The need for deep rest: Six stories of critical grief pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper reimagines the four tenants of critical grief pedagogy (CGP) through entwined narratives of and teachings on grief by introducing a fifth, essential tenant for engaging with CGP: the deep need for rest. Storied around their 2022 delivery of a digital Death Café for graduate students in a master's-level disability justice course, Collins and Jones reframe CGP in the classroom through lenses of disability justice and methodologies of collective narrative. In collaboration with four student participants from the Death Café, this article responds to our interdependent grief experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, madness, anticipatory grief, and the relationalities of these modes of grief. This paper is a gathering of those conversations and our collective writing. Through these narrative experiences, we engage in a mode of collaborative exploration, composition, and de-composition. We explore what it means to take teaching and learning as a 'grief-facing' praxis that changes how we engage with embodiment in higher education. In what follows, our entwined responses to the Death Café remind us that grief is ubiquitous and expansive in academic spaces, and that rest is essential and political.

Keywords: Critical grief pedagogy; Death Café; disability justice; ecological grief; storytelling

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Introduction

In describing their 'grief-facing' approach to teaching and learning called critical grief pedagogy (CGP), Poole et al. (2022, p.28) set the scene. 'People have been dying all around,' they write of an era characterized by pandemic-related grief and climate change met with grief supremacy: 'The water, land, and atmosphere are dying too' (p. 29). This grim snapshot sums up the ethos in which we teach disability justice, including our 2022 delivery of a digital Death Café—a salon-style

conversation about death, dying, and grief—for graduate students in a master's-level Social Justice and Equity Studies (SJES) program. Disability justice is an intersectional political movement led by, and centered on, the lives and interests of Indigenous and Black people, people of colour, queer, and trans disabled people who have been marginalized in mainstream disability rights movements (Sins Invalid, 2015). Given that these folks are heavily impacted by both pandemic-related and climate-change-related death and loss (of life, land, culture, and imagined futures, among other possibilities), grief is a central topic in teaching and learning disability justice that can be supported by CGP.

As a method of gathering to discuss death in a justice-oriented way, the Death Café, curated and hosted by Collins, was a departure from our usual in-person seminar classes in SJES 5P12, largely because Jones was, at times, teaching from bed as she recovered from surgery. Being in a course on disability justice, students were adaptable to the changes and transitions necessary for everyone to participate in this Death Café seminar—they were versed in Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2018) rationale that sometimes community is made and work is done from bed, 'and it counts just as much' (p. 200). In this way, teaching and learning from bed are valid pedagogical approaches, from a disability justice lens. And, following principles of relaxed performance pedagogy (Jones et al., 2025) which is rooted in disability justice, everyone involved in SJES 5P12 was invited to participate in ways that worked best for their bodyminds. Through this pedagogical vantage point, we found ourselves online, some cameras on and others off, participating in a Death Café. Collins and Jones hoped the digital Death Café would enact, in some ways, the four tenets of CGP: *de-medicalizing grief* and resisting its pathologization, *recognizing grief as a result of systems of power* that 'affect and reflect rules for grieving,' such as ableism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy among others (Poole et al., 2022, p. 30), *embodied witnessing* of grief narratives, and *practicing compassionate communicatio*n in response rather than reproducing "proper" responses that uphold systems of power that stifle the unruliness of grief (p. 31).

To engage in the third and fourth tenants more fully than a one-hour digital Death Café would allow, we—five students, one faculty, and a doctoral candidate—met regularly in the weeks that followed to revisit some of the topics that emerged in the Death Café, including personal losses, anticipatory grief, and feelings of losing one's self and identity. We consolidated these discussions by sharing vignettes of our thoughts and reflections on the Death Café. This paper is a gathering of those conversations and our collective writing. Through these narrative experiences, we engage in a mode of collaborative exploration, composition, and de-composition. We explore what it means to take teaching and learning as a 'grief-facing' praxis that changes how we engage with embodiment in higher education,

including by suggesting a fifth tenant for CGP: the *need for deep rest*. As we reflect on our own experiences with grief and loss, we recognize the need for deep rest as a crucial component of our work. This need for deep rest emerged early in our process as we considered how grief, particularly in academic contexts, often intersects with the pressure to perform and be productive. In teaching and learning, especially within the context of disability justice, rest is not just a personal necessity but a political act. In what follows, our entwined responses to the Death Café remind us that grief is ubiquitous and expansive in academic spaces, and that rest is essential.

Morgan's story: Storytelling as methodology

> I think when thinking about grief and death during our Death Café, I couldn't really think of anything in class to talk about because I hadn't felt I'd ever experienced the loss of someone close to me.
>
> I don't plan my future. I don't think about buying a house, I don't think about what I will be like in the years to come, and I sure as hell don't think about having children. I don't think we, the whole planet as a collective, will survive until then. Well, maybe the billionaires planning to colonize Mars will survive. I have a sense of impending doom regarding the state of our world. Even as I write this, I can still smell the smoke from my walk to campus. I read the news, we are having a bad "wildfire season." This isn't wildfire season, this is early summer. I can only see it getting worse from here. It feels hopeless. I try to change and fight as much as I can but when we live in a capitalist colonial system that favors profit over the planet, it feels hopeless. I know I am not alone in this feeling. I think many people my age have a collective sense of how the world is going to end. (Morgan)

Demonstrating the entangled nature of grief, we begin with Morgan's story to foreground the expansive understanding of the grief we espouse. Centering climate change in her writing, Morgan makes linkages between movements like disability justice and the need for CGP. Morgan's writing stretches grief beyond an individual affliction toward the systemic, pointing at once to the tangible, embodied reality of smelling smoke in the air and the broader realization of neoliberal classism ('the billionaires planning to colonize Mars') that leads us into mourning. We recognize through Morgan's story Poole et al.'s (2022) second tenet of CGP: 'grief's unruliness is not a bio-deterministic issue internal to the griever, but rather a result of systems of power … that affect and reflect rules for grieving' (p. 30). Given our

disability justice leaning, we also acknowledge what many Black and Indigenous thinkers have been telling us all along: COVID-19 and climate change may be characteristics of our time, but they are only two of the many material and existential crises marginalized people have had to face and endure—that loss of life, land, and culture is nothing new in colonial contexts like ours (Burton, 2020; Heglar, 2020; Yusoff, 2018).

To experience and witness grief narratives, each section of this paper is prefaced by a story. Each story is different—each person's experience of grief and composition are different. We center stories not only because Poole et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of storytelling in enacting CGP, but because story and its composition are a crucial part of the embodied experience of affect. We make stories the pulse of this paper not only to acknowledge that each person has a story, but also to emphasize that grief is relational, interdependent, and a shared experience (Adichie, 2021; Clare, 2017; Samuel, 2018). Even so, we heed Butler's (2004) reminder of the limitation of first-person storytelling in relation to loss and grief. Butler (2004) explains that loss changes us, and re-orders our sense of self insofar as the "I" does not exist independently. 'If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mount the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I without you?' (p. 22). The stories here constitute part of who we "are" in the shadow of grief, at times irrecoverable to our past selves. Rather than bowing to myths of writing as an independent mode of ordering thoughts, feminists have long understood writing and composition as critical forms of embodied vulnerability and intimacy (Butler et al., 2016; Cixous, 1993). Each story, then, demonstrates how grief keeps us in relation to others and interrupts who we think we are (Butler, 2004, p. 23).

This sentiment is shared in critical disability studies, the discipline from which we write, wherein composition itself has long been understood as a complex, messy mode of embodied cultural practice inescapable from affect (Clare, 1999; McRuer, 2006; yergeau, 2023). When it involves disability, the labour of writing is invariably a political pursuit, meaning: '[d]isability shapes authorship' (Mills & Sanchez, 2023, p. 15). The embodyminded experience of writing as a 'felt, and performed phenomenon' (p. 2) is one that can both obey and transgress normative rules of composition and also do things between. In the institutional space of the university, where pedagogical and colonial practices have traditionally focused on routinizing and rushing composition in the interest of "progress" (read: publish or perish), our decision to write together is one that nods to McRuer's (2004) de-composition as a critical mode of teaching and learning to write, and writing to teach and learn. This writing itself is a process of grieving, whereby we make grief itself into a resource for politics, to paraphrase Butler (2004).

Our writing took place through four online meetings, where we discussed the Death Café and responded to writing prompts. Sometimes we shared our writing, other times we kept the writing close to our hearts. This work was unpaid, insofar as our meditations on CGP are also unfunded. In our respective positions as a doctoral candidate and faculty member, where writing is a luxury that we can afford and must engage with to receive credit for publications (Khúc, 2023), Collins and Jones took on the bulk of the organizing—gathering the group for four meetings between March 2023 and June 2023, writing a first draft, and submitting this article for publication. We worked in crip time, knowing everyone would write at a different pace, in a different mindbodyspace (Kafer, 2013; Samuels, 2017). Our temporal approach, which allowed for missed meetings, blank pages, and writing a lot or a little, takes into account Samuels's (2017) instruction that 'crip time is writing time' (n.p.). There was no rush. And, anyway, there is little point in rushing grief writing. As Adichie (2021) tells us, 'we don't know how we will grieve, until we grieve' (p. 69). We came together to engage in writing as a process that teaches us things (halifax, personal communication, 2023). In this case, we engaged in a shared, online writing praxis to learn together about grief and to experience CGP. We take the stories embedded in this paper to be productive perseverations on grief that 'compass us toward nonnormative embodiment' (yergeau, 2023, p. 39). "Productive" in the sense that this is writing stemming from intimacy—a felt and performed phenomenon reproduced on these pages as testimony to the 'patchwork or partial' nature of *de-composition* (Mills & Sanchez, 2023, p. 5). And "productive" in the sense that the writing was never static. During the final stages of this paper, we discovered Khúc's (2023) instruction on writing, wishing we could have shared it with the group earlier:

> You are differently unwell at all times, endlessly navigating your shifting needs, limits, and the demands placed on you. Come to know yourself inherently worthy whether or not you write another goddamn word for the rest of your life (p. 27).

Our task in what follows is to wrap our intimate writings on grief into a communicative convention that will undoubtedly fail to fully reflect our shifting lives but will, we hope, capture our shared teaching and learning about and through CGP and the deep need for rest.

Janice's story: Introducing the Death Café

> On November 7, 2022, I took part in a virtual Death Café with my Masters SJES cohort. During the Café, we broke off into smaller groups to discuss a given discussion prompt. Although I do not remember the specific prompt, I do recall that it transported me back to my dad's stage IV mesothelioma diagnosis, an asbestos-related terminal cancer with a typically maximum survival rate of 1-5 years after diagnosis. My life was on autopilot, with full days of teaching Mondays-Fridays, caring for my young family, and commuting 2.5 hours North most weekends to help my mom and spend time with my dad. As we shared during the Café, I remember feeling surprised by how raw my emotions still were. My thoughts centered on the last day I spent with my dad and my work life following his death. The final day I spent with my dad, he was sitting in his usual chair wearing a light green dress shirt in place of his typical choice of a hot rod t-shirt. We danced to Peter Gabriel's song 'Solsbury Hill', my dad in his chair and my twin sister and I beside him. That evening, I cut my dad's hair upon his request, the texture of his hair different now, feeling less alive than usual. The feel of his hair in my hands as I cut it told me it would not be long now. (Janice)

The discussion prompt Janice references is one of several prompts Collins developed for the Death Café. The 60-minute virtual Café included a presentation on the political and often medicalized understandings of grief, death, and dying, as well as space for group discussions wherein students could respond verbally or by text to prompts, including: 'What are your cultural practices of death and dying?' and 'What are your first memories of death and loss?' These questions respond to experiences of embodied affect—a significant theme in a course premised on disability justice. Disability justice is, after all, a framework that engages with a myriad of embodyminded experiences (Robinson, 2017). As Orsini (2021) points out, affect is political and critical to sense-making. And sense-making is a complex exercise in post-and-with-pandemic 'grief saturated' times that merits a compassionate response (Perreault, 2011 in Poole et al., 2022, p. 28). Therefore, in a CGP move that makes space for 'embodied witnessing of grief' and '[practicing] compassion,' Collins divided the class into smaller online groups for reflection (Poole et al., 2022, p. 30). As Janice's story demonstrates, centering death in class discussions can spark deeply personal memories—even as we engage in the political contours of death as a disability justice issue, the personal details of our lives, and of lives lost, flare up.

Our online Death Café format is a deviation from earlier iterations of the exercise (Ignagni et al, 2021), including the first Death Café held in 2004 by Bernard Crettaz. The Swiss sociologist held the first café, known as a Café Mortel, in 2004 shortly after the death of his wife (Elmhirst, 2015), and held 40 Café Mortels throughout Europe, one of which was covered by magazine *The Independent* (Battersby, 2012). Taken by the idea, British web designer Jon Underwood hosted the first Death Café in the UK in 2011. Underwood created Death Café as a social franchise, meaning that anyone who follows the Death Café guidelines can use the name. Underwood's guidelines for the Cafés state that they must be non-profit, accessible, respectful, and confidential. And importantly: the hosts must serve tea and cake (Welcome to death café, n.d.). Death Cafés meet a felt need and provide space for people who are willing and interested in discussing death (Miles & Corr, 2017), and at the time of writing, over 15,000 such Cafés have been held worldwide (Rogala, 2023) with the number surging during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chang, 2021).

And while Death Cafés have risen in popularity in the Global North, these Cafés and the death positivity movement have been rightly critiqued for their whiteness. As Black death doula Arthur notes, a "good death" is often synonymous with a white death. And although many Black, Indigenous and people of colour have done end-of-life work for generations, the modern death positivity movement is dominated by white voices (Arthur, 2024). This sentiment is echoed by other critiques of the death positivity movement, naming it 'the happy death movement' (Lofland, 1978, p. 55), which positions some deaths as "bad." In describing some deaths as "good" and some as "bad," the death positivity movement fosters neoliberal responsibilization in which "good" deaths are a result of individual effort rather than systems and structures of power (Koksvik, 2020). Moreover, the "good death" movement is entangled in the positive thinking movement and wellness discourses which can equate health with happiness, thereby eliding the difficult emotions which are part of the human experience (Davies, 2016; Ehrenreich, 2010). Taking these critiques seriously, and in line with previous experimentations with Death Cafés (Ignagni et al., 2021), our Café was curated to raise personal, political, and spiritual engagements with death, dying, and grief. We aimed to find ways to engage in CGP that evoked curiosity and expansiveness about grief, given Butler's (2004) argument that grief is part of political communities that must affirm relationality and interdependence.

Chelsea's story: Framing grief

> Four days following an ankle arthroscopy, I'm in bed with a hot laptop on my legs. I should have taken time off, but I couldn't bring myself to do this; the pressure to perform outweighs most else in academia.
>
> Anger swells in my belly. I broke my ankle the same night I moved to a new city. My partner and I have been "adopt-ready" for five years but without enough space for a child. Now we have the space. But, no child is on the way. I shake off the anger, and try to focus on Kim's Death Café. I can't focus. My mind pivots toward my tenure application. I'm applying early. Why not? I'm working from bed all the time anyway.
>
> By wintertime, acute anxiety sets in. Anxiety can concretize in the body without notice. The out-of-nowhereness of anxiety and panic is a common experience for many, widely pathologized as built-up, untended emotions, or an overactive fight-or-flight response. The riddle of anxiety is complex, and when it takes over I spend weeks trying to figure out what is happening: desperate phone calls to family and friends; sleepless nights shaking on the floor; long walks over icy streets; floods of tears; screaming into pillows; shaking; dry heaving over the toilet. It doesn't let up. I pour all my time, uncritically, into tools that have helped in the past: prescription medication; cognitive behavioural therapy; psychotherapy; yoga therapy; acupuncture. It's a new semester, and I smile at my undergraduate students; I am seasoned enough to perform a disembodied pedagogy. Even with tenure in the bag, it's still risky to come out as mad at school (Price, 2011). This time, about a month in, a new suggestion arrives from my psychotherapist: 'Maybe it's grief.' (Chelsea)

Grief is both emotion and construction, arriving in our bodyminds as a deeply felt shift in how we move through the world and as an affect mediated by contemporary understandings of loss. As Ratcliff (2017) reminds us, 'grief is not a state or episode but, rather, a process' (p. 157). Much recent scholarship asserts that grief currently occupies a central role in western societies (Head, 2016; Kumar, 2021; Poole & Galvan, 2021). Indeed, today's pathologization of grief is relatively new in our cultural history (Granek, 2017; Granek, 2014; Jacobsen & Petersen, 2019; Lund, 2021; Otto, 2013). In their descriptions of mad grief, Poole and Ward (2013) gesture to how western understandings of grief have, throughout history, privileged rationality, so that prolonged grieving may be sublimated by the linear process of so-called "normal grief" or "good grief." Building on these ideas, Poole and Galvan (2021) introduce the concept of grief supremacy as follows:

> co-option of grief/loss by the political and ideological system that is white supremacy. Grief supremacy elevates and amplifies white loss, white grief and makes the rules around grievability or which lives and bodies are worthy of which grief responses (p. 63).

Following Poole and Galvan (2021), we position grief as necessarily entangled with systems of power and structures of oppression. In addition, relational framing of grief can account for systems of oppression that impact how we *feel* grief. As Nash (2019) suggests, this enables us to consider 'how structures of domination feel, and to suggest that simply naming structures fails to do justice to how they move against (and inside of) our bodies' (p. 30).

As critical disability scholars and students studying disability justice, we are concerned about the privileging of embodyminded normativity through the pathologization and individualization of psychic experiences, including grief, especially when these processes overshadow possibilities of interdependence and relationality. Of course, we feel grief as individuals. However, as Butler (2004) explains, the "I" in the story is undone when we take grief as relational. In the story above, there is grief over the loss of mobility, the loss of (imagined) kin, and a loss of one's place in the world. All these individual losses are tied up with academic ableism (Dolmage, 2017), which prevents any expression of grief beyond the norms encoded in "good grief." By "good grief," they mean grief that is 'gendered, staged, linear, white, and bound by privilege and reason' (Poole & Ward, 2013, p. 95)—that is, the tidy, expected, normative stages of grief we are so often expected to experience and get over so we can return to normal. Moreover, as Granek (2014; 2010) explains, grief has become politicized and closely tied to psychiatry, resulting in its privatization and specialization, with mental health professionals now managing its treatment. The inclusion of Prolonged Grief Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) frames some grief related to human loss as "disordered" including timeframes with which to monitor for normalcy, thereby positioning those who cannot keep up with an accelerated neoliberal pace as "sick." Lund (2021) suggests that the criteria for disordered grief represents an effort to "fix" grief by breaking it down into various measurable emotions and sensations in order to align it with societal expectations and social norms. In other words, pathologizing and individualizing grief depoliticizes what is grieved, making grief a personal problem, or the issue of the griever, rather than acknowledging how grief 'signals a political response to broader structural conditions of injustice' (Gillespie, 2016, p. 580). The story above is a testimony to what Butler (2004) calls the insolubility of grief—the psychotherapist's assessment ('maybe it's grief') is an individualized observation,

but it does not preclude the varying possibilities of relationality that are felt in the storyteller's body.

Kim's story: Grief as eco-relational

> 'The clock is ticking. … We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.' The urgency in U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres words as he opens today's session of COP27 reverberates through me as I try to calm and slow my breathing before the virtual Death Café. Clark (2015) describes the psychic disruption that occurs when trying to consider the scale of the climate crisis as Anthropocene disorder. He tells us that Anthropocene disorder is the attempt to link day-to-day actions to the implications of the 'slow-motion catastrophe' as it unfolds all around us (p. 140). It is the impossibility and banality of decisions like do I buy the Ziploc bags if I can't afford the beeswax wrap so I can take food with me to avoid buying a lunch in a take-out plastic container? The absurdity of grappling with these futile decisions while trying to understand the global fallout of ocean heat waves or wet bulb temperatures would be ridiculous if it wasn't so fucking heartbreaking.
>
> A year later and I am still struggling to write a coherent reflection. As the reader, you may have noticed how I tend to intellectualize my emotions. I evoke the literature or try to use theory to tame them, quiet them, to keep them from waking me in a cold sweat in the middle of night. And yes, I know, intellectually (of course) that this is likely "unhealthy", and that theory can't quiet them for long. This is how I find myself sobbing while planting tulips. Grief is often likened to waves, but it can also be like tulips; you might have a plan but when the bulbs hit the ground, they scatter and devise their own groupings. And in spring when they appear (or don't) you are reminded that control is an illusion. (Kim)

Our Death Café opened a larger conversation about often-unacknowledged grief related to ecological changes. Kevorkian (2004), oft-cited as the first scholar to introduce the term *environmental grief*, employed disenfranchised grief theory to articulate the way environmental grief has not been socially acknowledged. Disenfranchised grief considers how the circumstances of the loss might lead to criticism or judgment. This is particularly resonant as emotional responses to climate change are often complicated through imbrication in environmental degradation, as a part of living with/in colonial-capital structures. In brief, environmental or ecological grief refers to 'grief felt in relation to experienced or

anticipated ecological losses' (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018, p. 275) and is intertwined with anticipatory grief—a long-recognized phenomenon within end-of-life care (Schoenberg 1974). Consolo and Ellis' (2018) research outlines three contexts for ecological grief: grief related to loss of environmental knowledge and identity, grief related to current ecological losses, and grief related to anticipated losses.

While some literature limits grief to human loss, we employ an expansive understanding of grief following Wade (2021), who defines grief as the feeling of being 'weighed down, to be made heavy, to experience mental suffering and deep sorrow' (p. 48). Importantly, Wade's definition does not require a preceding loss or event, 'just a subtle awareness of the present moment and how that might impact the future' (p. 48). This framing of grief is one that encompasses a multiplicity of experiences, including our relationality with more-than-human others (Butler, 2004; Collins, forthcoming; Gillespie, 2016). As Butler (2004) reminds us, it is through grief and mourning that we can understand our relationality, as through grief 'something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are' (p. 22). The ways grief moves us is a reminder that control is an illusion, as Kim's comparison to tulips demonstrates.

Grief is a powerful emotion with plenty of potential—it can push us away from or toward justice (Granek, 2014). It can also push us downward toward depression. But even so, grief can be an invitation rather than an impediment, as Akomolafe suggests (Grossman, 2023). This work of grieving and transformation must include those most impacted (human and more-than-human) to engage ethically with grief in the classroom. Kim's story leaves us wondering what can be gained if we consider ecological grief to be an invitation, and how difficult it is to grapple with this invitation as the climate changes around us in material ways beyond our individual control. And, like tulip bulbs, we may need a cooling period before taking up the invitation, if we do at all.

sarah's story: Critical Grief Pedagogy

> I remember a feeling of creeping, patient fear that accompanied me as I entered my first Death Café. It pricked at the corners of my eyes. It spoke my language. It has a limited, cyclical vocabulary: What if she forgets me? What if she remembers me, but not herself? What if I can no longer muster the strength to pretend that this is my first time being told that story today? What if the years she starts living in her mind lead her to mistake me for her daughter? What if she stops recognizing her daughter as her daughter—altogether—no longer the bad guy that tells her what to do, but no longer

> anyone she can recall? What if she dies without knowing who I am? What if she snaps at me when I offer her help? What if I snap back?
>
> In short: my relationship with grief feeds on expectation.
>
> My grief is shaped by anticipation.
>
> I am ill. Or maybe, I am mad. I am mad that I am ill. Or I am so ill that I am mad. I am somewhere in between. (sarah)

In writing of her experience of the Death Café, sarah notes that 'it spoke my language.' This vocabulary of grief is echoed by Adichie's (2021) suggestion that grief is always about language, a grasping for language, and ultimately its failure. Because grief is, for most, an inevitable vulnerability that comes with the bodymind experience, pedagogical praxis must then be attuned to affect-centered approaches to both the relational and individual experiences of loss. In this sense, attention to grief in teaching and learning spaces is a significant access gesture. Collins and Jones engage in affective pedagogical praxis (Collins et al., 2022a), relaxed pedagogy (Jones et al., 2025; Jones et al., 2022) and the need to include the more-the-human world (Collins et al., 2022b). In this sense, critical accessible pedagogy involves applying a critical and compassionate lens to teaching and learning CGP. Both modes of classroom operation build on critical pedagogy, a term emerging from the work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Freire, which links learning with social justice (Collins et al., 2022c).

CGP is anchored in Mad[1] grief, which Poole and Ward (2013) describe as a reclamation of 'that which has been traditionally used to other, pathologize, and ostracize those who grieve. It may defy categories, binaries of normal or abnormal, may be unstageable, possibly circular, and frequently extended' (p. 102). Aligned with critical disability studies, Mad grief asks what grief gives to us, enabling us to reframe the issue of grief not as a problem of the griever, but rather as society's failure to make room for all our grief (Poole & Ward, 2013). In this way, Mad grief is a practice of resistance that welcomes stories of loss, including sarah's story of anticipatory grief for her grandmother's Alzheimer's peppered with 'what ifs' that may, in moments of mourning, constitute madness. Mad grief is a resistance practice that makes space for 'the subjugated sense of loss that comes to us all' (Poole & Ward, 2013, p. 95). Building on Mad grief, Willer et al. (2021) offer CGP as a Mad feminist pedagogical intervention that resists sanist perspectives on mourning and calls attention to systems of power that limit grief. CGP acknowledges that grief is always already in the classroom. It challenges the

[1] A reclaimed word, Mad references a socio-political identity of those who have been labelled with 'mental health issues' or with experiences of emotional distress (Landry, 2023).

cultural script about grieving, demanding that we 'carry on,' 'be normal,' and 'keep functioning,' particularly in the face of silenced emotions 'related to the fear of the body and of being out of control' (Granek, 2009, pp. 46-47). In doing so, CGP also challenges the pervasive logic of 'sane supremacy,' wherein political, academic, social, and media structures reinforce "saneness" as the norm (Procknow, 2017, p. 18), marginalizing those whose experiences of grief do not fit this narrow framework. In this way, CGP welcomes bodyminds into academia.

Guneet's story: The need for deep rest

> I lost my grandmother a few months ago. She died in India while I was here in Canada. Winter was too harsh on her, and she gave in after struggling for days. When she first got sick, I got this feeling that something was wrong. I called my mother to check up on her and she told me that grandma was already sick. That feeling, that sense of impending doom, is sheer torture.
>
> I said my goodbyes to a corpse on a video call, and I tried to bury my emotions deep. What could I have done? Sitting miles and miles away, I couldn't even hug my mother when she lost her own. It is the only way I know how to cope, I think, with ignorance. It just hurts too much otherwise. Productivity is unaccommodating to a heavy chest and teary eyes.
>
> Maybe a week away from work will be good enough to settle this uneasiness and heartbreak?
>
> But my parents don't want me skipping classes or assignments; there are consequences, and there are penalties.
>
> My professors are okay with this right now, but will they accommodate my needs for long?
>
> I need to get a hold of myself.
>
> I am tired. I want to go back to bed and sleep. (Guneet)

Grief is exhausting. It can mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and creatively wring us out. This exhaustion was collectively recognized after the Death Café when the class truncated the discussion for time to rest. As our digital Death Café came to closing, Jones asked students what they needed next: To continue with class or something else? In the chat box, someone typed, 'I need a nap.' This sentiment elicited several nods. We ended our class early in the interest of rest.

From this moment of deep exhaustion, we suggest a new tenet to CGP: a recognition of the need for *deep rest*. This may mean carving out time in teaching so that individuals can rest. Or, in alignment with CGP's resistance to

individualization, we might refuse the default narratives of rest as "self-care" and instead embrace rest as a disability justice action (Desai et al., 2022). This refusal is a return to the labour of working from bed and other spaces not traditionally understood as work-appropriate (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). It might mean working at a different pace or not working at all. We posit, then, that rest is an essential element of CGP. So essential that the need for deep rest can be imagined as the fifth tenant of CGP. Resting can do more than respond to the systems that set the rules for grieving, it can resist these systems as a compassionate response to grief that can hold the individual narrativization of grief without buying into its pathologization.

Yet the suggestion to not work at all cannot be separated from privilege. As Guneet's writing gestures to, rest is not always available to us and can awaken 'consequences … [and] penalties.' Few of us can simply choose not to work because we need rest. And, even though the Death Café was nestled in the broader decision to work despite needing rest, Jones's decision to end class early in the interest of rest undoubtedly speaks to her privileged position of power as a full-time, tenured faculty member. Yet, as Smilges (2023) describes, we can still rest. Smilges puts forward the idea of 'access thievery'—of stealing the access you need, including rest—as a way to describe 'an alternative economy of access in which the needs generated by exclusionary institutional or institutional neglect are met in ways outside, or beyond, or in addition to the access provided by those institutions' (p. 44). In a profound moment that speaks to the need for rest, they write:

> While I wish we didn't have to steal our flourishing, having to steal it doesn't make it any less ours. It might not seem particularly honorable to fabricate excuses for missing meetings now and then, but I'm unsure that honor was ever in the cards for me. And that's fine. I don't need honor; I just need to go back to bed (p. 51).

From the perspective of disability justice, we write understanding that 'crip time is grief time' (Samuels, 2017, n.p). Crip time is a reconsideration of time spent that resists normative pacings and instead allows for bodymind difference. Crip time, Samuels writes, 'is a time of loss, and of the crushing undertow that accompanies loss' (n.p.). This "loss" time requires attending to the needs of our bodyminds and taking breaks, because rest is essential to dealing with grief (Samuel, 2018). Reflecting on a reviewer's comments about who can access deep rest, we turn to Norman's work on the crip wisdom of young disabled carers, which asks, 'without each other, how is deep rest possible?' (Fowlie et al., 2025). In times saturated with grief, the need for community and interdependence becomes even more crucial, as

shared support and mutual care allow for the space necessary to navigate such profound loss.

For the deep need for rest to be a useful addendum to CGP aligned with disability justice, we call upon those who position rest as liberatory in its inert challenge and disrupt capitalism and white supremacy—a stance also clearly offered by Hersey, founder of the Nap Ministry. Hersey (2022) argues that grieving is a sacred act which can reconnect us with our bodyminds and must be supported by rest. In her framework, rest is necessarily slow and (re)connective with the potential to take us in unexpected directions. This need for slowness is echoed by Akomolafe (Young, n.d) who suggests that slowing down in the face of urgency is a way of 'hacking the machine,' which invites us to consider alternatives to the often-instrumental ways we engage with embodiment and activism, allowing us access to 'different kinds of realities, other worlds' (n.p.). Thus, shifting of temporalities is a way of 'hacking the grief machine' that dictates who, how, and what grieving must present as in spaces dominated by Euro-Western supremacies (Poole, personal communication).

Conclusion

The process of reflecting on our Death Café evolved in the years that followed. In the winter of 2024, our group reviewed a draft of this article and could not move forward without acknowledging how our experiences of grief have been profoundly shaped by the ongoing genocide against Palestinians. As Guneet wrote in an email about this paper wherein she reflected on ecological, anticipatory, and ongoing grief, 'I feel that with every passing moment, such grief becomes more profound.' As a dynamic constellation of emotions, grief also encompasses feelings of anger, rage, and sorrow (Rosenblatt, 1996). As we witness the unfolding global turmoil and wonder how to respond, we witness institutional responses that are insufficient and violent and wonder what's next. At the time of writing, Harvard University, for example, is being sued by Palestinian and Jewish students for failing to stop harassment and protect their safety (Anderson, 2024; Stempel, 2024). We wonder how students and faculty in our institutions and elsewhere are navigating grief (or rest) amid events that produce deep trauma. We cannot ignore this phenomenon. Acknowledging the evolution of grief requires teaching and learning as 'grief facing not grief fearing,' as Poole et al. advise (2022, p. 29).

The ways in which our bodies respond to grief and, by extension, engage with composition—the ways we write—are intimately tied to our bodyminds and cultural norms (Mills & Sanchez, 2023). Given their usefulness in gently and

collectively facing the insolubility of grief, we position Death Cafés as a worthwhile pedagogical tool for CGP. They are a method with which to engage in careful, collective conversations about loss, grief, death and dying. As our stories here demonstrate, Death Cafés can be an example of a 'deeply engaged and embodied coursework that defies academic norms of good grief' (Willer et al., 2021, p. 28). However, we still wonder: Could CGP help us process this contemporary tangle of grief in the winter of 2024? If we staged a Death Café right now, would the tenants of this mode of pedagogy help us process the events of the moment? In another email, Janice preemptively responded to these questions, writing: 'We don't know what our future grief will look like.' Nor do we know how our future ways of relating will take shape. In some nearby time, we will likely lose touch. And, as Willer and her former students (2021) have acknowledged, there will be loss in moving beyond a shared learning space with mutual discoveries. Yet, as Braidotti (2020) admonishes, *now* is a time to grieve. We should 'mourn the dead, humans and non-humans' and work to 'develop different ways of caring and relating' (p. 2). As we continue to position grief as necessarily entangled with systems of power and structures of oppression, we position Critical Grief Pedagogy, Mad grief, and rest as critical modes of caring and relating.

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Janice Desroches (she/her) holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from Brock University and is currently an MA student in Social Justice and Equity Studies there. With over 20 years of experience as an educator in Ontario, she has taught English language learners at the post-secondary level and facilitated professional learning opportunities for K-12 faculty and staff. She is the co-founder of Chapters4Change.com. Her research focuses on the effectiveness of equity-centered literature circles in boosting K-12 educators' confidence to address inequities and discrimination by enhancing their critical thinking, knowledge building, and awareness of social justice issues.

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Morgan Crosby (she/her) recently graduated from Brock University's MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies. Her most recent work, *Canadian Mining in Guatemala: Framing Analysis and Indigenous Testimony* (2024), engages in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist lenses to analyze the negative impacts of extractive companies on local communities and the environment. Morgan continues to work in this field, hoping to return to Guatemala to promote and support further measures to protect its Indigenous Maya communities and environments from extractive practices and challenge the larger global impacts of extractivism.

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