

Mutual vulnerability: a key principle in a humanising pedagogy¹ in post-conflict societies

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In this article we argue that education in post-conflict and traumatised societies should be partly underpinned by the principle of 'mutual vulnerability' as central to a humanising pedagogy. We explain the conceptual links between 'reconciliation pedagogies', 'mutual vulnerability' and 'humanising pedagogies' and associate them with the broader framework of critical pedagogy. In the process of applying the principle of 'mutual vulnerability', normative frames and human-default drives are unveiled and interrogated in an educational context of shared moderation, learning and critical self-reflection to create the space for renewed and meaningful teaching and learning. Based on this logic, we decode 'mutual vulnerability' as a humanising pedagogical principle that is central to educational efforts aimed at reconciliation. We finally demonstrate how 'mutual vulnerability' as a humanising pedagogical principle may steer educational practice in post-conflict societies.

Introduction

A cursory glance at the myriad of conflict barometers available to us depicts a world where conflict and its aftermath have become commonplace.² It is therefore not surprising that post-conflict and 'reconciliation' education is emerging as a distinct pedagogical formation, or at least a distinct contextualised, educational effort. This is, however, not a unique phenomenon, given the plethora of educational responses to identifiable societal needs in the form of Education for Democracy, Democracy Education, Civic Education, Citizenship Education, Political Education, Peace Education, International Education, Global Education, World Education, Moral Education, Environmental Education, Development Education, Multicultural Education and Anti-Racism Education. Though there are many more educational formations associated with post-conflict education, the literature points to those listed above as being the most dominant ones (Lynch, Modgil & Modgil, 1992a, 1992b; Lynch, 1992; Tarrow, 1987; Tibbutts & Torney-Purta, 1999; Andreopoulos & Claude, 1997; Tarrow, 1992, 30-31; Shafer, 1987, 192-193; Plan of Action for the World Programme on HRE, March 2005). We believe these educational formations, including 'reconciliation' pedagogies, should be underpinned by a humanising pedagogy and be guided by the principle of 'mutual vulnerability'.

The notions of 'reconciliation pedagogies', 'mutual vulnerability' and 'humanising pedagogies' can be conceptually linked through the following line of reasoning. The pedagogical transaction in post-conflict societies presupposes a focus on reconciliation processes and presumes the need for pedagogies that can respond to the consequences of conflict and the factors that gave rise to the conflict in the first instance. Pedagogies of this nature aim "to heal the effects of traumatic events that produce guilt, anxiety, resentment and injustice that persist and distort individual and national well-being" (Hattam, 2004, 1). An array of conflicting differences, power-relations, embedded interests, fears and anxieties that intersect with educational processes in a variety of ways are assumed within reconciliation pedagogies. As processes, these differences, interests, power relations and concomitant elements are resident within, between and amongst students, educators and other role-players and stakeholders in education. As part of the meaning-making machinery, differences, interests and power relations are constitutive elements of cultural and normative frames. We refer to cultural and normative frames here as the "totality of background meanings, norms, discourses, and practices" to "which the self orients itself" (Odysseos: 2004, 5-6). These frames, in turn, construct the contextualised meanings of all the fears, anxieties, hopes, entitlements, and expectations

that are played out in educational settings.

Disrupting these frames in a moderated educational setting is the primary objective of the employment of the principle of 'mutual vulnerability'. Kwenda (2003, 69-70) locates the notion of 'mutual vulnerability' in the broader context of cultural injustice and cultural justice.

Cultural injustice occurs when some people are forced, by coercion or persuasion, to submit to the burdensome condition of suspending — or more permanently surrendering — what they naturally take for granted, and then begin to depend on what someone else takes for granted. The reality is that substitution of what is taken for granted is seldom adequate. This means that, in reality, the subjugated person has no linguistic or cultural 'default drive', that critical minimum of ways, customs, manners, gestures and postures that facilitate uninhibited, unself-conscious action ... By cultural justice, we mean that the burden of constant self-consciousness must be shared or, at the very least, recognised and, where possible, rewarded. The sharing part is very important. For it is only in the mutual vulnerability that this entails that the meaning of intimacy and reciprocity in community can be discovered. It is in this sharing that, on the one hand, cultural diffidence is transcended and, on the other, cultural arrogance overcome.

The educational interpretation of Kwenda's analysis suggests that the actors who operate from within non-dominant or non-normative frames are mostly required to forfeit recourse to their own 'default' or meaning-making frames in an asymmetrical power-relation with their interlocutors. This asymmetrical power-relation is for most part dominant within educational settings and places the responsibility for constant self-consciousness on the carriers of non-normative frames. 'Mutual vulnerability' dictates that this responsibility, this burden, be shared. Sharing in this way is the incubator of 'mutual vulnerability', and the educational possibility of authentic learning that rests within the power of reclaiming vulnerability, is infinitely renewed. This renewal includes the viable prospect of the mutual re-creation of all those engaged within the pedagogical endeavour.

Certainly, the anxieties and educational risks associated with 'mutual vulnerability' would require careful consideration of and deliberation on the pedagogical transaction. Its potential, however, far outweighs these risks. 'Mutual vulnerability' contends that enhanced teaching and learning is possible by first confronting and then transcending the adversarial and polemical logic of differentiated, asymmetrical frames of meaning and actions. Central to 'mutual vulnerability' is the pedagogical process that allows teachers and other authority figures to open up and render their frames vulnerable for learners and students to risk their full participation in the pedagogical transaction. Through this full participation other frames and default-drives are dislodged which in turn makes them accessible to critical reflection and moderation through educationally driven processes.

Power, in this process, is subjected to a premeditated and intended educational objective of becoming naked and vulnerable so that, in Foucault's words, the unequal relations of power "can be traced down to its material functioning" (Dreyfus & Rabinow on Foucault, 1982, 186) and be confronted. For instance, in an interesting psychological analysis, Fiske (1995, 438-456) describes how power encourages stereotyping and stereotyping maintains power. In this case, applying the principle of 'mutual vulnerability' within an educational context will reveal the material functioning of how power encourages and is maintained by stereotyping. Disclosing the material functioning of power is of crucial pedagogical interest since the success of power is "proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Dreyfus & Rabinow on Foucault, 1982, 134). Through 'mutual vulnerability' the influence of power can be curbed by this process of disclosure.

Educational settings are almost genetically predisposed to stereotyping as a building block of meaning-making frames.³ For the most part these frames are in turn linked to deficit education models.⁴ Given the rootedness of these frames, the principle of 'mutual vulnerability' has to be buttressed by a broader humanising pedagogy that simultaneously works against the dominance of deficit models on the one hand, and confronts systemic injustices on the other. This duality is captured more powerfully by McLaren and Jaramillo, quoted in Cibils and Pruyn (2007, 10-11), when they proposed that we "articulate a humanizing critical pedagogy that is rooted in the cultural,

spiritual and linguistic dimensions of everyday life; but a humanizing pedagogy [that] is also grounded in a critique of the material social relations and practices associated with contemporary capitalist formations". A humanising pedagogy is thus directed by compassion, care, respect and love for students and teachers, and their identities, histories and experiences.

We are exploring the conceptual links between 'reconciliation pedagogies,' 'mutual vulnerability' and 'humanising pedagogies' throughout this article. For now we turn our analysis to 'power' 'discourse', and 'meaning-making frames' to further strengthen these conceptual links.

Power, discourse and meaning-making frames

The conceptual logic of 'humanising pedagogies' has its roots in the work of Freire (1972) who presented a pedagogy based on a relationship of trust between teachers and students engaged in praxis, reflection and action (Parker-Rees & Willan, 2006,62). Freire's work spans a lifetime of pedagogical and political engagements that witnessed the intensification of the educational, political and societal challenges with which he grappled. Apart from various expressions of social justice concerns in education, these challenges now reveal themselves in disturbing trends in modern day political practice and limitations to democracy, policy sadism, administrative violence, perpetual human conflicts, environmental enmity and hostility towards social and economic justice. They have their origins in "the extraordinary potential for violence, injustice and inhumanity as witnessed by the history of the twentieth century" (Cronin & Pensky, 2006, viii). These challenges are further linked to the tendency of market-driven globalization "to undermine social solidarity within constitutional democracies and to aggravate global injustice and insecurity, not to mention environmental destruction and climate change" (*ibid.*). The deepening of human conflict, global poverty and inequality as expressions of predatory capitalism and consumerism became the representative portrait of these conflicts, contestations and challenges.

Extending Fanon's (Kiros, 2006, 219) argument that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" to the realm of modern-day post conflict societies, the argument could be made that the potentialities of various forms of violence⁵ is permanently resident in post-conflict educational contexts, and probably in all other contexts. Educational capabilities within post-conflict environments are constructed by a complex set of factors that generally relate to the varied political, socio-economic and cultural frames through which a diverse group of individuals and collectives try to mediate their own pedagogical engagement in a troubled context that is characterized by asymmetrical power-relations. This is most notable by the fact that students and educators within these contexts carry diverse sets of meaning-making frames and histories from the past that intersect with their expectations of the present and their vision for the future. These frames and histories cart and convey differentiated epistemic currencies which locate them at different levels within an epistemic hierarchy. The location within this hierarchy determines the nature and level of the logical function of each of the frames within pedagogical transactions. It follows that the epistemic currencies, that underpin these frames, assigned them into hierarchical positions on the basis of their normative values. The positions of these frames within this hierarchy determine their power within the educational discourse.

There are two useful conceptual tools for reflecting on meaning-making frames and the power relations within and between them. One of these is Foucault's and Laclau and Mouffe's work on 'discourse'. If the functions of discourse, in a Foucauldian sense, are extended to meaning-making frames, then these frames, like discourses "embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations" and they "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Ball, 1990, 2). Laclau and Mouffe (Howarth, 2002, 104) again assert the primacy of politics within 'discourse' in their attempt to construct a political theory of discourse. Their (*ibid.*) argument is that

systems of social relations, which are understood as articulated sets of discourses, are always political constructions involving the construction of social antagonisms and the exercise of power.

Social antagonisms “occur because social agents are unable to attain their identities (and therefore their interests)” (*ibid.*, 105). These identities are created and mediated through meaning-making frames and the dominance of one frame over another invariably leads to constraints in attaining the identities of those who operate within the dominated frame. ‘Mutual vulnerability’ has, as one objective, the development of insights in how the exercise of the discursive power of dominant meaning-making frames contributes to the non-attainment of the identities of those who are subjugated. The consequence of the non-attainment of identities logically results in the increase of social antagonisms, conflict and violence.

A second set of conceptual tools can be derived from the insights of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s hermeneutics where “understanding is grasped as our way of being-in-the-world” (Holub, 1991, 52). This implies that human beings create, adapt to and become conversant with their own meaning-making frames as an ontological⁶ necessity of “being-in-the-world”. ‘Ontological’ here simply refers to the essence or nature of being or to conditions of being and human existence. For human beings the world is not independent of their existence, but a web of meaning-making systems and practices within which they actively take part. Different groups of people or individuals are introduced to and socialised into making particular choices around meaning-making frames based on their histories, culture, economic position, beliefs, political orientation, etc. Frames become normative as a result of their discursive power and domination in relation to sub-ordinate frames and their links to the dominant economic, social, cultural and political discourse. This unequal power-relation is methodically sustained through social practices and discourses themselves.

The implications of ‘power’, ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘social antagonisms’ have wide-ranging implications for a humanizing pedagogy and the principle of ‘mutual vulnerability’. Since communication is central to education, and “communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons” (Foucault, 1994, 339), power is permanently resident within the pedagogical transaction. And again, because ‘meaning-making frames’ are linked to ‘being-in-the-world’, disrupting them presupposes temporary ontological dislocations. This means that education should result in the momentary disconnection between human beings and their meaning-making frames to create the space of critical self-reflection. However, in many instances normative meaning-making frames act out their power in concurrence with their own ontological necessity to avoid dislocation. This contributes to the conditions for the emergence and the sustenance of social antagonisms, conflict and violence.

Confronting the embedded nature of frames and power, which probably contributed to the conflicts in the first place, would require innovative educational processes of a special kind in a post-conflict educational context. We believe that the principle of ‘mutual vulnerability’ may provide one such option available to us. Still, the pedagogical challenge is difficult since temporary ontological and power disruptions that will allow for shifts in meaning-making frames would require educators and education authority figures to make the functioning of their power unfamiliar to themselves. Stated differently, educators and education authority figures should comprehend how their own power functions in the processes of entrenching or disrupting meaning-making frames. This necessary self-awareness is a prerequisite for ‘humanising pedagogies’. Further, to expect human beings to temporarily unmoor themselves from the meaning-making frames that certify their “being-in-the-world” would entail carefully mediated educational processes. These processes would include a serious consideration of the implications and possible consequences of ‘mutual vulnerability’ and an appreciation of the educational approaches required to deal with it.

Since the principle of ‘mutual vulnerability’ itself is rooted in a broader context of what can be regarded as critical pedagogy, radical pedagogy or liberationist pedagogy, the next section deals with its location within these frameworks as a way to set the backdrop for a later discussion on its possible employment in the pedagogical transaction in post-conflict societies.

Towards a critical humanising pedagogy

Critical or radical pedagogy is not easy to define and, in fact, no generic definition can be applied

to the term. Though characterised by a multiplicity of approaches, critical pedagogy does exhibit a particular orientation to educational theory and practice that is interwoven with this array of approaches. Exploring the historical context of critical theory, Giroux and Freire (1986, xiii) argue that early forms of radical educational theorising almost exclusively focused on the reproductive link between schooling and work. Three sets of theories of reproduction are identifiable.⁷ Firstly, the economic-reproductive model most commonly associated with Bowles and Gintis (1976; 1988) and Althusser (1971) which focuses on the relationship between schooling and the economy. Secondly, the cultural-reproductive model of Pierre Bourdieu which focuses on the “mediating role of culture in reproducing class societies” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986, 79). Thirdly, the hegemonic-state reproductive model based on the work of Gramsci that directs its attention to the relationship “between the state and capitalism and ... the state and schooling”. These theories, though providing valuable insights, have been criticised for their deterministic view of ideological domination, lack of reflection on race and gender, the downplaying of human agency, concentration on overt resistance, limited attention given to the psychological processes that “reproduces itself in the psyche of human beings” (*ibid.*, 104), failure to move beyond the language of critique (Giroux & Freire, 1986, xiii) and their contention that all forms of oppressions are necessarily class related (*ibid.*, xiii).

In response to these shortcomings, Giroux and Freire (*ibid.*, xiv-xvi) put forward the central positions of a critical pedagogy as follows. Firstly, the scope of pedagogical practices resides in the broader notion of education. Not only schooling, but the construction of meaning and social practices in popular culture, mass media, trade unions, the family and other structures are all subjected to pedagogical engagement and political analysis. Secondly, the voice, subjectivity, and experiences of subordinate groups are emphasised. Thirdly, for Critical Pedagogy experiences are historical and constructed by gender, race and class “specific ideologies” that interplay with systems of power “that point to both the persistence of oppressive structures and ideologies and the possibilities for struggle and social change”. Fourthly, theories of psychoanalysis and feminism employed within critical pedagogy point to cultural politics as inclusive of everyday experiences, interest, desires and needs which broaden critical pedagogy’s interest in various forms of oppression and emancipation. Fifthly, counter-hegemonic practices so crucial to the agenda of emancipation are identified through historical inquiry that challenges dominant ideologies and practices.

McLaren (1989, 159-191) also provides a useful overview of the foundational principles and major concepts of critical pedagogy. The principles include the relationship between schools and politics, schooling as cultural politics, the interplay between schools and economics and the centrality of social empowerment; the historicity of curriculum as experience and curriculum as constituted by interests. For Leistyna and Woodrum (1999, 3) “critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the kinds of educational theories and practices that encourage both students and teachers to develop an understanding of the interconnecting relationship among ideology, power and culture”. The institutional forms and practices which people on one hand constitute through their actions are on the other hand influential in determining their lived experiences in an interconnecting web of ideology and power relations which ultimately shape culture. In this sense culture partially represents all forms and levels of vulnerability created by asymmetric power relations in terms of gender, class, race, age, HIV&AIDS status, sexual orientation and the other categories of discrimination. These arrangements are hegemonic in that they present the dominant framework through which a social reality that is masked by ideology is engaged. Schools and other educational institutions and pedagogical practices, such as the electronic media, produce a certain typology of knowledge and configure educational practices in particular modes through which this culture is produced and historically developed. It is praxis and critical reflection, to which these patterns are exposed, that ultimately lead to conscientization.

Freire, in his *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992, 9), captures one of the primary tasks of a progressive educator as unveiling “opportunities of hope”. In the context of critical theory, “opportunities of hope” reside within contradictions that can only be exposed by a reflexive dialectic. This is necessary, according to Freire (1993, xi), because we have to “recognize multiple constructions of power

and authority in a society riven by inequalities [and therefore] there must be a growing recognition of new forms of subjectivity and new strategies of emancipatory praxis which are derived from non-western settings ...” Furthermore, a strategy to change the structures of power radically requires critical pedagogy to build networks across differences since the inability to do so only “serves to preserve the structures of domination and exploitation” (Darder, 2002, 27).

Freire (1972) linked humanism and critical pedagogy as far back as his treatise on the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. However, in the light of the above salient features of critical pedagogy, the deeper theoretical argument to link critical and humanising pedagogies with one another requires a careful consideration of humanism, humanistic psychology and a good dose of African philosophical principles. It would be presumptuous to present summaries of these rich and diverse intellectual traditions. We rather highlight the following lines of reasoning as a way to move towards a critical humanising pedagogy within which ‘mutual vulnerability’ can find expression as an educational principle.

Firstly, critical pedagogy’s revolutionary praxis is embedded in a Marxist interpretation of the reproduction of systemic inequalities and capitalist accumulation that imprison human beings within their own inhumanity.⁸ The dominant presentation of Marxism as focusing on structures and systems is challenged by Marxist Humanists who argue that the humanist or psycho-social dimensions of Marxism have been neglected, even in its educational form. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005, 58) for instance maintain that for Marxist educationalists critical pedagogy is “intimately linked to the following questions: What does it mean to be human? How can we live humanely? What actions or steps must be taken to be able to live humanely?” Marxist Humanism thus provides one theoretical possibility of moving towards a critical humanising pedagogy.

Secondly, Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist and psychologist who was, amongst many other portfolios, a renowned African Marxist Humanist⁹ with Leopold Senghor, argued that the “human self is given a personality through the act of recognition” (Kiros, 2006, 217). He was deeply aware of the psycho-social dimensions of oppression and its dehumanizing power and though he argued for the instrumental value of “counter-violence” in opposing the violence of colonization, he did so with the aim of presenting the logical possibility of the emergence of a “universal humanistic consciousness” (*ibid.*, 223). Based on his philosophical and psychological insights, his ultimate call was for a “new humanism” that allows for a “language of hope and political action” to take root to conquer “disease, hunger and poverty on the African soil” (*ibid.*, 223). A critical humanising pedagogy for Fanon would certainly have been one that merges the focus on systemic violence and structural inequalities with unlocking the humanistic potential of human beings. The same could be said for Steve Biko, a Fanonian whose main concern was the “existential struggles which shape human, especially African, existence (More, 2006, 213)”. On this score a humanising pedagogy is a radical pedagogy, not a “soft” one, and its humanising interest is linked to focusing on both structural and psycho-social dimensions of human suffering, and human liberation.

Fanon’s arguments, which were first published between 1952 and 1961 without a specified educational interpretation, have in part found contemporary expression in educational thinking on “merging radical pedagogy with humanist psychology” and the rise of a pseudo-psychological therapeutic ethos in education” (Ecclestone, 2003, 3-4). This is linked to the wider concerns for people’s psychological and emotional wellness which in part has been translated into the need for a ‘humanising pedagogy’ in an educational context. However, this tendency might seem to displace the central objectives of radical pedagogy related to countering systemic inequalities (*ibid.*, 4) which is in dissonance with our broader argument in this article. We contend that a psycho-social and humanist alignment of critical pedagogy acknowledges the trauma-ridden and dehumanising contexts within which education plays itself out. We further maintain that it is precisely this acknowledgement and the pedagogical responses to it that unlocks its radical potentialities in an infinite number of ways to respond to structural and systemic inequalities, whilst at the same time it contributes to a humanising ethos within education. It is the interplay between humanist and structural concerns that provides a humanising pedagogy with infinite educational potential.

Thirdly, African philosophy puts forward the “normative conception of a person” as rooted within group solidarity (Menkiti, 2006, 324). Though there are varied conceptions of personhood in African cultures, the notion that “I am because we are” is an ontological one. This communalistic conception does not displace the recognition of individual human beings, since the ‘we’ can only exist through acknowledging the ‘I’ (*ibid.*, 338). However, the “ontological priority of the collective”, which is dependent on “the initiatives and actions of individual persons” (*ibid.*), provides a logic that can inform an emerging understanding of the relationship between ‘mutual vulnerability and reconciliation pedagogy’.

It is the “ontological priority of the collective” (*ibid.*) that substantiates the principle of ‘mutual vulnerability’ as a pedagogical concern because cultural and normative frames are, at least to a certain extent, collectivised notions and therefore already shared within particular groups and by individuals. Cultural and normative frames are the subjects of ‘mutual vulnerability’ and questioning and disrupting these frames its objective. However, it is when different normative frames interplay with one another that the “the burden of constant self-consciousness must be shared” (Kwenda, 2003, 70) amongst these different normative frames as would be the case in the classrooms of post-conflict societies. For reconciliation pedagogies to take root in these educational settings, the conditions that create the possibility for an equalising discourse between different normative frames are prerequisites. ‘Mutual vulnerability’, on this score, is both a principle and a condition.

Mutual vulnerability as a key humanising pedagogical principle

The notion of ‘mutual vulnerability’ has been predominantly employed in a development and human security context that explores the interdependence between human beings and between them and their environment (Nef, 1995; Fraser, Mabee & Slaymaker, 2003). More recently and since the publication of Kwenda’s (2003) essay titled *Cultural Justice: the pathway to reconciliation* and social cohesion, the notion has come to be employed in theological, cultural, philosophical and educational studies (Naude & Naude, 2005; Odora-Hoppers, 2008).

The aim of our argument is to develop ‘mutual vulnerability’ into an embedded pedagogical principle that can disrupt and rupture normative frames and at the same time spread the burden of self-consciousness more substantively equal¹⁰ within an educational engagement. We believe that this process is tied to epistemic and cultural justice and as such houses infinite opportunities for renewed pedagogical transactions. We are forwarding the following conceptual possibilities for ‘mutual vulnerability’ to be understood and implemented as a pedagogical principle.

Firstly, the notion of ‘mutual vulnerability’ must be understood not as an equalisation of vulnerability, but as the re-creation of a totally new set of vulnerabilities — suggesting that true scholars and educators find their power not in their ‘knowing’ but in their ability to transcend the power they are exercising. As Freire (1970, 66) suggests, ‘those who work for liberation must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed — dependence that is the fruit of the concrete situation of domination which surrounds them and which engendered their unauthentic view of the world. Using their dependence to create still greater dependence is an oppressor’s tactic. The notion of mutual vulnerability in essence is both an acknowledgement and a confrontation with the social concentration of vulnerability within subjugated groups in the ways in which education has historically been set-up.

Secondly, ‘vulnerability’ does not mean lack of agency. In fact, the ‘mutual vulnerability’ suggested in this article is the opposite of powerlessness, but suggests the establishment of a ‘power’ that emerges from solidarity over and above a power that is somehow provided through a social norm of power distribution, based on academic ritual, social biases or educational organisation and arrangement. Freire (1970, 69) again helps us by suggesting that truly liberating education must be based on the practice of ‘co-intentional’ pedagogy, whereby teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this

knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as the permanent re-creators thereof.

Thirdly, there is a link between the notions of 'mutual vulnerability' and Habermas's model of communicative rationality which is "incarnated in mutual understanding of language [and] in practices of reciprocal recognition" (Kompridis, 1999, 122). Communicative rationality is not aimed at producing a deficient 'other' through what it "objectifies, excludes and represses" (*ibid.*), which are more or less the consequences of most of our conventional pedagogical engagements. Educators will do well by being aware of the inclination of education to produce a deficient 'other' and how their own pedagogical practices and organisation of teaching and learning contribute to it. 'Mutual vulnerability' can powerfully contribute to this self-awareness as a crucial first step towards a 'humanising pedagogy'.

Fourthly, in pedagogical terms Kwenda's (2003) notion of a shared burden of constant self-consciousness is the starting point for the principle of 'mutual vulnerability' to emerge as rooted in an understanding of an ontological collective¹¹ that elevates the burden of constant self-consciousness to an ethical imperative. Further, the burden of constant self-consciousness and of deep self-awareness is an ethical responsibility within educational processes. Educators only become humanising pedagogical agents through this critical self-consciousness. It is an imperative that becomes even more significant because being-in-the-world as an ontological collective requires a critical engagement with individual and collective meaning-making frames. As educators and authority figures open up their meaning-making frames to become vulnerable, they simultaneously question the collective cultural, economic and political rooting of those frames. And as their students risk their full participation in this process based on the vulnerability of 'authority', they too become inclusive contributors in the process of 'mutual vulnerability'. In this sense the notion of 'mutual vulnerability' calls for a more 'authentic exchange' of knowledge between different sets of meaning-making frames.

Fifthly, 'mutual vulnerability' provides a new grammar for pedagogical engagement so that the conceptual spaces are opened up and the experiences of the marginalised, the traumatised and the distressed and the micro-politics of peoples' struggle for survival become its central pre-occupation. 'Mutual vulnerability' will infinitely enhance the 'experiential', 'participatory' and 'emancipatory' interests of education. The experiences that make up the experiential will find participatory expression through 'mutual vulnerability' because the frames of its interlocutor are made vulnerable and therefore hospitable to moderation.

Sixthly, pedagogy is a political activity and through employing the principle of 'mutual vulnerability' we are able to acknowledge that certain pedagogical alignments and calibrations further an agenda of critical social justice and empowerment, and understand how other alignments militate against such possibilities. 'Mutual vulnerability', because it presupposes vulnerability, invariably makes the familiar unfamiliar as opposed to polemics that render frames familiar and thus hidden. Stated differently, the mechanics of meaning-making frames will remain hidden because its workings are not open or unfamiliar to its users. It is in vulnerability that the workings of our own frames can be made known to us, whether or not these frames have a political, religious, economic or cultural character. Thus, there is no contradiction in the statement that we should 'learn to know that which is familiar to us'. Knowing in this way will permit us to see and understand the politics of pedagogy and the political nature of education and help us to make informed choices about our pedagogical practices. This awareness is crucial to a humanising pedagogy because to know how to know yourself is a prerequisite for us to attempt to know how to know our students, our colleagues and other interlocutors.

Conclusion

The challenges for pedagogy, thrown up by the complexities of educational contexts, require a constant consideration of new and renewed conceptual tools to respond to these challenges. These

contexts range from post-conflict circumstances to educational environments characterised by various forms of violence, poverty and discrimination. In this article we argue that ‘mutual vulnerability’ may be regarded as one such conceptual and practical tool. However, we are acutely aware that the principle of ‘mutual vulnerability’ needs to be rooted in broader educational theoretical frameworks to contribute to its pedagogical value. For this reason we firstly tried to establish the link between ‘reconciliation pedagogies’, ‘mutual vulnerability’ and ‘humanising pedagogies’ to ground them within a conceptual cycle.

We, secondly, seek to frame ‘mutual vulnerability’ as linked to a critical humanising pedagogy to advance its dual purpose of humanising the pedagogical endeavour whilst at the same time relating the educational process to challenging structurally anchored inequalities.

We, thirdly, attempted to develop the notion of ‘mutual vulnerability’ as a pedagogical principle with the hope that this principle might be taken up in the way that we do education.

The arguments forwarded in this article are tentative conceptual engagements in the complex world of education in post-conflict, unequal and poverty-ridden societies. These engagements may or may not have wider applicability in educational settings. However, what we hope for is that the pedagogical logic presented here may find material expression in the teaching and learning experiences of schools and universities.

Notes

1. The concept and call for ‘A Humanising Pedagogy’ was introduced at the University of Fort Hare in 2006 by the Dean of Education, Denise Zinn, one of the authors of this article. The concept has a familiar resonance, rooted as it is in democratic and critical orientations to pedagogy and education, but acknowledgement of the phrase is given here to Bartolome (1994) from an article published in the Harvard Educational Review entitled: “*Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy*”.
2. See report from the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (2006).
3. This can be validated by a cursory look at research on racism, discrimination and diversity in schools and universities.
4. See Bartolome (1994). This model has the longest history (more than three centuries) of any model discussed in the education literature. It is also referred to as the ‘social pathology model’ or the ‘cultural deprivation’ model.
5. See Odora-Hoppers (2008). The analysis of the nature of violence at a cosmological plane therefore reveals three main types of violence. Direct violence, often expressed as military power, usually kills quickly, and is intended to do so. Structural violence, often expressed as economic power, kills slowly, for instance, by corroding the basis for self-reliance and aggravating vulnerability. Cultural/epistemic violence — often expressed as cultural power, legitimizes the other two types of power, finding language and telling those who wield power that they have a right to do so, even a duty — for instance, because the victims of direct and/or structural power are pagans, savages, atheists, kulaks, and communists (Odora-Hoppers, 1998).
6. ‘Ontology’ in philosophy is the study of the nature of being, existence or reality in general, as well as of the basic categories of being and their relations. Traditionally listed as a part of the major branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, ontology deals with questions concerning what entities exist or can be said to exist, and how such entities can be grouped, related within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology>, accessed 23 January 2009).
7. See Aronowitz & Giroux (1986).
8. See McLaren & Farahmandpur, (2005, 58).
9. See <http://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/index.htm>. Accessed 1 December 2008.
10. Though the concept of equality is predominantly framed within a legal discourse, the legal distinction between formal and substantive equality is useful to understand that ‘mutual vulnerability’, given embedded power relations, does not refer to an ‘equalization of vulnerabilities’. “Formal equality seeks to treat all individuals, notwithstanding their differences, the same. It starts from the flawed premise that fairness simply requires everyone to be treated the same as everyone is competing on the same terms and on the same terrain. Substantive equality, on the other hand, recognizes that past patterns of discrimination have resulted in some segments of the community being disempowered and unable to compete

and interact on an equal footing with other segments of the society. Achieving equality within this reality means that certain parts of the community may have to be treated differently to other parts. This is not unfair discrimination as there is a rational and reasonable basis for this difference in treatment” (<http://www.library.und.ac.za/chapter%25204-quality>, accessed 23 January 2009).

11. The notion of ‘mutual vulnerability’ may be in congruence with the postmodernist emphasis on the local and the particular insofar as this vulnerability is personalised (see Thompson & Thompson, undated). Without undermining the importance of the individual, we are however of the opinion that the notion of ‘mutual vulnerability’ is better suited as a response aimed at epistemic justice which in turn is focused on making collective normative and cultural frames vulnerable.

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