

Unsettling the Humanist Teacher Education: Posthuman and Decolonial Figurations of Practice

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1. Objectives and purposes

We propose a dialogue between theoretical frameworks and the situated experiences of university faculty to examine how posthuman, feminist, and decolonial perspectives (Borghi, 2020; Braidotti, 2013, 2019; hooks, 2000; Vergès, 2019) can reimagine the epistemology of practice in initial teacher education. Echoing bell hooks (1994, 2010), we understand the university classroom as the most radical space of possibility we have—a place where transformative pedagogies can expose contradictions, disrupt normative languages, and nurture plural, embodied ways of knowing.

This inquiry emerges from our critically engaged practice as university teachers and is informed by the educational experiences and student narratives generated within two courses we taught during the 2024/2025 academic year at the University of Florence:

- *Developing Professional Identity*, part of the integrated five-year degree program in Primary Teacher Education;
- *Active Methodologies for Professional Development in Early Childhood Services*, within the three-year undergraduate degree program in Education and Training Sciences.

Each course, lasting 60 hours, involved approximately 200 students—the vast majority white women between the ages of 22 and 28—preparing to work either as early childhood educators (0–3) or as preschool and primary school teachers. The near homogeneity of these classrooms reflects the historically feminized and racially unmarked configuration of teacher education in Italy. These contexts are shaped by normative expectations around care, development, and educational efficacy. Within such settings, the classroom became a site for questioning dominant imaginaries of teaching and for experimenting with practices that resist normalization.

Our contribution pursues three interwoven objectives.

First, we aim to critically reflect on the methodological practice of *defamiliarization* (Braidotti, 2019, 2021) and the construct of *revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising* (hooks, 2000, 2010) as navigational tools to help us:

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- a) unlearn our privileges, including Eurocentric, humanist, and anthropocentric mental habits;
- b) deepen awareness of the forms of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism we have inevitably internalized, in order to recognize our own embeddedness within the systems of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1994, p. 26) of which we are a part.

We argue that without these methodological tools, efforts to enact posthuman, feminist, and decolonial pedagogies risk remaining rhetorical—mobilizing the languages of diversity, equity, and inclusion while leaving intact the very structures of domination they claim to dismantle, and reproducing forms of tokenism (hooks, 2010) and *non-performative* commitments (Ahmed, 2012). Within our university teaching practice, this has meant interrogating our own complicities, foregrounding positionality as a political and epistemic act, and reclaiming revolutionary feminist consciousness—alongside the contribution of visionary feminism—as a collective and disruptive force. As white, cisgender, highly educated scholars, we recognize how easily feminist language can be appropriated within institutional contexts, stripped of its radical potential, and aligned with careerism, respectability, or neoliberal ideals of empowerment. This risk is particularly acute for those of us whose trajectories have been shaped by academic privilege, and who must continually resist the tendency to domesticate feminist critique rather than sustain its capacity for rupture.

Second, we investigate the potentialities and shortcomings of the teaching methods and techniques we adopted within our courses—such as Controversial Case Study (Gherardi, & Murgia, 2015), Metaphor Analysis (Hoggan, Simpson, & Stuckey, 2009), Action Learning Conversation (O’Neil, & Marsick, 2009), and collective reflection through project-based learning (Poell, Yorks, & Marsick, 2009)—not as universally applicable models, but as situated practices entangled with specific materially embedded and embodied, affective, relational, and institutional conditions. Drawing on post qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2011, 2017, 2022), this orientation diverges from a conventional humanist qualitative methodology grounded in representation, coding, and thematic generalization. Rather than assuming a stable individual who reflects on experience and produces analyzable “data,” we approach classroom events as immanent entanglements in which subjectivities, affects, discourses, and material conditions co-emerge. In this sense, we examine how these methods—though conceptually and epistemologically distinct—have supported diverse forms of reflection within our classrooms: from problem centered analysis and reasoning to symbolic, ecological, and experience-based ways of knowing, and to an exploration of how subjectivities are shaped within systems of power. Our inquiry therefore does not aim to extract themes or represent pre-existing meanings, but to trace how meanings are produced in the event itself, attending to moments of friction, disorientation, and epistemic unsettlement that prompt us—as teachers and learners together—to disrupt taken-for-granted professional imaginaries and to question how our identities are positioned within broader zoe/geo/techno assemblages of human and more than human components (Braidotti, 2019; Cozza & Gherardi, 2023).

Third, we explore how narrative practices—emerging in and through our classrooms—can operate as sites of affective and relational inquiry, enabling us to “unforget” personal and collective histories and to generate affirmative reconfigurations of educational experience. Informed by affective ethnography (Gherardi, 2019; Pellegrinelli & Parolin, 2023), we consider student–teacher narratives not as transparent accounts but as generative textures of embodied memory, relational attunement, and material-discursive forces. These narratives, produced in writing, speaking, and performative reflection, act as carriers of experience that exceed individual voices. Rather than seeking coherence or closure, we trace how these stories circulate, intensify, and displace dominant imaginaries of teaching, foregrounding tensions between inherited educational scripts and their potential recompositions. In this sense, narrative work is not a projection of better futures, but a practice that mobilizes affect, memory, and imagination in composing alternative modes of becoming-educator in a world shaped by colonial histories and complex relational ecologies.

2. Perspectives and theoretical frameworks

We speak as white, cisgender faculty with tenured positions in education in Italy, teaching and conducting research at the University of Florence and the University of Siena. As two associate professors, one assistant professor, and one full professor, we are embedded in institutions shaped by long-standing humanist traditions—yet, as Taylor (2016, p. 7) observes, “we are already in the middle of the posthuman condition, its forces already entangled in the humanist fibre of our lives and thinking.” Following Quinn (2021), inhabiting these universities means confronting the enduring hold of humanist logics while engaging with the transformative openings offered by posthuman and decolonial perspectives. This means, among other things, acknowledging the privilege inherent in speaking from institutions that shape and consolidate dominant power. Following Borghi (2020), such awareness calls for a continuous exercise of decoloniality: to inhabit the margins within the center, to expose the mechanisms that reproduce dominance, and to remember that when you hold privilege you can choose to use it differently—to overturn it, to mobilize it as a tool of resistance and subversion within the very system that confers it.

The degree programs in which we teach—preparing future educators—are embedded in a university system shaped structurally and culturally by practices that reproduce a gendered, racialized, and classed division of labor. AlmaLaurea (2024)² reports that around 94% of graduates in these degree paths are women, and about 3% are students with non-Italian citizenship and/or a migratory background. While no official data are collected on race or ethnicity in the Italian university system, these indicators confirm what is evident in our classrooms: the overwhelming majority of students are white women. This racial homogeneity, though structurally normalized, is rarely interrogated in public discourse on education and equity in Italy. In this sense, teacher education in Italy does not simply reflect social homogeneity; it actively contributes to the reproduction of a racialized epistemic order in which whiteness operates as an unmarked norm.

Leathwood and Read (2009) explored how, in the British context, the discourse on the feminization of education—conceived in a Foucauldian sense as a system of statements, rules, and practices embedded in relations of power—has gained visibility in media and policy debates, producing taken-for-granted assumptions and negative “truths” that have turned it into a matter of public concern. Similar narratives in mainstream media and policy discourse also circulate in Italy (Bracci, 2018). To cite just a few headlines published in recent months in the online editions of major national newspapers: “Too Many Women: The Dark Side of the School?” (*la Repubblica*, June 2025); “The Gynaeceum of Teaching. In Search of the Lost (Male) Teacher” (*Corriere della Sera*, April 2025); “Teaching: More and More a Job for Women. OECD Alarm: Persistent Gender Imbalance” (*La Stampa*, February 2024).

As Thompson (2016) notes, when applied to schooling and initial teacher education, the term “feminization” is commonly used to signal: (a) the growing presence of women as faculty, students, and practitioners; (b) an alleged cultural feminization of pedagogy and curricula; and (c) a perceived threat to male students and to dominant ideals of masculinity. This discourse not only rests on essentialist assumptions but actively marks this field with devaluing connotations precisely because of its predominantly female composition.

Against this backdrop, one of the challenges is to cultivate disruptive, generative dialogues that refuse inherited norms and unsettle the gendered symbolic order that continues to cast teaching—especially in early childhood and primary education—as “women’s work.” It calls us to question narratives that naturalize teaching—as, for example, tied to domestic and caregiving roles and to supposedly innate “feminine” qualities like empathy and sensitivity—and to imagine it otherwise, transcending rigid gender binarisms so that capacities and responsibilities are no longer tethered to essentialized identities.

² <https://www2.almaurea.it/cgi-asp/classi/Scheda.aspx?codiceAggr=11216&tipoCorso=LSE&lang=it>

Another layer of complexity lies in the racial homogeneity that characterizes future teachers, practicing teachers, and university faculty alike: in Italy, education in its dominant form is white. This whiteness is not a neutral backdrop but an unmarked norm that defines what counts as legitimate knowledge, whose histories are remembered, and whose experiences are rendered invisible. We believe that education must reveal the world's diversity and dismantle the white, Eurocentric veil that has long stifled Italian culture and history. At the same time, we must not dwell on the figure described by Sullivan (2014) of the *good white people* who—often with self-congratulatory overtones—focus on taking symbolic distance from their own whiteness rather than using their privileged position to advance gender and racial justice. This calls for practices capable of taking distance from the abstract universalism that defines the human within the humanist schema. Instead, it proposes to assume subjects as neither unitary, autonomous, nor self-determined, but as embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics (Braidotti, 2019). At the same time, we remain attentive to the fact that posthumanist critique, emerging largely within European philosophical traditions, does not automatically coincide with decolonial struggles rooted in histories of racial violence and dispossession. Their convergence cannot be presumed; it must be worked through in tension.

Within these tensions lie openings for pedagogies that do not merely reproduce inherited imaginaries but actively participate in generating subversive politics, expressed through alternative visions of the human articulated by those historically excluded from, or only partially included in, that category. It entails the creation of other possible worlds. This transformative edge assumes that no emancipatory process, however partial, is ever fully subsumed or incorporated into dominant socio-economic conditions, to which it remains attached by critical opposition. Discrete margins of intervention persist—margins from which educational practices can be reconfigured and enacted toward more just, plural, and yet-to-be-imagined futures.

3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

Our inquiry adopts a post qualitative, practice-based approach (St. Pierre, 2011; Cozza & Gherardi, 2023) that positions teaching and research within the same field of action. Rather than treating “methods” as neutral tools, we approach them as material-discursive practices through which knowledge, subjectivities, and power relations are continuously enacted. Our engagement with post qualitative inquiry does not release us from the humanist methodological tradition within which we were trained; rather, it compels us to confront how that tradition continues to shape our analytical habits even as we attempt to displace them.

Developed within the context of the two university courses introduced above, the inquiry unfolded through a set of activities carefully composed as sites of practical reflexivity and collective problematization. Within this framework, the empirical materials were not pre-defined data sets, but traces generated in and through pedagogical processes. Alongside these iterative movements, we also integrated moments of more frontally delivered input, where we introduced key theoretical and epistemological coordinates to situate the path undertaken. These lectures provided critical and creative cartographies that helped map the theoretical coordinates underpinning the participatory and generative processes described below.

The inquiry unfolded through a series of iterative movements:

- *Exploring educational practices* through narrative and metaphorical elicitation (e.g., critical incident reflections, analysis of metaphors, and case-based discussions);
- *Collectively problematizing emerging concepts* through collaborative mapping, dialogical analysis, and shared interpretation;
- *Exercising authorship* through action-oriented planning, project design, and iterative feedback loops.

Analysis accompanied each stage of this work, through collective debriefings and mappings that attended to the affective, symbolic, and relational dynamics embedded in student productions. In line with affective ethnography (Gherardi, 2019), we positioned ourselves as implicated in these processes, treating the courses as living laboratories of inquiry in which methods, materials, and participants mutually shape one another. Table 1 synthesizes the methods and techniques employed.

Table 1. Methods and techniques adopted during the courses			
Methods and techniques	Empirical materials and prompts	Activities	Analytical work and tensions activated
Critical Positionality	Personal experiences and embodied narratives shared by faculty members as feminist tools to enact the principle that the personal is political	Dialogical sharing and analysis in class of autobiographical accounts and disorienting dilemmas shared by faculty	Acknowledge and interrogate one's own positionality; mobilize embodied experience as a political and epistemic resource; move from the self to the collective without indulging in ego-eco closures (hooks, 2010); rework personal narratives into shared, critical, and relational forms of knowing
Metaphor Analysis (Deshler, 1990; Hoggan, Simpson, Stuckey, 2009).	Metaphor-based narratives individually written by students in response to a prompt about a meaningful teacher, followed by group analysis and co-construction of new metaphors	Starting from a prompt to recall a meaningful teacher, participants individually produced metaphor-based narratives through spontaneous, embodied associations. In small groups, they critically examined the metaphors to uncover implicit assumptions, values, and normative imaginaries. Through collective discussion and re-authoring, they co-constructed alternative metaphors that disrupted dominant educational imaginaries and opened new possibilities for thinking and practicing teaching otherwise.	Render visible and interrogate the values, beliefs, and affective-symbolic assumptions embedded in dominant educational imaginaries; collaboratively reimagine teaching through the creation of alternative metaphors; open reflexive rearticulations of professional subjectivities and pedagogical visions
Controversial Case Study (Gherardi, Murgia, 2014, 2015).	Orientation text with two gendered versions (mentor teacher as male/female)	Students individually wrote a narrative evaluation of a fictional mentor teacher—presented either as “Livia” or “Arturo”—based on a prompt simulating a trainee experience in a school setting. Unaware of the gender focus, they described the mentor's perceived qualities, competencies, and teaching style. In a second phase, all narratives were analyzed and discussed in small groups. While the technique relied on a binary gender frame, it generated epistemic disorientation and made visible internalized norms, stereotypical attributions, and implicit ideals of “good teaching”. Group discussions critically addressed how professional practices are gendered and normatively evaluated	Make perceptible how teaching practices and professional identities are gendered; interrogate stereotypical attributions and dominant ideals of the “good teacher”; critically examine the moral orders that underpin evaluative judgments and structure recognition within educational contexts
Narrative stimulus based on Fanta-Ghirò, a folktale from the Italian oral	After a collective reading and discussion of the tale, Participants individually wrote original fairy tales inspired by	Narrative stimulus based on Fanta-Ghirò, a folktale from the Italian oral tradition rewritten by Italo Calvino. The story presents an initially	Engage embodied narrative inquiry; connect individual narratives to shared cultural imaginaries and symbolic

tradition rewritten by Italo Calvino (Gherardi, Poggio, 2009; Bracci 2018)	personal or professional experiences. These narratives were then analyzed in small groups to explore symbolic tensions and gendered imaginaries.	unconventional female figure who disguises herself as a man and subverts gender roles—only to conclude with a canonical ending that restores the traditional order through matrimony and male inheritance, in line with the classical narrative principle of restoring violated order. After a collective reading and discussion of the tale, participants individually wrote original fairy tales inspired by personal or professional experiences, engaging with symbolic tensions and interiorized gendered representations. The narratives were later analyzed in small groups	orders; reconfigure traditional narrative structures through decolonial, feminist, and posthuman lenses to generate counter-narratives and alternative figurations
Action Learning Conversations (Marsick, Maltbia, 2009; O’Neil, Marsick, 2009)	Follow ALC steps: Step 1: Share question/challenge → Step 2: Q-storming → Step 3: Assumption sharing → Step 4: Problem reframing → Step 5: Problem holder identifies next steps. Discuss in groups	Students followed the ALC protocol in small groups to address professional dilemmas. The process enabled a shift from individual concerns to collective inquiry, supporting critical analysis, problem reframing, and shared planning.	Sustain iterative collective inquiry; integrate critical feedback into professional development; rework the relation between reflection and action
Affirmative Cartographies for Creative and Critical Thinking in small groups	Collective conceptual mapping of educational tensions and interdependencies	Participants collaboratively mapped the entanglements between concepts, practices, and values within educational experience. These situated cartographies acted as affirmative tools for deconstructing inherited knowledge regimes and tracing new epistemic directions	Co-compose shared conceptual frameworks; visualize the relational nature of educational practices; destabilize inherited epistemic assumptions while tracing situated, plural configurations of knowledge
Project Design Activities (Poell, Yorks, & Marsick, 2009)	Group-based writing and design of feminist and posthuman pedagogical proposals	Working groups co-designed educational interventions grounded in posthuman, feminist, and decolonial principles. The activity combined theoretical reflection with creative experimentation, emphasizing collaboration, inclusivity, and situated responsibility	Experiment with the pedagogical implications of critical insights; explore alternative practices; compose collective responsibility; work with difference as generative force rather than as a problem to be managed

4. Analytic Movements and Material Traces

The materials generated through the activities described above include a rich set of narratives and artefacts, produced individually and in groups. Students were actively engaged not only in creating these materials but also in analyzing them, collectively tracing recurring assumptions and points of tension rather than stabilizing thematic categories.

Our analytical process unfolded through three intertwined movements. First, we closely read each narrative to examine how students described themselves, their roles, and their relations to others within emerging professional imaginaries. Second, we conducted a second-order reading to identify how students’ narratives aligned with, negotiated, or resisted dominant representations of teaching and learning, without assuming these representations to be unified or internally consistent. Particular attention was given to how power relations—around gender, race, corporeality, and sexual orientation—were reproduced, resisted, or reframed. Third, we examined how these intersecting dimensions shaped and constrained what could be recognized as “good teaching,” professional belonging, and educational practice.

We focus on two techniques that most clearly render visible our analytic orientation—Metaphor Analysis and Controversial Case Study. While multiple devices were mobilized throughout the courses, we deliberately refrain from providing an exhaustive tabular account, as such a cataloguing gesture would risk turning the inquiry into a procedural and ultimately tedious repertoire rather than a situated analytic process. Tables 2 and 3 do not present definitive findings but trace recurrent tensions and reframings in how “good teaching” becomes recognizable within the materials.

Table 2. Metaphor Analysis: how it worked			
Metaphors written individually by students*	Perceived strengths as articulated by students	Dominant assumptions surfaced and co-constructed with participants	Reframings co-created by students in small groups
Lantern <i>It was like a lantern in the fog... not imposing absolute truths but giving tools to reflect</i>	Discreet guidance, support for autonomy, emotionally reassuring presence	Knowledge is imagined as adult-centered and directional, framed within a civilizing narrative of clarity vs. confusion. The adult acts as a stabilizing figure offering epistemic security	Network of lights co-created with learners, materials, and environments
Gardener <i>Like a patient gardener... protects the fragile plants, waits for them to bloom.</i>	Care, long-term growth, attunement to individual rhythms	Growth is seen as linear, individualized, and steered by the educator, who tends to learners as passive recipients. Care is naturalized and feminized, framed as inherent rather than professional	Ecosystem where educators, children, and environments are understood as co-evolving rather than guided by a single developmental trajectory
Sewing needle <i>A sewing needle... precise, sometimes sharp</i>	Precision, attention to detail, methodical construction	Teaching is depicted as solitary craftsmanship, precise and controlled. Learning is positioned as passive matter to be shaped through discipline and repetition	Collective embroidery with many hands, threads, and non-human materials
Lighthouse <i>A lighthouse in the storm... a safe guide</i>	Stability in difficult moments, orientation and reassurance	The teacher is portrayed as a solitary anchor of safety and orientation. Authority is stabilized in a heroic figure, external to the collective experience	Circle of lights and voices enabling plural, situated guidance
Warm blanket <i>Like a warm blanket on a cold day</i>	Care, protection, comfort, emotional containment	Care is linked to protection and comfort, masking asymmetrical power relations. Emotional labor is feminized and individualized, evoking maternal roles	Warmth shared across human and non-human bodies in mutual relationality
Referee <i>Like a sports referee... ensuring fairness</i>	Fairness, justice, respect for shared rules	Authority is legitimized through enforcement of external rules. Fairness is framed as control and neutrality, aligning with disciplinary logics and male-coded leadership	Rules negotiated and co-constructed; disobedience acknowledged as a right
Rainbow <i>Like a rainbow... when you see it, it brightens your day</i>	Joy, inclusion, hope, sense of wonder	Diversity is celebrated aesthetically and emotionally yet disconnected from structural transformation. Difference is exceptionalized rather than normalized	Relational spectrum of difference that exceeds symbolic celebration and gestures toward structural implication
Match <i>Like a match in a dark, cold room</i>	Ignition, energy, spark for transformation	Transformation is activated by an external spark, positioning agency in a singular adult figure. Light signifies progress, while darkness is linked to ignorance or lack	Shared ignition generated by collective and distributed agency

Compass <i>Like a silent compass... orienting without imposing</i>	Orientation, trust, promotion of learner autonomy	Orientation is imagined as fixed and predefined, with the teacher as neutral guide. Apparent neutrality obscures positionality and situatedness	Multiple situated compasses—human and non-human—orienting together
Robin Hood <i>A Robin Hood of education: turning little into much, breaking the rules</i>	Creativity, courage, willingness to challenge the rules	Educational change is framed as individual transgression driven by exceptional figures. Disruption is romanticized, with limited attention to collective or systemic dimensions	Redistribution through collective action and shared responsibility
*Next to each recurring metaphor described by the students and listed in the table, we included an excerpt from a narrative that we considered particularly illustrative.			

Table 3. Controversial Case Study: how it worked				
Analytical Focus	Livia, female tutor	Arturo, male tutor	Contrasts rendered visible	Posthuman Re-reading
How teachers are gendered	Constant presence, affective availability, emotional attunement. Described through maternal traits and proximity <i>She greeted everyone with a smile, made me feel part of the team from day one.</i>	Calm, dialogic, reflective, structurally competent. Breaks masculine stereotypes but is framed as exceptional <i>Even in moments of tension, he stayed calm and gave clear instructions</i>	Narratives reproduce feminized caring in Livia and rational professionalism in Arturo. Both figures remain within normative whiteness	Focus on the individual tutor as agentic center; absence of relational, material, and spatial co-production
Stereotypical attributions	Naturally caring, patient, emotionally available. Moralized through gratitude and devotion <i>She never said no to anyone, always ready to help</i>	Calm, authoritative, intellectually capable. Admired and respected <i>When he spoke, everything became clear</i>	Gendered scripts associate women with emotional care and men with clarity and logic	Traits are individualized and essentialized; power asymmetries and positionality are unexamined
Definitions of good teaching	Good teaching as relational presence, deep care, and emotional labor <i>She knew every child's story and made us feel seen</i>	Good teaching as structured clarity, logical explanation, cognitive empowerment <i>He helped me see the logic behind every choice</i>	Contrast between relational-affective and procedural-cognitive models; both draw from dominant educational scripts	“Good teaching” remains human-centered; distributed and collective agencies are not considered
Moral orders in evaluation	Evaluated through emotional proximity, unconditional support, and gratitude <i>I'll always be grateful; she never judged me</i>	Evaluated through competence, empowerment, and intellectual admiration <i>He made me believe I could do more</i>	Recognition is anchored in gendered moral frameworks: virtue vs. mastery	Evaluations overlook institutional conditions and material assemblages shaping teaching experiences

5. Results and Substantiated Arguments

There are no neat results but fragments that trouble and provoke. Across metaphors, controversial cases, Fanta-girò narratives, Action Learning Conversations, and design activities, what emerges

are not unified visions but collisions—between inherited imaginaries and moments of rupture, between what education has been scripted to be and what it might yet become. Rather than anticipating alternative futures, this work foregrounds the instability of the present as the condition from which any rearticulation must begin.

These narratives reveal how deeply participants are entangled in gendered moral orders, humanist assumptions, and institutional routines that appear natural and inevitable. Simultaneously, the acts of narration, design, and debate begin to unsettle dominant imaginaries. A student initially describes her mentor as “a patient gardener who waits for each child to bloom.” The image circulates in the group as a reassuring figure of care. When we begin to ask what counts as “blooming,” the conversation slows. Words such as “maturity,” “readiness,” and “proper development” surface. Someone notes that gardeners also prune and discard. The metaphor does not collapse; it thickens. Two weeks later, the same student refers not to “waiting for bloom” but to “shared pruning,” shifting the emphasis from individual growth to collective decision-making. The movement is subtle, not triumphant; it marks a displacement rather than a conversion.

Similarly, in the discussion of Livia and Arturo, no explicit defense of gendered difference is offered. Livia is described as constantly present, emotionally attuned, “always there.” Arturo is described as clear, composed, structurally competent. When asked whether Livia’s authority is ever articulated in the same terms as Arturo’s, the room does not erupt in disagreement; it hesitates. The asymmetry is not declared; it is embedded in adjectives. It is not resistance but normalization that becomes visible—the quiet distribution of credibility along gendered lines. What appears as benign differentiation reveals an inherited grammar of evaluation.

From these fragments we can trace three intertwined movements:

- Shifts in imaginaries of “good teaching” – from solitary, gendered hero figures toward more distributed, collective, and more-than-human figurations, collaboratively articulated in discussion.
- Cracks in moral orders – moments in which caring or authoritative traits are recognized as gendered, racialized, and institutionally patterned rather than naturally given.
- Openings that complicate action – collaborative design activities did not resolve tensions into stable solutions but rendered visible the conditions under which posthuman and decolonial frames can be inhabited within institutional constraints.

These arguments, while fragmentary, also remind us that analysis is never external to the pedagogical event—it is part of the doing. The metaphors and narratives were not neutral containers of meaning but material-discursive artefacts that acted back, generating new openings and provoking unexpected dissonances. In several cases, students refused or rewrote dominant symbols—rejecting the lighthouse as a solitary figure of salvation, questioning the warm blanket as infantilizing, or complicating the rainbow as a decorative rather than transformative sign. These gestures did not resolve contradiction; they shifted the terrain on which recognition operates.

Similarly, we remained alert to the risk of aestheticizing difference—of invoking queer or fantastical figures such as Fanta-ghirò without interrogating their cultural politics. Some students embraced her rebellious stance; others exposed the pacifying moral closure of the tale. These tensions were not smoothed into consensus. They persisted as sites of friction, reminding us that rearticulation does not dissolve structure but encounters it. The emancipatory character frequently attributed to transformative pedagogies cannot be assumed as ontologically given; it remains contingent upon the conditions under which recognition, legitimacy, and authority are structured within educational institutions. In this sense, we do not aim to extract generalizable solutions, nor to stabilize a model of transformative practice. Rather, we attend to the fragile, situated displacements through which professional imaginaries become momentarily unsettled—displacements that do not promise emancipation, but interrupt inevitability.

6. Scholarly Contribution and Significance

This work offers a posthuman feminist interrogation of teacher education, grounded in the situated experiences of faculty and students. By critically engaging with the feminization and structural whiteness of education, our inquiry examines how dominant imaginaries of teaching are produced, stabilized, and rendered natural within institutional routines.

Instead of positioning posthuman and decolonial frameworks as transferable solutions, we attend to the conditions under which such perspectives can be inhabited within classroom practice, as well as to the frictions they encounter.

In doing so, it foregrounds positionality and affective relationality not as techniques to be implemented, but as sites of epistemic implication through which faculty and students recognize their participation in the very regimes they interrogate. Its scholarly contribution operates on two levels: theoretically, it complicates prevailing assumptions within posthuman, feminist, and decolonial pedagogical debates; methodologically, it repositions narrative and collaborative inquiry as spaces where the limits of transformation become visible rather than resolved.

This work does not offer solutions. It lingers within the tensions that traverse teacher education, resisting the stabilization of transformative claims and foregrounding the fragility of any attempt to exceed inherited binaries.

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