



AUSTRALASIAN LAW ACADEMICS
ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2026

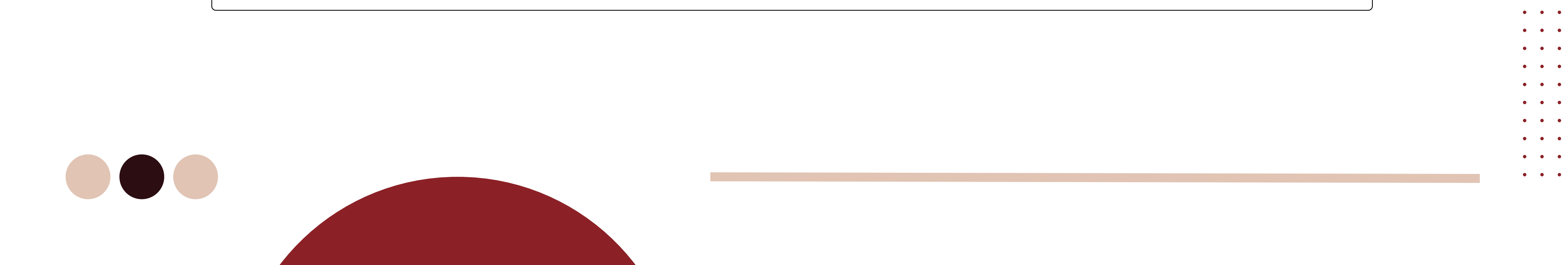
FROM REACTION TO RESPONSE:
PRACTISING REFLECTIVE PRESENCE IN
LEGAL EDUCATION

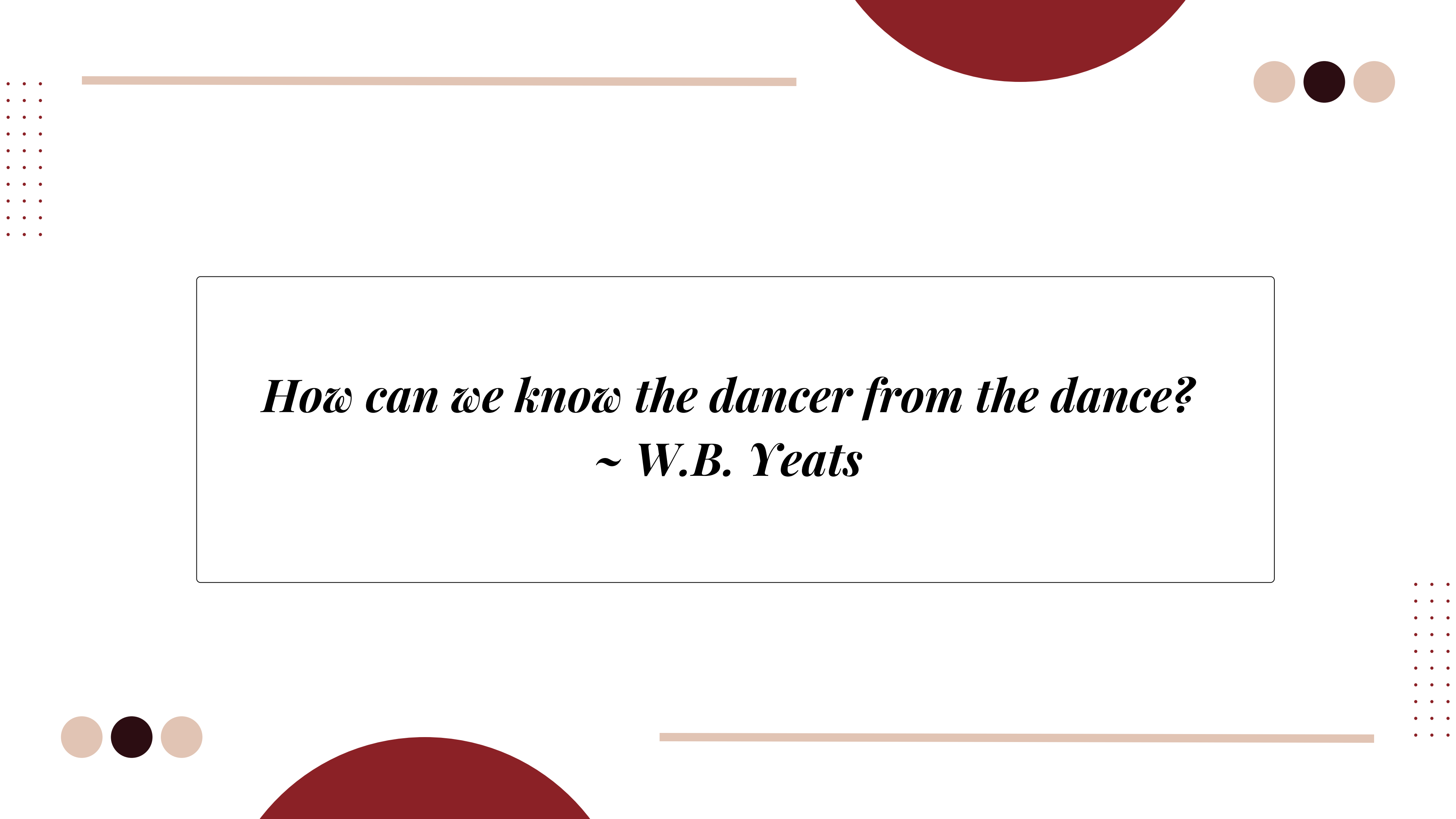


By Florence Thum, The College of Law Australia

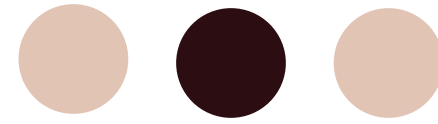


*As productivity and artificial intelligence
continue to shape the doing of law, what
becomes of the being of lawyers, and of the
educators who nurture them?*



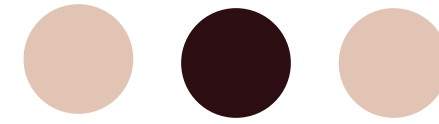


How can we know the dancer from the dance?
~ W.B. Yeats



QUESTIONS

- What kind of lawyer are we forming IF we teach students to reach conclusions, but not *to inquire* into the stories, assumptions and values from which those conclusions arise?
 - What becomes possible in legal education WHEN we stop treating reflection as evidence of learning, and begin treating it *as a way of discovering what is shaping our judgment?*
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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

“...is the development of insight and practice through critical attention to practical values, theories, principles, assumptions, and the relationship between theory and practice which inform everyday actions.”

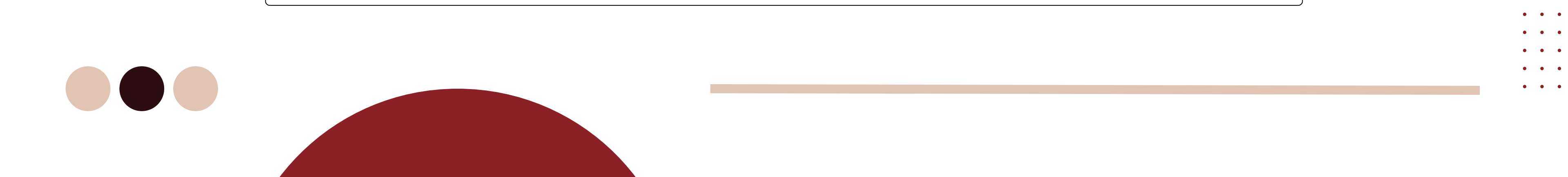
“...is a state of mind, an ongoing attitude to life and work, the pearl grit in the oyster of practice and education; danger lies in it being a separate curriculum element with a set of exercises.”

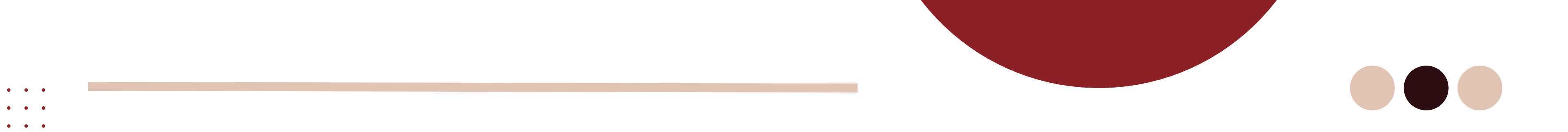
~ Gillie Bolton & Russell Delderfield (2018)



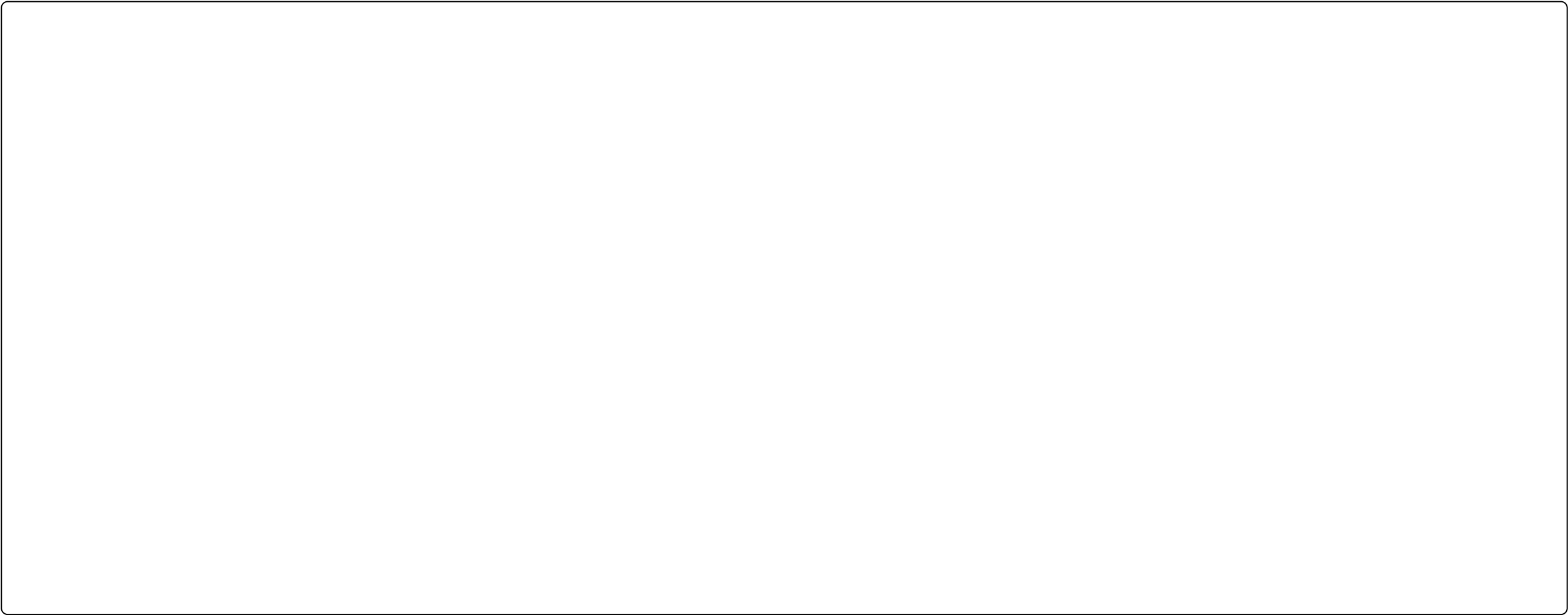
ARRIVING

*At the still point of the turning world...
there the dance is.
~ T.S. Eliot*





PAUSE *(the first step...)*





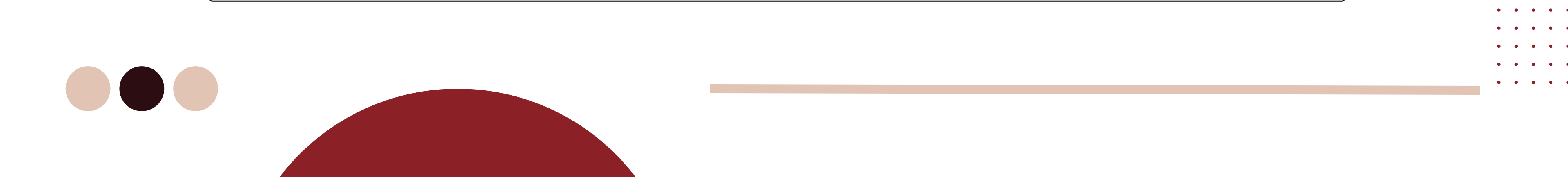
SITUATION

A student submits a reflective assessment. It is vague, defensive and emotionally charged.

They write:

“I don’t see why I should have to reflect on my feelings. I came to law school to learn the law, not to talk about myself. This assessment feels intrusive and subjective.”

You are tired, behind on marking, and aware that several students have made similar comments.





NOTICE

A student submits a reflective assessment. It is vague, defensive and emotionally charged.

They write:

“I don’t see why I should have to reflect on my feelings. I came to law school to learn the law, not to talk about myself. This assessment feels intrusive and subjective.”

You are tired, behind on marking, and aware that several students have made similar comments.

- What happens in me when I read this?
 - What do I feel?
 - What am I assuming?
 - What do I want to do?
- 



NOTICE

*Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced.
~ James Baldwin*





EXPAND

What story am I telling about this student, this situation, or myself?

Where did that story come from?

What does the story reveal about my assumptions, values or fears?

What value of mine has been touched or threatened?

What professional habit or institutional pressure is shaping my response?

What might I or this student be protecting?

What else might be true?

What am I not yet seeing?

What becomes possible if I do not act from the story?





EXPAND

*And the end of all our exploring /
Will be to arrive where we started /
And know the place for the first time.
~ T. S. Eliot*





CHOOSE

A student submits a reflective assessment. It is vague, defensive and emotionally charged.

They write:

“I don’t see why I should have to reflect on my feelings. I came to law school to learn the law, not to talk about myself. This assessment feels intrusive and subjective.”

You are tired, behind on marking, and aware that several students have made similar comments.

- What response is called for here?
 - What response would be educationally responsible?
 - What response would preserve appropriate boundaries?
 - What response would invite learning rather than merely enforce compliance?
 - What response is aligned with the kind of lawyer formation I value?
- 



CHOOSE

*The choice may have been mistaken,
the choosing was not.
~ Muriel Rukeyser*





DISCUSSION

What shifted between your initial reaction
and your considered response?

PAUSE – NOTICE – EXPAND – CHOOSE

Pause – What is happening here?

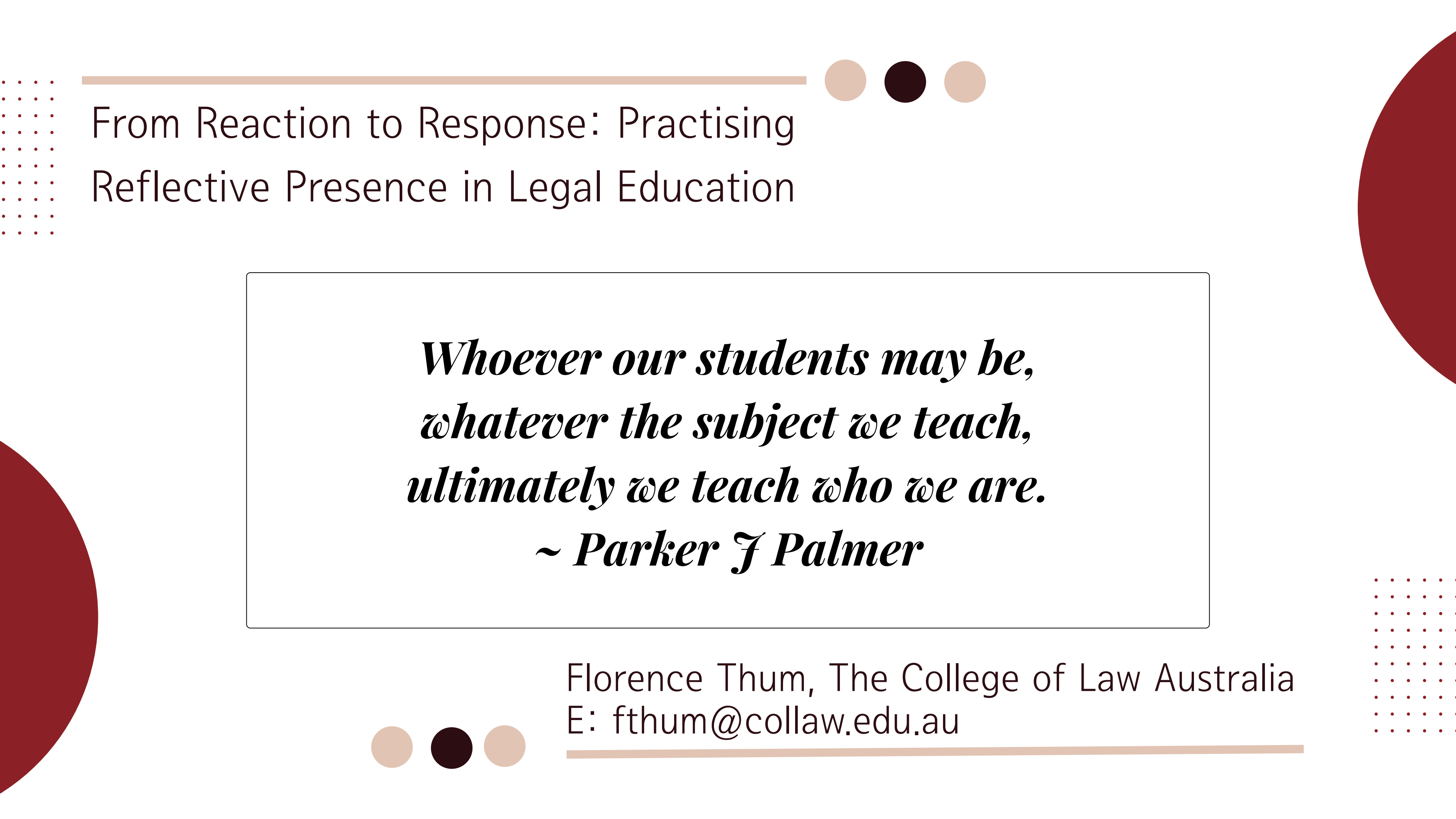
Notice – What am I feeling, assuming, wanting to do?

Expand – What else is present: context, power, values, culture, risk,
vulnerability, ethical tension?

Choose – What response is called for?

FROM THIS ROOM, INTO YOURS

- Begin with arrival – open a seminar, clinic, or supervision session with sixty seconds of intentional stillness before the work begins.
- Use the framework as a personal debrief – after a challenging class or student encounter, move through PAUSE–NOTICE–EXPAND–CHOOSE before you respond or record.
- Design scenarios for your students – invite them to work through a charged professional moment using the framework before reaching for a legal answer.
- Shift the reflective question – in feedback and assessment, move from what did you do? to what did you notice? and what else might have been true?



From Reaction to Response: Practising Reflective Presence in Legal Education

*Whoever our students may be,
whatever the subject we teach,
ultimately we teach who we are.
~ Parker J Palmer*

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