Walker and Gleaves 2016). For example, Thompson (1998) criticises the colour-blind assumption of white feminist perceptions on caring that are characterised by low expectations for disenfranchised students, as a result of the pity felt for students' social circumstances. Different expectations about caring inevitably fuel conflict and power struggles between teachers and students who see each other as not caring (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006). As a result, conceptualisations of caring in particular settings of higher education must explicitly challenge the idea that assimilation to dominant notions of caring is a neutral process; instead, educators in universities need to question the ways in which particular sociocultural contexts shape identities and thus influence expressions and interpretations of caring.

The ethic of discomfort and the reconceptualisation of caring teaching in higher education

As it has been emphasised so far, the literature on caring teaching shows that discussions have tended to focus either on preconceived and often deterministic conceptions of what caring is and how to develop it in teaching (Goldstein, 2002) or on atheoretical discussions of the generic importance of 'a teacher being nurturing, supportive, nice, inclusive, responsive, and kind' (Goldstein, 2002: 2). Such conceptions of caring teaching, I would argue, fail to recognise that enacting caring teaching is primarily an *ethical* and *political* practice involving relations that cannot simply be mapped onto existing norms of the ethical and the political.

One of the ethical and political directions that has been suggested as a way to enrich manifestations of caring teaching, both theoretically and practically, is the notion of *discomfort*: that is, how far educators can 'push' their students and use discomfort as a caring pedagogical practice (Berlak, 2004; Boler, 1999, 2004a; Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Faulkner and Crowhurst, 2014; Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009; Mintz, 2013; Zembylas and McGlynn,

2012). Particularly in higher education, there is growing research showing both the benefits and the challenges in utilising discomfort pedagogically (e.g. see Gachago et al., 2013; Leibowitz et al., 2010). From this perspective, caring teaching is more than simply a social relation with ethical dimensions; it can also be the basis for an alternative ethical *and* political standpoint, with implications for how we view traditional notions of educational development and its politics in higher education.

So, let me begin first by saying a few things about the pedagogic value of discomfort itself. In recent years there has been a recurring theme at various levels of education, including higher education, that students' experiences of discomfort as well as pain and suffering are pedagogically valuable in learning about injustice. More specifically, it has been argued that a *pedagogy of discomfort* (Boler, 1999; Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas and Boler, 2002), a term coined by Megan Boler back in 1999, is a teaching practice that can encourage students to move outside their 'comfort zones' and question their 'cherished beliefs and assumptions' (Boler, 1999: 176). This approach is grounded in the assumption that discomforting feelings are important in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and they create openings for individual and social transformation.

Increasing research on the notion of pedagogies of discomfort in higher education shows its potential as an important tool for enriching educational development in alternative ways. An excellent example from South Africa is the work of Brenda Leibowitz and her colleagues in their project on *Community, Self and Identity* (Leibowitz et al., 2012). Leibowitz and her colleagues demonstrate how a pedagogy of discomfort is valuable in uncovering and questioning the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that shape some individual and group privileges (e.g. those of White South African university students) through daily habits and routines (see also Leibowitz et al., 2010). Similarly, Gachago and her colleagues (Gachago et al., 2013) implement a pedagogy of discomfort in the context of teaching on and with difference in a South African pre-service teacher education classroom, combining a digital storytelling process with participatory learning and action techniques. This research shows how through the creation of disruptive moments of sharing and listening openly to each others' stories, students began to critically engage with the unspoken emotional rules and power dynamics governing the classroom and their lives. By closely problematising these emotional habits and routines and their attachments to structural injustices, both Leibowitz and Gachago's research studies suggest that higher education teachers and students in a context in which there have been and still are serious human rights violations can begin to identify the invisible ways in which they comply with dominant ideologies. One could easily argue, then, that pedagogies of discomfort can be manifestations of caring teaching, promoting some sort of ethical and political transformation among students.

On the other hand, there are concerns how far can one go with pedagogies of discomfort until we stop calling them caring teaching practices. In her book *Giving an Account of Oneself,* Judith Butler (2005) follows Adorno in arguing that in the name of ethics people may sometimes harm others, hence the notion of 'ethical violence'. Butler draws attention to the idea that an ethical norm becomes violent insofar as it fails to be appropriated by individuals "in a living way" (Adorno in Butler, 2005: 5) but rather it is imposed in the

name of universal principles (e.g. democracy, justice). Consequently, if a pedagogy of discomfort— in the name of caring—causes harm to students in efforts to help them re-examine their identities and worldviews, then it is unclear in what sense an 'ethic of discomfort' in pedagogy could be nonviolent (I come back to this later).

For the time being, it may be argued that a pedagogy of discomfort entails what Foucault (1994) calls an 'ethic of discomfort', that is, an ethic which embraces discomfort as a point of departure for individual and social transformation. Foucault defines an ethic of discomfort as follows:

> never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions. Never to let them fall peacefully asleep, but also never to believe that a new fact will suffice to overturn them; never to imagine that one can change them like arbitrary axioms, remembering that in order to give them the necessary mobility one must have a distant view, but also look at what is nearby and all around oneself. (448)

The ethic of discomfort that Foucault seeks to introduce into our relation to the present is one that emphasises the proactive and transformative potential of discomfort. As Rabinow and Rose explain, Foucault's intention is to problematise manifestations of discomfort 'without portraying them as acts of bad faith or cowardice, to open a space for movement without slipping into a prophetic posture' (2003: xxvii). Discomfort, then, entails a particular ethic and a turbulent ground on which to critique deeply held assumptions about ourselves and others.

Discomfort, then, entails a particular ethic and a turbulent ground on which to critique deeply held assumptions about ourselves and others. An educator who does this for the benefit of her students' ethics of being and transformation in the world may be considered to act out of caring; besides, it is argued that some discomfort is not only unavoidable but may also be necessary for individual and social transformation (Berlak, 2004). The idea that discomfort is not only inevitable but also ethical (under certain conditions) has been initially suggested by Shoshana Felman (1992) in her work on the role of crisis in listening to stories of suffering and trauma. From her experience teaching about the Holocaust in the classroom, Felman (1992) concluded that when teaching engenders some sort of crisis in the student, and this is done with care about students' well-being, then there is potential for transformation.

Needless to say, this process should not be assumed to be always already transformative, and beyond ethical concerns. In response to arguments about the transformative role of discomfort in the classroom, Rak (2003) raises questions whether creating discomforting emotions is indeed an ethically responsible or caring way to teach. What does it really mean that students are 'not driven crazy' (in Felman's [1992] words) or how far can a teacher push students' discomfort, when they are engaged in critical inquiry of their cherished beliefs—all in the name of caring teaching? Can provisions for 'classroom safety' and caring orientation on behalf of the teacher provide any assurance that students will experience some transformation while not feeling any discomfort?

As Boostrom (1998) suggests, the assertion that classroom space should be safe does not necessarily imply that it should also be free of stress and discomfort. The creation of classroom safety is certainly a goal toward which educators should strive; at its heart is a respect for students' emotions (Leonardo, 2009). But the obligation of educators to guarantee a safe space is an impossible and sanitising task (Boler, 2004b). As Megan Boler and I (Boler and Zembylas, 2003) have argued there are no safe classroom spaces, if one considers that conditions of power and privilege always operate in them. For example, marginalised students' need for safety (i.e. not being dominated) seems incompatible with the privileged students' desire to not be challenged; for privileged students, safety may imply not having their values and beliefs questioned (Davis and Steyn, 2012). Safety cannot be constructed, then, as the absence of discomfort; similarly, experiencing discomfort should not be confused with the absence of safety (Adams, Bell and Griffin 2007). Whether or not educators are able to create safety and/or discomforting conditions, it is important to open up a much needed learning space in the classroom to engage students in critical inquiry regarding their values and beliefs. Safe space, then, is not about the absence of discomfort, but rather it is a way of thinking, feeling and acting that fosters students' critical rigor (Davis and Steyn, 2012).

The above ideas, I argue, help us reconceptualise caring teaching as a pedagogy of discomfort that takes a critical stance towards ideas and practices which fail to consider the emotional consequences of power relations within or beyond the classroom. The process of critical interrogation of how emotions are linked to caring responsibilities in different aspects of social life, including education, identifies and challenges the emotional burden of responsibility allocated to marginalised groups who have to deal with the choices made by privileged groups. In this manner, for example, critical caring teaching in higher education exposes how pervasive some dominant pedagogies of emotion are in universities and the society, that is, how some educational, workplace and societal discourses and practices function in ways that sustain the forms and effects through which hegemony is lived and experienced. Thus critical caring practices in higher education can make an important contribution by showing the link between hegemonic pedagogies of emotion and particular 'regimes' of caring responsibilities; that is, critical caring practices can offer an analysis and action-oriented possibilities that challenge how power relations highlight some emotions and ignores other emotions and their social, ethical, and political consequences.

Implications for educational development and the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education

The reconceptualisation of caring teaching through the ethic of discomfort offers important insights that could serve as a point of departure to reconsider the implications for educational development in higher education, and more specifically for the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. The reader is reminded once again that educational development discourse should not be conflated with that of institutional imperatives and discourses around improving teaching (see Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2016). Academics, challenged by a diminishing sense of academic freedom, are perhaps not quite able to adapt their teaching in more radical ways since they are becoming more governed by larger systemic and societal structures (see Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Thus, this paper focuses on the institutional or

organisational discourses and the conceptualisation of "teaching improvement" in higher education, problematising how an emphasis on improving teaching has become institutionalised (e.g. as a result of a number of globalising factors bearing on institutions).

There are, in particular, three insights that a reconceptualised notion of caring teaching through the ethic of discomfort offers to the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. First, the reconceptualisation of caring teaching as a social and political practice of potential transformation establishes an important conception of ethical responsibility in higher education. Second, the reconceptualisation of caring teaching raises the issue of whether and how a pedagogy of discomfort cultivates an ethics of nonviolence. Finally, the reconceptualisation of caring teaching highlights the value of *critical* and *strategic* pedagogical responses to students, not in the sense of annulling violence altogether (because that would be impossible), but in terms of minimising ethical violence and expanding relationality with vulnerable others. Each of these insights is discussed below in relation to the potential contributions of pedagogy of discomfort as caring teaching in higher education. Needless to say, these contributions are inevitably connected to how different communities understand caring within their sociocultural context; therefore, it may be easier to operationalise these ideas in some disciplinary contexts than in others, given the nature and structure of disciplines within higher education, as well as the constraints imposed by institutional contexts.

First of all, pedagogy of discomfort, as discussed earlier in the paper, is grounded upon the idea that discomforting feelings are valuable in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and thus create openings for individual and social transformation. A major requirement, then, of pedagogy of discomfort as caring teaching is that students and educators are invited to embrace their vulnerability and ambiguity of self and therefore their dependability on others. Pedagogy of discomfort suggests that ethical responsibility toward the other does not mean 'we can be responsible only for that which we have done, that which can be traced to our intentions, our deeds [...] but [we are responsible] by virtue of the relation to the Other that is established at the level of my primary and irreversible susceptibility' (Butler, 2005: 88). In other words, a pedagogy of discomfort not only refuses to disavow this susceptibility, but rather it invokes that the ethical dimensions of social existence demand a view of the subject (i.e. student and educator) as vulnerable to discomfort because discomfort is inescapably tied to others: we always live in discomfort in this sense. Pedagogical discomfort, then, is the feeling of uneasiness as a result of the process of teaching and learning from/with others; insofar as the others "de-centre" us in this process, namely, they challenge my cherished beliefs and assumptions about the world, pedagogical discomfort seems to be a necessary and unavoidable step in pedagogical actions.

In embracing this vulnerability in teaching and learning, a pedagogy of discomfort as caring teaching also acknowledges the limits of knowing the other and the ethical claim that unknowability makes. Given that an important implication of a pedagogy of discomfort is the acceptance of the contingency of students and educators' beliefs about themselves and the world (Boler, 1999; Boler and Zembylas, 2003), the disavowal of mastery and coherence constitutes an important dimension of the struggle for an ethics of nonviolence. It appears,

then, that this dimension of a pedagogy of discomfort counters ethical violence—if violence is the act of reinstalling mastery and unity, according to Butler (2005)—suspending the demand for a coherent self. Yet, the power differential between educator and student generates questions whether the student's vulnerability and exposure to discomfort is fully justified—which brings me to the second insight.

The second insight from a reconceptualised notion of caring teaching through the ethic of discomfort raises the issue of whether pedagogy of discomfort constitutes any form of ethical violence and if such violence can be expunged as part of the struggle for an ethics of nonviolence in caring teaching. To put it differently: if students are essentially "forced" to experience discomfort, pain or suffering as a result of being exposed to "difficult" testimonies, and if they are "pushed" into particular directions in their transformation, do such acts risk doing violence to students? Can such acts be caring, and if yes, in what sense? If students, for instance, are urged to subscribe to empathy and solidarity and to show those in practice, when they cannot appropriate these values at the moment or do not wish to share their discomfort as a result of their struggle, then 'such an assignment may fail to honour the incoherence and opaqueness of the subject' (Ivits, 2009: 41). In particular, how does the teacher, acting out of caring, make sure that marginalised students are not forced to be representative of a homogenised group or privileged students are not forced to make their transformation "evident" in public?

On the one hand, if students are encouraged to transform themselves, when they do not inhabit a stable and coherent self in the first place, then this practice risks inflicting violence because it rejects the unknowability of the subject and may become, as Ivits (2009) rightly suggests, a way for the teacher to govern the subjectivity of the student or a way to urge the student toward confessional responses (in the Foucauldian sense). On the other hand, one may also raise the question of how teachers can disestablish certain kinds of subjectivities in students without inducing any ethical violence at all, when students are already living in normative regimes. As noted earlier, it is problematic to ask marginalised students to claim publicly a position that is supposedly representative of their group, as much as it is problematic to require privileged students to confess their transformation (Davis and Steyn, 2012). The position that all ethics entail some form of violence and thus one may have to choose the least possible or delimiting violence compared to more severe violence (Mills, 2007) can be viewed as part of the ongoing struggle to construct a 'nonviolent ethics' in caring teaching.

Importantly, Butler's evocation of nonviolence does not necessarily imply that violence should never be used, or that it cannot ever function instrumentally to obtain certain effects (Jenkins, 2007). For example, the 'imposition' of democratic principles in a classroom might be an ethically violent act, but one can justify this 'as a delimiting response to another, perhaps more severe violence' (Mills, 2007: 150). Ethics, reiterates Butler (2007: 194), is not a calculation but rather 'something that follows from being addressed and addressable in sustainable ways'. Whether or not to do violence, says Butler—and most important which mode of violence—is an ethical question that emerges only in relation to the other. If ethical responsibility, according to Butler, is taken as an 'experiment in living otherwise', as a mode of existence that disrupts the norms that constrain the possibilities of subjective experience, it still remains the case that the classroom cannot do without norms (cf. Mills, 2007). Butler's

evocation of nonviolence, suggests Jenkins (2007), must be grasped as a practice that intervenes in those dimensions of violence that make it appear as fully justifiable response to injury and as a mode that articulates resistance.

Finally, the third insight from a reconceptualised notion of caring teaching through the ethic of discomfort highlights the value of "critical" and "strategic" responses to suffering and pain. This means that teachers' pedagogical use of discomfort or suffering and pain need to focus on how to minimise the (inevitable) ethical violence exerted on students whenever an ethical norm is introduced; it takes time and effort for students to appropriate violence in a 'living way'. As noted earlier, violence cannot by annulled altogether; therefore, the issue has nothing to do with cleansing or expiating violence from the domain of normativity (Butler 2007). As Butler further explains, the struggle against any form of ethical violence is one which accepts that violence is part of the 'bind' that is nonviolence. Inevitably, one has to accept that pedagogy of discomfort as caring teaching is entangled in some form of ethical violence, therefore, what is important is whether this sort of pedagogy has the capacity or offers the "tools" to minimise violence, *critically* and *strategically*. But what does this mean in pedagogical practice?

One of the basic tenets of a pedagogy of discomfort is that it promotes "active" rather than "passive" empathy (Boler, 1999). Boler argues that empathy does not necessarily lead to awareness of how to engage in action to bring change. Therefore, a critical exposure to discomfort or suffering and pain—that is, one which promotes not only knowledge but also action for change—is needed. But what has not been made very explicit so far is also the importance of evoking empathy as an action that retains a productive quality. Empathy in pedagogy of discomfort has to be "strategic" too, that is, it has to use empathetic emotions in both critical and strategic ways (Lindquist, 2004). "Strategic empathy", according to Lindquist, refers to the willingness of the teacher to make herself strategically sceptic in order to empathise with the troubled knowledge students carry with them, even when this troubled knowledge is disturbing to other students or to the teacher (see also Zembylas, 2012). An example would help clarify this point further.

In his discussion of the pedagogies that might be needed in post-apartheid South Africa, Jansen (2009) points out how all sides—both those who have benefited from apartheid and those who have suffered—carry with them "troubled knowledge" from the past, namely, traumatic knowledge about one's own community involvement during apartheid and its aftermath. According to Jansen, if the teacher takes sides too early in the classroom and dismisses or undervalues the emotional difficulties that some white students may experience, for instance, to adjust to the new situation, then this may not always be a very productive stance. The educator, Jansen emphasises, might need to work sometimes against her own emotions in order to empathise with students' troubled knowledge, even if this means to acknowledge "difficult" or "unacceptable" emotions. This does not imply of course that "anything goes" and that the recklessness of accusation is simply tolerated (Jansen, 2009). However, what is important is to critically engage with students' troubled knowledges and discomforting emotions; taking sides too early may in fact make it impossible to build a constructive point of departure to navigate through and transform these knowledges and emotions. In this example, it is acknowledged that some form of ethical

violence might be exerted in the classroom, but this is done in order to critically disrupt the emotional roots of troubled knowledge. Undermining the emotional roots of troubled knowledge through strategic empathy can be productive both in terms of taking into consideration the ethical implications of discomfort and helping students integrate gradually their troubled views into socially just perspectives (Zembylas, 2012).

To sum up: Caring teaching in higher education is reconceptualised through the theoretical framework of discomfort described here. Caring teaching becomes "critical", when it recognises that caring itself is an act full of tensions and ambivalences; hence, enacting caring teaching is an ethical and political practice involving relations that cannot simply be mapped onto existing norms of the ethical and the political. Pedagogies of discomfort in context of higher education widen the possibilities of critical interventions as critical forms of caring teaching, expanding at the same time the notion of "teaching improvement". Institutional discourses and conceptualisations of "teaching improvement" should not be couched in the discourse and practice of pursuit of blind improvement of teaching in higher education; the whole ethical and political framing of teaching in higher education needs to be reconsidered, if the vision is to make contributions that advance awareness of (in)justice and have social and transformative potential (Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper has considered the ethical implications of engaging in a pedagogy of discomfort, using as a point of departure the critiques of caring teaching. I have argued that a pedagogy of discomfort might always entail some sort of ethical violence and suggested that the turn to a nonviolent ethics might become possible when educators become critical and strategic about ethical violence. These are theoretical dimensions that are desperately needed in educational development and teaching in higher education, if we wish to move away from instrumental and rationalist discourses of what constitutes improved teaching in universities. If, as higher education teachers, our aim is individual and social transformation, then we may need to admit this is impossible without enduring some sort of ethical violence, and thus causing students some discomfort in our pedagogical approaches. To go back to Foucault, the job of the intellectual—the job of the educator at all levels of education, in my view—is 'to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions' (1988: 265). The gesture of even posing ethical and political considerations of care and discomfort in higher education teaching may not oppose the recitation of violence in teaching, however, it may 'begin to mark its undoing' (Jenkins, 2007: 176).

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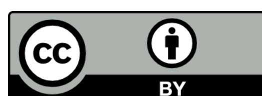

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