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## **Research article**

# Decolonising non-violence: what Indigenous wisdom traditions contribute to non-violence teacher education

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# Abstract

Knowledge systems and social philosophies from Indigenous communities in the Global South have long promoted non-violence through a sense of shared humanity and community building, and as such are valid counter-hegemonic alternatives to the existing colonial, Eurocentric model of knowledge production in use. This article details the contributions made by two specific Indigenous wisdom traditions – ubuntu and Buen Vivir – to a non-violence education teacher training programme in Chile framed within decolonial epistemologies. Using participatory workshops as a method, this study sought to offer Chilean trainee teachers a set of tools to explore issues of discrimination and exclusion and to deal with tensions arising from these issues informed by non-violent approaches. Participants read and reflected on how these wisdom traditions could contribute to their own teaching practice and later planned and facilitated a session with their peers to help them develop awareness on the principles of ubuntu and Buen Vivir. Results show paradigm shifts in three areas: individual versus collective action; their perception of human interconnectedness and of our interconnectedness with the environment; and how these perspectives could inform their teaching practice to foster greater inclusiveness.

**Keywords** Indigenous wisdom traditions; ubuntu; teacher training; non-violence; non-violence education

# Introduction

Since the end of the 2000s, Chile has witnessed an unprecedented increase in social violence, particularly against ethnic and sexual minorities. It began in 2006, with the so-called 'Penguins Revolution' and continued until October 2019, through a series of subsequent student movements that demanded educational reforms, such as the elimination of school admission tests, the allocation of universally free college tuition and school transport, and the eradication of policies that perpetuate segregation (Bellei et al., 2014). (The Penguins Revolution, or March of the Penguins, was the name given by the press to a series of student protests carried out by Chilean high-school students in 2006. The name derives from the colours of public school uniforms in Chile: grey trousers, white shirt and navy-blue jacket.) Not only did these movements garner support from different segments of the population, but they also expanded into a series of further social demands from teachers, members of feminist movements and the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, at the start of movements in 2006, students were joined by teachers and parents on the streets and, in October 2019, media sources reported a figure of 1.2 million demonstrating on a single day (Larsson, 2019). However, these demonstrations and movements were marred by groups of participants that had routinely resorted to, and attempted to justify, violent acts, such as barricading the entrance to schools and universities and looting, burning and destroying their own premises as well as public property, including those that perform a public service, such as pharmacies, commuter buses, subway stations and supermarkets (Marino, 2006; Muñoz, 2006; Ponce, 2019). These violent acts in turn engendered further violence on the part of the government and police forces, who, in full riot gear, used aggressive crowd control, such as tear gas, rubber (and real) bullets and armoured trucks, and engaged in violent, and even deadly, confrontations, with casualties on both sides (Dominguez and Silva, 2019; Franklin, 2019). This is the backdrop against which I designed and conducted a study intended to investigate the extent to which non-violent approaches might form the basis for classroom practices that could permeate into human relations outside the educational setting and bring people closer together in harmony, understanding and mutual cooperation.

This study was prompted by my desire to: (1) investigate to what extent the violence described above was manifesting in the classrooms and educational communities themselves; and (2) facilitate a collaborative space for trainee teachers to learn about and discuss how to deal with these situations within a framework of non-violence and inclusiveness. More specifically, I wanted to investigate the contributions that the transnational wisdom traditions of ubuntu and Buen Vivir could bring to such debates, and how they could contribute to a non-violent pedagogical framework built within their practice. The ubiquity of Indigenous groups within Chilean society, and the historically relevant fact that the educational system and curriculum are both rooted in coloniality and Western epistemologies to the detriment of other forms of knowledge production (Aman, 2015, 2017; Aman and Ireland, 2019; Mignolo, 2017; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), offered this research study an opportunity to address this educational and cultural inequality from a non-Western, decolonial perspective. This study stems from the belief that there must be a recognition of existing diversities, and that these diversities should translate into epistemological ones.

There was another reason for exploring these perspectives: the absence of both non-violence education and Indigenous wisdom traditions as part of current decolonial efforts towards greater social justice in Chilean education. As of 2023, empirical and participatory studies in Chilean classrooms are largely absent from the investigative landscape. There is an abundance of research on issues of inequality (Espinoza et al., 2021; Leyton and Slachevsky, 2021; Martínez and Uribe, 2017) and lack of inclusiveness (Iturra Gonzalez, 2019; Manghi et al., 2020; Martínez and Rosas, 2022). However, these are largely policy rather than practice oriented, and descriptive rather than empirical, and, in the case of those studies focusing on inclusiveness, they are focused almost entirely on disability.

As far as Indigenous research goes, most efforts in Chilean education concern the development of *interculturalidad*, and the revitalisation of local Indigenous languages (Aman and Ireland, 2019; Durán et al., 2008; Gutiérrez Pezo, 2020; Núñez, 2017). There is a distinction between *interculturalidad*, as I have used it here, and interculturality. Whereas interculturalidad – its Spanish translation – is not merely that; rather, it carries a connotation unique to the Latin American context. Aman (2015: 122) explains that *interculturalidad* 'implies bringing about a new model of society through a different vision of development, nation, identity and territorialisation; that is to say, a vision that is not dependent upon or structured by the imposition of one ideal society on another'. These intercultural efforts that I mention have focused on promoting Indigenous knowledge within the school and university curriculum, but they do not touch on transnational wisdom traditions such as ubuntu (Africa) or Buen Vivir (South America), nor on what these could contribute to a non-violent framework geared towards education.

This study represents an attempt to add these missing elements to the debates on educational inclusiveness, and to do so from an empirical perspective that brings trainee teachers' own experiences and recommendations into the process. It was designed as a three-part workshop with two different groups of participants, all trainee teachers at two Chilean universities. The first part of the workshop consisted of pre-session reading and reflection. The second was a face-to-face collaborative session designed to discuss their initial reflections, investigate instances of violence present in their classrooms and design strategies to address them, drawing on their previous reading. The final stage was a general discussion of findings, where participants discussed and analysed these with each other.

This article first details the key concepts informing and underpinning this study, namely violence and non-violence, as well as Indigenous wisdom traditions and their possible contributions to non-violence education. It then describes the methodology used and discusses the main findings made, as well as the challenges that participants identified in bringing non-violent intercultural perspectives into their own educational context. Finally, the article engages in a discussion of the main findings.

# **Conceptual framework**

## Understanding violence and non-violence

To understand non-violence, I will first elaborate on what exactly is meant by violence in the context of this article. For this purpose, I will refer to Galtung's decades-long work on this issue. His oft-cited work 'Violence, peace and peace research' (Galtung, 1969), as well his later publications 'Cultural violence' (Galtung, 1990) and Peace by Peaceful Means (Galtung, 1996), define violence as: 'the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance' (Galtung, 1969: 168). In other words, if the means and opportunity to create greater equality exist and we do not use them, we are perpetrating violence. Galtung illustrates this using the example of a patient with tuberculosis; were they to die today, after all the medical advances we have achieved, it would be considered an act of violence. He further expands on the concept of violence, from the direct (or physical), where there is an obvious perpetrator, to the structural: 'Resources are unevenly distributed, as when income distributions are heavily skewed, literacy/education unevenly distributed, medical services existent in some districts and for some groups only, and so on' (Galtung, 1969: 171). He further defines cultural violence as 'any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form' (Galtung, 1990: 291). Examples of this are the language used in our representation of others or the ideology, religious beliefs or values that allow for direct and structural violence to exist in the first place, and legitimatise it.

Let us turn our attention to non-violence by also establishing the difference between non-violence and pacifism. Howes (2013: 427) describes pacifism as 'the ideological assertion that war and violence should be rejected in political and personal life'. Historically, however, non-violence has involved a committed engagement in political action while refusing to take part in violent acts, and, in some cases, while maintaining a strong spiritual commitment. This is exemplified in some important historical events: Gandhi's (2013) *satyagraha*, for instance, which served as the ideological foundation for the Indian independence movement, calls for direct noncompliance to those exerting violence on people through committed resistance. In further analysing non-violence, Ojha (n.d.: n.p.) described it as 'a weapon of conflict resolution'. In his famous speech during the March on Washington, Civil Rights leader John Lewis (1963: 1) highlighted that the struggle for civil rights was a non-violent revolution and that 'we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory'. Lewis, who was nearly beaten to death by the police during the March on Selma, remarked:

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. (Cited in Bote, 2020: n.p.)

Finally, at the height of the American war in Vietnam, the renowned Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh founded what he called engaged Buddhism. According to Nhat Hanh (2020: 1) 'out of love and the willingness to act selflessly, strategies, tactics, and techniques for a nonviolent struggle arise naturally', and 'nonviolent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity'. In other words, what each of these positions share, in addition to the strong spiritual element (Gandhi was a Hindu, Lewis was a Christian and Thich Nhat Hanh was a Buddhist monk), is the view of non-violence as anti-oppression *action*, to which I might add the concept of *collective* action. Although each of these proponents spoke to individual commitment, they did so in view of the social issues of the time, which required collective action for success. This links to Judith Butler's (2020: 60) argument that our self-sufficiency is a fantasy, and that we live in a world where, whether we abide by this concept or not, we are bound by moral obligations of a social nature; that by overcoming our fantasy of possible self-sufficiency, we can begin to imagine a 'new form of civic and political life' anchored in non-violent interdependency.

The classroom, I argue, is a microcosmos of this world, which provides us with a small ecosystem in which collective action can potentially add to a flourishing of human relations. Wang (2013) emphasises this collective aspect when highlighting the fact that non-violence is relational. By drawing from Taoism and international wisdom traditions, she establishes the inherent mutuality of our relations and how non-violent approaches can contribute to a shift from dualistic to non-dualistic, from separate to interconnected.

#### Indigenous perspectives within this study

Indigenous ways of knowing have been historically viewed in the West from a reductionist perspective of being not real bodies and systems of knowledge, but as cultural traditions (and, for some, even wild and primitive, at that) (Ortiz, 2007; Said, 1978; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In spite of these condescending views, however, Indigenous ways of knowing contribute metaphysical and practical elements that have been historically ignored in Eurocentric, positivist literature. One of them is the element of holistic, peaceful interconnectedness between all people and things; another is that the creation of knowledge comes from people's direct experience, and from their relationship with their surroundings; a third is that this knowledge, unlike in the West, is passed on orally from one generation to the next, and thus a tradition is formed for how knowledge is transmitted (Macedo, 1999; Mahuika, 2019; Neha et al., 2020; Ortiz, 2007; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). It is worth mentioning, for instance, that the original Mapuche teachings – the Mapuches being the oldest and largest Indigenous group in Chile - began to be recorded only in the eighteenth century. Ortiz (2007), who conducted his research in intercultural communication within a Mapuche community in southern Chile, further argues that incorporating elements of Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum not only creates a much-needed counter-hegemonic approach, but also strengthens native students' sense of meaningfulness when engaging in their educational practices, thus highlighting the need for curricular inclusiveness. Fassetta and Imperiale (2018) support this view in a think piece that attempts to identify gaps in current Indigenous research; their contention is that Indigenous people have useful and important knowledge that allows them to manage their natural resources and engage in their own practices for development, but that these have been historically, and even fairly recently, sidelined in social research, which has tended to privilege Eurocentric systems of knowledge creation over those of Indigenous communities. Their essay, which dissects the literature available on this issue, confirms the fact that Western researchers usually understand these groups and their knowledge by applying their own lens, thus missing an opportunity to view the world from an Indigenous perspective (Fassetta and Imperiale, 2018). I would like to point out that, although the term Indigenous knowledge has not been exempt from scrutiny (for a critique of the term and its uses, see Horsthemke, 2004), the contention remains that the imposition of Western

'rationality', knowledge and cultural forms have had calamitous consequences in a wide range of human endeavours within Indigenous communities, not the least of which has been the historical dismissal and near destruction of many of their traditions, cultural norms and cultural heritage. Therefore, whether 'knowledge' is defined as a 'knowledge that' or a 'knowledge how' (Horsthemke, 2004: 35), or whether we place their philosophical framework under that umbrella term or not, the fact remains that their approach to understanding life, nature and relationships, unfitting and incoherent as it is with the Eurocentric linear search for provable truths (Ortiz, 2007; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), has been largely set aside; yet research, including the aforementioned studies, has unearthed the richness and applicability of Indigenous knowledge on issues of interconnectedness, interdependency and peaceful coexistence.

## Indigenous wisdom traditions and interdependency

This leads us to the confluence of ideas regarding interdependency, communal harmony and overcoming individualism, which we find as a way of life within Indigenous communities. Hossein et al. (2011: 545) researched the individualism/collectivism dichotomy within Navajo communities in the USA, and although they note that economic factors and industrialisation have had an impact on their communal way of life, as has the increasing 'Westernisation' of their populations, they also acknowledge that Navajos continue to strive for a collective approach to social life, whereby the well-being of the community supersedes that of the individual, and that their sense of self is inextricably linked to their community and family, and their relationship with their ecosystem. This is an important point, as Brewer and Chen (2007) show that individuals can be collective, but it is how much members value group harmony, duty to one's group and interpersonal relationships that differentiates one from the other. Research conducted in Andean communities shows that the notion of communal life taking precedence over individual goals, building harmonious relationships not only with immediate and extended family, but also with the larger community as a whole, and developing a sustainable connection with the land, is still an essential part of these groups' world view (Apaza-Huanca, 2019; Garcés and Maureira, 2018). Furthermore, in an interview with Mapuche students and teachers, Del Pino and Ferrada (2019) illustrate how their world view links directly to the notion of interdependency. For instance, the Mapuche concept of kyme mogen (well-being and health) promotes the belief that everything around us is alive and that it is our duty as individuals to learn about each element (person, water, land and the sea), so that we can nourish them. As our well-being depends on each of these elements, they depend on our actions on them being based on our understanding of them.

In conclusion, I assert that there are lessons to be drawn from Indigenous practices in terms of working towards a state of interdependency, harmony and unity that inform not only our classroom practice and the type of learning environment we strive to create, but also the relationships we form outside of it.

## Ubuntu and Buen Vivir

Both ubuntu and Buen Vivir are deeply rooted in the mutuality and interconnectedness described above. They are therefore fundamental in informing our non-violent commitment.

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu (1999: 29), who headed the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, acknowledges how difficult it is to accurately translate the word ubuntu into the English language; however, its principles are not difficult to explain:

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

He adds that ubuntu has as its maximum goal the achievement of social harmony through shared human participation, and that, in the end, we can only be a human being through other human beings; therefore, committing an act of violence against someone is an action of dehumanising both the victim and ourselves.

Another perspective on what ubuntu is can be found in the work of Gade (2011, 2017). His writing informs us that, prior to the 1990s, when ubuntu began to be mostly defined as a human quality, it was part of what he coins a 'narrative of return' (Gade, 2011: 304). What this means is a return to the pre-colonial values of African societies: social harmony, dignity and confidence. Nyerere (1966) adds to this when describing the relationship between ubuntu and what he calls African socialism: in it, there are no brotherhoods versus their foes, but human beings who are all part of the same family. Here we have an individual dimension joined with a social one, or what Mangena (2016) aptly described as a person only being able to exercise their humanity through other persons, which in turn emphasises the importance of the community.

In *The Force of Non-Violence: An ethico-political bind*, Butler (2020) notes how violence ensues as a result of a difference in the value we place on the lives of others. Although we mourn the loss of those close to us, either by family ties or social ones, we do not grieve equally for those who we see as outsiders. Therefore, there is a sense of inequality built into our social contracts and the structures that surround us and support us. Fukuyama (2019) offers a somewhat similar perspective in elucidating how identity politics has come to shape and inform our conversation about social inclusiveness. In the postmodern, post-colonial world, as the Other has begun to reclaim their right to agency and self-determination, and to transform both their individual and social identity, people have also begun to grow further and further apart, as each historically marginalised group engages in their rightful reclamations.

Ubuntu, although geographically context-specific, offers a very different perspective on human relations that can move (and has in fact moved) beyond its African borders. In her argument, with which I agree, for non-violence as a viable, sustainable approach to social justice education, Wang (2013) notes that postmodern, critical perspectives on social justice have tended to exacerbate the difference between the self and the Other, between the oppressed and the oppressor. Her work on multicultural curriculum studies in the USA draws on Buddhism, Daoism and ubuntu as practices that emphasise non-dualism and, in the particular case of ubuntu, the 'rehumanizing of both the victims and the perpetrators' (Wang, 2013: 490). Here is the key in my opinion: non-violence as a practice of inclusiveness is a practice of *equality*: a practice in which every life, even of those who have oppressed us, is equally worth grieving and equally worth valuing. I further argue that, although ubuntu is an African world view 'based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values' (Broodryk, 2002: 13), these are in fact universal values. They present a genuine challenge to both the individualistic mindset and the social over-identification, both based on the dualistic perspective of *us and them*, which prevents us from developing these values.

Let us now turn to Buen Vivir, the other Indigenous wisdom tradition from which this article and the research described herein draws. Often translated as 'Live Well' or 'Good Living', Buen Vivir primarily represents a counter-hegemonic model to the neoliberal pattern of development that has permeated South America's life and economy for the past 40 years. Gudynas (2011: 442) traces the genesis of Buen Vivir as an answer to the negative environmental impact and 'debatable economic effects' of neoliberal economic policies in the region. The ideas and philosophy of Buen Vivir have been incorporated in the constitutions of Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009), and this has, in turn, allowed for greater efforts directed towards intercultural awareness and inclusiveness, such as Indigenous universities that are extraneous to the national educational framework or community activities and spaces for debate, and especially open to members of Indigenous communities, where the conversation revolves around ways in which to preserve their knowledge (Bacquet, 2022; Burman, 2016).

Although upon reading the above description, it might seem that it bears little or no connection with the philosophy of non-violence, there are two key linkages. The first lies in the fact that the focus of Buen Vivir lies in building community, establishing a sustainable relation with the Earth and how to make use of its resources and, more importantly, decolonising cultural and spiritual practices (Gudynas, 2011; Villalba, 2013). The second important connection is that Buen Vivir presents an alternative development model that comes into direct opposition to the Western-centric neoliberal vision. This vision, I contend, is rooted in, and has perpetuated, a paradigm that in itself, for the all the reasons I have laid out, is violent in its inequality. Furthermore, the mere notion that living in harmony and sustainably depends on our mutual interdependence is a direct challenge to the fragmented society in which we live, and to our current paradigms concerning the self and the Other. Violence stems, as I have described, from unequal and oppressive power relations, and Buen Vivir, as Echavarría and Orosz (2021) posit, represents an opposition to any form of domination, while promoting social harmony.

It is because of the values that these two traditions represent that they were chosen to be part of the overall theoretical framework of this research. Although the number of people identifying as Indigenous in Chile is much lower than in Bolivia or Ecuador (12.5 per cent versus nearly 60 per cent; IWGAI, n.d.-a, n.d.-b), Indigeneity is an important issue: this 12.5 per cent, amounting to nearly 2 million people, have historically been marginalised and have been, since the early 1990s, engaged in efforts to achieve greater social inclusion and in violent conflict with the government over land. I believed that any project aimed at fostering inclusiveness through a non-violent framework would have to consider these facts so as to be fully non-violent.

# Methodology

Within the framework of research methodology, Ørngreen and Levinsen (2017: 71) describe workshops as 'an arrangement where a group of people learn, acquire new knowledge, perform creative problem-solving, or innovate in relation to a domain-specific issue'. I found this to be a suitable structure, both within the scope of the chosen design and in the research context, as participants discussed and generated ideas in order to tackle specific social and structural issues concerning violence and inequality. Ørngreen and Levinsen (2017) identify three strands in workshop knowledge, which have simultaneously distinct and shared features:

- 1. workshop as a means, wherein participants join with the aim of achieving a specific goal
- 2. workshops as a practice, wherein participants partake in them and develop protocols that can be used and incorporated into future situations that need them
- 3. workshops as a research methodology, which have been specifically designed as part of a research task, and which aim at producing data that are valid and reliable.

As far as this study is concerned, each of these strands offered a distinct yet overlapping perspective and, as a result, all three approaches were used: participants joined the study with the aim of gaining new pedagogical tools; they developed protocols through the peer-teaching stage; and the sessions had specific tasks that produced valid data.

This study consisted of two workshops, organised thematically around the topic of Indigenous knowledge and its relationship to non-violence. These workshops, attended by 14 participants during the first iteration, and by 24 during the second, were held at university premises: the first one at Universidad de O'Higgins, a public regional institution, and the second at the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaiso, a private, non-profit research university. Participants were trainee teachers enrolled in their English-teaching degree, most of whom had some teaching experience. Recruitment was done through a university-wide call for participants to take part in this elective course; participation was voluntary, and an information session was organised by the universities and delivered by me prior to the commencement of each iteration. Consent forms were given, signed and collected after each of these information sessions. All participants' names used here are pseudonyms.

# Workshop structure

The workshop related to Indigenous wisdom traditions and their connection with non-violence education was structured as follows:

- 1. A pre-session reading assignment, which consisted of the following:
  - a. Chapter 3 in Robert Aman and Timothy Ireland's (2019) Educational Alternatives in Latin America: New modes of counter-hegemonic learning. The chapter, titled 'In search of the good life: Promises and challenges of Buen Vivir for knowledge, education and gender' (Stromquist, 2019), contains research done in Bolivia. It highlights the successes and challenges of Indigenous communities creating their own universities and public spaces for knowledge creation.
  - b. Chapter 2 in Desmond Tutu's (1999) *No Future Without Forgiveness*. This chapter provides a narrative of the reconciliation and peacebuilding process in post-apartheid South Africa.
  - c. Chapter 10 in Ladislao Semali and Joe Kincheloe's (1999) What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the academy. The chapter, by R. Sambuli Mosha (1999), is titled 'The inseparable link between intellectual and spiritual formation in Indigenous knowledge and education: A

case study in Tanzania'. It provides a detailed overview of what Indigenous knowledge is, its world view and cosmology, and how it is informed by both intellectual and spiritual elements.

- d. A video and two newspaper articles that further explain what ubuntu and Buen Vivir are, and how they can contribute to Western, evidence-based epistemologies. The video is titled 'What we can learn from the African philosophy of Ubuntu (BBC Reel, 2022), and the articles are 'Buen Vivir: Colombia's philosophy of good living' (Selibas, 2021) and 'Buen Vivir: The social philosophy inspiring movements in South America' (Balch, 2013).
- e. Following the reading assignment, participants were asked to reflect on the following points:
  - ways to bring these ideas into their classroom practice
  - how to foster greater collaboration and a sense of mutual dependence within their classrooms
  - how to bring the ideas and philosophy of Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous communities, since not all of their students identified as Indigenous
  - challenges in doing the above
  - any new insights and awareness gained.

Participants would then submit this reflection in the form of a written document, video journal, audio recording or a drawing accompanied by an explanation.

- 2. Once participants had completed the reading and personal reflections, they met for a face-to-face session. During this session, they shared their reflections and thoughts about strategies to implement the concepts found within their communities and in their classroom practice.
- 3. Participants then designed and facilitated a 30-minute peer-teaching session that they could later replicate at their schools with younger students, and which was done with their peers. The session they designed and facilitated in turn comprised the following:
  - a. Leading a contemplative practice called *Tonglen*, aimed at awakening compassion in the practitioner by breathing in the suffering we see, and breathing out relief of that suffering (Chodron, 2002). This activity, like the main task of the session, was chosen by the participants. *Tonglen* is a Tibetan practice of giving and taking, or exchanging oneself with others. This means that in the meditation, the practitioners take on other people's suffering as their own. They think of groups of people who are experiencing pain or suffering, such as homeless people, people with terminal diseases and people undergoing painful experiences. During the meditation, they contemplate this and wish away these people's suffering, while sending them happiness, safety and comfort.
  - b. After leading the meditation, participants went on to the main task of the lesson. In it, they led an activity the goal of which was to recognise the mutuality of our human experience and our degree of interconnectedness. Once the class was organised into small groups of three or four students, the activity itself comprised three steps:
    - identify some of their recent common experiences
    - identify shared feelings and emotions concerning these experiences
    - discuss what they shared and what they have found to have in common as human beings.

The data collected were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) framework for thematic analysis. The process of coding and identifying themes involved combing through each individual reflection, group report and lesson plan in order to determine the themes that emerged. The results of this analysis are presented in the next section.

# Findings

The data analysis revealed three main areas where there was either a paradigmatic shift or new insights gained, namely: (1) challenge to individualism: from 'I' to 'we'; (2) we are interconnected, and we belong in a bundle of life; and (3) classroom applications: what we can do about developing interconnectedness.

# Challenge to individualism: from 'l' to 'we'

Participants' insights reveal a paradigmatic shift that moved from an individualistic mindset to a more collective one, as can be seen from these observations:

I noticed the sense of community in which I work with others as 'we', but also as my own growth as an individual. Western people on the other hand are taught that the only thing that matters is the 'ego', ourselves, everything that surrounds us, we own it. (Susan)

Eventually, we should not fully advocate individualism, but be promoters of human beings as interdependent social creatures that live in communities and societies. (Pedro)

In Indigenous knowledge, we are devoted to help others, not for the sake of our own benefit but, more profound, for the sake of our humanity. (Carlos)

It is the relationship with others that makes us human. The interactions with people that surround us is what allows to be fulfilled, we thrive in communities but we also see our humanity when we come in contact with those towards whom we direct it. (Patricia)

These insights speak of several dimensions worth highlighting. The first is the impact of Western epistemologies in creating an individual viewed as separate from other human beings, which, as in Butler's (2020) example earlier in this article, is seemingly self-sufficient and requires nothing but themselves to survive. The second insight emphasises the fact that we are interdependent, and not the participants of what Butler (2020) has described as the fantasy of our self-sufficiency. The third observation offered by participants here speaks of the realisation of what Indigenous wisdom traditions offer in this context: a philosophy that proposes a manner in which we as humankind should be living: not for ourselves, but for each other. Finally, the last of these insights points to the fact that, in the end, it is our relationships that make us human, and it is these relationships that bring fulfilment. This is what Tutu (1999) points out when describing what a person with ubuntu should be, at its full embodiment.

## We are interconnected, and we belong in a bundle of life

The second paradigmatic shift evidenced by participants' data was the realisation that we are interconnected and that we depend on each other as a community. The insights offered below illustrate a few key points: (1) the realisation on the participants' part that, as individuals living within communities (social groups, nations, humanity), we are not only related to one another, but are also equally worthwhile; and (2) the importance of our relationships in shaping our social identity, and how nurturing these relationships is essential in the life and growth of our communities. Finally, in an extension of the concept of being a human through other human beings, the connection with the teaching profession, and how both teachers and students can only fulfil their roles through the existence of the other:

There are two concepts mentioned: 'My humanity is inextricably linked to yours' and 'I am because you are'; they are related in the sense of interconnectedness. As I have mentioned before, to these philosophies everything and everyone are one, that means, everyone is related and important at the same level. (Renato)

I think this concept has a huge impact in terms of how relationships between us can affect us, is beyond a superficial level, our relationships with each other are the core of our identities. (Mateo)

I am part of a network that should be constructed with love, understanding and diversity. We are part of the same whole in humankind, but we are diverse. It is this diversity that configures this classroom. I am because you are: I wouldn't be a teacher without the students and vice versa. (Karla)

The concepts mentioned above (ubuntu and Buen Vivir) have a deep impact on human relationships, as they give meaning and significance to every action of our everyday lives. And although our community was not established in these principles, their practice can motivate a change and a more peaceful way of living. (Juan)

It is the relationship with others that makes us human. The interactions with people that surround us is what allows us to be fulfilled, we thrive living in communities, but we also see our humanity when we come in contact with those towards we direct said humanity. (Elisa)

As one participant concluded:

We as humans do not exist in an individual sense, our actions and expressions affect the lives of other people that may or may not be part of our own environment. We are also responsible for other live species that can be found in nature, since we share the same planet. (Lucas)

These realisations and insights are an invitation to reimagine our classrooms and educational communities as a place where gradually we stop seeing others as an Other, and where our actions add meaning to the lives of those around us by expanding our moral responsibility and circle of concern. Almost 20 years ago, Nagler (2004) argued that our society was on a downward spiral towards a state in which competition and a win/lose mentality were prevalent, rooted in a sense of 'unconnectedness'. The voices of the participants that I have presented here, anchored in the ontological reinterpretation that ubuntu and Buen Vivir make of our human (and non-human) relations represent, in my view, a call to build deeper and more compassionate connections that acknowledge our interconnectedness.

## Classroom applications: what we can do about developing interconnectedness

This brings us to the last point of the discussion and analysis, which importantly focuses on classroom practice and what participants suggested as possible ways to promote the values that Indigenous traditions advocate, such as developing communal harmony and fostering collective well-being and a mutually shared responsibility for each other. What these activities and practices involve, in the participants' eyes, can be summarised in these six main ideas:

- 1. Create more instances of collaboration: develop a sense of 'we' and reduce competitiveness.
- 2. Create instances for community work, in and out of the classroom: develop a greater sense of interdependence and social awareness.
- 3. Foster accountability: make students individually accountable for how their actions impact on the well-being of the group.
- 4. Work towards common objectives: ensure the classroom community works towards a shared goal, such as a community project, where everyone is allowed to contribute, and their contributions are fairly balanced.
- 5. Reflect: create instances to collectively reflect on our shared human experience in order to create an awareness of our interdependence.
- 6. Raise awareness: design lessons that raise awareness about how to live sustainably, and that also critique our current development model.

Let us delve into what participants had to offer. The first insight suggested here highlights the significance of helping learners understand the importance of community if we are to raise awareness of our interconnectedness and shared humanity:

I thought that maybe if we start teaching students about the importance of their communities, like why it is important that there are so many schools in a particular city, and make them think about their communities, in this way they can start being conscious about this idea of interdependence: the community is important for them, they should respect the community and the people who live in them as they are all interconnected. This would be a first step to make them think this way, because of course the real objective is to make them think that every human in the earth is important, not just in their community. (Patty)

The next participant highlights several important points. One is the sense of individual accountability, as well as shared, balanced contributions to collective endeavours. Another is how, within educational communities, knowledge is mutually constructed and shared, with individual members learning from each other:

When you work collaboratively, you can understand the content in a different way, since perhaps your co-worker understood aspects of the subject that you did not. An example of collaborative work are group projects, these motivate us to work with different classmates, so each one will have a task to develop, but always collaborating with the final work. I remember when I was in my fourth year of high school, we had to create a project focused on contributing something significant to our school. After discussing as a group what we would do, we decided to build a 'well', this would be merely decorative, and its function was to be able to put plants inside. Although in the work we did not have to use our conventional knowledge of the traditional subjects taught at school, I was able to share general knowledge with my classmates, for example, how to hammer or paint. I was surprised that each classmate had something interesting to teach about how to make our work. It also allowed us to build a closer relationship. (Valentina)

Significantly, the perspective offered by the next participant emphasises the importance of creating a collaborative spirit that challenges and diminishes competitiveness, while raising awareness of interdependence as a path towards non-violence:

I believe that the main concept that we must work on in the classroom is collaborative work. Create strategies so that students understand and feel that they are not there to compete to get the best grade, but to learn together with all their classmates, where they can support each other and support their ideas. From my perspective, group works are a good resource to promote this idea of interdependence. In a teamwork, each one fulfils a function, so each member is essential for the realisation of this. Fostering this idea that we depend on our peers to learn is a big step in starting to create a non-violent environment. Stop competing, include those who have different ideas, want the success of my classmates for the good of everyone. These are ideas that the new generations will acquire and gradually reform the world view of society. (Ricardo)

These views were perhaps best summed up by a group of participants who, when asked to think about strategies that could help learners develop an interdependent and interconnected mindset, not only covered several of the points above, but also incorporated an exercise to be done in class, which can help learners to think more empathetically about others, while remaining conscious of how their own behaviour might affect others. These points have been transcribed verbatim from a poster created by them:

- 1. Promoting instances for students to share their feelings.
- 2. Trying to promote respect in order to develop consciousness.
- 3. Findings ways to realise what you are doing/how to behave.
- 4. Doing the following exercises in a classroom/during class:
  - a. Remember: When did you feel like that?
  - b. Imagine: How does the other person feel? How would you feel in the same situation?
  - c. Watch and listen: What is the other person saying? What is their body language telling you?
  - d. Ask: What is the person feeling, and why?
- 5. Be grateful for what you have/are (asking students what they are grateful for). (Roberto, Dante, Catalina and Luz)

In short, participants identified a range of classroom practices that can aid in the process of bringing the values of ubuntu and Buen Vivir into their communities. Such practices, values and ideas, in turn, can potentially make a positive contribution to the development of a non-violent framework. Although not a goal of this study, and certainly not by 2030, as stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, working on the development of non-violent strategies and philosophy through intercultural efforts aligns with current Sustainable Development Goals in education, particularly 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (Council of Europe, n.d.: n.p.)

# Challenges

In addition to thinking of the strategies and approaches to bring these perspectives into the classroom, participants voiced their views concerning possible challenges in doing so. The first of these challenges concerns the culturally ingrained individualism present in Chilean classrooms; as one participant says:

I personally consider that many people will refuse to accept this way of living because they were taught that 'I' as an individual must go on top of every other being no matter the facts; so one big challenge will be to get out of this systematic way of seeing others as a threat to the course of our lives. (Mario)

Another challenge concerns ideological differences, and how we might deal with those when they arise:

Some of the challenges that I might face are ideological disagreements or ideas of what is correct or what is not, and understanding each other's beliefs, but, as I mentioned before, I know that I will be able to understand the reason why they believe something specific and to respect their points of view, no matter how different they are of mine. (Juan Carlos)

A third possible challenge identified by participants lies in students' own homes, and in the parental perspectives to which they are exposed:

I believe that the perspectives presented in the material may help eliminate barriers that otherwise might exist between students, regardless of what their specific differences may be. The main challenges to this will probably come from the students' parents, since they are the ones who, depending on their value systems, may have less cosmopolitan views of society, which can rub off on their children. (Sebastian)

The first two points concern the overlapping dimensions of culture and ideology. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) offer a useful perspective for helping learners negotiate their intercultural identities. As individuals engage in the process of community building and interconnectedness and interdependence, they embark on the process of navigating multiple identities as well. It is important to note that their work is deeply linked to the use of mindfulness to help learners engage empathetically in intercultural communication. In reference to their work, mindfulness is defined as 'being aware of our own and others' behaviour in the situation, and paying attention to the process of communication taking place between dissimilar others' (Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 2019: 16). Because individuals fundamentally seek to be understood, respected and supported, engaging in communication with others must involve a commitment to validate the other in our communication. Mitigating these ideological differences must, therefore, inevitably implicate the recognition and acceptance of each other's differences – with the understanding that this is a process taking place over time that does not lead to instantaneous change. The use of intercultural communication frameworks, such as the ones offered by Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019), Jandt (2018), Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016) and Zorana et al. (2016), affords us such opportunities from a diverse range of possibilities.

Concerning the role of families in facilitating the educational process in learners, evidence points to the need to strengthen the relationship and collaboration between families and institutions, given the positive outcomes obtained when such collaboration exists. A study by Saracostti et al. (2019) investigating this very issue in Chile provides not only a wealth of data on the positive impact that this bond has on students, but also that, as of 2019, only one in three teachers feel supported by families in their educational endeavours. Therefore, there is a definitive role for the school as a whole to establish deeper bonds, and to strengthen existing ones, with families, so that they are active and willing participants in students' learning journeys.

# Discussion

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) explain coloniality as a dimension that implies a manner of being, knowing and doing that started with the colonial experience, and which remains as its legacy. This manner of being, knowing and doing seeks to, and continues to, perpetuate existing power structures and hierarchies that are constitutive of Western political and economic models. Thus, decoloniality constitutes a direct challenge to this, in a manner that Albán (2008: 85) calls re-existing:

The mechanisms that human groups implement as a strategy of questioning and making visible the practices of racialization, exclusion and marginalization, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self-determination, while at the same time confronting the bio-politic that controls, dominates, and commodifies subjects and nature.

There is strong evidence that reading about different Indigenous wisdom traditions, which presented participants with non-violent, decolonial ways of being, helped inform their awareness of how to build inclusive, sustainable relationships; this ranged from drawing on different Indigenous traditions about ways of community building to a community-based pedagogy rooted in our relationship with, and need to care for, the environment as well as each other, which links directly to research by Delgado-Rivera (2021) and Stromquist (2019) on bringing the paradigms of Buen Vivir into the educational context, and Wang's (2013) work on ubuntu in Western contexts. While Brown and McCowan (2018) acknowledge that in our current education context, dominated by a modernist discourse, these perspectives present their own set of challenges – namely, ideological and structural, which I have described – they also, as participants noted, bring a different awareness of issues of human and non-human interconnectedness and communal living.

The concept of community building is fundamental in a decolonial framework. As Quijano and Ennis (2000) posit, and as Dutta (2018) confirms, hierarchical relations that perpetuate models of domination and exploitation are not only a key embedded element in colonial models, but, in being so, also allow for the continuation of structural violence. Therefore, creating egalitarian, equitable communities goes directly to the heart of this issue. Furthermore, creating classroom communities rooted in interdependence defies the traditional classroom hierarchies, and, although it can certainly be argued that the teacher-student relationship is always hierarchical, facilitating the process of community building within the classroom can go a long way in dismantling it. I would also add that the first step in effecting change is by developing an awareness of both the problem and possible solutions, and evidence here in the way of insights gained and recommendations made points to how decolonial, non-violent perspectives have assisted participants in deepening that awareness. For instance, a participant noted that they had not considered how gender or racial inequalities can be seen in differentiated opportunity and access, but after participating in the workshops, they had felt better equipped to tackle these as an educator. Another participant pointed out that, although their perspective on inequality had not changed, their awareness of how to address it through non-violent action had deepened, particularly on how non-violence can be used as a tool to dismantle power structures through civil disobedience. They also indicated how the knowledge present in Indigenous wisdom traditions, particularly their view on the interconnected dimension of life, had helped them to reconsider their approach to human relations. I acknowledge that what is almost entirely missing from these insights is the more-than-human element present, which, as Kerr and Andreotti (2018) point out, needs to be a greater component of our decolonial practice as we build towards a more socially just future. I attribute this to my initial lack of awareness and knowledge of ecocritical scholarship; this shortcoming prevented me from offering participants a wider range of materials and discussion points concerning the inextricable union between the human and the more-than-human, and how this union is an important element of decolonial work.

# Conclusion

This article has described how ubuntu and Buen Vivir can, from somewhat different perspectives, inform our practice of non-violence education. Evidence presented by co-participants reveals that by the end of a study that involved reading, reflecting and teaching, there had been a significant paradigm shift concerning the dimensions of interconnectedness and interdependence, and their role in community building and moving towards the practice of a philosophy of non-violence.

Through the implementation of a participatory approach, participants had the opportunity to engage in community building themselves. Their feedback shows that by the end of the project, there was a deeper sense of community among them.

Challenges in bringing these ideas into an educational community, where neither ubuntu nor Buen Vivir are part of the existing cultural paradigms, are acknowledged and mitigations are also suggested, particularly those offered through the lens of intercultural communication and intercultural education.

It is acknowledged that, so far as this study is concerned, the main contribution that Indigenous wisdom traditions have made is their view on relationship building, on the eventual disappearance of the Other as such through the humanisation of others: human beings with a shared sense of humanity, whose lives are equally valuable to ours, and whose very existence relies on our own, as ours relies on theirs.

Finally, it is also acknowledged that this article represents a small part of a bigger study on non-violence education, of which Indigenous wisdom traditions are an integral component.

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# Declarations and conflicts of interest

## **Research ethics statement**

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the University of Glasgow ethics board.

# **Consent for publication statement**

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

# Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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