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# Bowing down and standing up: Towards a pedagogy of cultural humility

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## Abstract

Cultural humility is a critical skill for effective intercultural interactions. While common in other scholarly fields, the concept is seldom found in the literature of global learning and international education. Utilizing grounded theory, this study explores the development of cultural humility through qualitative data analysis of in-class assignments and reflection journals from a university course in the United States (n=18). Throughout the semester students worked in teams to write grant proposals for agricultural development projects in Kenya. Examining student work and reflections sheds light on differing avenues of global learning, which has traditionally prioritized international travel as the core means of learning. This article proposes a pedagogy of cultural humility to promote global learning through a variety of educational interventions. Prioritizing cultural humility can yield enhanced respect for others, providing a focus on lifelong learning, more meaningful global understanding and more fruitful intercultural relationships. In an increasingly interconnected globe, cultural humility offers a meaningful framework to support substantive interactions between individuals across the globe or down the street.

**Keywords:** cultural humility, global learning, intercultural education, qualitative methods, pedagogical theory

## Introduction

The field of global learning has come to encompass a diverse range of practices, modalities and purposes. By way of introduction, we propose a thought experiment. Imagine a university student of traditional age (18–24) who plans to pursue a global learning opportunity at a university in the Global North. This student has a finite amount of time to spend on globally oriented activities. If that student could choose only one of the following modalities, which would you recommend to them?

- Two weeks of a lecture- and discussion-based course on the history of Africa
- A two-week-long guided tour of Kenya, with a school group
- Spending two weeks staying with a friend (nearby) who is originally from Kenya
- A two-week-long course assignment developing a grant proposal for a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kenya

The present study seeks to explore the least likely option in this list, the course assignment, though not at the exclusion of the others. Rather, drawing upon the experiences of a group of students enrolled in a global learning course, we propose an approach to teaching cultural humility that represents a shift in thinking about the purpose and practice of global education.

Cultural humility addresses a disposition of seeking to understand across cultural differences (Tervalon and Murray-García, 1998). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, this paradigm is of greater importance. While often found in the scholarship of social work and healthcare (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Hook et al., 2013), there is little mention of cultural humility in educational research, including in the literature focused on pedagogical approaches to global learning. This article explores the development of cultural humility among university students in the United States as they navigate an assignment in which they write grant proposals for a locally founded and run NGO in Kenya. Utilizing an inductive, grounded theory approach, the researchers used class assignments and reflection journals as the basis of an in-depth qualitative analysis. Recommendations are made for the development of a pedagogy of cultural humility.

## Background and definitions

It is difficult to pinpoint when the concept of global learning first came into existence. If the concept is defined experientially, then it began when the first ancient peoples wandered in search of new people and places, or perhaps its origins coincided with the overseas exploration that occurred around the sixteenth century, whether in the Pacific or the Atlantic. These early encounters may have expanded our collective knowledge of the world, but they also constitute the first of many lessons to be learned about how (and how not) to engage with people and places that may be different from your own. This collective knowledge is the basis of both global learning and global education.

While the value of gaining an in-depth understanding of the wider world has been a significant component of formal (i.e. classroom-based) and informal education initiatives for centuries, the study of 'global learning' began to emerge as a pedagogical concept in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the end of the second of two world wars. From the 1990s onwards it became a formalized educational programme in many countries (Standish, 2014). The term 'global learning' is sensitive to changing historical and cultural contexts, making a consistent definition difficult to pin down. However, in the context of this study we use the definition advanced by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, n.d.: n.p.), which defines the global learning outcome as 'a critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability'.

In contemporary higher education, global education models, which facilitate global learning, have achieved both curricular and co-curricular status – curricular in the sense of offering specific courses or degrees focused on global issues, co-curricular in initiatives focused on implementing a global perspective across many, if not all, courses. This is in addition to the availability of separate, but high-impact, practices such as study abroad or study away. Universities around the world are supported in these endeavours by a host of institutes, centres, NGOs and professional societies, as well as a growing number of for-profit companies who have entered the global learning marketplace (Verger et al., 2017).

## Global learning and global education

As a field of academic study, global education serves several purposes, often subject to a variety of interpretations. Historically the field emerged as a reform movement, seeking to apply education to avoid the profound damage wrought by cross-cultural encounters based on limited knowledge, narrow perceptions and unequal relationships.

As a degree or certificate programme, it primarily serves to develop graduates who will work in careers in global development, often for governmental agencies or NGOs with multinational missions. If we look to the future, the field serves what might be described as a more idealistic purpose, such as 'enabling young people to participate in shaping a better, shared future for the world' (Rae et al., 2008: 2). Just what that future should be, and how young people should contribute to it, has been the subject of often-politicized debate (Davies et al., 2005; Kirkwood, 2001), but scholars have noted that there does seem to be some degree of consensus around the principles of 'interdependence, connection and multiple perspectives' (Hicks, 2003: 270).

These values centre on the recognition that much harm and damage have been done by individuals with noteworthy ideas and a limited understanding of a local context. Scholars identify the colonial legacy of those in the Global North conducting well-intentioned projects with disastrous results in the Global South (Easterly, 2013; Escobar, 1995; Ogden, 2007; Peet, 2007). Ogden (2007) highlighted the similarities between education abroad programmes and colonialization, with participants travelling from different regions to observe the patterns of local people from a distance.

To redress these persistent issues, facilitators of global learning have adopted a two-pronged approach. The first focuses on increased knowledge of multiple global contexts, but the second is an emphasis on what one scholar calls 'the inner dimension', or the personal growth of the individual student (Hicks, 2003: 268). Embedded in humanist ideas of education, this belief focuses on turning students into thoughtful citizens of the world who practise values such as compassion and respect, regardless of whether they are abroad or at home. Study abroad programmes, for example, are frequently described as transformative (Perry et al., 2012; Vatalaro et al., 2015) – not because of increases in knowledge or skills, but because of 'outcomes which reflect the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of a student' (Strange and Gibson, 2017: 85).

### **Global learning pedagogies**

For many years, the prevailing wisdom was that these holistic student learning outcomes would be achieved largely by osmosis, namely the direct engagement with other cultures. Until recently, the practice was largely lacking in a distinctive pedagogy or curriculum, other than exposure to people, places and practices in countries other than one's own. This began to change in the early 2000s when two pedagogical theories, transformational learning theory and experiential learning, were integrated into the field. This development led to a renewed emphasis on purposeful reflection as a catalyst for personal development (Bell et al., 2016). The integration also served another purpose in providing the basis for systematic programme assessment – most often in the form of documenting reflective artefacts which, in turn, contributed to the elevation of study abroad to the status of a high-impact practice (HIP) (Kuh et al., 2011). This change in status led to significant increases in the number of US university students participating in study abroad programmes, as well as the need for further refinement of both assessment models and pedagogical approaches.

The outcomes-oriented approach, reflected in both the AAC&U and HIP models, was soon joined by an alternative approach grounded in competency-based educational models. A consortium of educators from the Global North came together and articulated a now widely adopted set of broader global learning competencies. These were divided into four domains, ranging from taking action to communicating ideas, and each has been linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Brodin, 2010; Cushner and Mahon, 2002; Kirby and Crawford, 2012). Competencies

differ from outcomes in that they are broader, but they are also often defined as applied skills or knowledge, the mastery of which can be demonstrated (Johnstone and Soares, 2014). The global competency of 'recognizing perspectives', for example, suggests that actions such as 'identifying personal influences' and 'empathizing with others' (World Savvy, 2021, n.p.) are indications that a student has mastered this domain. These competencies had the advantage that they could be achieved through a variety of means, whether via direct experiences, such as study abroad, or through classroom learning. This latter begs the question of whether we can do more, from either inside or outside the classroom, to teach students to achieve these global competencies (e.g. foster their sense of compassion, strengthen their ability to empathize and embrace multiple perspectives)? If so, how do we do it?

## Current context

For decades, the answer to the question of whether these habits of mind could be taught in a classroom was often 'no'. Scholars not only contended that such dispositions cannot be taught, but also that they *should* not be, being inappropriate subjects for an academic classroom. This belief has historical roots. In medieval and Renaissance times, empathy and humility were moral virtues, attributes that could be strengthened largely through individual spiritual practice. The nurturing of such virtues was thus considered a personal and religious matter rather than an academic one (Button, 2005; Worthington, 2008). With the exception of these domains, philosophers and scientists alike considered attributes such as empathy and humility as fixed personality traits, not dissimilar to being born with a phlegmatic temperament, and one that would not change over a person's lifetime. This belief lingers in some scholarly quarters, but recent advances in neuroscience have led to a growing body of evidence that the capacity for empathy is located in a particular part of the brain; it can be strengthened or weakened by a host of factors, including genetics, environment and, perhaps most importantly, education (Weidman et al., 2018; Zaki, 2019).

Scholars do know one way in which intercultural empathy (as a global learning competency) can be taught: multiple studies, as well as historical accounts, attest that travelling to other places and experiencing diverse cultures can enhance the cultural competency of individual students. That said, there have also been an increasing number of studies indicating that the benefits of study abroad do not accrue equitably across all students (Aktas et al., 2017). Rather, the additional costs of study abroad are often prohibitive factors for students, especially those from lower-income households or regions. Similarly, the time commitment required for extended travel is often prohibitive for the growing number of adult students, or for those with work or family commitments outside school. In addition to these factors, critical pedagogy studies have increasingly questioned the degree to which the structure of HIPs (such as study abroad) are fully accessible for LGBTQ+ students (Stewart and Nicolazzo, 2018). Simply put, not every student has the time, money or opportunity to study abroad (Johnstone et al., 2020; Sweeney, 2013; Whatley and Raby, 2020). Scholars and practitioners alike are actively looking for new frameworks to expand equity and inclusion in study abroad (and related) programmes, which adds to the growing demand for new pedagogical approaches to global learning.

Until very recently few global educators were exploring the intercultural implications of global learning without travel. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused most work- and school-related travel to be shut down, this question has risen to the fore. Solutions have ranged from the technological (e.g. virtual or

augmented travel experiences) to the social (e.g. PenPals, Global PenFriends, Students of the World). At the same time, the conditions of worldwide quarantine have led to conflicting indicators of greater collective empathy and/or exacerbated social and political tensions. To address the social isolation an outpouring of educational models has been developed, focusing on enhancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) (Gertz et al., 2018; McGee Banks and Banks, 1995). DEI scholars and practitioners draw upon a long-standing tradition of critical pedagogy, closely associated with education scholars Paolo Freire and bell hooks. Both Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) argued for the development of cultural humility over empathy – a reflection of their shared belief that relationships, whether teacher to student or traveller to local, should not just be reciprocal but co-created (Roberts, 2017; Tinkler and Tinkler, 2016; Waks, 2018).

It would appear that a number of forces are converging to strengthen the need for fundamental changes in how global learning is embedded into university curricula. The concept of cultural humility has emerged as a potential catalyst for pedagogical transformation. The concept of 'cultural humility' first emerged in the research literature on the relationships between healthcare workers and their patients/clients (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998). The definition expanded to include 'a process of openness, self-awareness, being egoless', in which reflection and critique are intertwined to bring about 'mutual empowerment, respect, partnerships, optimal care, and lifelong learning' (Foronda et al., 2016: 213). In the caring professions, the term refers to two simultaneously held, seemingly conflicting practices: cultivating an openness to multiple perspectives and recognizing the limits of the knowledge we can have of the worldview of others (Danso, 2018; Hook, 2014; Hook et al., 2013). In this context cultural humility was consciously articulated as disposition rather than a competency. The latter has been the subject of considerable critique in healthcare fields (Campinha-Bacote, 2018; Danso, 2018; Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Tervalon and Murray-García, 1998). A competence indicates an arrival, meaning that one either does or does not possess a particular competence, whereas cultural humility highlights an ongoing, even lifelong process of learning.

The concept of cultural humility has proliferated in contexts such as social work and counselling, practitioners of which have extended the term to encompass a broader range of client relationships whether in the clinic, community centre or classroom. This enabled the concept to work its way into higher education, especially as a basis for engaging with others through service learning projects (students) and community-engaged research (students and faculty) (Tinkler and Tinkler, 2016). In this study, we propose that the next leap forward may be expanding the scale and scope of community to include the integration of cultural humility into global learning. To date, only a handful of educational research studies have suggested this connection.

The largest application of this concept to any sort of global learning comes from examinations of study abroad programmes within the scholarly literature of healthcare and social work. Selected qualitative studies in nursing, for example, have identified cultural humility as desired programme outcomes, especially in the context of study abroad and community-engaged research (Belliveau, 2019; Ferranto, 2015). Hartman et al. (2018) introduced the concept of cultural humility to the broader scholarly field of global learning in a text examining the theory and practice of global learning. Within the current context of global learning, the growing recognition that global learning can, should and sometimes must take place across many learning modalities and that direct experience, such as study abroad, may or may not be available to all students equitably, provides an auspicious opportunity to consider new pedagogical approaches. The present study seeks to explore the question of

how cultural humility can serve as the basis of global learning, even without leaving the classroom.

## The study

The Senior Seminar in International Agriculture course is taken by students in their third or fourth year as undergraduates in the International Agriculture minor at Pennsylvania State University. The course is required for students in the International Agriculture minor (with 55 students currently enrolled) and draws students from a range of academic disciplines including community development, agricultural education, plant science, veterinary science, agricultural science and more. Data were collected in autumn 2018 and spring 2019. For the autumn semester of 2018 (n=10) 8 of the students were female, the rest male. For the spring semester of 2019 (n=12), 10 of the students were female and the remainder male. Of the 22 students enrolled, 18 consented to participate in the present study. In both semesters, all of them were university students of traditional age (i.e. under 25) from regions in and around the northeastern part of the United States. It is expected that many students in the course will pursue either employment or graduate work in fields that have a significant global component. The course does not include a study abroad component, but the professor sought to design assignments that encompassed all domains of global learning to the broadest possible extent.

## The intervention

For the culminating project, students worked in small groups to draft a 15-page grant proposal intended to support the development work of the NGO Children and Youth Empowerment Centre (CYEC) in Nyeri, Kenya. The students could have completed a similar assignment for an organization based in their local surroundings, but this project provided the opportunity to learn more about international agricultural development in a different region of the globe. The CYEC is a Kenyan-founded and Kenyan-run organization which exists to support the holistic wellbeing of former street youth and the surrounding communities; it pays particular attention to addressing structural deficits in food security, employment opportunities and education. The CYEC was neither a composite nor a random selection. Rather, other faculties at the institution have had a long-standing relationship with the centre and its staff, and the organization has welcomed the chance to collaborate with Pennsylvania State University over many years.

The intention of the project was not only to provide the students with a practical, applied learning opportunity, but also to support the work of the CYEC by researching and writing grant proposals to fund work and projects. As an organization with a small staff (around 10 people) focused on development work in the local area, the team are so busy that they do not have copious free time to research and write grant proposals. Recognizing a tendency of well-intentioned foreigners to make more work for local staff of organizations, a core function of the project – and something the professor emphasized to students in the class – was to establish that the project was intended to support the organization's work, not create an additional burden for its staff. The leadership of the CYEC and partners familiar with their work identified projects they would like to conduct in the future.

Over the course of the semester, the professor worked to address the North–South power dynamics that come with 'helping' in local communities – especially in

nations that were previously colonized. The instructor highlighted the importance of local knowledge and the fact that the organization's staff were the experts of their local contexts. Much discussion focused on recognizing that people locally are also experts on their context and that this was an opportunity to play a small part in supporting the CYEC's work. The class assignment required students to pick one of the project areas identified by the CYEC and work in interdisciplinary teams to prepare a concept note and grant proposal that could be given to the staff of the organization at the end of the semester. In this way, the students worked to provide meaningful support to the organization. The grant proposals were reviewed using criteria very similar to those employed by external funders. In other words, while the exercise itself was somewhat stylized, the context, medium and potential beneficiaries were not.

## Methods

Following the completion of their grant proposals, students were asked to engage in an extensive structured reflection on their learning experience. These reflections (n=18) serve as the basis for this study. After receiving institutional ethics board approval to conduct the study, students were asked to provide written consent so that the researchers could access their reflections as well as the submitted proposals. The reflection papers were first de-identified, then the researchers engaged in a three-stage emergent coding process using a constructivist epistemological approach (Creswell et al., 2007). The coding process is based on Charmaz (2006) and occurs in three phases: open coding (initial coding), focused coding and theoretical coding. Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to grounded theory embraces the complexities of diverse experiences, and the emerging theory is a process theory, which explains an 'educational process of events, activities, actions, and interactions that occur over time' – the latter of which we have labelled a pedagogy (Creswell, 2012: 396).

In stage one, both researchers (one the instructor, the other an educational researcher) independently reviewed the content of the essays for emergent themes, patterns and critical moments; components of these were coded using MaxQDA. In stage two, the initial codes were merged into five themes (described below) and the two researchers recoded the data according to the tentative thematic framework that had emerged (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). After successive rounds of critical iteration, the framework was again revised and refined. The educational researcher coded the final iteration based on theoretical coding until theoretical saturation was reached. Throughout the process, the proposed codes, themes and theoretical framework were triangulated with other data sources, including other artefacts generated by the students, field notes from the classroom, the lived experience of the instructor and prior interviews with CYEC stakeholders (Creswell et al., 2007). What emerged from this multi-stage, iterative qualitative analysis was a tentative framework of cultural humility as a teaching and learning process, in other words, a global learning pedagogy.

## Findings

Based on our analysis of the students' reflections, we were able to identify a distinctive pattern through which each of the students navigated the assignment. We suggest that this pattern is indicative of the five components, or building blocks, of a grounded theory of how cultural humility can be learned and, by extension, taught. These building blocks are, in sequential order: recognize ignorance, practise critical literacy, embrace ambiguity, engage in adaptation and find purpose.

## Recognize ignorance

Global learning has arisen as a field not only to address the current challenges of rapid globalization, but also to integrate the lessons learned from historical globalization. If a student were to take the history class, such as the one proposed in our introductory thought experiment, they would most likely hear accounts of Western expansion that are replete with examples of the dangers of cultural ignorance and arrogance. In the global competencies model, these errors in judgement are replaced with an emphasis on recognizing multiple perspectives, i.e. 'that they have a particular perspective, and that others may or may not share it' (World Savvy, n.d., n.p.). By contrast, cultural humility begins with a recognition of what you do not know, perhaps even what you cannot know, about other people and cultures.

In our study, the students expressed this limitation in various ways. An example of what we coded under this theme was the lamentation of one student, who declared 'I was most frustrated that I was lacking in boots on the ground information'. In other instances the students also expressed limitations in the available sources of knowledge, such as 'We had very limited or no knowledge of what Kenya was actually like besides what we read'. Perhaps most interestingly, several students also suggested that there was some knowledge that could be obtained only through direct experience, making comments such as 'I can talk to people and research, but it's really no substitute for being at the actual location and seeing the dynamics' and 'There are also subtle little cultural things that can be helpful that you won't pick up on unless you have been to the area that you intend to work in'.

## Practise critical literacy

A central tenet of critical pedagogy is an emphasis not only on recognizing what you do not know but also on questioning what you do (or what you think you do). Without this kind of interrogation, Paulo Freire (1970: 67) suggested, we are 'unable to transform reality'. In this sense, the development of critical consciousness is an ongoing activity, one that is constantly active and engaged. In other words, critical consciousness is not a competence that one masters, but a practice that develops over time. It is also used to inform critical literacy, i.e. the ability to locate and interrogate sources of information. Such a process is not always easy, as one student suggests: 'It took me hours to finally come across practical documents that would support what I was trying to implement.'

In studies of critical thinking, the tendency for many students to privilege first-hand, direct and personal experience is often viewed as an obstacle that they will need to learn how to get past. As they become more adept at the skill of thinking critically, students learn to be critical of the evidentiary power of the anecdote or the subjective nature of first-hand observations. What we see reflected in these comments, however, is not the same as the struggles faced by entry-level students. Not only are these students interrogating the value of their sources of cultural knowledge, but they are also expressing a specific knowledge of what direct experience provides as a source of higher-level understanding (e.g. 'seeing the dynamics', 'little cultural things'). In other words, the entries we coded in this theme indicate that the students appear to have learned (with varying degrees of success) how to navigate a crucial pathway between and among multiple sources of formal and informal evidence about people, place and culture.

## Embrace ambiguity

This latter insight further begs the question of the role of formal education in global learning. At one end of the spectrum, Minerva University, an alternative higher education

institution in San Francisco, California, utilizes a full immersion model, expecting all its students to live and work in countries all over the world while taking classes online. Towards the other end are many institutions that lack the resources, connections or permissions to send their students abroad. As a third space, the classroom provides a mediating role between the full complexity of the modern world and the singular experience of an individual (Schapiro, 2009).

From their reflections, it appears that most students went through a similar cycle when addressing the challenges inherent in an assignment that had not been stylized or scaffolded for their benefit. We coded responses from across this cycle under the thematic heading we labelled 'embracing ambiguity'. At first, the students tended to express excitement simply about a project that felt new, in other words, 'not another mundane project like a research paper or poster'. Their excitement then seemed to build as they realized that they were being given the opportunity to get a glimpse of the real world, as the following quote attests. 'What I also found incredible about this class project was that it wasn't just any other class assignment. It was on a real-world problem, with a real-world organization.' This lowering of the conventional boundaries between classroom and external space was also a source of new challenges, including a sense of responsibility for others; as one student wrote, 'one of the challenging parts was trying to put myself in the CYEC youth's shoes and figure out what solutions would be the most beneficial in terms of food security.'

### Engage in adaptation

As the previous sections suggest, the students' initial excitement was followed by the realization of a growing number of obstacles or limitations. After undergoing a period of some frustration or indecision, the groups were able to adopt a variety of strategies to work through the challenges and adapt their approach, as in the following example:

For instance, I was originally thinking dairy cows, but after talking to [another student who had previously travelled to the area] I found out they only had two cows, but they had more goats. So to start I considered the dynamic of keeping a dairy cow. I thought about how long they take to mature, how much they eat and their water requirements. Then I researched goats to compare and found they required less inputs, were cheaper and smaller, so easier to handle (which will be important for teaching, I remember getting pushed around by cows once they matured).

What is noteworthy about this passage is the degree to which the student indicates they have integrated their thinking across multiple forms of knowledge, such as direct experience of others, personal experience and library research, to come up with a solution more suitable for the global context of the assignment.

There was emerging evidence, too, that they adapted more than just their approach to the subject matter. Rather, the students indicated shifts in their attitudes towards working with open-ended problems with ambiguous parameters, as the following quote illustrates:

My group and I struggled at first with the lack of information and lack of guidelines associated with this project. It was completely out of our strict [university] assignment comfort zone and most definitely frustrated my group at first. However, after talking through the goals and objectives of this assignment, we realized the beauty in this level of freedom and the ideas flowed from there.

Another student reached a similar conclusion with an added emphasis on their emotional engagement, noting that 'I enjoy being given a mission without too many guidelines and relying on insight, innovation and creativity to come up with a plausible and real-world solution'. The reflections of these students (coded under this thematic heading) suggest that complex problem-solving in a global context is not just about knowledge or skills. It is also, arguably even more importantly, about attitudes and dispositions.

### **Find purpose**

This assignment challenged students not only to generate a grant application, but also to articulate ways forward in addressing some very large and complex issues facing the world today. One of the students, for example, perceived the embedded wickedness of the challenge his group faced in the following manner:

Certain goals can be set and measurably achieved by the duration of our proposed project, but the largest one, tackling food insecurity by reducing instances of child malnutrition in Kenya, can only be realistic once smaller successes have occurred.

Implicit in this description is a glimmer of hope. In this case, that hope lies in the belief that ending global hunger is not a lost cause: on the contrary, it can be realized.

Current theorists argue the world has become sufficiently complex and interdependent to breed a whole new category of problems – which in turn calls for the application of a quite different problem-solving process. This latter term is a bit of a misnomer, however. One of the defining characteristics of 'wicked' or super complex problems is that they are sufficiently complex that the goal is not to solve them; it is rather to tame them or to find smaller ways in which a person or group of people can navigate pathways forward (Brown et al., 2010; Hanstedt, 2018; Ramley, 2014). In this case the emphasis is upon developing adaptability in the moment and focusing on what can be done rather than what cannot, namely, the 'smaller successes' mentioned by the student above.

Critical theorists such as Freire (1970) argue for the catalytic power of hope, suggesting that simply the belief that the world can be a more just and equitable place is, in and of itself, a powerful lever of change. The pedagogy of hope, by extension, focuses on empowering students to act as change agents and re-create the world as they would like it to be. Global learning teaches us, however, that the world is a very complex place, and cultural humility suggests that there are many different visions of what it should be. In their reflections (coded under this thematic heading), the students suggest that perhaps hope could be replaced with purpose, or with the belief that you have a role to play in taming the wicked problems of the world – whether in personal life, professional life or both. As one student poignantly stated, 'This class gave me the perspective to realize that I can have an impact and there are ways I can contribute to the greater good'.

### **Discussion and implications**

At the beginning of this article, we articulated the value of various methods of promoting global learning among university students, some that involved travel and others that did not. In an era where global learning is of increasing importance, but challenges to in-person travel abound, it is of great significance to identify the development of cultural humility through a classroom-based assignment that involved no direct

experience. Through a qualitative analysis of students' assignments and reflection journals, cultural humility emerged as a disposition, that is a lifelong, on going learning perspective, from the instructional design of the course and the experience of the instructor. Consistent with the definitions of cultural humility from social work and healthcare (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Foronda et al., 2016; Hook et al., 2013; Tervalon and Murray-García, 1998), students reflected development in the understanding and practice of cultural humility.

Looking through the lens of these reflections, it could be argued that the result of this learning experience was not necessarily a right answer or even a fundable grant proposal, but rather the process of working through cultural humility. To consider a disposition as the end result of the learning process represents a shift in thinking which Barnett (2004) described as *ontological*. As he explained, when faced with an unknown future, educational institutions no longer serve primarily as the builders of knowledge or skills. Rather, higher education enables individuals:

to prosper amid supercomplexity, amid a situation in which there are no stable descriptions of the world, no concepts that can be seized upon with any assuredness, and no value systems that can claim one's allegiance with any unrivalled authority. (Barnett, 2004: 252)

This framework not only places practices such as cultural humility at the centre of higher learning, but also further positions students to practise ontological as well as cultural humility when engaging with other people and places (Porter and Schumann, 2018). In other words, the concept extends beyond the external indicators of culture (e.g. dress, food, language) and towards the recognition of just how much of what we may believe to be universal habits of mind are, in fact, culturally constructed. There is a cultural tendency among the Global North to be task- and outcome-oriented, a construction often evident in our approach to, among other things, teaching and learning. Embracing cultural humility as a pedagogy asks educators to shift that thinking from competence to practice, outcome to process and projects to people. This latter realization may be a revelation to cultures that have long prioritized tasks over relationships (Hofstede, 2003), but it is a potentially disruptive concept for institutions of higher education that are based on Western/Northern European models.

While our study suggests that there may be great value in integrating the concept of cultural humility into classroom instruction, it is important to be purposeful and reflective about when, where and how we might do this. As critics have noted, the concept itself may be culturally bound and not relevant to other national or cultural contexts. The authors recognize that even the use of the term 'humility' (broadly speaking, that is, not cultural humility specifically) may have very different perceptions in different cultural contexts. While humility emerges from the organizational leadership literature in the Global North (Melby et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2009; Owens et al., 2013; Sousa and Dierendonck, 2017), the underlying concepts of power and power differentials may be viewed very differently across cultures and nations globally (Hofstede, 2003). Humility itself might be a less desirable trait for people in a culture where a priority is placed on emphasizing power differences. That said, even in a setting of higher power differentials the intentional cultivation of cultural humility could potentially serve to open doors for meaningful relationships and partnerships between individuals of different cultural backgrounds.

While this study focuses on how cultural humility can emerge from the design of classroom practice, the intention is for the practice to be the basis of lifelong learning. While beyond the scope of the current study, the possibility exists that widespread

adoption of the practice of cultural humility could provide a foundation for more effective and meaningful relationships across a multitude of contexts. The key is meaningful understanding across cultural boundaries, a concept relevant for anyone who engages across cultural boundaries regardless of where in the world they are located. The concept has the potential to become a relevant basis not only for class assignments, but also for professional interactions, friendships and daily activities in a multicultural world.

With that in mind, we answer the central question posed by this project with an emphatic yes – university students should be taught to practise the disposition of cultural humility as part of their global learning. If it is important to teach cultural humility, the next question becomes how to do so. Investigation of the most effective ways to teach cultural humility is an area of future research. Two specific ideas appear based on the findings of this study: having the faculty member model cultural humility, through their approach to teaching the subject matter, and creating space in the course for students to wrestle with the concept. Our findings suggest that students can learn cultural humility when it is modelled for them by professors. This can be a challenge even for individuals with great expertise; however, by asking questions and recognizing that they as professors also need to learn, instructors will be able to show students what it looks like to engage in cultural humility. Instructors themselves will need to recognize areas where they are ignorant, practise critical consciousness, embrace ambiguity, engage in tactical adaptation and sustain hope. This process involves decentring expertise both inside and outside of the classroom. In this case, for example, it was imperative to establish local community members and leadership of the local NGO both as experts in the local context and as the ones who establish the agenda of the projects. Without this framing, the project could become yet another example of colonial behaviour of those in the Global North working to address the concerns of those in the Global South.

Second, instructors can provide students with the opportunity to wrestle with the content through class sessions and assignments. A large body of educational research points to the value of reflection as a learning tool (Jordi, 2010; Moon, 2004). Having students reflect on what they have learned allows them to contemplate the places where they may have practised cultural humility and weigh the value of that experience. Reflection provides the opportunity for students to describe and make connections between the course content and their own lived experiences. These connections provide rich learning opportunities to reflect upon their own desires, abilities and concerns about learning across cultures. This study indicates that offering opportunities for students to reflect and wrestle with complex problems provides a space for them to follow their own distinctive path towards cultural humility.

These recommendations are suggestive of changes to how global learning is taught, but their efficacy remains unproven. The insights gained were based on a small number of students (18), drawn from a relatively homogenous student body at a single university. There are many ways in which this is a uniquely bound case and a non-representative sample of all university students. For example, students in this course are all upper-level undergraduate students who had previously travelled abroad. This self-selection could bias students towards the development of cultural humility compared to other students who have not had these prior educational and life experiences.

We recognize we are advocating for integrating cultural humility as an open-ended, lifelong, non-standardized, contextually sensitive habit of mind into the field of

global learning within higher education. We did not encounter the concept of cultural humility by design; rather, it emerged through our analysis of how students navigated a complex task of professional cross-cultural relationship-building. Our analysis was authentic in the sense that it was driven by the direct experiences of the students, but it should be emphasized that although the assignment was re-designed to incorporate many features of real-world situations, such as ambiguity, it remained a proxy for direct engagement. Despite these limitations, both authors believe this theoretical concept shows strong promise as the basis of a revised pedagogy for global learning that extends beyond existing paradigms of cultural competency. Our study is suggestive of the catalytic validity of this concept. We hope that it inspires others in their scholarship and practice of global learning.

In the present context of global learning, educators are wrestling with two moving targets: the face of the field is changing at the same time as critical discussions regarding the broader purpose of higher education are taking place. As a learning outcome, the practice of cultural humility can potentially be extended across a wide range of educational contexts and settings. Purposefully incorporating cultural humility as a critical component in global learning is itself an interrelated act of both humility and strength, much like bowing down and standing up.

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## Declarations and conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

## Institutional review board approval for research

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Pennsylvania State University (STUDY00012310).

## Originality of article statement

This article is not under consideration for publication anywhere else, nor published in any form prior. The authors agree that the submission is original. Where there is potential for duplication, the authors have correctly referenced and cited the work.

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