

Dignity in the University World.

Upholding care and connection by resisting neo-liberalism in academia

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Abstract

In this paper, the author explores the concept of dignity, including equal dignity, and cites from a number of studies and examples of the diminishment of dignity in university settings, often related to neo-liberalism. Recent decades have brought a shift in focus from educational processes, and aspirations, to the financial management of the North American university. This writing explores the context of dignity as a social interactional force that uplifts humans and offers a sense of worthiness and belonging in the environment.

Any person or institution that tries to rob me of my dignity will lose

Nelson Mandela (2012, p. 34)

Dignity is central to healthy social interaction. It offers the individual a sense of care, respect, and well-being. In working with my colleagues at the Centre for Response-Based Practice, we study and teach about the reparative role of equal dignity, particularly for those who have been oppressed, misrepresented, humiliated or harmed by violence. Being treated with dignity, in interpersonal, public and social service settings, is crucial for people in recovery from forms of violence. This is also true for the citizens of that society, or workplace. Kind, effective and helpful treatment has been referred to as the experiencing of "positive social responses" (Andrews et al., 2003). When I speak of dignity, I am referring to the concept of 'equal dignity', coined by my colleague Allan Wade. This term specifies a kind of dignity that reasserts social equity, does not perpetuate social inequities and the power of the ruling class (Allan Wade, personal communication, 12 June 2026). The notion of "equal dignity" means that "all persons possess inherent worth and dignity and should be treated accordingly.

Equal dignity does not entail obedient subjugation, loyalty or supplication. The following Ethiopian proverb relates a rejection of 'dignity within hierarchy' that uplifts a few and enslaves many: "When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts" (Greene, 1998).

In my role as a professor at Concordia University in Tiohtià: ke/Montreal, I hold a research chair in Indigenous Healing Knowledges. I am a co-founder and co-director of the Centre for Response-Based Practice, an organization that emphasizes the upholding of dignity for individuals who have been harmed. My relationship between the university, my research, practice and therapeutic work position me as an advocate for “spaces of dignity” in both academic and practice settings. My worldview is informed by a number of ways of seeing the world, including response-based practice as well as in my Metis culture. Traditionally, the Metis held roles as mediators in settings such as the fur trade, between various cultural groups. In Canada, there are three Indigenous groups recognized in the constitution. These are the First Nations, the Inuit and the Metis. Metis people have their roots on the prairies as descendants from First Nations and European (English, Scottish, Irish, French) fur traders in the 17th century. I straddle multiple worlds and try to integrate the aspects that fit together with some grace and resonance.

The term “positive social responses” is based on dignity being at the centre of engagement with others whether they be clients, students, patients, colleagues or members of the community. It doesn’t mean pandering, praising or avoiding meaningful discussion. It does not mean we refrain from conversations that are challenging, but rather we explore a person’s experience, thoughts, feelings, acts of resistance and responses to any given situation.

Response-based practice (RBP) is founded on a critical realist perspective meaning that we are interested in the facts of daily interaction in the social world. This approach is based on helping people recover from violence while finding ways to prevent violence and enable social justice in the larger world. This approach embodies the knowledge that language is a powerful tool that can shape perception and interaction. As such, we aim for realistic descriptions using accurate language. When someone experiences violence, it is not a (post-modern) perspective but rather an event in the real world. Damage is done, there are bruises, broken bones or feelings of sorrow and humiliation. The response-based practice team typically work with people who we refer to as perpetrators and victim/survivors through restorative, dignity-centered processes, clearly articulating the violence that has been committed and the responses to it by victims and others. In this way, individuals and institutions who are doing harm can be assisted to move towards practices that are non-violent and demonstrate human care. Response-based practice aligns with aspects of a decolonizing approach in that: “Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Smith, 2002, p. 101). Some of the aspects of interactional care are outlined in a recent article by Richardson and Kinman (2026) entitled “Living as if we all mattered: Kinship and other gifts in community.”

We focus on social interaction and, as family therapists, we are influenced by systemic practices going back to teachers such as Gregory Bateson, the Mental Research Institute (the MRI), and collaborative therapies focusing on “talk.” RBP draws from the cybernetic perspective that problems exist between people, in the social world, not in the individual mind. Bateson’s application of Second Order Cybernetics is a helpful process for creating positive social responses for individuals in institutions, bringing dignity into the room. This process includes the observer in the system, together with, and not above, the observed. In this way, it is equalizing and promotes reflexivity.

The observer, which includes the counsellor, the administrator, the board, to ponder

“How am I acting?”

“What am I doing (to promote dignity)?”

“What are the consequences of my actions?”

In terms of policies, a university may ask

“How are students responding to this initiative?”

The social interactional perspective that invites us to co-construct outcomes and resolutions that address current issues, whether they be solutions to the world’s larger problems or how to make the photocopier machine work. With rapid advancements in technology, many educators struggle to keep up with the administrative demands and processes of their profession; their own education and role was not focused on balancing accounts, entering data into computerized spreadsheets, handling multi-factorial logins and a plethora of passwords. Taking up important time and life force energy managing the bureaucracies of the job can feel demeaning; others may criticize the educator for managing these tasks unsuccessfully although they have now become a central aspect of the work. Humiliation and stigmatization are topics explored in depth by sociologist Erving Goffman. He writes “stigma is a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity” (1963, p. 3). In this paper, I put forward a notion of dignity that is inherent and relational, rather than being based on obedient subjugation, loyalty or supplication. Dignity, in a response-based context, is understood as the opposite of humiliation.

In a recent lecture offered by Allan Wade (Wade, personal conversation, June 12th 2026), the following questions were explored:

- 1) What does dignity mean?
- 2) How is dignity achieved?
- 3) What is humiliation (e.g. the opposite of dignity?)
- 4) How is dignity repaired and upheld?

These questions can highlight the degree to which dignifying and safe-enough social spaces are present.

In an Indigenous/Cree worldview, the process of the medicine wheel teaches about the human journey through the six directions. The four cardinal directions are seen as representing the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspect of the person. Well-being is understood as balance between these aspects. The other two directions are up (the heavens) and down (Mother Earth) (Richardson and Wade, 2013, 2010). According to these teachings, the spirit of the person descends to Earth at the time of birth and enters the wheel in the East, travelling through their life until they later return to the spirit world in the North. Upon arrival, the infant is filled with life-force that is synonymous with love, connection and wholeness. When faced with life’s affronts, this sense of full-spiritedness may be diminished, and healing processes may be required to restore the fullness of one’s being. I believe that this embodied life-force is synonymous to the presence of dignity. We tend to feel well when we are seen, loved, respected, listened to, understood and uplifted. Wade writes “for some cultural

groups, equal dignity extends to the stars, the water, the ancestors, the plants, the animals, and grandchildren to come.” For example, the quw’utsun people have specific words for six generations of the unborn children (Donna Johnny, personal communication, Duncan, BC, May 10). So, how is dignity expressed, enacted, in a relational and social space? Indigenous processes of teaching and learning take place in ways that acknowledge this depth of context and demonstrate respect for the pre-existing ability of each learner.

The Relationship Between Dignity, Well-Being and Social Responses

The term “social responses” refers to the treatment received from others, including family, friends and professionals, when a person discloses violence or some form of norm-challenging behaviour. Due to various forms of negative social responses, such as stigmatization and victim-blaming, the suffering of the individual can be increased. Where dignity has been violated, the restoration of dignity is crucial to well-being (Heritage and Sefi, 1992). Sociologist Erving Goffman documented various forms of dignity-related actions, such as “saving face” and resisting stigma, humiliation and spoiled identity (2008, 1967, 1963). Within the university context, one may find processes such as “othering”, competing, gatekeeping, humiliating and excluding. The notion of safe or safe-enough spaces, for what Vikki Reynolds would call “risky conversations,” (Richardson and Reynolds, 2014) is denigrated, or mocked, by conservative politicians, because it challenges the permission of those with more social power to say what they want about minoritized or oppressed groups, regardless of the harm it brings (Richardson and Reynolds, 2014). Reynolds writes: “I work to create some-safety, enough-safety, or a safe-r conversation and relationship. All conversations across difference are risky because power is always at play. Doing harm by replicating oppression is always a potential risk. This is true despite our commitments to social justice and our collective ethics.” Reynolds believes it is important to contest objectivity and neutrality and take on an overt position for justice doing” (Reynolds, 2009). Education should not constitute a negative social response to the situation of those who are not part of what Pinkola-Estés calls “the overculture” (2010).

If an educational institution, such as a university, is serious about upholding the dignity of the learner, they would seek input and feedback about how to create such a learning environment. Evaluation and critical reflexion would be a part of curating meaningful educational spaces. In that context, such a positive social response would mean offering, and receiving support and information in clear, polite, helpful ways that demonstrate respect. Parents teach their children manners because they are the means through which we avoid harming and humiliating one another. Dignity in interaction weaves the fabric of the social world and accords due respect to each and every person, a practice highlighted in Indigenous codes of ethics and numerous religious traditions. The Seven Sacred Teachings from Turtle Island (North and Central America) indicate that “respect is more than a word; it is a way of life” (Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre). I’m not suggesting that Indigenous notions of respect are identical to the concept of dignity, but there are important similarities and resonances that we often explore when working with groups of people. Indeed, ideas are culturally embedded to a large extent and relate to the particular land and worldview of a cultural community. Religions scholars Chen and Wang (2025), in their examination of religious texts worldwide, indicate that “the Golden Rule”, an edict which says we should accord others the same level of care that we desire for ourself, is a universal, foundational tenet found across many faiths. The Humanist Manifesto (2003) promotes dignity and respect by positioning human beings as the primary source of meaning and

values, believing that dignity is inherent to every person regardless of status, achievement or religious belief. The feminists have centered their writings on “the ethic of care”, attending to the interconnectedness and responsibility of care in society. The practice of caring for one another is identified as a necessary relational process (Fisher and Tronto, 1990). It then follows that these values should be present in university life, which is made up of human beings and human activity after all.

The application of manners and ‘common courtesy serve as ‘social lubricants’ to assist in the smooth operation of daily interactions. Once there is an infraction, sometimes in the form of a humiliation, a social wound is created (Goffman, 1963; Wade, 1997). If not repaired, it can fester and provide fuel for an ongoing sense of alienation and critique of the institution. It is important to add that the practicing of manners is culturally-specific. What is polite and pro-social in one cultural group may be offensive in another. The university institution emerged from a particular culture, from ancient Greece specifically, and many of its practices harken back to the rituals, protocols and practices found in medieval Europe. From a perspective of relational dignity, the university enacts processes that can affront its participants and create barriers to resolving harms and disputes with clear, thoughtful communication. This may include excluding those who challenge their superiors in ways that are deemed unacceptable to those in positions of power. Transcending an orthodoxy may result in exclusion, removal and/or humiliation. As major social institutions go, universities can be resistant to change - change is often initiated from the bottom up, through protest. When a student, or lower ranking professor challenges the status quo, in the context of an unfriendly, punishing environment, their acts of resistance are often framed as rebellious and problematic. This has often been the case for Indigenous and racialized students in traditional, colonial, institutions. They are not seen as “team players.”

The philosophical foundation of interactional dignity is a belief and understanding that our basic energy or life force is enhanced, as well as our sense of well-being, through dignified interaction. Many people seeking assistance (e.g. counselling, medical care, legal services, government bureaucracies) are faced with a power inequality imposed by the professional who adopts a “one up” position in relation to the person in front of them (Todd and Wade, 1994; Fuller, 2003). Todd and Wade’s 2004 article “Dominance, Deficiency and Psychotherapy: Parallel Objectifying Practices”, outlines how the psychological professions are based on the helper taking the position of superiority over the help seeker, a dynamic drawn from European colonialism. While the study of psychology emerged in the 1800s during the time of empire and conquest, there was little recognition of the fact that people everywhere resist invasion and colonization (Wade, 1993). Patients are expected to cede the value of their life experience to the expert knowledge of the practitioner, although university trained may have no real experience of the phenomenon being treated (Terlouw et al, 2004; Todd and Wade, 2004). Some researchers have noted that professional and institutional power dynamics taken precedence over “ethics of care” and find this problematic (Tronto, 1993).

If we look back into early scholarship, we see that the modern notion of dignity was articulated by Immanuel Kant in his 1785 book “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”. In this publication Kant articulated his view that all persons have inherent dignity and, as such, we have an obligation to treat the person “as an end” (e.g. a holistic being of value) rather than a “means” (Groundwork, 4:429). This refers to seeing the human as a person and not merely a statistic, a customer, a staff member, or a number. In response-based practice, we understand that whenever a person is mistreated they resist in some way (Wade, 1997). Their resistance, or other responses, may not stop or prevent the violence,

but they aim to preserve dignity and sometimes to maximize safety. While others may try to affront our dignity, we aim to preserve it in many ways, including those described in memoir, autobiography and books such as James C. Scott's "Domination and the Arts of Resistance", Nelson Mandela (The Long Walk to Freedom), Todorov (Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria) and many other resistance writers and human rights activists. Scholars have also indicated that ideas about dignity in society run more deeply in the philosophical community and that French philosopher Rousseau should be acknowledged for ideas about humanity and dignity (James 2013; Hanley 2017; Sensen 2017). In the counselling world, we refer to this as according "unconditional positive regard" to the person in front of us. Philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote about dignity and "the right to have rights". Arendt conceptualized that dignity was based on a person's "natality", their capacity to initiate spontaneous and indeterminate action such as the ability to think, speak and act (Macready, 2018, p.113-114). Hanna Arendt believed that dignity must be asserted and recognized by human beings and described it as conditional, intersubjective and political. This aligns with Wade's view of dignity as being social, equal and inherent.

Professionals in various fields, including psychology and psychiatry, are able to assert power by positioning others as deficient. For instance, in a companion to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) system of diagnosis, Othmer and Othmer (2002) advise clinical interviewers to position themselves as expert in clinical knowledge systems and clients as lacking pre-existing knowledge that could be of relevance.

The following excerpt from "*The clinical interview using DSM-IV*" is used to inform psychological professions on how they should treat the people they serve.

Assess Insight-Become an Ally

There are three levels of insight: full, partial, and no insight. A patient who describes his psychiatric symptoms as a result of his disorder (sic) demonstrates full insight. For instance, a patient with panic attacks who recognizes them as "ill" (sic) has full insight.

Show Expertise

Empathy goes a long way, but empathy is not enough . . . Convince him you are an expert. Use three techniques to convince him that you understand his disorder:

- a. make him understand that he is not alone, put his illness into perspective;*
- b. communicate to him that you are familiar with his illness-show knowledge;*
- c. deal with his mistrust.*

This expertise sets you above well-meaning family members or friends. It distinguishes you as a professional.

Establish Authority

While empathy roots in your compassion with the patient's suffering, and expertise in your knowledge of his problem, authority originates from your ability to handle him.

Establish authority at the moment you meet your patient by taking control of the situation. Take responsibility for his welfare.

The acid test for your authority is his acceptance of your explanations and his willingness to comply with your treatment plan.

This passage demonstrates a view grounded in the notion of social superiority and the need to dominate and get the population to adopt the view of the professional. Social theorists, collaborative therapists and critics of colonialism find this view to be acontextual, impositional and disrespectful to a client's culture and belief-system. The writings of the Just Therapy team of Aotearoa/New Zealand have articulated a strong critique to such decontextualized and 'top-down' processes (Charles Waldegrave, Kiwi Tamasese, 1993). Activist counsellor and supervisor Vikki Reynolds writes "If treating people like shit worked we'd all be doing so much better!" While these words were shared at a Dignity conference (2015, Hawkes Bay, Aotearoa/New Zealand), her evidence and theorizing of this point is documented in her article "Resisting burnout with justice-doing" (2011).

In Educational Systems

Equal dignity in the workplace is central to feeling good at work. Many, many people who seek counselling are being harassed at work. They experience competition, being suppressed, subjugated, discredited by others who seek self-elevation and funding. Often victim/survivors of violence know that if they report the violence, their life will get worse, not better, at least in the short term. People who report violence, or "whistle-blow", are often blamed, attacked, back-lashed, and silenced. They are often discredited, accused of lying, being over-sensitive or of having pre-existing psychological problems. There are many reasons why people choose not to report violence. Discussions of systemic violence erase individual perpetrators and conceal the particular dynamics and strategies of the people in charge. Unequal power dynamics and stratified systems form part of the "colonial container" from the beginning with traditional, patriarchal dynamics forming part of the structure. In many universities today, diversity initiatives and affirmative action are being attacked and dismantled, many of the gains of social revolutions of the 1970s (Taylor, 2025).

Workplace harassers are offered a great deal of impunity. It can take up to a decade for an institution to rid itself of a professor who is abusing students or other colleagues. In the meantime, they often continue to receive a generous salary (according to job search site Indeed). This colonial strategy was and is also applied to police (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), abusive teachers in residential schools,

When they are finally deemed to be violent or problem-causing in a tribunal, they tend to quit at the 11th hour and move to another institution - a time-honoured colonial strategy. They become someone else's problem while maintaining an esteemed position with impunity (Namie, 2009). This phenomenon has been referred to as the "wandering officer" in the context of policing (Freivogel and Wagman, 2021) and "priest shuffling" in education, such as in Canada's residential schools (Armbruster, 2021) This institutional framework in which universities grant impunity to abusers has been referred to as "institutional betrayal" by Jennifer Freyd (Smith and Freyd, 2014).

Such transgressions by those in power violate dignity practices that help people feel valued and respected in their community. Power structures based on hierarchy and domination create the conditions where equal dignity is violated, where people may become harmed by abuses and, as such, experience alienation or exclusion. Diversity educator Jane Elliot (2021) uses the term “pushed outs”, rather than “drop outs,” to indicate that people who are subjected to discriminatory environments are forced out because it is unbearable for them to stay. Institutions may frame this as a decision to leave rather than an institutional failure. “Othering” is a typical practice in such power dynamics where people are presented as worthy or unworthy. Victim-blaming ideas, such as those presented by Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff in “The Coddling of the American Mind” (Haidt and Lukianoff, 2018) accuse students of being overly sensitive, implying that they complain too much about injustices such as racism and sexism in the classroom. Critics, including journalist Moira Weigel (2018), problematize Haidt and Lukianoff’s attack on “safetyism” and its presentation as being politically neutral. Weigel accuses such as ideas as thinly covered right wing ideology as a weaponized tool to silence or delegitimize left-wing activism, often by elites”. Edward Said (1978) reminded us that “othering” creates us and them categories, ‘us’ typically referring to a category of person with more power. As such, slights against the othered group are deemed as more acceptable, while ignoring their calls for justice, while slights against the dominant group are often handled with fragility. Working in the university demands some adherence to tradition and policies that uphold hierarchies and the time-honoured status quo.

Typically, academics are not rewarded for kindness and cooperation; rather they are rewarded for recognition in their field, through the receiving of grants, through research findings and publications. As we have seen in history, the nefarious actions of artists, scientists and philosophers are overlooked when they are seen as popular public contributors, as noted in the case of Vanessa Springora (2021) and the victims of many popular celebrities, including university professors. Well-esteemed contributors to the academic canon signed a petition in France to permit “sexual” relations with minors. In 1977, the following French intellectuals, many of whom were university professors, published in *Le Monde* and *Libération* a letter supporting the decriminalizing of sexual acts between adults and minors under the age of 15; the signatories included Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida (although he was Algerian), Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Roland Barthes and Gabriel Matzneff (Medium 2022). Today, we would contest the word “sexual” in that these are acts of violence, including rape and sexualized assault of children. We can see how this type of violence was contested by young women such as Vanessa Springora in her recent book, *Consentement* (2021), exposing the violations of writer Gabriel Matzneff. Quebec journalist Louise Bombardier challenged Matzneff, on the French television program *Apostrophes*, on the justification of his predatory and paedophilic acts with pre-teen Springora, for which she was mocked and reviled by the French literary establishment (Ravary, 2019). Journalist Lise Ravary documents that Bombardier was accused of provincialism while male intellectuals insulted her, some suggesting she deserved violence for challenging Matzneff’s predation of minors. These acts do not depict a culture of care in the academic and literary environment. It is imperative that we explore the implications of being guided by theorists who were abusing, sexually and otherwise, their students and employees while critiquing power inequalities in their writing.

Cultures of Care

There are various new terms that have emerged recently to imagine a more ideal world and workplace. Terms such as “collective care”, “compassionate leadership”, “therapeutic research” are slightly detectable in educational settings. While educators talk about “safe spaces”, or “safe-enough” spaces, governments denigrate such notions preferring “risky spaces”. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported “Quebec university classrooms should not be safe spaces, says academic freedom committee” (CBC, 2021).

As a former Indigenous student and current professor in an Indigenous Studies program, this declaration feels alarming to me. The idea of ‘courageous spaces’ actually means that we must listen to “the other side of the story,” justifying horrors done to Indigenous people as if there was some benevolent other side. “Objective” teachings about European colonization end up rationalizing land theft, child theft, rape, forced sterilization, kidnapping, the poisoning of communities by extractive industries and normalizing food and water insecurity.

A few years back, a non-Indigenous guest speaker told a Cree student “it’s good that social workers removed you from your parents – otherwise they would have likely sexually abused you!” This same professor also told a Cree student that he wasn’t really Cree, because he grew up in Canada, which is a Euro-Canadian society. The guest speaker left having terrorized the class which was comprised of roughly one third Indigenous students and two thirds non-Indigenous students. Both these groups were outraged and some requested debriefing and referrals for counselling to process this academic and epistemic violence. The professor was an anthropologist. The students went to the media.

I was also interviewed by a journalist. I said that these students had been harmed. There had been no apology to them, except one by the sessional teacher that was later retracted at the request of their union. As the program director, I apologized and said racism shouldn’t happen anywhere, not in any university and particularly not in a First Peoples Studies class. I also made a comment about anthropology not always being a friend to Indigenous people, meaning that outsider understandings of a culture are not always accurate, or ethical. A Samoan friend once told me that the teenagers who were ‘coming of age in Samoa’ made up stories in their conversations with a well-known anthropologist, which were later published as “truth” (also see Freeman, 1999). Soon after the debacle in the classroom, that guest professor rallied her troops who all signed a hate letter against me and sent it to my boss. Out of all the signatories, not one asked how the students were doing. That didn’t matter to them. As professors, we often hear rumblings about how sensitive students are these days.

Brazilian authors Carlotto and Gondim (2025) write about how the dismantling of the university foundations that have supported workers’ rights and controlled the level of exploitation in terms of working conditions, and attacks on dignity, are overwhelmingly evident. Brazil has shifted towards the implementation of an academic capitalism that was consolidated in the 1990s and instrumentalized in the 2000s, intensifying over the last few years. Capitalization means that more research dollars go to schools of economics, computer science and management. Today, it means money into AI at the expense of research that promotes human rights, feminist outcomes and increased well-being for the population. It often means white men get more research money than do racialized people.

Carlotto and Gondim explain that the end of the 1990s saw market pressures and management tools become explicit in government discourse, constituting guidelines to address reforms in the

governance and management of higher education institutions. Managerialism brought principles to the management of universities that impacted their performance in terms of competition, positioning in rankings, emphasis on numbers and results, productivity, and performance. This generated direct effects on the dynamics of public and private higher education institutions. These changes also saw universities hiring more systems and financial management personnel than educators. In recent years, educators are made to manage strenuous accounting systems that surveille expenditure. Such processes can devour hours of time due to their impenetrability. Tying people up in bureaucracy suppresses creativity and the dissemination of research ideas and knowledges. Goffman wrote: “When persons are present to one another they can function not merely as physical instruments but also as communicative ones. This possibility, no less than the physical one, is fateful for everyone concerned, and, in every society, appears to come under strict normative regulation giving rise to a kind of communication traffic order” (2008, p. 23).

There are consequences to the dehumanizing and undignifying of the university community. These Brazilian researchers noted that these changes have resulted in a “decrease in interest in academic careers among young people and their disengagement from these careers.” They assert that the degradation of the status of research professors has been highlighted for some time now, with the implementation and expansion of neoliberal policies that have contributed to low salaries, increased bureaucracy, and a loss of autonomy. These changes have driven young people away from academic careers in both private and public contexts. Today, this has only worsened, which highlights the need to problematize the teaching career and its future in the face of such evident degradation.

Dignity at work has recently been ratified as the capacity for autonomy and freedom to affirm social identities, beliefs, and values. It also involves access to decent working conditions and the provision of opportunities for contribution to make work activity meaningful and fulfilling. While Carlotto and Gondim make their point strongly regarding Brazil, similar conditions can be found in Quebec, as well as in other locations across Canada. When people are treated badly, they resist (Wade, 1997). Educators can pre-empt this push-back by establishing work environments that are conducive to worker (and student) satisfaction. This includes creating conditions where people feel valued. Many of the dehumanizing processes interrupt possibilities for connecting with one another in our various communities of work. As the Chair of Indigenous Healing Knowledges at Concordia University, I have tried to create opportunities for people to come together, to enjoy ceremony, to talk, to sing, to connect, to share feelings and to take care of their mental, emotional and psychological health. There are a few wonderful and noteworthy spaces on the campus, such as SHIFT Centre for Social Transformation and 4th Space, where dignity can live. I am grateful for these spaces. Psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estés believes “when the soulful life is being threatened it is not only acceptable to draw the line and mean it, it is required.” She believes that, “one of the most calming and powerful things you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it” (2003, p. 297). A culture of care can be reflected in the words of American philosopher and activist Cornell West who believes that “justice is what love looks like in public” (2011). I can align with this. It is important to find ways to ‘stay alive’ in the academy.

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