How to Help Online Learning Students Manage Their Vulnerabilities and Grow Their Resilience

Invited seminar
Contact North I Contact Nord
Wednesday 14 October 2020

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Image credit: Pixabay

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New International Bestseller"

How to overcome feeling vulnerable and realise your potential!
Ten *easy* steps

Endorsed by:
E.A.S.Y. Rich (Forbes 100) and author of the bestselling "Yes you can, and you will"

Picture credit: Pixabay

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Everybody hurts – R.E.M

When your day is long
And the night
The night is yours alone
When you're sure you've had
enough
Of this life
Well hang on
Don't let yourself go
'Cause everybody cries
And everybody hurts
sometimes
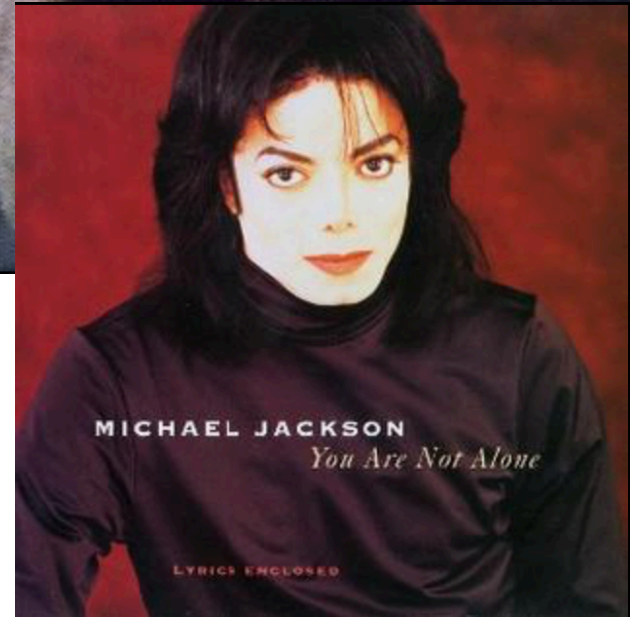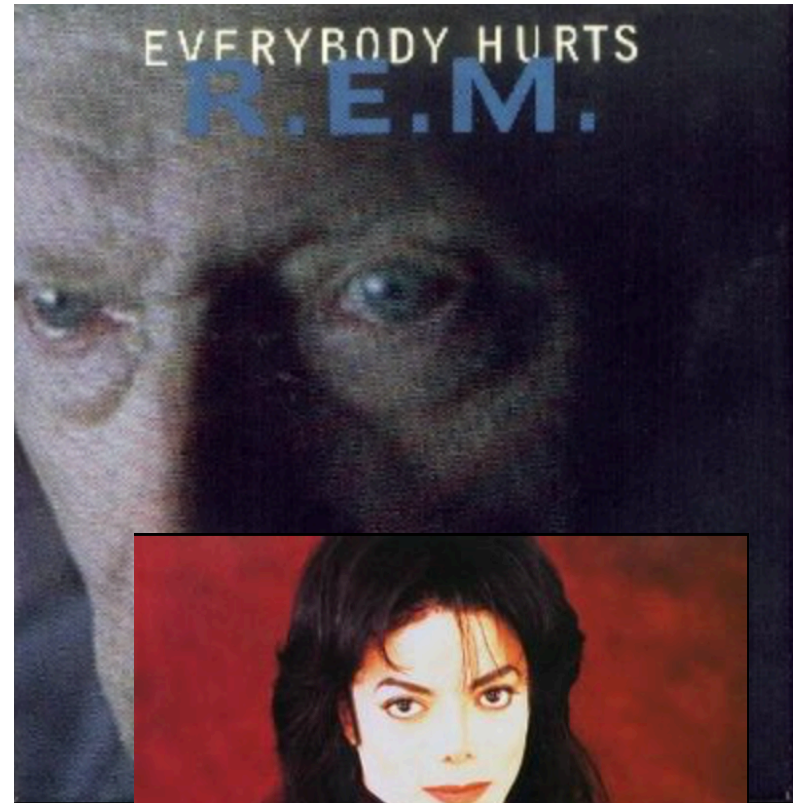
"If you stumble, make it part of the dance.

—author unknown—

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Self   Meditation

Unleash Your Mind's Potential With the Power of Meditation

By **Shawn K** - June 16, 2017

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How do we understand (student) vulnerability?

How do we identify these vulnerabilities – what data do we use and why?

What are our assumptions about these data/categories?

How can we prevent vulnerabilities in our systems and processes to impact or exacerbate their vulnerabilities?

Image credit: Pixabay

Some students are more vulnerable, **at particular points**, in their journey than others, whether **temporary** or **occurrent**.

Their vulnerabilities are often **linked** to or caused by vulnerabilities in the system (ICT, faculty).

We **have a responsibility** and **moral mandate** to identify and support the vulnerable, and address or ameliorate the impact of the factors causing the vulnerability*.

* Terms and conditions apply

Image credit: Pixabay

The harmful idea of student 'vulnerability'

A growing zeal to address 'well-being' diverts resources from those who really need help, says Kathryn Ecclestone

January 23, 2014

Kathryn Ecclestone

Twitter: @EcclestoneK

"...the vulnerability zeitgeist becomes a self-fulfilling pit of need that obscures real vulnerability and **encourages students to shift responsibility for managing everyday problems on to the institution**"

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"The rise in vulnerability claims is leading **academics to become more lenient**. Some withdraw assessment demands or soften their feedback; others become more cautious about exploring controversial ideas"

"There needs to be a debate about the assumptions we make about vulnerability. **It is increasingly difficult for lecturers to differentiate between trivial and serious vulnerabilities**"

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Are Struggling College Students Like Cuddly Bunnies That Should Be Drowned?

A trip down the rabbit hole of a scandalous analogy

By *Steve Kolowich* | FEBRUARY 12, 2016

When Simon P. Newman, president of Mount St. Mary's University of Maryland, was pushing for a more ruthless method of improving his college's retention rate, he chose a provocative analogy.

"This is hard for you because you think of the students as cuddly

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Source credit: https://www.chronicle.com/article/are-struggling-college-students-like-cuddly-bunnies-that-should-be-drowned/

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Vulnerable students as an invasive species

Mount St. Mary's campus is Australia. At-risk students are cuddly bunnies that don't belong in the ecosystem and threaten its economy. Mr. Newman, the president, is a hunter-conservationist who wants cull the herd.

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BEHAVIOR & SOCIETY

Debate Arises over Teaching "Growth Mindsets" to Motivate Students

Research shows conflicting data on the impact of the intervention, but a major new study confirms it can work

By Lydia Denworth on August 12, 2019

Source credit: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/debate-arises-over-teaching-growth-mindsets-to-motivate-students/

Article | Open Access | Published: 07 August 2019

A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement

David S. Yeager ✉, Paul Hanselman ✉, Gregory M. Walton, Jared S. Murray, Robert Crosnoe, Chandra Muller, Elizabeth Tipton, Barbara Schneider, Chris S. Hulleman, Cintia P. Hinojosa, David Paunesku, Carissa Romero, Kate Flint, Alice Roberts, Jill Trott, Ronaldo Iachan, Jenny Buontempo, Sophia Man Yang, Carlos M. Carvalho, P. Richard Hahn, Maithreyi Gopalan, Pratik Mhatre, Ronald Ferguson, Angela L. Duckworth & Carol S. Dweck

106k Accesses | **60** Citations | **1003** Altmetric | Metrics

The National Study of Learning Mindsets showed that a **low-cost treatment**, delivered in **less than an hour**, attained a 0.1 grade point boost…

We emphasize that **not all forms of growth mindset interventions can be expected to increase grades** or advanced course-taking, even in the targeted subgroups.

Some question whether this level of improvement—a **mere 0.1 grade** point boost, for instance—is meaningful.

Before COVID-19, thinking about vulnerability entailed thinking of *Others* – the frail, the sick, the very young, the very old, or those with disabilities or depression,
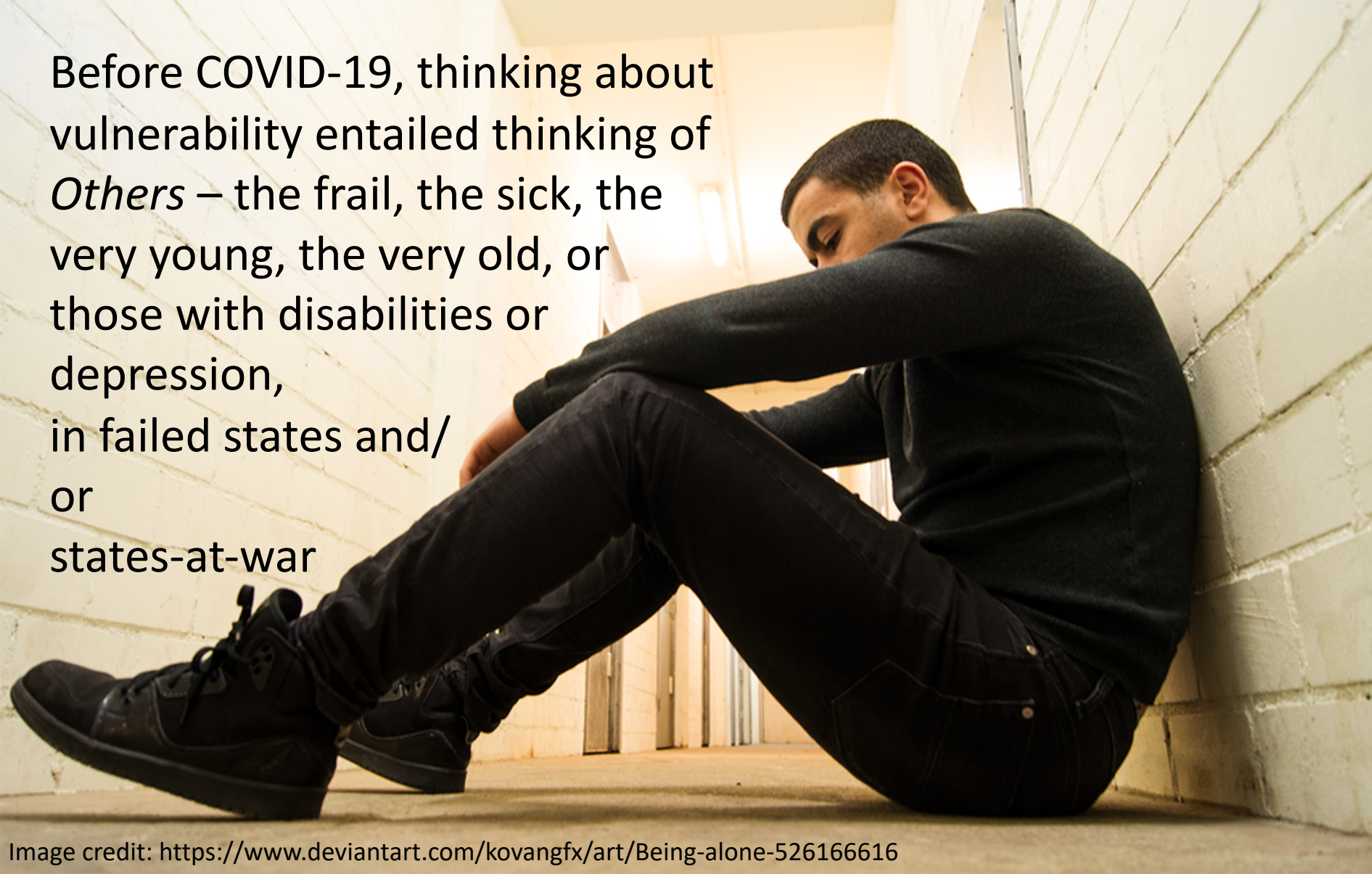in failed states and/
or
states-at-war

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COVID-19 changed our understanding and experiences of 'vulnerability' – suddenly we were ALL vulnerable.

We were, however, not all *equally* vulnerable.

We were in the same storm, but very definitely in different boats

Image credit: Pixabay

As education institutions moved online/remote, faculty, administrators and support staff (and management?) realised how multi-layered, nuanced and intersected vulnerability is…
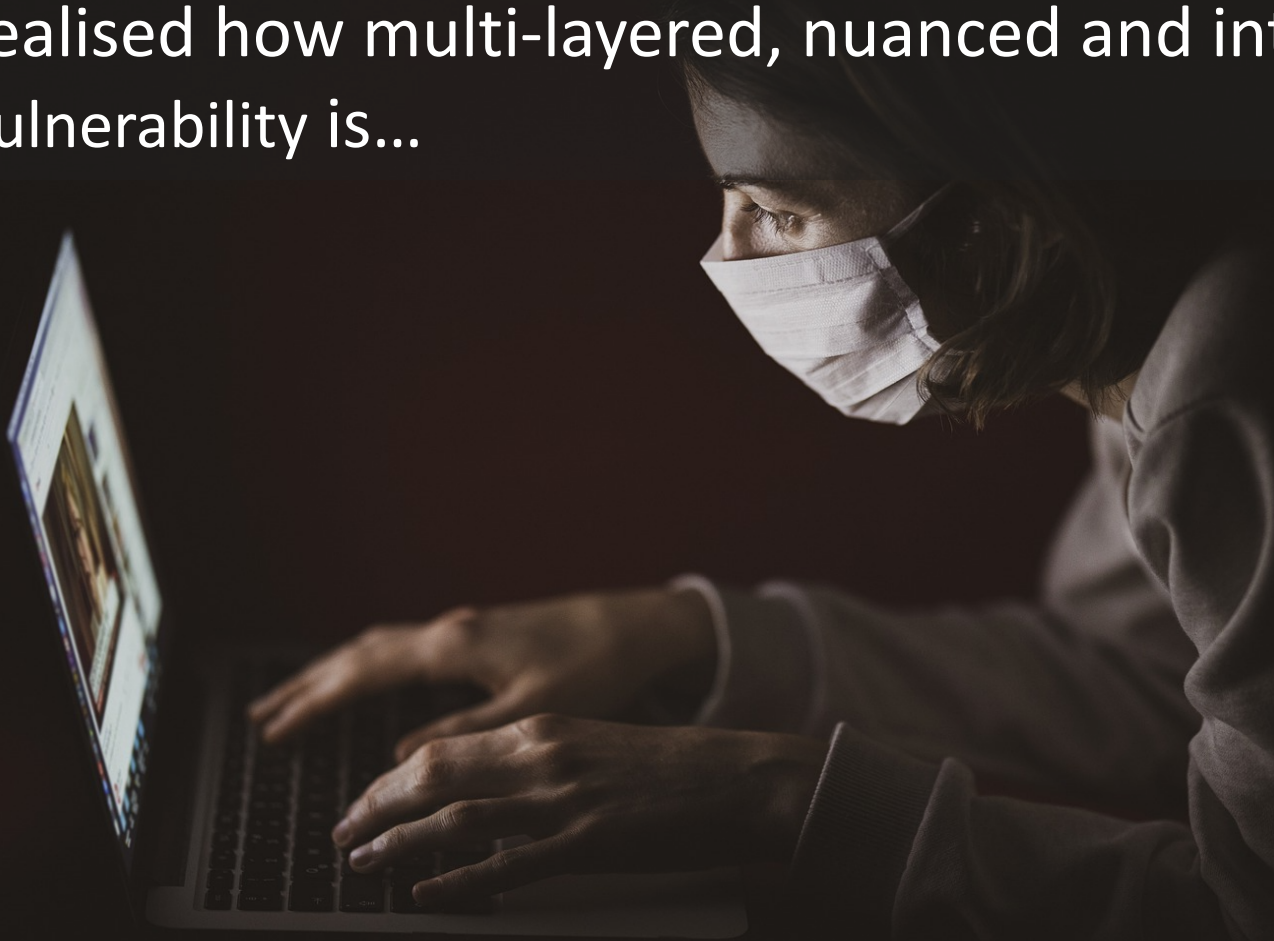
- Vulnerabilities in education are **eco-systemic** - entangled in relations between different human and non-human agents.
- Changes in the vulnerability of any one or more of these connecting actors have **a domino effect** on the vulnerabilities of others

So, what are the implications of thinking about (student) vulnerability and the ways it manifest using an *eco-systemic* lens?

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Thinking of students' vulnerabilities as *their* fault, of characteristics *they* don't have

- Student habitus
- Demographics
- Prior learning
- Disciplinary background
- First generation students
- Socio-economic status

Macro-societal factors, e.g. economic, political, social, technological, environmental and legal factors.

Registration   Pedagogy   Formative assessment

Choice of programs/ modules   Support (affective, cognitive, and administrative)

Institutional/lecturer (in)actions, or (in)efficiencies impacting and shaping students' behavioural data, their chances of failing, dropping out, stopping out…

Subotzky, G., & Prinsloo, P. (2011). Turning the tide: A socio-critical model and framework for improving student success in open distance learning at the University of South Africa. *Distance Education*, *32*(2), 177-193.

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Students' age, gender, race, street address, zip code, occupation, pre-enrolment educational data, registration data, engagement data, academic data, library data, financial aid data, behavioural data, location data, who-are-in-their-networks-data
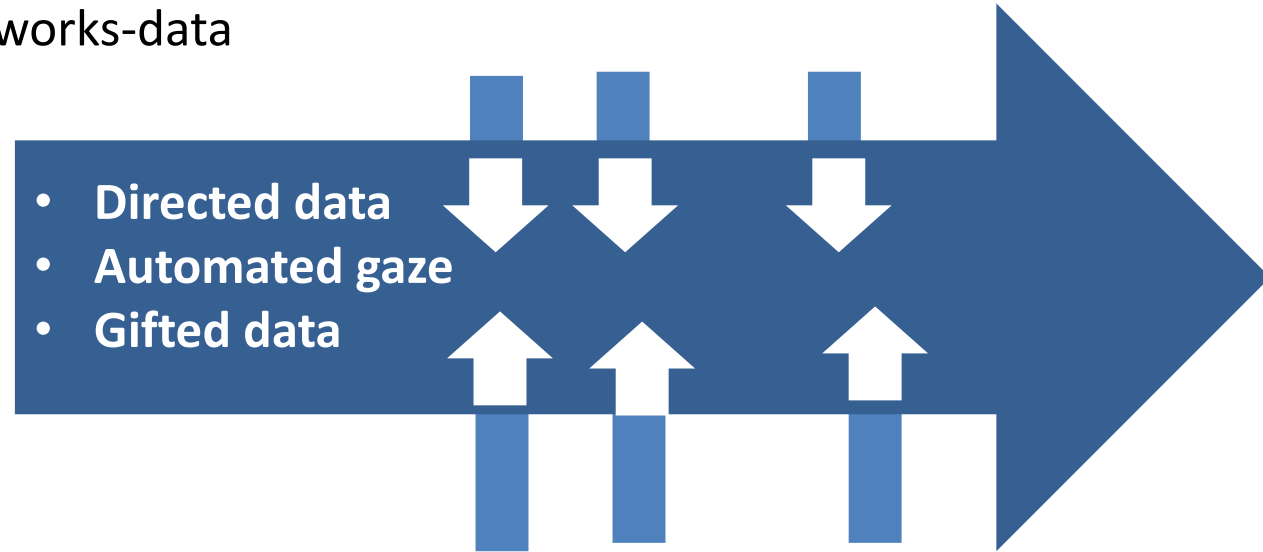
- **Directed data**
- **Automated gaze**
- **Gifted data**

HR/ policy/ processes

ICT/data infrastructure / LMS
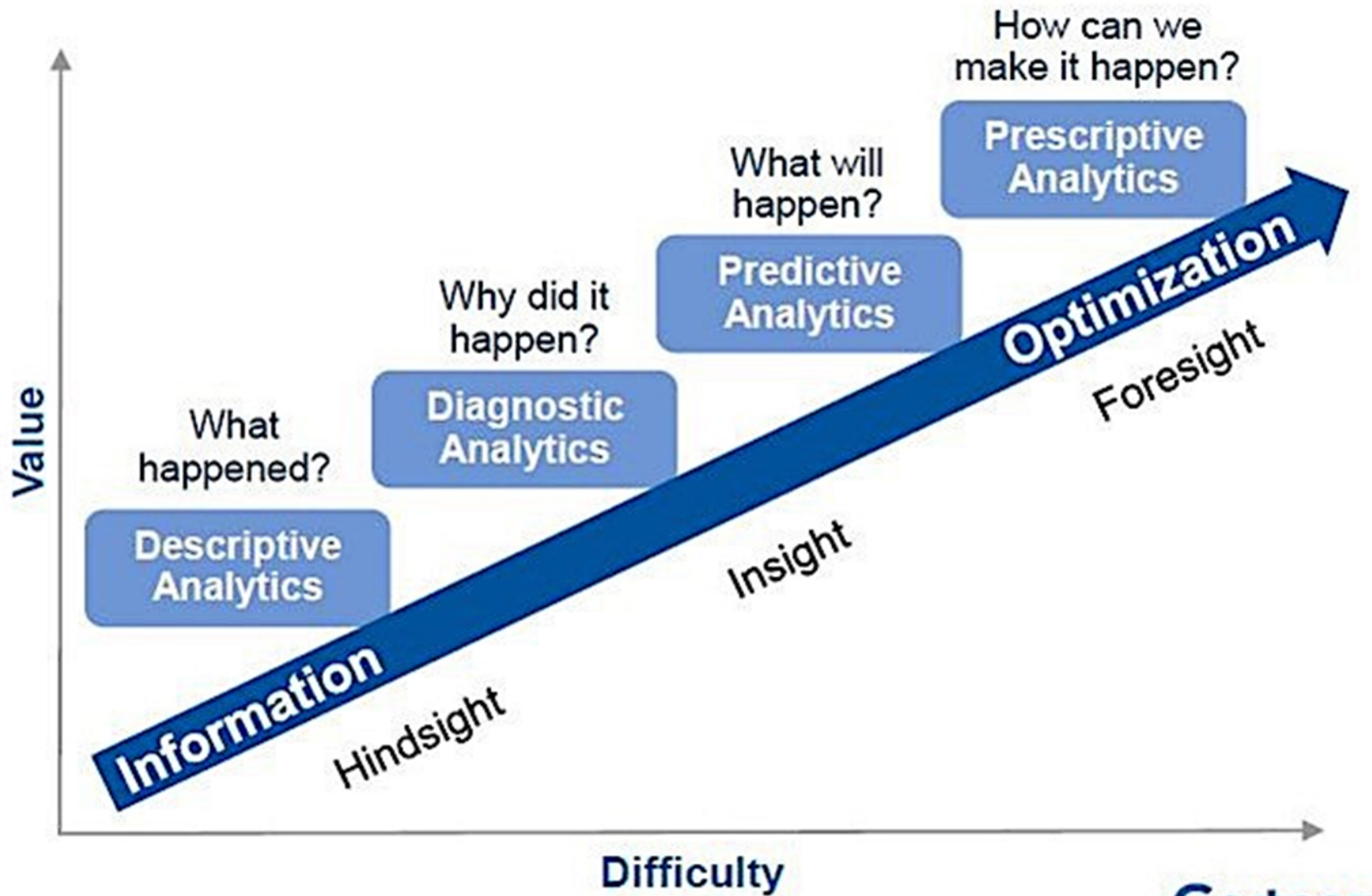
Responsive systems (or not)

How do we understand 'vulnerability'?

... and how does their vulnerability link to their agency and responsibility, and how can we help?

Image credit: Pixabay

Three considerations

- A **taxonomy** of vulnerability (Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds, 2014)
- Vulnerability as **layered** (Florencia Luna, 2009, 2019)
- **Destabilising responses** to vulnerability (Judith Butler 2012, 2016)

Butler, J. (2012). Precarious life, vulnerability, and the ethics of cohabitation. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 26*(2), 134-151.

Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking vulnerability and resistance. *Vulnerability in resistance*, 12-27. Retrieved from http://bibacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Rethinking-Vulnerability-and-Resistance-Judith-Butler.pdf

Luna, F. (2009). Elucidating the concept of vulnerability: Layers not labels. International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics, 2(1), 121-139

Luna, F. (2019). Identifying and evaluating layers of vulnerability–a way forward. developing world bioethics, 19(2), 86-95.

Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W., & Dodds, S. (eds.). (2014). *Vulnerability. New essays in ethics and feminist philosophy.* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

A taxonomy of vulnerability

- *Inherent:* intrinsic to the human condition - our corporeality, dependence on others, our affective and social natures
- *Situational:* Vulnerability caused by macro-societal factors – political, economic, social, environmental, etc. Can be short term, intermittent or enduring

Both can be dispositional and/or occurrent

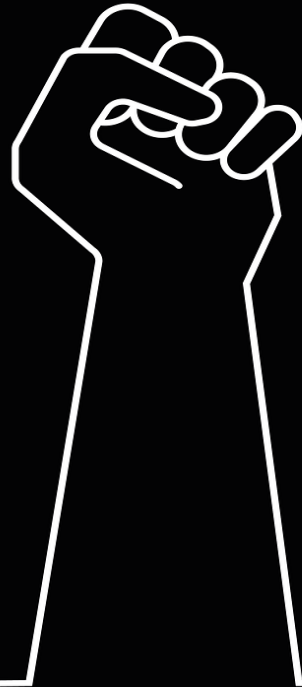- *Pathogenic:* When attempts to ameliorate vulnerability increase vulnerability

Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W., & Dodds, S. (eds.). (2014). *Vulnerability. New essays in ethics and feminist philosophy.* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Image credit: Wikipedia

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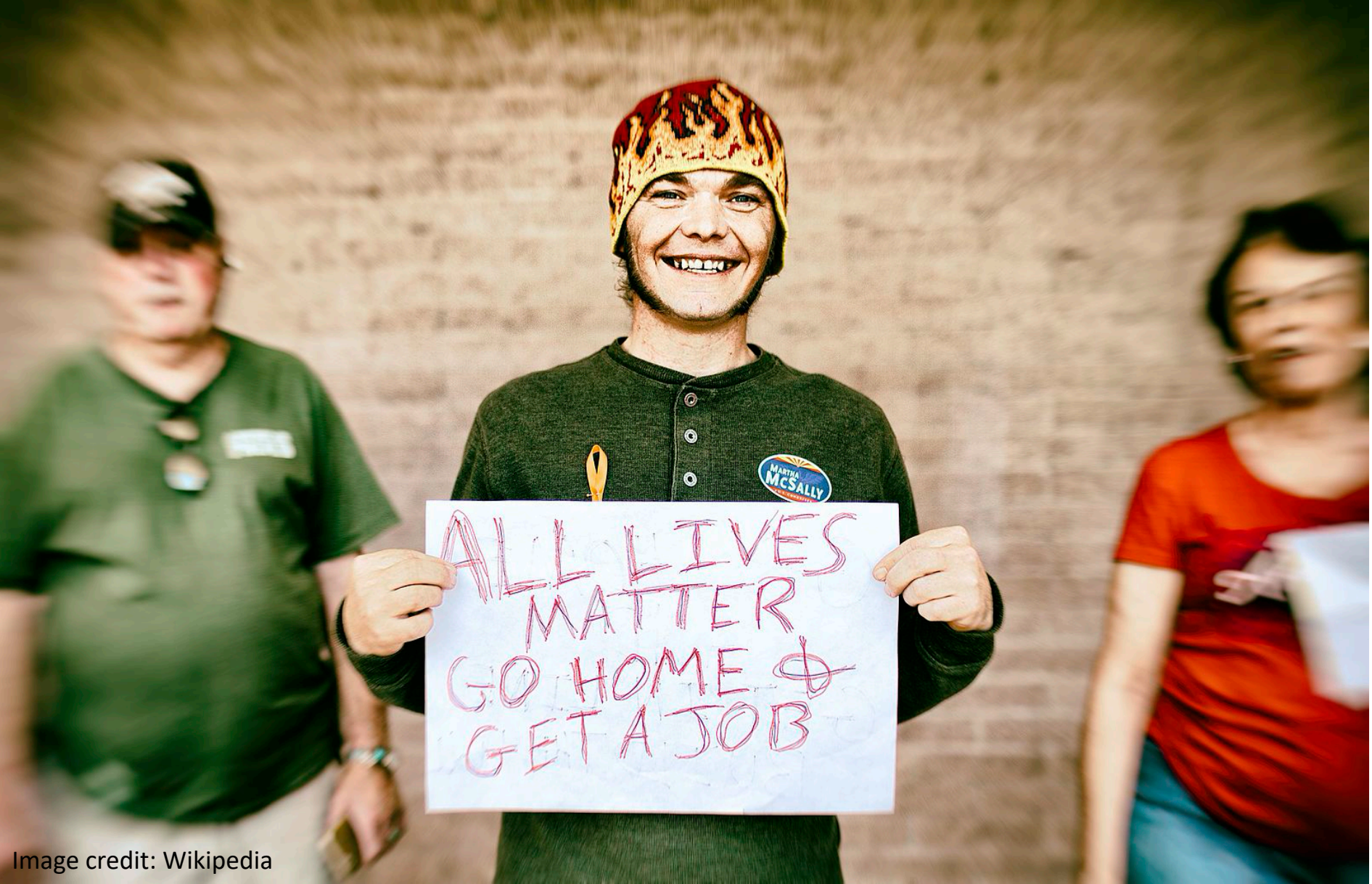
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EDUCATION

For Black Kids in America, a Degree Is No Guarantee

A new study shows that African-American college graduates face unemployment rates nearly twice as high as others with the same education.

JANELL ROSS AND NATIONAL JOURNAL   **MAY 27, 2014**

MORE STORIES

The Children Who Desegregated America's Schools
REBECCA J. ROSEN

The New York Town That Tried to Stop Desegregation
ADAM HARRIS

The Persistence of Segregation in South

Source credit: https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/05/when-a-degree-is-no-guarantee/371613/

Disadvantage is worst of all when race and class collide. African Americans and Hispanics are especially vulnerable to class-based economic disadvantages because they are more highly concentrated in low-income groups and because **race seems to add power to the negative effects of low-income status and degrade the positive effects of income and educational improvements**.
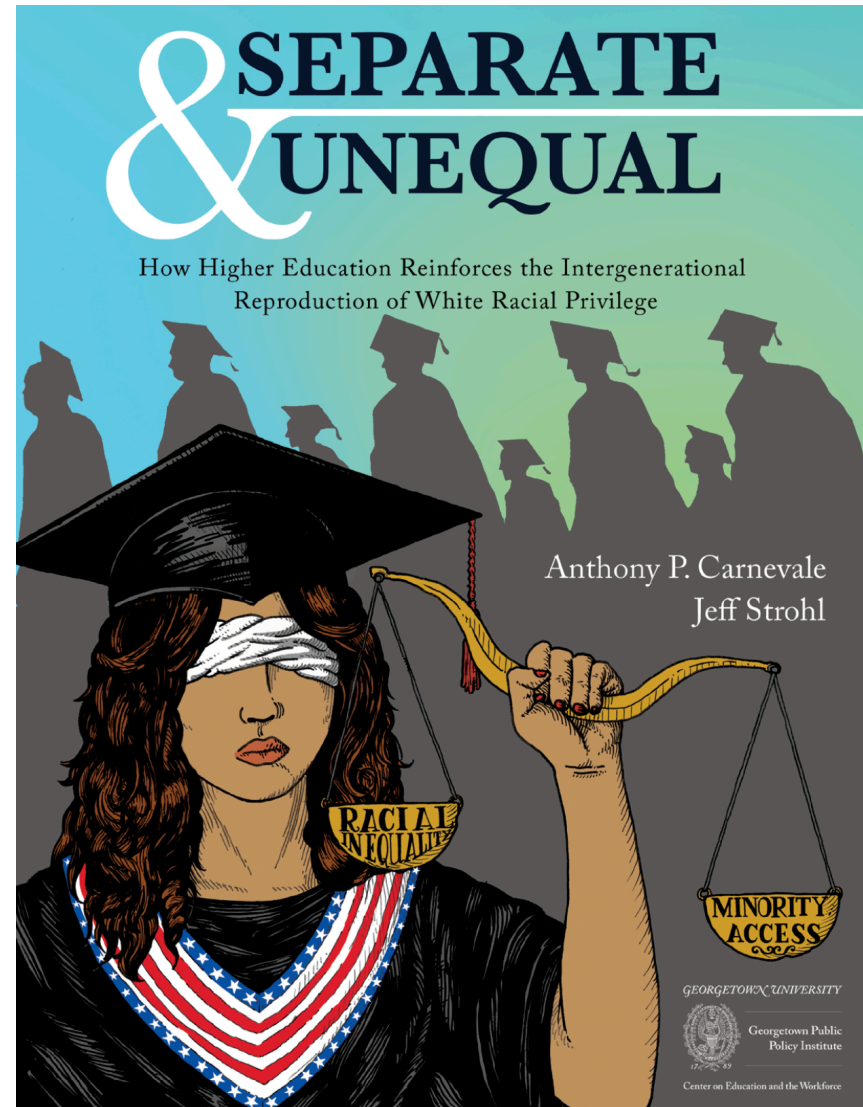
Image credit: Pixabay

Some vulnerabilities are structural, intergenerational and have to be understood and addressed as such.

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Layers of vulnerability

- Vulnerable groups are often classified as such because they share characteristics that makes them vulnerable
- There is a danger that vulnerability then becomes a label and a simplistic answer to complicated problems
- Different vulnerabilities can overlap, and if we see vulnerability as layered, we can ameliorate an individual's vulnerability *layer by layer*

Luna, F. (2009). Elucidating the concept of vulnerability: Layers not labels. International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics, 2(1), 121-139

Luna, F. (2019). Identifying and evaluating layers of vulnerability–a way forward. developing world bioethics, 19(2), 86-95.

Example of layered vulnerabilities

Student with disabilities – deaf
Single mother, two children
Private school background
High socio-economic status
43 years old
Black
Support networks
Abusive relationship
Employed

Student with disabilities – quadriplegic
Partnered, one child
Public school background
Low socio-economic status
25 years old
White
Lack support networks
Employed

Both students are vulnerable, but *differently* vulnerable.

Destabilising responses to vulnerability: Judith Butler (2012, 2016)

- How do we respond to someone's vulnerability when the person is not close - "proximity imposes certain immediate demands" (2012, p. 135) - or when the individual is not of your race, language, culture or even the enemy?
- An ethical obligation to respond does not require our consent or contract, and our ethical obligations are pre-contractual
- The "Other has priority over me" (Butler, 2012, p. 140)

Butler, J. (2012). Precarious life, vulnerability, and the ethics of cohabitation. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 26*(2), 134-151.

Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking vulnerability and resistance. *Vulnerability in resistance*, 12-27.

Using vulnerability to protect your privilege

In California, when white people were losing their status as a majority, some of them claimed that they were a "vulnerable" population. Colonial states have lamented their "vulnerability" to attack by those they colonize, and sought general sympathy on the basis of that claim. Some men have complained that feminism has made them into a "vulnerable population" and that they are now "targeted" for discrimination. Various European national identities now claim to be "under attack" by new and established migrant communities (Butler, 2016, p. 13).

Some guiding principles and examples

Image credit: https://pixabay.com/photos/compass-hand-travel-direction-1753659/

Towards a layered and eco-systemic view of (student) vulnerability

- **Identify** the intersecting layers
- Map which layers increase vulnerability when **intersecting** with other layers
- How do the different layers interact and change when the **context** changes?
- Which layer can trigger **pathogenic** vulnerability?

1

Image credit: Pixabay

- Rank the different layers resulting in vulnerability with regard to their harmfulness in a particular context.

- Of particular importance would be to identify those layers resulting in vulnerability that are cascading or that have a domino effect.

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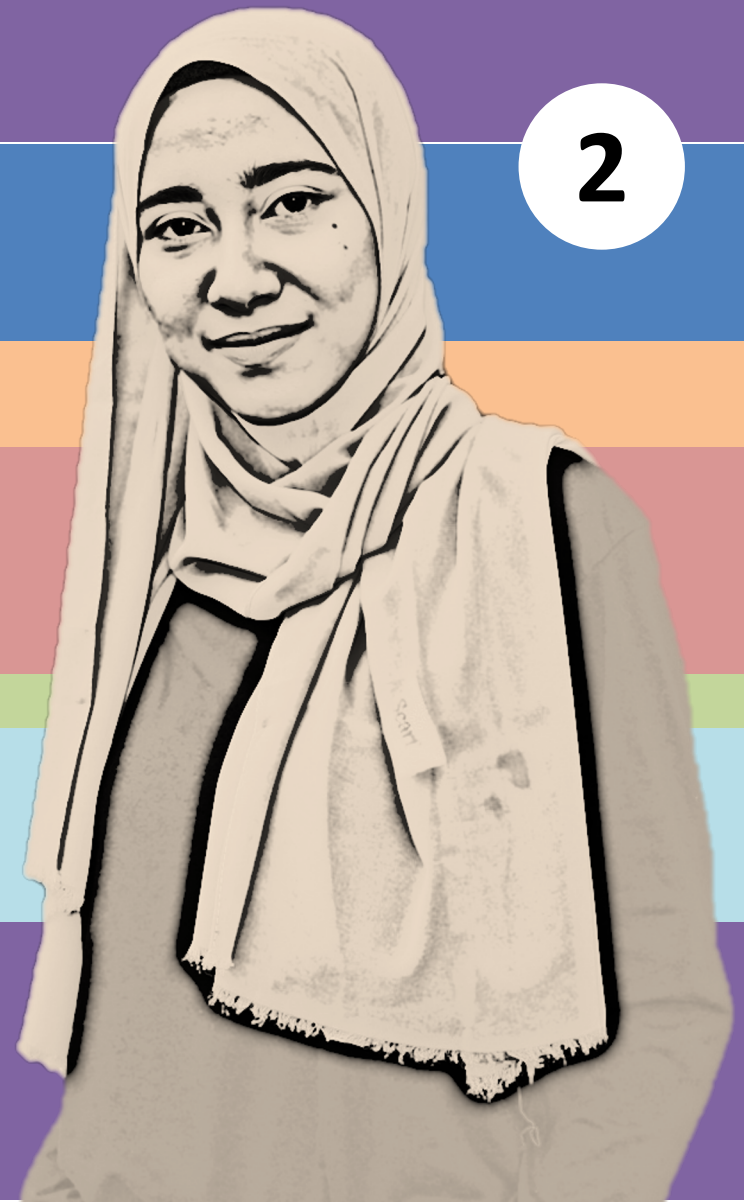
Student activity 1: Mapping your vulnerabilities, support networks and risks

1. List all the factors that have an impact on your studies
2. Draw yourself in the middle of a piece of paper and map these factors as circles around you – factors that impact the most as bigger circles, and those who impact the least, as smaller circles
3. Take three colors – green, <mark>yellow</mark> and red – and revisit every factor and use the colors to indicate whether the impact is supportive (green), neutral (yellow) and red (negative)
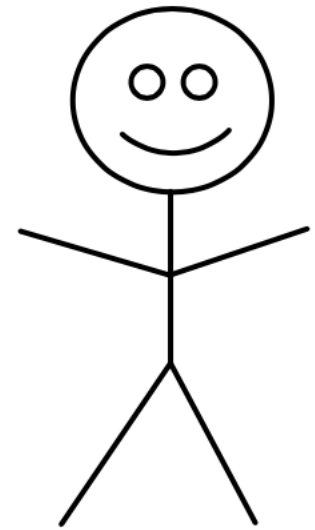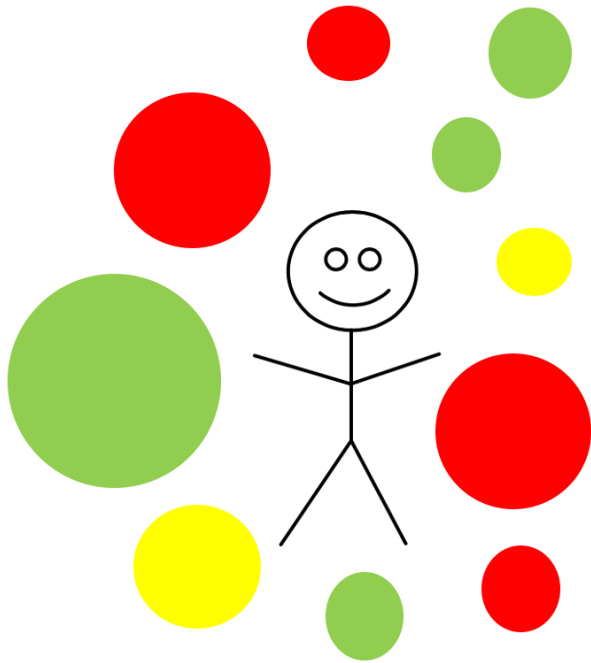
Student activity 1: Mapping your vulnerabilities, support networks and risks

- Part-time employment
- Time constraints
- Financial insecurity
- Family responsibilities
- Peers
- Church
- Community organisations
- Grandparents
- Health
- Neighborhood
- Internet access
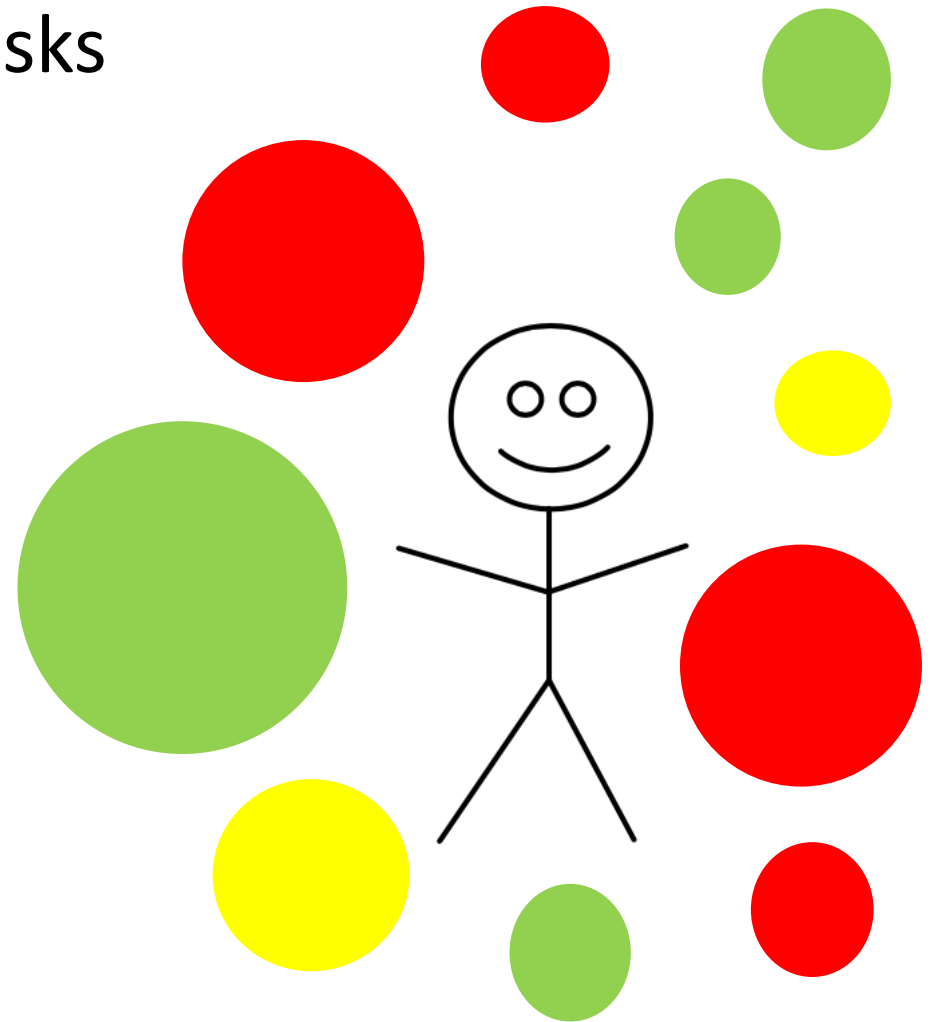
Student activity: Understanding the temporal dimension and agency

1. Think how the picture looked **a month ago** – what changed and how did it change?
2. **Which of these circles are linked** so that a change in one may change the color in another?
3. What can you do t**o keep the green circles green**, make the yellow circles green and at least make some of the red circles smaller or change them to yellow?

Using (traditional) research to grow student understanding and agency

- Which students doing Introductory Economics are successful – what is the profile? Mathematics? Gender? Studying in their home language? School leaving marks? Successfully passing the compulsory formative assessments? The biggest predictor was shown to be success in formative assessment.

- Creating a **crossroad experience** for students: know your risk

- Pretorius, A. M., Prinsloo, P., & Uys, M. D. (2009). Student performance in Introductory Microeconomics at an African open and distance learning institution. *Africa Education Review*, *6*(1), 140-158.
- Pretorius, A. M., Prinsloo, P., & Uys, M. D. (2010). The impact of raising students' risk awareness in Introductory Microeconomics. *Progressio*, *32*(1), 131-154.

Using (traditional) research to grow student understanding and agency

The following is designed to give you an indication of your potential success during the upcoming ECS101-6 examination. Start with a count of 30 and then add the indicated values if the conditions apply to you.

		Initial score: 30
1.	If you passed Mathematics in matric/grade 12, **add 7.**	Revised score: ....
2.	If you passed matric/grade 12 with a full matriculation exemption, **add 7.**	Revised score: ....
3.	If you are younger than 26, **add 3.**	Revised score: ....
4.	If you are studying in your home language, **add 8.**	Revised score: ....
5.	If you are registered for ECS101-6 for the first time and are not repeating the module, **add 6.**	Revised score: ....
6.	If you have submitted three assignments, **add 5.** If you have submitted all four assignments, **add 13.**	Revised score: ....
7.	If you are registered to write no other module during the coming exam, **add 2.** If you are registered to write four other modules during the coming exam, **add 2.** If you are registered to write five or six other modules during the coming exam, **add 6.**	Revised score: ....
		Final score: ....

What your score means

30–40

For a variety of reasons, some students find studying through distance education more challenging than others. If you scored less than 41, you are probably one of them. **This does not mean that you will not pass ECS101-6, but it does indicate that the hurdles that you face might be a bit higher for you than for other students.**

55 and more

It appears that you have a sound foundation for a successful academic year. Just remember that a high score alone does not guarantee success. So do not take things too easy up until the examination!

41–55

If your score is 41–55, **you already have many of the characteristics of successful students** and you are doing the things that predict success in this module. You might, however, still find studying a bit challenging.

- Student with disabilities – deaf
- Single mother, two children
- Private school background
- High socio-economic status
- 43 years old
- Black
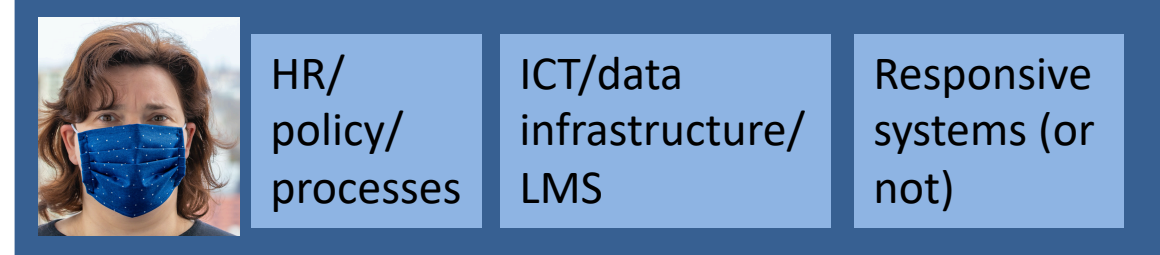- Support networks
- Abusive relationship
- Employed

Situational vulnerabilities due to macro-societal changes

- **Directed data**
- **Automated gaze**
- **Gifted data**

Pathogenic systemic vulnerability
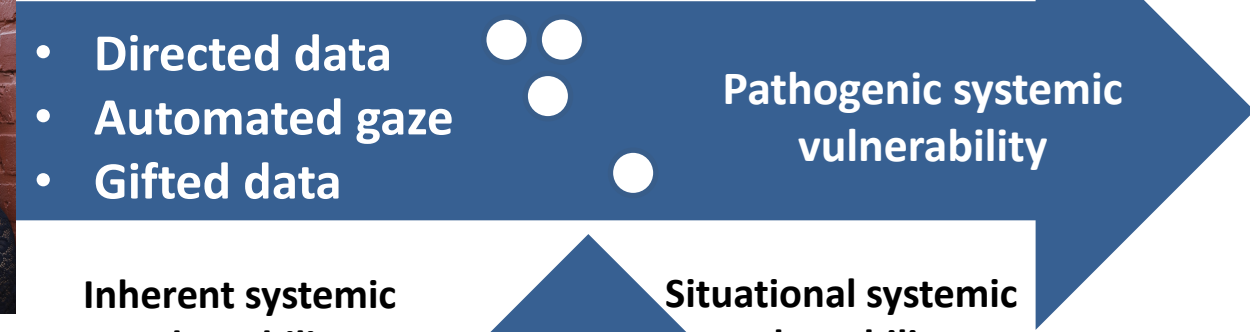
Inherent systemic vulnerability

Situational systemic vulnerability

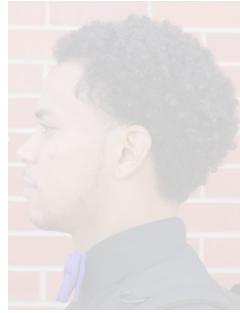| HR/ policy/ processes | ICT/data infrastructure/ LMS | Responsive systems (or not) |

Subotzky, G., & Prinsloo, P. (2011). Turning the tide: A socio-critical model and framework for improving student success in open distance learning at the University of South Africa. *Distance Education*, *32*(2), 177-193.

Image credit: Pixabay

Macro-societal factors, e.g. economic, political, social, technological, environmental and legal factors.

- Student habitus
- Demographics
- Prior learning
- Disciplinary background
- First generation student
- Socio-economic status

| HR/ policy/ processes | ICT/data infrastructure/ LMS | Responsive systems (or not) |

How do we use (student) data to identify specific vulnerabilities, not only of students, but vulnerability-as-relation with other humans and non-humans in this eco-system?

Subotzky, G., & Prinsloo, P. (2011). Turning the tide: A socio-critical model and framework for improving student success in open distance learning at the University of South Africa. *Distance Education*, *32*(2), 177-193.

Image credit: Pixabay

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Three obligations (Luna, 2019)

1. *Do not worsen* an individual's vulnerability – avoid exacerbating any layer of an individual's vulnerability.
2. *Eradicate* layers of vulnerability and where a layer cannot be eradicated, ameliorate the consequences of the layer.
3. *Minimise* the impact of specific layers.
4. These obligations can entail different strategies such as protections, safeguards, as well as empowerment and the generation of autonomy.

Image credit: https://pixabay.com/en/sculpture-bronze-child-boy-1392529/

Thank you

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