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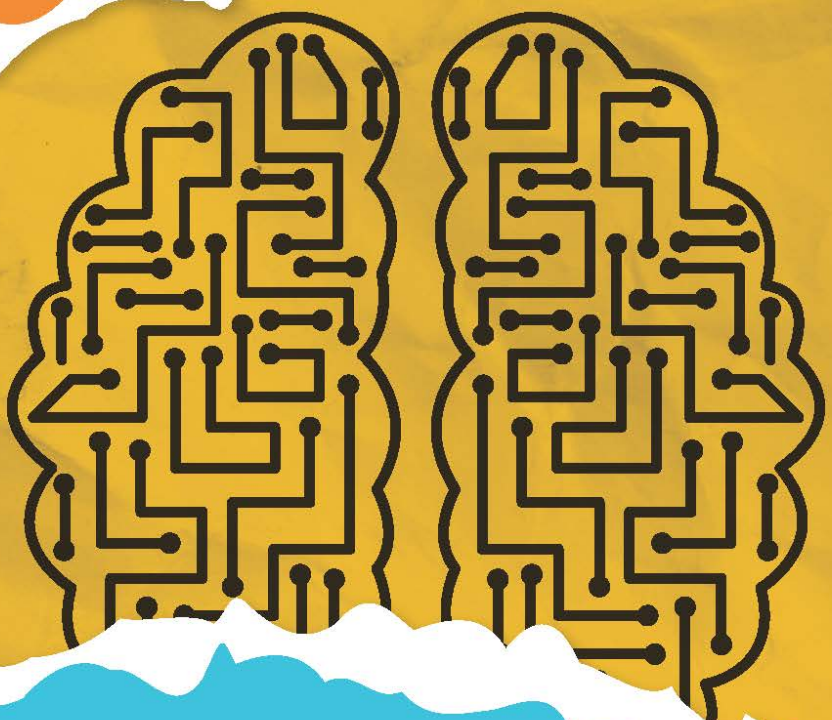
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Reimagining South African Higher Education

Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future



Editors: Danie de Klerk, Greig Krull, Tshepiso Maleswena, Fiona MacAlister

Reimagining South African Higher Education:

Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future

● Danie de Klerk ● Greig Krull
● Tshepiso Maleswena ● Fiona MacAlister

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FOREWORD

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The idea that new futures and possibilities can be imagined has become powerful and influential in education and higher education. Moreso, at a time in our history which is characterised by complexity and uncertainty usually associated with navigating contradictory terrains of neo-liberal impulses in education, the imperative for redress of historical exclusion on markers of race, class, gender, disability, language, geographic dislocation occasioned by war, the unfolding climate crisis, and the exponential growth and development in generative artificial intelligence.

Against this changing background, this book opens inspiring and hopeful ways of thinking about educational futures in the Global South. While local in its outlook, it is global in its ideas, conceptions and proposed actions. The book offers more than just thinking about these futures and, in fact, locates much of this thinking in the context of university classroom practices, reflections, and observations.

The book is organised around four themes, with several chapters under each theme, underpinned or framed by the most up-to-date thinking and research on learning, teaching, and student and staff development. Through the different chapters, the reader gets a first-hand account of the reimagined possibilities for higher education in South Africa. Each chapter surfaces new and fascinating insights into the different ways student learning and support intersect with institutional context, disciplinary orientation, and teacher development in higher education. The thirteen richly textured chapters invite the reader to reconsider established understandings of knowledge and student learning in a university setting and map out how an equitable educational practice is possible. In view of such a powerful stance on learning – whether staff or student learning – this volume becomes a must for anyone with a stake in education and possible new horizons in university education post-COVID-19. As you read this book, you will see examples of how authors are enacting this core focus by leading the way in initiatives and offerings grounded in the concerns and problems of equitable educational practice. The chapters pull together the finest tradition of scholarship of teaching and learning and have managed to find a pedagogic centre for the reader in times of educational complexity. Together, they provide critical analysis and accounts of engaged practice in higher education in South Africa.

Timely, accessible, and a compelling read which gives us grounds to imagine that a learning university or a university that learns from the experience of its teachers and its students is possible. Chapter by chapter, the book builds the user's confidence to unlock the possibilities for how to centre the student in our endeavours of teaching in a university that learns from its practice.

I commend the contributors to this volume for inviting us to reconsider our established understandings of knowledge and human learning. There is a compelling message that teacher and student learning is the most important condition for an equitable knowledge society. The knowledge interests of the contributors clearly show their responsiveness to the local, whilst framing their thinking and actions in the global. The book reminds its readers that knowledge about university teaching and its production is not independent of its context and its contextual relevance.

INTRODUCTION

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The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted higher education globally. It posed challenges for teaching, assessment, learning, and equitable access for students to higher education institutions. Students rapidly had to prepare for Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) and academics had to learn to teach remotely and online, while having to adapt courses initially designed for in-person delivery. As the pandemic progressed, staff and students reported burnout and fatigue due to the blurring of boundaries between work and home life. In short, the pandemic and ERTL fundamentally challenged traditional ways of doing and being across the higher education landscape. Yet from the disruption and chaos emerged a fertile environment for change; an opportunity to reimagine what could be. It is against this backdrop that the idea for this book was born.

In *Reimagining South African Higher Education*, assumptions about what constitutes good teaching and assessment are interrogated, while surfacing new narratives about how student success could be defined in South African tertiary contexts: a reimagining of learning and teaching for South African higher education, where students are positioned at the centre of the higher learning experience. Yet the ideas, arguments, and approaches put forward in this book could be applicable to audiences outside South Africa, particularly in the Global South where similar higher education climates may prevail. In compiling this edited volume, our ultimate intention is to advance scholarship on student centredness by offering a range of perspectives on how it could be realised and what it may entail, whether within the proverbial classroom or in the broader higher learning environment.

The book consists of thirteen chapters, clustered into four thematic areas. The thematic areas (or sections) help guide the reader, but the chapters can be read as standalone scholarly texts, depending on what the reader hopes to gain from the book. The respective sections comprise of ideas and innovations, often based on lessons learned from ERTL, put forward by learning and teaching practitioners, lecturers, and individuals working in the broader South African higher education landscape.

In the first section, student-centredness is viewed from the perspective of curriculum and learning design approaches. Here the focus is on meaningful learning design that considers students' learning needs (Chapter 1), curriculum co-design with students (Chapter 2), and advancing equity through learning experience design (Chapter 3).

Section two foregrounds care and student context to advance the notion of student centredness. The authors of Chapter 4 explore care and humanising pedagogy as vehicles for advancing student success, while in Chapter 5 student privacy and safety, within and beyond online learning environments are discussed. In turn, the authors of Chapter 6 challenge established views of cultural capital and argue that student differences should not only be accommodated but embraced.

Section three focuses on student learning, with Chapter 7 highlighting the importance of context in relation to assessment design and student learning, and Chapter 8 exploring a novel teaching approach through podcasting[1]. Chapter 9 looks at postgraduate education, with the author arguing for collaborative learning spaces aimed at enhancing the postgraduate researcher experience.

The fourth and final section explores the centring of students through academic advising (Chapter 10), the development of student affairs professionals in South Africa as a way of advancing student success and support (Chapter 11), and academic professional learning tied to a social ACTivist approach to curriculum innovation with students in mind (Chapter 12).

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 13, ties together the threads of student centredness that are woven throughout the edited volume. In it, we, the editors, argue for an intentional integration of work done in the broad spheres of academic professional learning (i.e., academic development) and student success and support as a means of dismantling the siloed thinking and approaches that tend to characterise the two spheres.

1 This chapter is co-authored with students who were part of the Ethnomusicology class on which the chapter is based.

Taken together, the book provides the reader with varied (re)imaginings of the student in relation to the broader tertiary landscape and shares innovations for enhancing learning and teaching that are contextually relevant to a reimagined South African higher education future.

Thematic Area 1:
Curriculum and Learning Design

CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS DEEP AND MEANINGFUL LEARNING: SHAPING CULTURE, DESIGNING CURRICULA, AND CONSIDERING STUDENT NEEDS

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Abstract

The last decade has witnessed a paradigm shift from teaching to learning excellence (as synonymous with quality learning) in higher education. The Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care (DFMPC) at the University of the Witwatersrand has developed a learning excellence philosophy that drives our approach to learning, teaching, and assessment. This philosophy is underpinned by a deep and meaningful learning framework. The framework espouses competencies, such as thinking and problem-solving, while allowing students to relate creatively and personally to their learning experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the diversity of students' learning needs into sharp focus. The authors present the DFMPC Health Systems Science (HSS) track, newly established within the Bachelor of Health Sciences degree programme, as an example of how the deep and meaningful learning framework and curriculum design processes were applied to understand student needs and to bring about curriculum change with the student voice at the centre. To ensure that all students have equitable opportunities for learning excellence, learning and assessment are reframed as more accessible and transparent, aligned with ever-changing graduate needs for students, employers, and society. This chapter explores 3 dimensions necessary to reimagine learning, namely context, culture, and curriculum. The importance of understanding student needs in context is emphasised, to complement a more innovative, adaptive, and inclusive approach to student-centred curriculum design. The notion of constructive alignment is broadened to include consideration of other stakeholders and notional hours. The chapter unpacks a deep and meaningful

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learning framework which is a student-centred, active-learning approach that focuses on developing 21st century skills, while aligning closely with the institution's graduate attributes. The DFMPC aims to produce self-directed and self-determined students with the competence and confidence to contribute to the workplace, their communities, and society.

Keywords: constructive alignment; curriculum evaluation; curriculum review; health systems science; learning design; student-centred curriculum design; student needs

1. Reimagining Learning: Why Culture, Curriculum, and Context?

Reimagining learning in higher education (HE) is a collective process between staff, students, and institutional leadership, requiring a commitment to foster a culture of student inclusivity, as well as an approach that prioritises learning and facilitates teaching. Students experience the system of higher education as different components, including teaching and learning, administration, and student support. The duty of universities to adopt an ethic of care (van As & Kluyts, 2023) demands that curricula, administrative, and support systems be reframed to place the student experience at the heart of the entire academic project.

This call to reimagine learning in HE follows current critiques of the role of higher education (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017) and the call to decolonise curricula (Heleta, 2016; Fataar, 2018). Furthermore, novel approaches to learning and teaching are needed to shift educational practices towards student inclusivity and to engender an environment that is conducive to partnering with students. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many educational institutions had to shift their teaching and learning practices, propelling the introduction of more opportunities for online and blended learning. The rapid disruptions to teaching and learning have opened a space for reflection and more sustainable innovation in our teaching practices.

This chapter introduces a conceptual framing developed by the authors, which is informed by theory (Bowden et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2019; Keeling, 2014; van As & Kluyts, 2023) and practice, through which to reimagine learning in higher education contexts (see Figure 1.1). The interplay between culture, curriculum, and context is considered critical to reimagine the nature and quality of learning. First, we unpack the concept of establishing a learning excellence philosophy for shaping culture and directing innovations around learning, administration, and support. Second, we further explore the application of the principles of deep and meaningful learning (DML) for developing curricula, and finally, we discuss the importance of student inclusivity. We posit a useful framework for centring culture and curricula on student needs, the 5-Ds framework, which considers students' technological needs and experiential contexts (device, data, digital access) and their motivation to learn (diligence and direction).

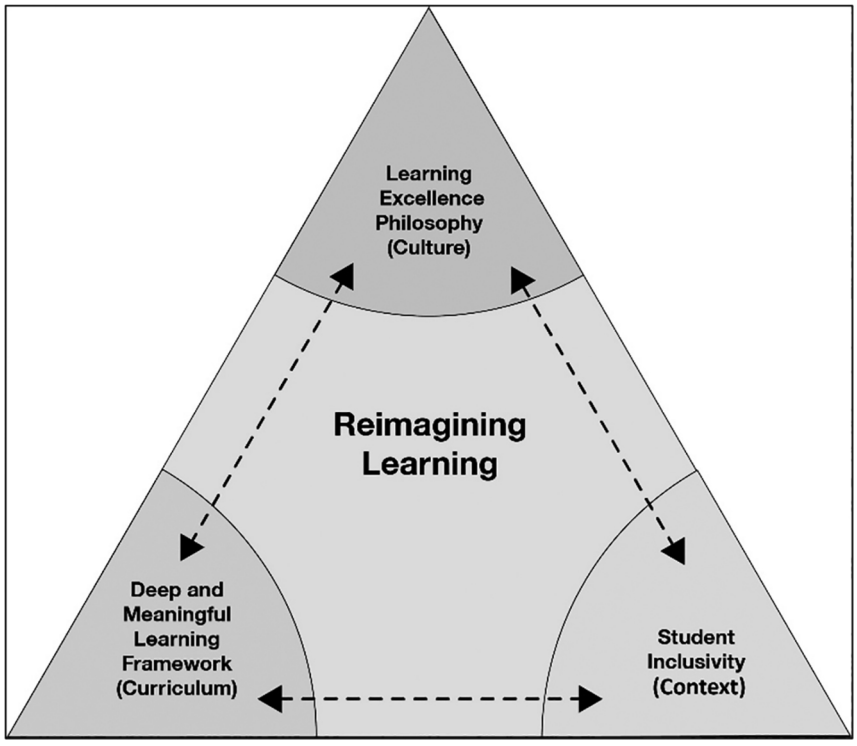


Figure 1.1: *Reimagining learning by considering culture, curriculum, and context*

The context of this work was the development of a new field of study in health systems science (HSS) within the Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care (DFMPC) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It afforded the DFMPC team an opportunity to apply a novel approach to curriculum design, and to shift cultural practices by foregrounding a student-centred curriculum premised on the principles of deep and meaningful learning (Hurtubise & Roman, 2014).

HSS, as an emerging field, is by nature multidisciplinary, drawing on 21st-century competencies (Germaine et al., 2016) and promoting a systems-thinking approach. HSS addresses health system challenges by considering the interdependence of the component parts of the health system while accounting for the system's inherent complexity. Both the novelty of the field and the multidisciplinary nature of HSS allowed for a *reset* of some traditional and challenging fundamentals in learning and teaching (Dison & Padayachee, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Zhao, 2020). We asked ourselves: How can this new programme transition students from simply memorising to applying knowledge and competencies? Why do students seem to focus on *learning for a test* and not on competence? Even if these challenges are addressed, how do we ensure students are "work-ready"? These kinds of questions prompted the DFMPC team to apply a deep and meaningful learning approach to the design and development of HSS by first trying to understand student needs and work on shaping the learning and teaching culture.

Deep and meaningful learning (DML) is a student-centred, active-learning approach that focuses on developing significant learning experiences through blended learning by producing long-lasting, meaningful change in the way that learners think, feel and act (Hurtubise & Roman, 2014, p. 164). As the unification of two concepts, both deep learning and meaningful learning aim to develop deep disciplinary understanding, transformative knowledge, personal meaning, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, creativity, and metacognitive skills while enabling learning that is active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative (Mystakidis et al., 2019).

DML aims to counter traditional teaching practices that have been criticised for emphasising "information-transfer teaching and studying methods and activities that lead to rote, surface learning such as memorisation and the raw assimilation of unlinked facts or procedures" (Mystakidis et al., 2019, p. 66). Rather, a DML learning approach has the potential to reshape student learning and focus on developing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and ensure that students can relate creatively and personally to their learning experience. For a student-centred DML curriculum to flourish, we also require a reimagined learning and teaching culture that is directed by a philosophy of learning excellence. Learning excellence pushes against traditional pedagogies that place the educator at the centre by promoting an organisational culture of learner-centredness.

With respect to our three-pronged approach (Figure 1.1) we start with a discussion of learning excellence as a means of affecting culture in HE. This is followed by considering the application of the principles of DML within curricula. Finally, we discuss the importance of considering students' needs by understanding the context in which they approach learning. It is useful to first unpack each of these three considerations: culture, curriculum, and context. However, as is noted in the discussion that follows, all three aspects are interrelated, and for reimagining learning, changes in all three areas are necessary.

2. Shaping Culture: Establishing a Learning Excellence Philosophy

Traditionally, a key focus of HE institutions has been teaching excellence (Kreber, 2002; Wood & O'Leary, 2019), in which pedagogies place the educator at the centre, promoting an organisational culture of teaching and knowledge transmission. In South Africa, universities place a significant emphasis on research output to remain internationally relevant and competitive. Yet, such an emphasis should enhance, not detract from, the students' learning journey. In other words, universities are not solely research centres but primarily centres of learning and teaching. The emphasis in HE institutions should, therefore, include providing students with the best learning experience possible, where students are placed at the centre of the decision-making process by shaping the culture and curriculum around their needs. It is equally important to consider the administration and support provided to students, as these considerations are fundamental to the student experience (van

As & Kluyts, 2023). Philosophically, it becomes important to promote a shift from an emphasis on teaching excellence towards learning excellence, which - alongside research - defines academic excellence in HE.

Learning excellence recognises that we have a duty of ethics of care towards our students and other stakeholders (van As & Kluyts 2023). It involves assessing and reassessing student, employer and societal needs to ensure that qualifications remain current and relevant. Drawing on 21st century skills, for example, is one way of adapting discipline-specific knowledge to remain relevant for radically changing work environments (Ghaith, 2010; Germaine et al., 2016). Additionally, learning excellence is also about providing appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities (University of Glasgow, 2021), which includes monitoring student performance, providing support through mentorship, peer-tutoring or additional assignments, and making counselling services available to students in need.

Implicit in the notion of learning excellence is a shift in institutional culture towards a balance of power between students and the institution, as the power in curriculum decision-making traditionally sits with institutions and academics. This renegotiation of power allows for a focus on the students' voice and encourages the institution to respond in ways that include students as active participants in curriculum design and development. This gives students more agency and leads to better buy-in and an increase in motivation. It also creates opportunities for students to be involved at different levels of organisation within HE institutions. Importantly, it draws into focus a need to address issues of quality in learning and teaching from the perspective of students themselves, which can better inform curriculum choices and help shift the culture towards learning excellence.

In realising a learning excellence philosophy, it is imperative to define students' learning needs. Several approaches could be used to determine these needs, such as using student journey mapping, developing a student-focused SWOT analysis of current courses, and/or instituting a Student Curriculum Review Team (SCRT). All these approaches contribute to a student-centred strategy for both curriculum design and culture that aligns with the intended learning excellence philosophy and that helps to guide the kinds of projects needed to ensure that students feel supported and have a good learning experience. By shifting towards a learning excellence philosophy and promoting student agency, HE institutions and the curricula they teach can account for the students' lived experiences and prior knowledge, as well as the motivations and reasons that students put forward for pursuing a particular course of study.

Through the process of developing the curriculum for HSS, the DFMPC team identified several guiding principles of learning excellence (see. Figure 1.2) that was informed by both theory (Jungblut et al., 2015; Kahu et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017) and practice. These include a commitment to continuous and collaborative curriculum design and innovation, adopting a holistic approach

to identifying and tackling students' needs, developing authentic and credible learning and assessment, creating a conducive learning environment, focusing on an institutional culture of shared development and growth, and developing robust and agile student support systems. Within each of these principles, several strategies are suggested (Figure 1.2).

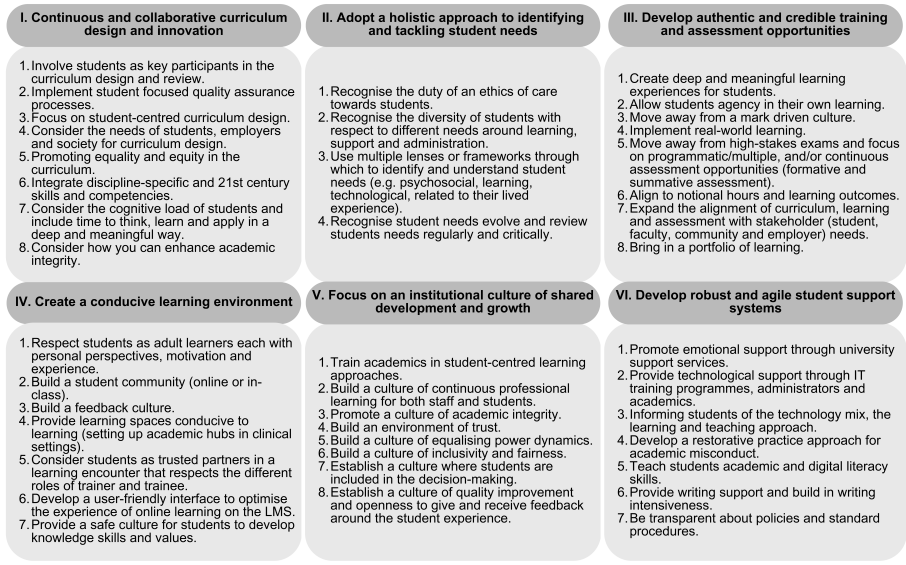


Figure 1.2: *Principles of Learning Excellence*

The Principles of Learning Excellence were contiguously instrumental in driving a process of cultural change. This is because the approach taken to curriculum development allowed us to identify and understand students' needs and to reshape our culture and practices to focus on learning excellence within the context of deep and meaningful learning. We recognised that a learning excellence philosophy as a shared vehicle for cultural change would allow for greater buy-in from different role players and engender a shared commitment towards improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Throughout this chapter, we provide several questions to prompt thinking about different measures towards reimagining learning related to culture, curriculum, and context.

Questions to consider for your context:

- What is the learning philosophy in your institution, faculty, or department?
- Does this philosophy support a student-centred learning environment?
- In terms of your institution's learning and teaching culture where are the priority areas for growth and development that might promote student inclusivity?

3. Designing Curricula: Applying Deep and Meaningful Learning

Although not a new concept (Vallori, 2014, pp. 199-209; Sutherland et al., 2010), DML is specifically defined by the DFMPC to support our approach to learning excellence. The DFMPC defines DML as a student-centred, active-learning approach focused on developing 21st-century skills while providing students with experiences and real-world learning that can produce long-lasting meaningful change in the way students think, feel (attitudes and values) and/or do (skills) (Hurtubise & Roman, 2014). The concepts of deep learning and meaningful learning are brought together in this definition by recognising that simply learning content knowledge is insufficient without developing critical reasoning and systems thinking skills (Sutherland et al., 2010) and creating a context where students can relate to what they are learning about or being self-directed in their learning.

Deep learning encourages depth in learning that seeks understanding rather than following a surface learning approach to pass a test (Jackson, 2012). Deep learning can be achieved by ensuring that students are deeply engaged in the learning process, in which a real-world context is provided and where students can apply their thinking and ideas. Students should be given opportunities to ask questions, construct meaning, and gain multiple perspectives and insights from others. Students should be encouraged to think deeply, consider complexity, develop alternatives and solutions, and share their insights. They should also be encouraged to be self-directed and work independently but also to work in ways that are collaborative, proactive, and thoughtful.

Meaningful learning focuses on 21st-century skills or competencies that enable a student to problem-solve, to think critically and creatively, while also being able to transfer and apply the learning from one context to another, in order to recognise that knowledge is not necessarily situated in silos. This combined approach goes beyond ensuring the simple understanding of facts but rather focuses on developing students' ability to creatively apply concepts, ideas, and their knowledge to unfamiliar problems in new contexts. These types of competencies should be crafted so that students become engaged and productive citizens who make meaningful contributions to the workplace and society (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018; Levy & Murnane, 2013).

In considering the principles of deep learning and meaningful learning collectively, the DML approach promotes meaning and understanding to make connections between essential concepts and ideas, as a constructivist approach. Furthermore, such an approach creates the space to allow students the agency to interrogate knowledge through advanced analysis, critical thinking, and interpretation. It encourages students to develop multiple literacies within the range of 21st-century skills. In addition, the process of learning is enriched by diverse personal experiences and views within the community of learning.

Given that there are multiple pedagogies that can be used to achieve deep and meaningful learning (Giuseffi, 2021; Gul, Khan, Yasmeen et al., 2021; Kori, 2021; Raschka, 2021; Wang & Wang, 2018), the DFMPC team selected six dimensions that could easily be adapted for a blended-learning curriculum (Figure 1.3). These include providing constructive feedback, real-world learning, collaborative learning, using authentic assessments, encouraging self-directed learning, and promoting reflection. Each dimension was selected as complementary and intended to enhance both the student's learning experience and intrinsic motivation to learn.

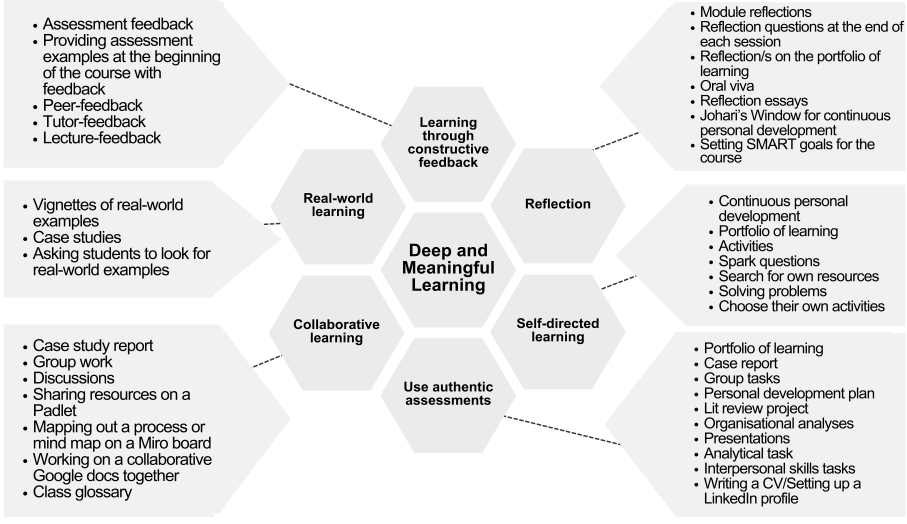


Figure 1.3: *The 6 dimensions (and task examples) of deep and meaningful learning used to structure our curricula*

As shown in Figure 1.3, several associated tasks were designed by applying the principles of the six selected dimensions of the DML framework. Importantly, each of the dimensions is complementary; together, they shift learning towards the student. When considering the adjustments that might have to be made to current curricula or when considering the time and effort that a student-centred DML approach requires, it might seem difficult to do justice to each of the dimensions described in the DML framework. Similarly, it might feel overwhelming to students to be required to learn through multiple tasks using the different dimensions. For this reason, it is helpful to identify key areas within specific courses where aspects of the DML framework could be included and to consider how these might articulate, over time, through a programme or degree. It is likely unreasonable to start off changing the curriculum to include all elements of the DML framework; however, the benefit of the six dimensions is that one can introduce and integrate each iteratively. For example, certain skills and competencies (such as reflection) take time to develop. As such, it would be important to consider scaffolding and spiralling the different aspects of the DML framework as appropriate to the context under consideration.

Questions to consider for your context:

- What competencies do your students need to acquire within your field of study?
- Do your courses have opportunities for reflection?
- Is there space in the curriculum for students to think and do?
- How could you incorporate a portfolio of learning into a course or programme where students can provide evidence of their learning over time?
- In what ways could you apply the DML framework to enhance the learning experience of your students?

Appendix A provides an example of how the DML framework can be scaffolded over a 3-year undergraduate programme. In the appendix, we detail different actions that are spiralled into HSS from the first to the third year of study. Different actions and activities are noted in relation to the various dimensions of the DML framework. Additionally, students require orienting towards a DML approach to learning throughout each year of study as well as key support measures to support students in their learning.

4. Considering Context: Focusing on Students' Needs

To achieve learning excellence, understanding student challenges is critical. The student experience is influenced by multiple factors, both internal and external, and is made up of their learning experience, the support they need, and their experience with administration processes for the course and programme. Understanding and responding to the needs of students must, therefore, be approached holistically. This involves assessing students' needs (the 5-Ds framework is introduced as a way to do so) and foregrounding the student voice in the curriculum (through student curriculum review teams and student SWOT analysis for quality improvement). The context (understanding student needs and challenges) should be used to inform the culture and curriculum, in deciding how we should enhance learning, support, and administration.

4.1. Introducing the 5-Ds framework

The impact of COVID-19 on academic teaching (Sandhu & de Wolf, 2020), the lingering effects of emergency remote teaching and learning (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021), and the move towards online and blended learning (Lemay et al., 2021), have forced shifts to learning and teaching. A reimagined HE learning environment makes the most of technological advances to support combinations of learning interactions, through in-person, face-to-face, hybrid, online, blended, and hyflex opportunities. Importantly, a philosophy of learning excellence should consider these pedagogical elements through the lens of student needs.

The 5D framework developed by the authors to assist in understanding the student experience during COVID-19 is premised on the fact that while learning environments have become increasingly reliant on learning technologies, not all students have equitable access. The 5D framework reminds us that students are different in their technological needs and individual experiential contexts (device, data, digital access) and their motivation to learn (diligence and direction).

When considering students' technological needs (device, data, and digital access), it is necessary to account for challenges faced by different students. The digital divide can be described as "a division of knowledge, expectations, and needs that, in turn, influences the access to information about what technology works, what technology is needed, and how such technology should be integrated in the classroom" (Juniu, 2005, p. 2). We need to consider different "ways of using technology" (Mitcham, 1990), as students have different technological needs and competencies. At the same time, students do not have access to the same devices and might not have limited access to data in the South African context. Considering issues of digital equity and access should be built into all programmes that place students at the centre, aligned to a philosophy of learning excellence.

A successful partnership between student (who is motivated to learn) and teacher (giving the appropriate direction and support) can only be achieved through recognition and mitigation of the risks of technological and other contextual challenges faced by students. This partnership is, therefore, important in the 5Ds framework (diligence and direction). Momentum is important to DML, as implied by the importance of scaffolding and spiralling the achievement of learning outcomes. Feedback from a teacher on a student's progress and gaps is also a process of understanding student needs and challenges. Context is critical, especially given that the diversity of university students mirrors that of an inequitable and unequal society. Therefore, unpacking student needs is critical; it does not help to develop a curriculum that focuses on deep and meaningful learning if students do not have access to learning or are not motivated to learn. In curriculum design and review these contextual realities need to be kept in mind when using a DML approach, for example:

- Promoting collaborative learning is hampered if some group members are "othered" because of challenges with access to and use of technology.
- Self-directed learning relies heavily on student motivation, which is often built iteratively over time. Challenges with technology can impact this progress.
- Providing students with data may not help if the bandwidth is not sufficient to allow for uninterrupted online access.

Questions to consider for your context:

- What are your students' experiential contexts?
- What are your students' technological needs?
- What are your students' psychosocial needs?
- What motivates your students to learn?
- How are the dimensions of learning, support, and administration addressed in your learning strategy?
- How is this addressed in your curricula?

4.2. Establishing the student voice in the curriculum

The importance of student voice is grounded in the educational theory of constructivism, which views knowledge and reality building as a process (Sandu & Unguru, 2017, pp. 51-61) structured around students' personal knowledge and experiences. Students add or modify previous knowledge while also constructing an understanding of the discipline with their peers as they move beyond memorisation of facts. Through this process, the aim is for students to build their concept of reality and develop a shared perspective on the world. In this way, learning becomes a very personal and shared experience driven by agency and motivation.

As these competencies speak to directing the very character of the students towards professional and engaged competence, the students should not be passive participants. Rather, their voice must be active, participatory, and valued. There are multiple quality assurance steps to ensure that student voice is included appropriately. We will consider the use of a student curriculum review team and a student SWOT analysis.

4.3. A team-based approach to curriculum design

Constructive alignment (Figure 1.4) is a critical component of curriculum success (Ali, 2018). To reimagine learning, this alignment should consider the learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and assessment, as outlined by Biggs (1996). However, it could be extended to consider the stakeholder needs (students, employers, and society to set the vision for the curriculum) and how they can be used to identify and update the learning outcomes. Of the different stakeholders, the students are those whose time (notional hours) must accommodate the opportunity to provide input as curriculum design partners. Students need to be given sufficient time to engage with activities and assessments within their courses; otherwise, student learning is likely to be superficial. There is a relationship between workload and how it impacts student intention (Jackson, 2012).

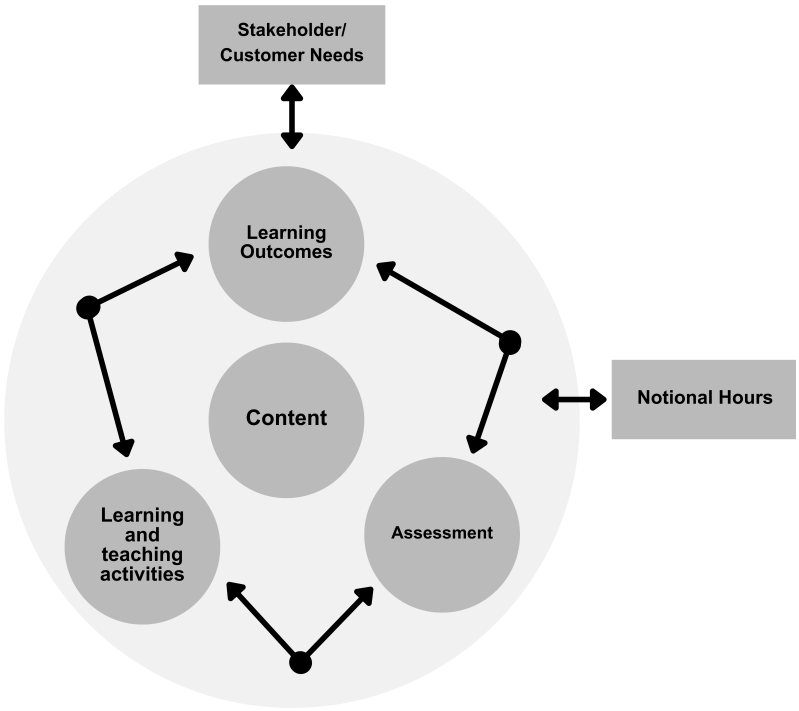


Figure 1.4: *An elaboration of Constructive Alignment (Biggs, 1996) to include alignment to stakeholder needs and to notional hours*

The ideal curriculum development team should therefore include a variety of stakeholders: students (pre, current, and alumni), employers, subject matter experts, curriculum experts, and learning experience designers. The curriculum team should also constantly ensure that the content, learning activities, and assessment are aligned to the learning outcomes and notional hours and that time to think and do (as mentioned above) is also included. To include the student voice in curriculum design, a student curriculum review team can be established.

4.4. Creating a student curriculum review team (SCRT)

Traditional practices in curriculum review include inviting students to participate in a focus group that is moderated by student representatives. A formal report is then presented to the course coordinator (Wilson et al., 2013). However, there are more dynamic ways of including students in the curriculum review and design process, such as a student curriculum review team (SCRT). This is a dynamic process of curriculum improvement with the aim of giving students agency to work directly and collaboratively with fellow students and course designers to bring about curriculum change (Hsih et al., 2015). Table 1.1 lists the SCRT aims outlined by Hsih et al. (2015, pp. 1008-1012), and how we adapted the process to collaborate with students for our curriculum design process.

The aim of a SCRT as adapted from HSih et al. (2015).	The SCRT for the HSS process
Engage students in active course improvement or curriculum design rather than end of course evaluations.	We selected current and previous students to form part of the committee. The committee is made up of student representatives, subject matter experts and a curriculum development/learning experience designer.
Gather this active feedback in a manner that is not influenced by the course coordinators or lecturers and allow for productive discussions.	We established a monthly face-to-face SCRT curriculum review workshop, to discuss the existing curriculum and proposed changes. The student representatives were tasked with obtaining feedback for specific components from both previous and current students, for presenting in the workshop. Students were also intermittently tasked to evaluate specific components for discussion. To facilitate a safe space, students were informed that they are part of the programme development team and that their inputs matter. They also became more eager to share once they saw we were debating their inputs and unpacking their ideas further for implementation.
Ensure that student feedback is presented and discussed with the curriculum team. There should be equal opportunity for students and faculty to express their viewpoints.	Students were able to express their viewpoints around changing learning and assessment practices. For example, a longitudinal case study provides them with the opportunity to apply their thinking in a real-world context which will prepare them for the work-integrated learning component in third year. They were happy with the removal of some traditional tests and examinations as a move to include authentic assessments.
Document the SCRT process for both transparency and future curriculum improvements	A scribe recorded the inputs and the action points for curriculum improvement. This formed part of the formal documentation for the HSS curriculum.

Table 1.1: *The SCRT process and how it was used for HSS (adapted from Hsih et al., 2015)*

Questions to consider for your context:

- Who are your stakeholders?
- Is your curriculum aligned with student, employer, and societal needs?
- What process/mechanisms do you have in place to establish your student needs?
- How do you deal with conflicting needs of students and other stakeholders?
- Does the curriculum address the competency requirement of your industry/sector?
- What is the benefit for students to be part of a SCRT? (for example, we considered giving them a certificate)

4.5. Applying a student SWOT analysis for quality improvement

Responsive curricula are seldom static, as they involve an ongoing process of engagement between students, academics, employers, and society. To continuously involve the student voice within a curriculum and to work towards learning excellence, clear methods of evaluation for the curriculum with your various stakeholders should be considered. Achieving effective evaluation requires multiple sources of information. Yet, traditional course evaluation processes often fail to gather specific feedback that could be influential for curriculum design (Amrein-Beardsley & Haladyna, 2012) or recognise the necessary support components required to develop learning excellence.

We used a SWOT analysis, looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the courses in the programme. This was done by conducting student focus groups where an independent learning designer led the discussions with students. The main aim was to understand what challenges or issues students might have experienced with a particular course, including issues of content, design, assessments, and learning experience. At the same time, a SWOT analysis helps to identify opportunities for improving a course or areas where student support can be improved. The feedback from this speaks to student need (understanding context) to improve the learning experience (curriculum) but can also be used to inform the culture. Table 1.2 provides an overview of the SWOT analysis challenges and opportunities identified and some of the resulting changes.

Major SWOT challenges/opportunities identified	Changes made as a result of the SWOT analysis
Threat: Students need further clarity on the professional identity of the HSS student and graduate, leading to a lack of motivation and purpose to learn.	■ Marketing plan to raise the identity of the students through a competition on social media
Weakness and Opportunity: Students want to see what job opportunities are out there after HSS.	■ Networking events with companies from the Health Sector ■ Podcast series around job opportunities managed by students ■ Infographic around potential further study pathways and career pathways
Threat: Students struggle with digital literacy and learning technologies	■ Create a Bookings system on Microsoft 365 Bookings to book IT support sessions ■ Host additional training sessions ■ On the home page, have a tab for learning technologies used in the course (including a training session)

Table 1.2: *Student-centred SWOT: Challenges/Opportunities and Changes Made*

Questions to consider for your context:

- Can you implement a formal curriculum review process that is more student-centred?
- How can you include the voices of your other stakeholders, if possible?
- How many sources of information do you use for your curriculum evaluation?
- Do you understand student motivation and how they are motivated in your programme?

5. A Summary Guide to Reimagine Learning

In order to reimagine learning to be deep and meaningful, we need to understand our students' needs around learning, administration, and support. This is used to inform both the culture and the curriculum. We also need to work on establishing a culture with staff and students that is focused on learning excellence, which also informs curriculum choices. Therefore, these dimensions inform one another, and procedures need to be implemented to help facilitate this change. The aim of reimagining learning in HE is underpinned by several principles detailed in this chapter. In Figure 1.5 below, we unpack the approach that we use to reimagine learning by working on culture, curriculum, and context in a series of practical steps.

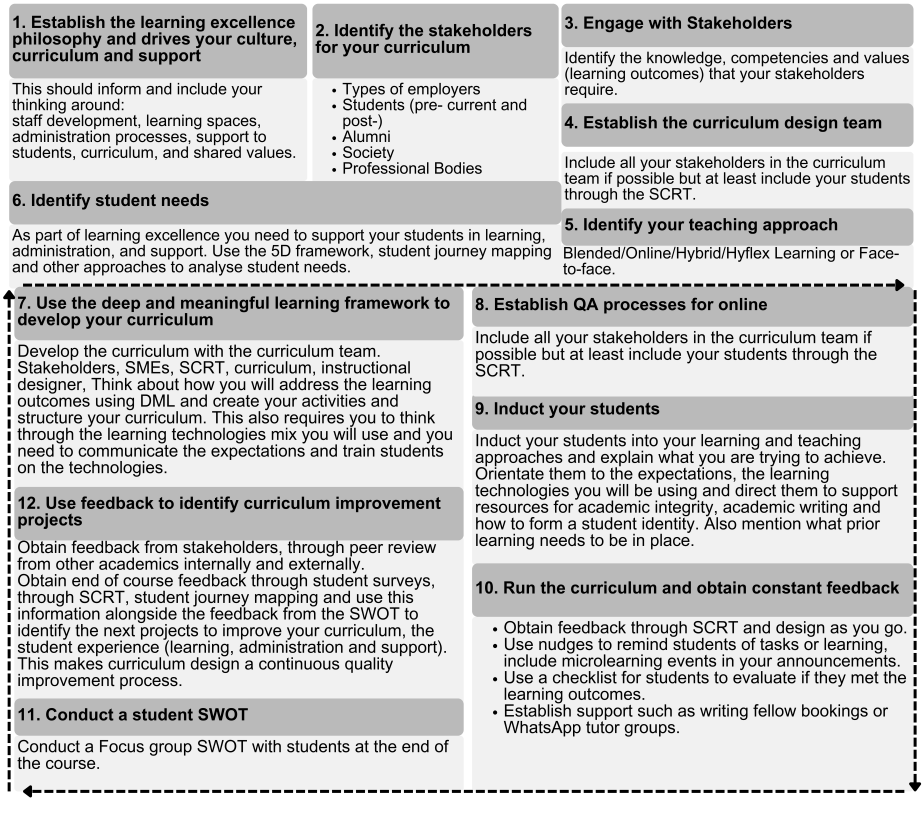


Figure 1.5: *A summary of the step-by-step approach to the design and/or review of a course that is informed by the theories in this chapter as well as practice in developing the course*

6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented an approach to reimagining HE by unpacking the relationships between culture (promoting a learning excellence philosophy), curriculum (using a DML approach), and context (student inclusivity). We propose that a key strategy for effecting institutional change around learning and curriculum development is to build opportunities for student inclusivity while recognising that student needs vary. We argue that a learning excellence philosophy as a basis for cultural change would allow for greater buy-in from different role players and engender a shared commitment towards improving the quality of learning and teaching. Taking the student voice seriously enables a thorough understanding of the diverse contexts and needs of students, preventing a top-down or teacher-focused approach. This can be achieved by considering the proposed 5Ds framework, using student curriculum review teams and conducting student SWOT analyses. At the same time, it should be noted that programme and course development require dedicated and significant resources, as well as a commitment to change over time. Nevertheless, by outlining the principles of learning excellence, combined with an understanding of the practice of deep and meaningful learning, HE institutions can craft transformative learning encounters.

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Appendix A: *Applying the 6 dimensions of the DML framework across a 3-year programme.*

Health Systems Science			
	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
Orientation	*Orientation is a key component to the success of students on any course. To support students with DML we induct them into our learning excellence philosophy and DML framework. We ensure a support module orientates students to setting up their e-portfolio (the final assessment) and sessions on how to learn online, create a community of learning, promote academic integrity, student identity, and values affirmation.*		
Applying the Dimensions of the DML Framework			
Real-world learning	A series of short cases building on each other that students use to analyse and compile a group report with recommendations. Vignettes of real-world. Short videos from experts in the field. Real-world lived experiences of the students. Students explore work opportunities in health analytics in our module on health information systems. We asked past students to create videos of their work experience in different fields in health systems.		HSS3 is an application based in real-world, health systems, and future work environments. Students conduct an organisational analysis, beginning as a desktop analysis and ending with students at Health Care Organisations conducting a needs analysis. They devise solutions for any unmet needs, and present such to their site supervisor and identified mentors within the organisation.

Providing Constructive Feedback	WhatsApp Groups for small groups of 20 students supported by one tutor (writing fellow). Students were required to submit two papers. Before submission, students would submit their drafts to tutors who provide them with constructive feedback and help them improve their work.	Tutorial sessions give feedback to activity worksheets that students complete in their own time online. Tutors (writing fellows) work with students to assist them to develop their academic writing skills, as students respond to essay briefs.	Through tutorial sessions, students are encouraged to ask questions surrounding their lectures and assignments. Teaching assistants and the course coordinator respond to online queries and any confusion around sessions. Student assignments are marked with comments regarding where marks were lost and how to improve are given. Students also request feedback on draft assignments, which we respond to timeously.
Reflection	As part of their portfolio of learning, students were required to write weekly reflections in a learning portfolio. Check-in sessions every two weeks where students were prompted with guiding questions to answer based on the prior two weeks of learning. Students write reflections after each module on what they learnt and how they learnt. These reflections are included in their portfolios of learning. Students compile a meta-analysis of their learning journey in their 2nd-year exam submission as a portfolio of evidence.		Students are encouraged to reflect through each session given to them. Students write reflections which they then include in their portfolio of learning.

Self-directed learning	We developed a competency framework for HSS; students were expected to reflect on their abilities, develop a personal development plan, and identify open educational resources to learn about these competencies and then reflect on them in their portfolio. Students were given a portfolio assessment as the exam equivalent. They selected artefacts (tasks, discussions, activities, assessments, information) from the course and made links between the domains, while reflecting on their learning.	Using a blended-learning approach, students are encouraged to work through material in preparation for tutorials or lectures. Sessions that address key skills for self-directed learning. For example, focusing on note-taking skills, how to summarise content, and how to manage one's time when working in an online environment. Student-led podcasting series around career opportunities.	The blended-learning approach is scaffolded by giving students a task known as Professional Development. This takes place a series of online lectures and activities once a week, which guides students through their own professional development this includes crafting their CV and interview skills. Students must identify three professional goals they wish to build on throughout the year and present them as part of their e-portfolio of learning. At the end of each session in each year students fill in a checklist to see whether they have reached the learning outcomes.

Authentic Assessment	Integrated case-study used as a basis for group presentations. Portfolio of learning Argumentative essay		Portfolio of learning Literature review project, building research skills - including writing and search. Organisational analysis Various ways of presenting (in-person, recorded, live Teams) Professional Development is included in the e-portfolio. Developing a CV/ LinkedIn profile.
Collaborative learning	Group work report. Using Padlets where students need to share resources or experiences. Google docs where they collaborate to identify characteristics or develop a team contract.	Teamwork contracts are developed at the start of the course. Students work in teams throughout the year on team presentations and group reports (3 of each). Students work on a group-based research protocol.	Groupwork is encouraged in this course, with block presentations, where students are assigned differing groups, teaching students how to work with different personalities. Research group work is also highlighted where a Group Contract is built in Block 1 and adhered to throughout the year.

Cross-cutting support	*Bookings system through office 365 for virtual; IT support, writing fellow support, or a meeting with the course coordinator.* *Additional training on the learning technologies we use.* *WhatsApp groups with 20 students to a mentor.* *Networking events to assist student with professional identity and career goals.* *Student led podcasting series to speak to people in different fields to understand career opportunities.* *Mentorship in the final year to coach them about career progression.*

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING REIMAGINED: A CASE STUDY OF CURRICULUM CO-DESIGN APPROACHES, BENEFITS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Higher education in South Africa is challenged to meet the demands of rapid technological development, calls for social diversity and inclusion and a context in which the role of students has shifted from receivers of institutional knowledge to co-producers in the learning process. These demands require curriculum designers to find new ways of thinking about curricula and adopt appropriate processes and approaches for leveraging change to design diverse, inclusive, and contextually relevant curricula. This study explores the use of co-design to make curriculum design processes and approaches more relevant, inclusive, and student-centred. The Knowledge Production Modes 1 – 3 model provides a theoretical framework for the study. Mode 1 knowledge is seen as scientific knowledge less concerned with application and quality controlled by disciplinary peers. Mode 2 knowledge production centres around inter-, trans-, and multi-disciplinarity, social accountability, civic engagement, and reflexivity, and Mode 3 knowledge points to a multi-level knowledge system. A case study analyses practical examples where co-design principles and approaches were employed to actively involve stakeholders such as students, lecturers, and industry in curriculum design at a Private Institute of Higher Education. The experiences of the curriculum designers and lessons learnt are reflected on, and some of the benefits and challenges are highlighted. The study contributes to the theoretical discourse and potential practical application of co-design toward reimagining inclusive, contextually relevant curricula for the future.

Keywords: co-design; curriculum design; democratisation of knowledge; double-diamond design process; user experience

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1. Introduction

The unprecedented technological development and digital transformation brought about by the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) promises a better future for all, yet simultaneously puts the world at the peril of increasing inequality and social tension or even a "recolonisation" (Schwab, 2016; Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 32). Urgent calls for sustainable ways of living and a deeper concern for social justice and equality are driving social, economic, political, and cultural shifts towards valuing innovation, customisation, interaction, and participation (Tan et al., 2017; Escobar, 2018). These shifts drive economic growth, social mobility, human capital demands in industry, and demands for equality and social justice from civil society (Tan et al., 2017; Escobar, 2018).

Similar challenges and tensions are also seen in Higher Education (HE), such as maintaining a balance between students who can contribute to the knowledge-based economy and wider participation (the social imperative) (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In South Africa, what started in 2015 as a call for fees to be removed to render HE accessible, quickly turned into a movement where students demanded change in knowledge and curricula (Fataar, 2018). They argued that a Eurocentric, modernist orientation in curricula created an alienating student experience and called for a complete overhaul of the curriculum to incorporate African-centred worldviews and the voices of previously marginalised people (Fataar, 2018; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights an urgent need for transformation towards inclusivity, equitability, accessibility, and connectivity to promote social justice and bridge the technological divide between the Global North and South (Fraser-Moleketi, 2021). Consequently, South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under pressure to adequately prepare students for shifts in human capital requirements, the social imperative and still meet their learning needs (Koopman & Koopman, 2021). Curriculum designers are therefore challenged to find innovative approaches to teaching, stakeholder empowerment, engagement, and support capable of responding to technological challenges, changing industry requirements and the new learning and social needs of students (Tan et al., 2017; Koopman & Koopman, 2021). These demands require curriculum designers to understand and anticipate changes in technologies, industry requirements and lecturer, student, and other stakeholder roles in HE. Curriculum designers need to find new ways of thinking about curricula and adopt appropriate processes and approaches for leveraging change to design diverse, inclusive, and contextually relevant curricula.

The question of how to practically make curriculum design processes and approaches more relevant and inclusive drives this enquiry that explores curriculum co-design approaches adopted from the broad field of design. The study starts with a theoretical exploration of the curriculum as a democratiser of knowledge and as a user experience. It then proceeds with the experiences and practical lessons learnt from employing co-design principles and processes in curriculum design at a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI).

2. Knowledge Systems and Curricula

The 4IR is characterised by unprecedented access to knowledge (Schwab, 2016), but many developing countries, such as South Africa, are hampered by a lack of resources. Challenges such as pandemics and climate change pose complex, ill-defined, and networked problems that cannot be addressed from one disciplinary perspective alone (Dorst, 2018). Addressing these problems requires collaboration between governments, knowledge institutions, industry, and civil society and a combination of codified, scientific knowledge produced through research *and* tacit, indigenous knowledge developed from observation and experience and embedded in local contexts and practices (Lundvall, 2016). Moreover, HEIs face student demands for more inclusive and culturally relevant education (Prinsloo, 2017). Within this landscape of rapid change and uncertainty, HEIs must prepare students for jobs that may not yet exist (Prinsloo, 2017) and empower them to address challenges that are as yet unidentified and poorly understood (Schwab, 2016).

The current economic, sociological, and epistemological shifts that result from the 4IR present opportunities to consider more democratic, diverse, inclusive, and contextually relevant curricula. However, to allow students to imagine and build a better world, a move beyond everyday knowledge to abstract, principled knowledge is required (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). As such, curriculum designers must critically consider whose and what knowledge is included in curricula, to what purpose, on what assumptions, and how local knowledge is constituted and developed beyond everyday knowledge (Motala, 2015; Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

The Knowledge Production Modes 1 – 3 (Carayannis et al., 2016) provide a theoretical framework for thinking about how curricula can be democratised. Mode 1 knowledge is regarded as codified, scientific knowledge, less concerned with application, and quality controlled by disciplinary peers (Boehm, 2015). Mode 1 knowledge is disseminated through peer-reviewed publications and can be absorbed by others who understand its language (Lundvall, 2016). Learning from Mode 1 knowledge is seldom automatic and usually requires prior knowledge for effective learning (Lundvall, 2016).

Mode 2 knowledge production centres around inter-, trans- and multi-disciplinarity, social accountability, and civic engagement; has overlapping phases of discovery and application, and quality is determined by the usefulness of solutions (Boehm, 2015; Nowotny et al, 2013). Mode 2 knowledge production and learning occur through observation, application, reflection, discussion of experiences, and information exchange within social networks (Lundvall, 2016). Consequently, Mode 2 knowledge production allows for industry and other stakeholders to participate in education, with work- or project-based learning and experiential competencies as part of the curriculum. In Mode 2 learning, the approach of lecturers transferring canonical knowledge shifts to a student-centred approach, with lecturers becoming facilitators of knowledge and students co-accountable for their learning (Nowotny et al., 2013).

Mode 3 knowledge is a catch-all term for a multi-level perspective that integrates Modes 1 and 2 and extends beyond the university and industry (Carayannis et al., 2016). Mode 3 is situated within the 4IR landscape and is concerned with the combined future of science, knowledge, and technology and students becoming active designers of local and global futures (Tan et al., 2017). In Mode 3, people bring their own needs and expectations, diverse realities, and reflexive and tacit knowledge about the contribution 'I/we' can make (Sandstrom, 2014).

3. Curriculum Design in a Shifting Landscape

A curriculum is the "what", "who", "how", and "where" of learning and teaching and is never neutral (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 73). In South Africa, the curriculum must align with the regulatory requirements such as the National Qualification Framework, the type of knowledge specific to the field and the type of institution (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). It also needs to contend with a new social and economic culture and changing student needs and expectations require knowledge, competencies, and aptitudes such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, adaptability, resilience, intercultural understanding, and respect for freedom and human rights (Tan et al., 2017; Penprase, 2018). Cultivating such knowledge, competencies, and aptitudes requires curricula that focus on knowledge co-construction and developing and empowering students to become active co-creators of sustainable and just local and global futures (Tan et al., 2017).

When designing curricula, individual educators or subject matter experts traditionally followed a linear, top-down, topic-driven approach (Dodd, 2020; Vorvoreanu & Connolly, 2015). As learning needs and technologies changed, curriculum design shifted towards a holistic approach, considering interactions between the learner and curricula (Dodd, 2020). This process works backwards, starting with the outcomes, and subsequently addresses the content, topics, strategies, and materials (Dodd, 2020), resembling processes from the broad field of design.

Design as a broad discipline shifted from traditional design areas such as industrial design, engineering, and architecture, to people- and earth-centred design and service to society rather than a service to industry (Escobar, 2018). This shift challenged how designers, including curriculum designers, *think* and *work* to become more integrated and collaborative. When used in this chapter, design thinking refers to the inherent way designers think and frame problems and not as a standalone problem-solving activity. Like designers in traditional design fields, curriculum designers are challenged to take a collaborative approach, bring users into the design process as stakeholders and co-creators, and keep in mind inclusivity, diversity, and participant safety (Svihla, 2018). The "if-then" "what-if" thinking provides an integrated design thinking approach to problems and solutions that leads to continuous iterations and agility (Svihla, 2018; Drain & Sanders, 2019).

4. Curriculum as User Experience

User experience encompasses everything that touches upon the way someone experiences a product/service when using it (Norman, 2016). Traditional education centres around fixed, existing knowledge domains (Mode 1), with no room for critique, interrogation, or adaptation. The student is positioned at the centre when approaching a curriculum from a user experience perspective (Vorvoreanu & Conolly, 2015). Here, curriculum designers work backwards from defined outcomes and strategies and consider the student's holistic development, learning environment, and experience (Vorvoreanu & Connolly, 2015; Dodd, 2020). This is a shift to a Mode 3 approach that includes consideration for the diverse realities of students.

Therefore, the domain of curriculum design expanded from being concerned primarily with content and materials to being concerned with the entire environment where learning happens (Dodd, 2020; Escobar, 2018). Consequently, curriculum design has become a team activity that requires collaboration between people from diverse backgrounds, professions, and areas of expertise, such as educational specialists, subject matter experts, instructional designers, and information technology specialists (Dodd, 2020).

5. Co-Design as Approach

Co-design is a collaborative approach where designers work *with* users and stakeholders as experts of their own lived experience to co-create relevant, meaningful solutions based on the guiding principles of democratic practices, equalising power relations, mutual learning, and context-based actions (Sanders & Simons, 2009; Drain & Sanders, 2019). The collective knowledge of participants provides a multi-dimensional and immediate snapshot of the status quo, making the early identification of possible synergies and obstacles possible (Sanders & Simons, 2009). When designing curricula, such an approach has the potential to bring local voices and knowledge to the table, which may contribute to decolonised curricula.

Participation in co-design gives stakeholders a voice in shaping their future and an opportunity to share in the ownership of the outcome, paving the way to continual sharing of ideas, prototyping and iteration and resulting in ownership and collective pride in the outcome (Drain & Sanders, 2019; Svihla, 2018). Its open, democratic nature promotes transparency of biases, assumptions, concerns, and judgments, allowing participants to negotiate shared meaning, ideas, and visions for the future from differing value perspectives. In the process, participants learn from each other, shifting their views towards a shared understanding (Drain & Sanders, 2019). During co-design, the role of the designer shifts, from shape-giver to facilitator of creativity, provocateur, and process guide (Sanders & Simons, 2009).

Involving users (students and lecturers) and other stakeholders, such as industry representatives, early and frequently in the curriculum design process helps curriculum designers identify and understand user needs, expectations, and experiences and how the curriculum will function as needed (Svihla, 2018). Designing with stakeholders can help the curriculum design team understand industry, lecturer and student needs, and requirements and institutional and regulatory goals and objectives, which can be combined to define curriculum purpose and outcomes and content and functional requirements (Vorvoreanu & Connolly, 2015).

6. Using Co-Design: Case Study

6.1. Context

This case describes a curriculum design process used at a multi-site PHEI over eight years in the degree spaces of Graphic, Digital, and Game design. The careers of the programme managers tasked with curricula development evolved from senior design practitioners to lecturers to academic managers. In grappling with meeting the demands of HE, curriculum design, and time and budget constraints, they employed design approaches and processes that they were familiar with, such as User Experience and agile design, co-design, and the Double Diamond Design Process (see figure 2.1).

The process started when the PHEI needed to review and rationalise current qualifications and look at the long-term potential for new qualifications in design education's evolving and competitive space. Teaching in design is still battling to shift away from the master-apprentice model with a high regard for craft and a tension between practical and theoretical knowledge (Burger & van Zyl, 2020). Finding employment is competitive, and students must evidence a portfolio of work and a qualification. The small number of textbooks and literature with local examples and suitable for undergraduate design education further challenges curriculum designers in this field.

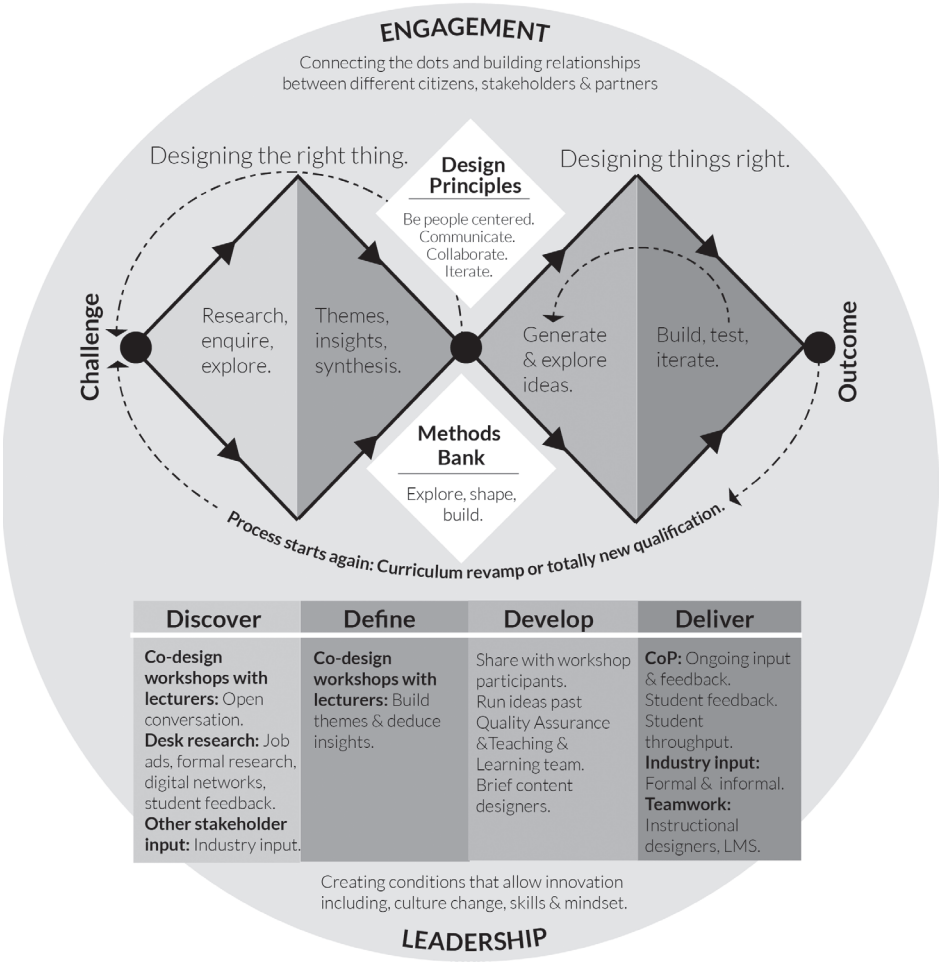


Figure 2.1: *Aligning co-design activities and stakeholder input with the different stages in the design process as applied in this case study (adapted from The Design Council, 2023)*

6.2. Discovering needs and expectations

The iterative Double Diamond Design Process (DDDP), used in design and innovation projects (Ball, 2019), was applied to structure the curriculum design process. The DDDP (Figure 2.1) comprises iterative phases of Discovery, Definition, Development, and Delivery and provides a practical flow for any design process (such as industrial design, a user experience or curriculum design). In Figure 2.1, descriptions of the curriculum design activities are added below the Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver phases of the DDDP model to illustrate how the curriculum design process aligned with the DDDP in this case study. The DDDP allows for stakeholder participation throughout the process in either feedback or more generative participation as co-designers. At the outset of the DDDP, the challenge is unstructured and open, and all that is known is the desired outcome. It, therefore, lends itself well to a Backwards Curriculum Design approach (Sanders & Simons, 2009; Dodd, 2020).

The Discovery and Define Phases of the Double Diamond Design Process aims to explore the fundamental problems and opportunities and determine what should or should not be designed (Ball, n.d.). Conversations are focused on needs and aspirations and aim to uncover what others do not perceive as a need or opportunity, do not understand as a problem, or do not know how to address (Sanders & Simons, 2009).

Desktop research, such as analysing recruitment advertisements, posts in community-of-practice forums and available formal research (such as published by DEFSA[1]) provided rich insights into the skills, knowledge, and personal competencies expected from graduates. Information was continuously supplemented with direct input from a network of design professionals in the form of emails and conversations. Available student and alumni feedback, as well as data from student focus groups were analysed to gain an understanding of student expectations and frustrations.

Current lecturers were invited to participate and collaborate in six regional co-design workshops of between three and five hours each, comprising 10 – 15 lecturers. These lecturers are in regular contact with students and have first-hand experience with the current curriculum and student experience, especially in the studio-based modules. Most of the lecturers came from or were still actively engaged as design practitioners and therefore also contributed to industry perspectives. Undergraduate degree students were not included in the workshops since they rely on lecturer and institutional guidance regarding what knowledge should be acquired, and their participation would therefore be limited to perceptions and experiences and less about knowledge and skills (Noor et al., 2012). Data regarding student views were obtained from student feedback and focus groups with students. One co-design workshop was conducted with a small class of honours students, to get input from recent graduates.

One of the fundamental principles of co-design relates to power dynamics. Co-design is democratic; all participants are regarded as experts of their own experience, and, therefore, all viewpoints are regarded as equally valuable (Sanders & Simons, 2009). Consequently, the principles of equality and democracy on which the workshops would be conducted were explained to participants at the start of the workshops. Workshops followed an open, unstructured approach to encourage open-ended conversations and to avoid stifling creativity with a set, structured agenda. The workshops were conducted along one central theme, namely, what a competent graduate of the future in the field of design might look like. Post-it notes, sheets of paper, and whiteboards were made available, and the participants could choose what to use. Participants debated their vision of a competent, future-ready graduate and started to organise ideas into themes such as designerly thinking, creativity, critical thinking, research, crafting, communication, and personal (Figure 2.2). The curriculum designers acted as back-stage facilitators and encouraged participants to discuss and debate their views freely. The sessions

1 The Design Education Forum of Southern Africa is an important local resource for design education, with a biannual peer reviewed conference (www.defsa.org.za).

were not recorded, but notes were made and mapped post-its photographed. Special care was taken to keep conversations as "blue-sky" and fluid as possible and to steer conversations away from existing modules and curriculum structure.

Designerly Thinking		**Research**	**Crafting**	**Communication**	**Personal**
Holistic thinking		Understand User	Strong software skills	Present work verbally and written	Self-directed continuous learning
Contextual thinking		Understand and predict trends	Strong digital crafting skills	Defend design decisions	Time management
Creativity	**Critical Thinking**	Immersive empathy	Strong traditional crafting skills	Rationalise and explain ideas and concepts	Adaptable to change / flexible
Design thinking	Knowledge of theory /history of design	Understand discipline-specific research tools and practices	Know and apply fundamental elements, principles and theories	Communicate visually	Take ownership of projects
Problem solving	Analytical thinking	Strong writing skills	Ability to use tools and technologies of discipline	Identify and relate underlying narratives	Can work in teams / collaborate
Fearless Exploration	Ethical & sustainable practice	Know what questions to ask	Know understand technology of printing / digital media	Articulate ideas	Perseverance – iterate until it is perfect
Playfulness	Understand / know roles of related disciplines	Know and select appropriate research tools	Drawing skills		Can plan & manage project and process
Conceptual development	User centered design				Passion
Visualise ideas: scamp / draw / photos	Understand and prepared for real world / design industry				Self-discipline
Curiosity	Know what questions to ask				Networking
					Can seek and learn from criticism

Figure 2.2: *First thematic analysis of graduate attributes*

6.3. Defining what should be designed

Boundaries between phases in an agile design process are blurred, and work in the next phase can commence before completion of the previous phase (Garrett, 2010; Svihla, 2021). Participants naturally moved between the Discovery phase to the Define and Develop phases during the co-design workshops. After identifying themes, participants organised themselves into groups according to their areas of

expertise and experience, and proceeded to generate ideas on how the knowledge, skills, and competencies related to the selected themes could best be developed (Figure 2.3). This stage provided ideas for outcomes and assessments. At the end of this stage, the workshops were concluded, and the curriculum designers proceeded to integrate the workshop outputs with desktop research insights.

Creativity	Critical Thinking	Crafting	Communication	Research
• Observe, document and explore environment • Immerse in different contexts – develop empathy • Dare to do new things • Embrace discomfort • Play • Experiment with ideas • Explore • Collaborate in teams, exchange ideas and perspectives • Visualise and communicate ideas (scamp, tell stories) • Give and receive critique • Iterate	• Analyse, evaluate and discuss case studies • Debate current theories and discourse (ethical, sustainable, inclusive design, design and the media etc) • Critically evaluate style and substance • Learn theory related to principles, processes • Critique / discuss own and each other's work and ideas • Defend work and ideas • Analyse / define problems and know what questions to ask	• Practise and apply discipline specific tools and Computer skills, • Apply theoretical knowledge in practical context • Submit project plans • Give and receive feedback • Self-discipline & motivation • Persevere • Adapt, be flexible -change project requirements or contexts • Present work • Collaborate • Experience real-life conditions	• Present, critique, rationalise and defend ideas, concepts and final solutions • Collaborate and discuss • Apply design "tool box" to communicate (creative solution) • Work in teams • Be flexible • Develop empathy through research, communication and understanding • Visually communicate and explain information (processes, profiles, diagrams etc.)	• Learn about different research tools and methods for different contexts • Learn about user centered design / user experience • Apply research tools to solve design problems in various contexts. • Present research defend design decisions

Figure 2.3: *Ideas on how to develop identified competencies within specific categories*

In accordance with the co-design principle of transparency (Sanders & Simons, 2008), the proposed curriculum structure, module purposes and outcomes, teaching and learning and assessment strategies were shared with workshop participants, and feedback and further input were welcomed. The institutional teaching and learning experts were consulted for feedback and refinement before proceeding to the content development phase of the process.

6.4. Developing solutions

During the development and delivery phases of the DDDP, multiple ideas are generated, prototyped, tested, evaluated, and refined until an appropriate solution emerges (Ball, n.d.). A challenge for curriculum design is that a prototype cannot be developed and tested in the same way an industrial invention can be tested, and curriculum designers continue to rely on feedback, input, and quality assurance throughout the design, development, and delivery processes. Input

from internal Teaching and Learning experts and Quality Assurance teams is systematically incorporated. Any significant structural changes to the curriculum and prescribed material was documented and motivated at governance levels (such as the Faculty and Senate). These steps are essential to reduce the risk of ill-considered curriculum changes that may negatively impact on learning and to align curriculum with operational requirements. Smaller changes to content and assessments were documented, shared with lecturers before the start of every new semester and saved on the institutional collaborative platform for reference for the following year when a new content development cycle commences.

6.5. Delivering solutions and starting again

Getting feedback from stakeholders who used or experienced the designed outcomes is an important part of user experience design (Garrett, 2010). The curriculum design went through multiple, increasingly smaller iterations for several years after the first iteration was completed. A cloud-based collaboration platform was created where curriculum designers, academic managers, and lecturers continued sharing input and feedback during the delivery stages. Deci et al. (1999), argue that people are intrinsically motivated to collaborate when they feel that it supports their freedom of choice. Providing all lecturers with an opportunity to collaborate gave them a voice in decisions about the subject matter and teaching approaches that would directly affect them. It empowered them to take ownership of the process and the outcomes (Drain & Sanders, 2019). The curriculum designers met regularly with lecturers to get their feedback and ideas on how to improve the entire curriculum experience (Figure 2.4). Feedback and ideas were also gathered from operational and administrative staff on campuses to understand challenges and inform refinements to teaching and learning strategies, different learning environment requirements, and managing multi-disciplinary student collaborations.



Figure 2.4: *Lecturers, academic managers and postgraduate students sharing ideas and knowledge across disciplines and faculties*[2]

The curriculum designers supplemented findings from standard institutional Student Evaluation of Teaching surveys and held open conversations with student groups. Class representative feedback and complaints all contributed to a better

2 Permission for publication of the above images have been obtained from all identifiable participants and is available from the authors on request.

understanding of students' experiences. Critical conversations with students and regard for students as active participants in the educational journey are crucial to evaluating, understanding, and creating contextually relevant, successful educational journeys (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Curriculum designers in this faculty are in a fortunate position to have direct access to students. Where dissatisfaction is communicated, they can explain the curriculum and reasons behind choices to students. Student feedback resulted in surprising insights about the direct role of students' daily life and their home circumstances in their learning experiences as well as about significant shifts in the way students view their roles, the roles of lecturers, institutions, and the curriculum in their own learning. A lesson learned from student feedback is to consider ways in which curriculum decisions and rationales can be included in student material, such as module guides so that students understand the curriculum decisions better.

More conventional institutional data sources such as assessment, module and programme pass rates, and throughput rates were also monitored. This provided the curriculum designers with multi-dimensional perspectives to evaluate the curriculum. On the one hand, feedback often served as an early warning system for potential declines in pass and throughput rates, enabling pro-active interventions where possible and providing context for understanding declines when they occurred. On the other hand, comparing changes in assessment, module, and programme success rates with changes in the curriculum provided a means to evaluate the impact of changes. Information from institutional systems such as programme review feedback as well as industry feedback on student performance in real-life projects and during industry immersions was analysed to evaluate the curriculum in terms of industry requirements.

The industry is a continuous source of input for curriculum designers, such as analysis of recruitment advertisements, participating in communities of practice, attending industry events and conferences, and engaging with industry practitioners to keep track of shifts in industry requirements. This approach led to the identification of significant changes in the industry that led to the development of new qualifications in response.

7. Lessons Learnt

Lessons learned during this case study brought to light some benefits and challenges of following a co-design process for curriculum design. A key benefit of the generative co-design workshops used in this case is the harnessing of creativity and "blue-sky" thinking that enabled participants to move beyond the constraints of what already exists to what might be and to discover new, innovative possibilities. Such approaches are particularly relevant when planning curricula for the future in new areas where the curriculum designers have never taught or worked (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In these instances, a co-design approach with *different* stakeholders promotes diverse knowledge perspectives, supports contextual sense-making, and meaningfully guides decisions on appropriate design solutions (Sanders & Simons, 2008; Drain & Sanders, 2019).

Generative co-design approaches during the early stages and stakeholder involvement in curriculum design take time and effort. Co-design is, therefore, best approached as a marathon, taking time to gather information, test, evaluate and refine, and not as a sprint that uses vast amounts of energy and resources (Garrett, 2010).

During the design process, stakeholders from the industry with diverse knowledge perspectives were sought, and input supplemented with desk research. The benefit of such an approach is that it allows for various voices that contribute to a more inclusive curriculum incorporating local and international knowledge perspectives, canonical knowledge, industry experience, and socially constructed knowledge. These insights inform considered, deliberate design decisions that save time and development costs in the long run and produce better learning experiences.

Active lecturer participation in curriculum design was beneficial, especially since lecturers experience the curriculum with the students first-hand. Involving lecturers actively, resulted in invested lecturers who continue to participate in refining the curriculum over time. Boughey and McKenna (2021) critique the lack of triangulating information from different sources when making decisions about curriculum design. In this case study, their critique was overcome by incorporating insights from stakeholders such as employers, industry, and lecturers.

Although student feedback, criticism, and suggestions were analysed to inform decisions about designing the curriculum in this study, active student participation in the curriculum design was still limited. Upon reflection, we realised that we too often view student criticism and push-back as entitlement. Like all other stakeholders, students are agents and experts of their lived experience and can contribute meaningfully to curriculum design. Boughey and McKenna (2021) caution against viewing students as customers and satisfaction becoming more important than learning. However, the root element of user experience relates to satisfying user needs by providing an efficient and user-friendly (learning) experience and meeting "product" objectives (Garret, 2010). A curriculum aims to meet its defined purpose and exit level outcomes, and by better explaining these to students and actively listening to the student voices during delivery as opposed to waiting for post-module feedback could be one way to enhance student participation.

Co-design approaches need institutional support and leadership that encourage innovation and allow experimentation and learning in open, agile projects (Tidd & Bessant, 2020). We are fortunate to be allowed such freedom and space. Still, institutional processes must be adhered to and aligning longer co-design timelines with complex institutional processes remains a continuous challenge.

The design field where this study was situated is still developing a theoretical base, especially in South Africa, where we need more locally produced research, literature, and textbooks. Furthermore, the curriculum designers, in this case, are familiar with generative, co-design methods, and user-centred design processes.

The question to consider is whether curriculum designers in other disciplines can (or should) employ co-design, supported by such levels of stakeholder input and if this approach followed in a private HEI would be of value for the public HE sector. Would lecturers in an established discipline with a curriculum that was designed using the established Mode 1 top-down approach and suitable local textbooks consider using co-design? More research and other examples are needed here. In our case, co-design assisted us in building a curriculum from the ground up in a developing field that resulted in a more relevant curriculum with the inclusion of decolonised knowledge, as is characteristic of Mode 2 and 3.

8. Conclusion

The study aims to contribute to the theoretical discourse and potential practical application of co-design toward reimagining inclusive, contextually relevant curricula for the future. Like any product or service, curricula require constant innovation to remain relevant. Throughout this journey over several years, we have observed changes in existing and emerging new technologies and shifts in disciplinary knowledge and practice, impacting curriculum content. However, as confirmed by Boughey & McKenna (2021), we have also seen vast economic, socio-political, and epistemological changes resulting in a new generation of students with new worldviews, needs, and expectations. A co-design approach affords institutions more agility to respond appropriately to curriculum problems rather than simply adding bridging or foundational interventions based on assumptions that the root of the problems lies with the student or the student's schooling, motivation, or cognitive ability (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In curriculum design, the design problems of what to design and how it should be designed constantly shift, requiring ongoing iterative cycles of gathering information, design and development, evaluation, and critical reflection and refinement. This case study practically shows the benefits and challenges of co-designing curricula to balance ever-changing contexts, learning requirements, and student needs.

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CHAPTER 3

PROMOTING EQUITY THROUGH LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN

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Abstract

This chapter argues that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in both an increased awareness of inequity and an increased space for collaboration between academics and Learning Experience Designers. These factors create an opportune moment to adopt policies and approaches which promote equity in online learning. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a rush to move university courses online. Student's experiences in this period were shaped by their socio-economic circumstances and geographic locations, resulting in highly inequitable access to learning spaces and materials (Dube, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). Universities developed a range of responses to ameliorate inequities, such as subsidised data packages and zero-rated learning sites. However, the urgency of moving courses online did not allow space for debate about sustainable policies and practices to promote equity through online learning design. This chapter explores two frameworks for implementing online design to promote equity. The first is web accessibility, which refers to measures that make online content accessible to people with disabilities. We argue that web accessibility measures should be prescribed and suggest that universities adopt or adapt the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The second framework is Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which seeks to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful learning opportunities. We argue that, in the South African context, particularly given that lecturers are usually responsible for designing their own course sites, influencing lecturers' mindsets is central to the implementation of UDL. A combination of prescriptive accessibility standards and interventions to include UDL in professional development and technical training programmes could make a substantial contribution towards enhanced access and equity in online learning.

Keywords: equity; online learning design; student learning; universal design for learning

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1. Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic resulted in a sharp awareness of issues related to equity and access in online learning. As the dust settles on the "Emergency Remote Teaching" era, South African universities need to build on this awareness to find institutionally sustainable ways of promoting accessibility and equity in online learning. This chapter explores the space to promote equity through learning experience design frameworks, such as web accessibility and Universal Design for Learning.

2. Background

South African universities are increasingly using online technology for learning. These technologies can create barriers for students with disabilities, students working in low-lit or disruptive learning environments, and students using mobile devices (Lim, 2020; Rayyan, 2020). As learning experience designers at a public South African university, the authors believe that the current moment provides an opportunity to promote equity by proactively adopting frameworks which seek to remove barriers to online learning for all students.

Before discussing how Learning Experience Design can contribute to equity, it is prudent to define some key terms used in this chapter. Conole, quoted in Pallitt et al. (2018), defines learning design as a methodology that allows lecturers and designers to make pedagogically sound decisions regarding the design of learning activities and interventions, making effective use of appropriate resources and technologies. In this chapter, the term "Learning Experience Design" (LXD) refers to learning design in an online technology-mediated space. In the context of South African universities, learning experience designers may be called by different names, such as "instructional designers", "online designers", and eLearning support staff. Lecturers who design their own online course sites also fulfil the role of learning experience designers.

Drawing on Gorski (2005), "equity" is defined as distinct from equality. The terms equality and equity are often misinterpreted in higher education (Willems, 2019). According to Levitan (2016), each term carries implicit assumptions about what is fair, such as how persons should be treated and how resources should be distributed in a given environment. Equality refers to the concept of sameness, or the idea that fairness and justice can be attained by treating everyone equally (Willems, 2019). Nevertheless, this is only fair and just if everyone begins at the same starting point. However, it must be acknowledged that the playing field is not level (Willems, 2011), and the causes and consequences of these inequalities raise questions around social justice (Young, 2001). The concept of equity, on the other hand, necessitates a transition to a paradigm which recognises the diverse needs of individuals while also admitting the disparity of the playing field (Gorski, 2005). This includes the various types of specific tools and equipment, or support needed to address these needs (Levitan, 2016).

3. Designing for Accessibility

To move towards equity, a good starting point is to focus on students at the margins. (Paramasivam et al., 2022). There is no doubt that students with disabilities face an ongoing disadvantage in accessing online course material (Rose et al., 2006; Tobin & Behling, 2018). Designing online material in ways which are accessible to students with disabilities is a step towards equity, in that it acknowledges an uneven playing field and adopts measures to mitigate uneven access.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) defines web accessibility to mean that "websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them" (W3C, 2005b). In the context of this chapter, web accessibility refers to measures taken to ensure that students with disabilities can access online content. Online learning material is web content, and the W3C web accessibility initiative provides a practical entry point for thinking about accessible online content.

The W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) define four principles for web accessibility and provides guidelines for implementing each principle (W3C, 2005a). The standards defined by WCAG are measurable, and adherence to the standards is measured at three levels: Level A, AA, and AAA, with A being the lowest level of compliance and AAA being the highest level of compliance. (W3C, 2005a). The WCAG guidelines can be implemented in the design of course sites on the Learning Management Systems (LMS) used by universities.

The first WCAG principle is that **content should be perceivable**. This principle leads to actions such as ensuring there are text alternatives available for non-text content, including alternative text (ALT text) tags for images such as graphs and diagrams, and transcripts for video content. Online content can be also made more perceivable to students using assistive technology by formatting text using heading styles, chunking long pieces of text, and ensuring adequate colour contrast (W3C, 2019).

The second principle is **operable user interface and navigation**. Most learning applications, such as LMSs, advertise their accessibility ratings. The W3C accessibility ratings are based on testable criteria for each accessibility principle, and result in an application receiving an A, AA, or AAA rating for accessibility, with AAA being the most accessible. These ratings allow potential application buyers to determine the accessibility of the application's interface. Procurement systems in higher education should include accessibility ratings as part of their procurement process. It is acknowledged that lecturers may not have input into university procurement processes, but lecturers can enhance operability by giving students control over settings wherever possible. For example, allowing students access to stop, pause, and play functions in video players; allowing students to resize text; and/or allowing students to control the volume of audio and video clips (W3C, 2019). Lecturers can also organise their online content in ways which make it more easily navigable. For example, by ensuring that pages have descriptive titles and that there is more than one way of accessing the various resources within a course.

The third WCAG principle is **understandable information and user interface**. There are a number of ways in which lecturers can ensure that text is understood by the broadest audience, such as using the simplest language possible, providing a glossary of new terms, and avoiding idioms specific to a single language or culture (W3C, 2019). Lecturers can also ensure that content appears and operates in predictable ways. This means using a layout where design elements such as icons appear in the same place on every page and carry the same meaning on every page.

The final principle is that content should be **robust.** Robust content is defined as "compatible with different browsers, assistive technologies, and other user agents" (W3C, 2019). This guideline applies more to software developers than to software users. The main role of lecturers as software users in ensuring robust content is to carefully examine any site or tool external to the LMS to ensure that it can be accessed by students with different abilities using devices with varying operating systems.

The WCAG principles and practices of accessible design are well established. In many countries where legislation requires developers of online content to comply with accessibility standards, the standards that are referenced are WCAG. For example, the United Kingdom's *Equality Act* 2010 (EQA) not only prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability but places the onus on companies to take active measures to enhance the accessibility of their websites. The EQA doesn't specify particular technical accessibility standards for private sector website owners. However, the *Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations* specifies that public sector bodies are required to meet a specific standard set by the W3C, namely WCAG 2.1 Level AA (Government Equalities Office and Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Similarly, in the USA, government websites must meet Section 508 regulations (U.S. Access Board, 2018), which state that all electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government be accessible to people with disabilities. These regulations were revised in 2018 to include the WCAG 2.0 standards at level AA (U.A. Access Board, 2018). In addition, *Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* require US schools and universities to ensure that the technology they use is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities or otherwise to provide equal access to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by the technology.

In South Africa, the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) and the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. However, there is currently no legislation which compels public or private sector organisations to comply with any specific web accessibility standards. The Department of Communications has issued accessibility guidelines which cover many of the same points as WCAG (RSA, 2018). However, these are simply guidelines and are not legally enforceable.

The South African government has also published a *National Strategic Framework on Universal Design and Access* (RSA, 2021) which is largely focused on accessibility in the context of physical spaces and spatial planning. The *National Strategic Framework on Universal Design and Access* is not legally enforceable at this stage. However, the document suggests that a legally enforceable UDL framework will be forthcoming:

> This framework serves as a prescriptive guide for the promotion and eventual enforcement of universal design and access standards, using a disability inclusion perspective as its motivating force". (RSA, 2021).

As there are no current regulations which compel South African universities to adopt specific web accessibility standards, it is up to each university to decide whether to adopt a web accessibility policy or not, to define the accessibility standards that it will prescribe, and to decide how to ensure compliance with those standards.

4. Designing for Accessibility: Shifting Approaches

Statistics SA estimates that around 7.5% of South Africans have a disability (Statistics SA, 2014). However, the number of students in higher education with a declared disability is significantly lower, estimated at only 1%. (Van der Merwe, 2017). Some universities have a higher percentage of students with declared disabilities. For example, in 2021, 1159 disabled students registered with the University of the Witwatersrand's Disability Rights Unit (DRU), comprising 2.8% of the total student body (DRU, 2022). The number of students with disabilities is likely to exceed the number of students with declared disabilities, as some students prefer not to declare their disability due to fear of stigma and being perceived as less significant members of the university community (Eccles et al., 2018; Aquino & Bittinger, 2019). However, even if we allow for students with undeclared disabilities, students with disabilities constitute only a small minority of students in higher education.

As a result of the small percentage of students with declared disabilities, lecturers and site designers may question whether it is worth implementing accessibility principles in their courses. While there is no doubt that implementing accessibility principles takes time and resources, it is an essential step towards equity. Implementing accessibility principles across courses enables a mind shift from the accommodation of a few students to learning environments that work for a greater number of students. Most universities currently have an accommodation approach to enabling students with disabilities to access online learning material (Perez, 2015). An accommodation approach consists of making an exception or a special accommodation for a single student on a once-off basis. Ketterlin-Geller and Johnstone (2006) note that:

> Accommodations can include changes to the setting in which instruction is presented or assessment tasks are given, the amount of time allocated to a student to learn a concept or complete a task, the format of the information that is presented, the method through which the student responds to questions, or the materials or equipment that support the student in his or her ability to interact with the material. (p. 164).

Edyburn (2010) argues that an accommodation approach maintains inequality because students may experience a delay in access (for example, the time it takes to create an alternative format for some learning material); students may be required to make a special effort to obtain or use an accommodation (for example, negotiating bureaucratic processes to schedule alternative assessments); and students may experience discomfort or stigma (for example, having to write examinations in a separate area if they ask for additional time). An accommodation approach is problematic because the burden is placed on students to self-identify as disabled before they can access support from the institution. A shift from accommodation to accessibility "places the burden for accessibility on the curriculum rather than on students" (Perez, 2015, p. 60).

Further, granting accommodations is by definition a resource-intensive process, where additional capacity is allocated to accommodate a specific need. An accommodation must be conceptualised and implemented for each individual student who requests it. In contrast, an accessibility approach can be mainstreamed into standard course development processes. For example, instead of adding a transcript to videos only where there is a student with disabilities in that class, an accessibility approach would ensure transcripts are added to all learning and teaching videos. An accessibility approach enables predictable resource planning, while an accommodation approach may result in unexpected resource requirements. However, while resource planning may be more predictable in an accessibility approach, it should be noted that the actual costs of implementing an accommodation approach versus implementing an institution-wide accessibility policy are not clearly established yet (Gidden & Jones, 2021).

The up-front costs and capacity requirements of an accessible design approach may be a key reason why South African universities have been slow to adopt an accessibility design approach. The calculation of the potential benefits of an accessibility approach is often weighed against the small number of disabled students in higher education. The missing factor in this calculation is the fact that accessibility measures benefit a far larger group of students than those with declared disabilities. This includes students who have not declared their disability and registered with university support units and students with undiagnosed disabilities. Recent experience with online learning during the pandemic suggests that this group also includes students accessing online learning material in disruptive environments, and students with limited access to connectivity and data.

5. Online Learning During the Pandemic

The pandemic forced universities to move the curriculum online. The term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) emerged as a way of distinguishing rapidly assembled online teaching practices from research-informed high-quality online education. Hodges et al. (2020) contrast learning experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, with ERT which is a "temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances."

The move to ERT exposed and exacerbated inequalities amongst students. Czerniewicz et al. (2020) note that "[i]n a certain sense, the pandemic, and the pivoting to online made visible, the invisible, or ignored manifestations and mechanisms of inequality" (p. 949). ERT brought home the extent of digital inequalities between students. The General Household 2018 Survey report estimated that only 22% of households had access to a computer and a mere 10% had access to the internet (Statistics SA, 2019, p. 63). Amnesty International (2020) recently pointed out that South Africa has one of the most unequal and broken education systems in the world, arising out of issues of social injustice. Students' socio-economic circumstances and geographic locations shaped the challenges they faced during ERT, ranging from the lack of adequate learning spaces and infrastructure, availability of electricity and electronic devices, and the affordability of data and internet connectivity. (Dube, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities have gained significant experience in offering courses and learning interactions to students outside the traditional face-to-face model. Many South African universities developed a range of strategies to enhance student access to learning materials and interactions. These included the provision of devices such as laptops and tablets; addressing the affordability of data by providing subsidised data bundles or negotiating with Mobile Service Providers to zero-rate some websites hosting learning materials (Czerniewicz et al., 2020).

Over the course of the ERT period, lecturers became acutely aware of the barriers students faced in accessing online learning material, particularly the affordability of data. At the beginning of the pandemic, many lecturers attempted to substitute face-to-face lectures with synchronous online meetings, using tools such as Zoom, Big Blue Button, and Microsoft Teams. It soon became apparent that these tools were very data heavy. Students who relied on the free data packages from the university were unable to join all the live sessions. Some universities benchmarked the data usage of different tools, and others issued guidelines for low bandwidth teaching (Czerniewicz et al., 2020).

As a result, many lecturers attempted to minimise synchronous lecture-style sessions and experimented with new formats. Furthermore, individual lecturers developed a range of creative approaches to improve student access to online course material. For example, some lecturers formatted assignments as interactive PDFs. This allowed students with limited connectivity to download assessments and complete them offline. Other lecturers allowed students to hand in photos

of handwritten work if they didn't have access to a device with a word processor.

As university leaders and individual lecturers grappled with student access to learning materials, it became apparent that measures taken to increase accessibility for disabled students had substantial benefits for other groups of students. For example, a video transcript benefits students with visual disabilities. However, it also benefits students with limited data and/or limited connectivity, as these students find it more affordable or convenient to access the video content by reading a text transcript. Students who speak English as a second language, and students who struggle to understand their lecturer's accent, would also benefit from a transcript. Similarly, accessibility measures such as colour contrast do not only benefit students with visual impairments but also students studying in low-light environments; and measures such as consistent layout and text chunking do not only benefit students with attention impairments but also students studying in noisy or otherwise disruptive environments.

The urgency of moving courses online during ERT resulted in quickly assembled courses, few of which incorporated any accessibility measures. As the era of ERT ends, it is time to reflect on how to use learning experience design to promote equity, not only for students with disabilities but for all students. Universities are in a position where, after nearly two years of online learning and teaching during ERT, many of the basic infrastructures and support systems for online learning are in place, and many academics are more skilled in creating online learning environments. University lecturers have a shared experience of confronting barriers students experience in accessing online learning, and a sharp awareness of how the diverse abilities, location, and socio-economic circumstances of students impact their access to online learning. (Erlam et al., 2021; Gumede & Badriparsad, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020).

The role of lecturers as learning experience designers is likely to increase as universities normalise course development processes after the pandemic. During the ERT era, many universities sourced additional learning experience design capacity to assist with the creation of online materials and courses. In some cases, this capacity was funded by short-term grants or other short-term budget allocations. As Legon et al. (2020) note:

> More institutions may now realize that the effort required to develop quality online courses—creating accessible, digital content, organizing course components into a path for learning, rethinking student interaction, and using technology to enable effective teaching—are aspects of online courses that faculty must contend with alone, when ID or teaching/learning help is not available. (p. 35).

South African universities are now at a critical moment where the models of learning experience design they adopt, and how they fund and resource those models, will shape the digital learning spaces of the future. While web accessibility principles are an essential starting point, a learning design framework which seeks to create inclusive learning spaces for all students is most likely to build on the momentum towards equity in online design. Universal Design for Learning provides this framework.

6. Universal Design for Learning

While accessibility is focused on enhancing equity through enabling access for students with disabilities, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a framework for thinking about inclusive online design for all students. UDL incorporates and extends accessibility. It is based on the idea that students are diverse in how they perceive and process information, how they navigate learning environments, and how they express themselves to demonstrate learning (CAST, 2018).

UDL grew out of the universal design movement in architecture, which aimed to make the design of the built environment accessible to as many people as possible (CAST, n.d.). Because the users of a building or physical environment are diverse, flexibility became a key concept of universal design. If a whole community is going to use a public building or environment, that environment needs to anticipate the needs of a wide range of users. Similarly, UDL aims to make the design of learning spaces accessible to as many people as possible. However, as Rose et al. (2006, p. 135) note, "[t]he idea of universal design transfers readily from the built environment to the learning environment, but its principles and techniques do not."

The principles of universal design are not adequate for learning environments because learning environments should be designed to enable learning, not just access. Rose et al. (2006, p. 136) note that "providing accessible learning material is essential, but it is not sufficient. UDL requires that we not only design accessible information, but also an accessible pedagogy." In the context of a learning environment, flexibility translates into increased student choice. Each of the three UDL principles seeks to expand student choice (Tobin & Behling, 2018).

The first UDL principle is **multiple means of representation**. This principle recognises that students differ in the ways in which they perceive and comprehend information. Students with disabilities may be unable to access some of the formats used to present information, such as audio or video content. Other students may find information in some formats is more accessible due to their perceptual or cognitive characteristics. Further, students who do not share the dominant language, or culture, or history of an institution may face barriers when the presentation of information assumes a common background among all students.

The application of accessibility principles can make learning materials more accessible. However, "[t]he goal of education is not only to make information

more accessible […] The goal of education is to teach students how to work with information, including finding, creating, using, and organizing information" (Rose et al., 2006, p. 137). The principle of multiple means of representation therefore extends beyond providing accessible course material, to include considerations about how that material is selected and organised. The presentation of information should highlight key concepts, provide ways of linking that information to students' diverse life experiences, and connecting new information to existing knowledge (CAST, 2018).

The second UDL principle is **multiple means of expression**. This principle recognises that students differ in the ways in which they can express themselves and demonstrate knowledge. Very often students are forced to adopt a specific mode of expression. For example, an assignment brief may ask students to submit a PowerPoint presentation on a specific topic. Unless mastering PowerPoint is linked to a course learning outcome, students should be given the choice to express themselves in text, in a presentation format, in a short video, or in a verbal presentation. Expanding the ways in which students are allowed to express themselves puts the focus on their learning rather than their mastery of a specific format. Rose et al. (2006) extend the principle of expression to ensuring that there are multiple mechanisms for student support and mentoring.

The third principle of UDL is **multiple means of engagement**. This principle recognises that students are engaged and motivated to learn in different ways. Some students are engaged by social activities and group work, while others find social situations stressful (Rose et al., 2006). Further, students have different emotional responses to learning activities. This requires that students are engaged and encouraged to develop motivation and passion for learning in multiple ways.

It is important to note that engagement is more than participation. Fredricks et al. (2004) identify three dimensions to student engagement. Behavioural engagement refers to compliance with behavioural norms, for example attending classes. Emotional engagement refers to affective reactions, for example feeling interest or enjoyment when learning. Cognitive engagement refers to an investment in learning. Building on Fredericks et al., Hollingshead and Carr-Chellman (2019) note that engagement facilitates learning, leads to meaningful student outcomes, increases student retention, and prevents boredom. The authors further argue that "[b]eginning the design process with learner variability in mind, followed by an intentional design of accessible materials, flexible methods, goals, and assessments, UDL-based environments can facilitate learner engagement and lead to meaningful learning outcomes" (Hollingshead & Carr-Chellman, 2019, n.p.).

7. Critiques of Universal Design for Learning

Collectively, the UDL principles aim to change the design of the learning environment and intentionally reduce barriers, so that all learners can engage in meaningful learning (CAST, 2018). However, UDL is not without its critics.

One line of critique is that the framework is too closely associated with disability rights, which leads to the argument that implementing UDL will only benefit a small number of students. As Fornauf and Erickson (2020) note:

> [a]n unintended consequence of linking UDL with policies related to students with labelled disabilities is the conflation of UDL and special education. UDL is often misinterpreted as a special education initiative, or a framework only for students with labelled disabilities. (p. 184).

To overcome the potential reluctance to implement UDL, the benefits of the framework for all students need to be emphasised. Another critique is that there is limited evidence-based research to prove that the costs of implementing UDL result in substantial benefits (Murphy, 2020). Further, much of the research on UDL has been self-published by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST), and the small proportion that has passed peer review has often focused on lecturers' ability to adopt UDL practices rather than on its effectiveness from a student perspective (Murphy, 2020).

A final criticism of UDL is that it is too idealistic, in that no design framework can ever cater for all forms of diversity. While this is certainly true, there is still value in pursuing an ideal which promotes equity. For example, large class sizes have plagued South African intuitions for decades, leaving lecturers without many options for promoting engagement in their learning and teaching environments (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020). In such scenarios, it can be argued that UDL can be used to make learning and teaching accessible to enhance diversity, rather than catering for the non-existent "average learner" (Baglieri et al., 2011).

8. Implementing a Universal Design for Learning Approach

Web accessibility and UDL provide frameworks for learning experience designers to create more equitable online learning spaces. Given the scarcity of resources for learning experience design at South African universities, strategies for implementing UDL will need to be carefully considered (Pallit et al., 2018).

The "Plus One" approach to implementing UDL, as put forward by Tobin and Behling (2018), has been adopted by many American universities. The "Plus One" approach involves adding one more way in which students can interact with learning material, each other, and the teacher. To apply this approach to an existing course, lecturers are asked to identify learning activities in their course that students struggle with and to add one more (different) way for students to engage with the activity. This can be applied to learning materials (if there is a single format, add a second format), assessments (add a choice of topic or add another submission format), academic support (if students can attend group tutorials, add an option for individual consultations), and types of interactions (if

students are submitting individual work, add an option for them to work in pairs or small groups).

The "Plus One" approach is iterative and is intended to allow lecturers to gradually enhance student choice on how they interact with materials, activities, and peers in a course. This kind of approach seeks to implement UDL through small changes to course design, or small changes to online pedagogies (Tobin & Behling, 2018). Tobin notes that the 'Plus One" approach is designed to provide an entry point to UDL and:

> helps to take what otherwise might look like an insurmountable amount of effort and break it down into manageable, approachable chunks. It also helps people to determine where to start applying the UDL framework so they can address current challenges and pain points in their interaction… (Tobin, quoted in an interview with Lieberman, 2018).

The "Plus One" approach sees universal design as an ideal to aspire to, rather than a standard that one can implement. Students are diverse in how they perceive and process information, express themselves, and engage with learning processes. Given this diversity, a truly universal design that works for everyone all the time may not be possible. Implementing UDL is therefore framed as a process where the outcome is a change in lecturers' or course designers' mindset, rather than a specific measurable standard.

The reality at many South African universities is that online course components were rapidly assembled in response to COVID-19 restrictions, and the overall course design may not be well considered. This will make it difficult for lecturers to review these courses from a "Plus One" perspective at this stage. On the flip side, lecturers are actively engaged in designing blended and online courses. This creates an opportunity for interventions which support the creation of accessible course sites which embody UDL principles by enhancing student choice.

One obvious point of intervention is training for lecturers on how to use their university's LMS. Building accessibility considerations into training on the LMS will raise awareness of the potential accessibility barriers when using different tools, and strategies on how to overcome those barriers. Critically, this training will need to go beyond "where to click" and include pedagogic content on the use of different LMS tools. Accessibility and UDL principles and approaches could also be included in professional learning opportunities for lecturers around teaching, curriculum development, assessment, and evaluation.

In the absence of institutional guidelines or minimum standards for online course sites, interventions at the training level will still rely on lecturers' "mindset" to implement UDL, as they will decide which accessibility or UDL principles to incorporate into their course design. However, prescriptive institution-wide

specifications for online course design are likely to be met with significant resistance. The authors have noted that the space for collaboration on course and site design with lecturers grew during the pandemic, as lecturers seeking support willingly shared access to their online course sites. We believe this space is already closing and returning to a pre-pandemic mode where lecturers are protective of their course sites and less open to learning experience design advice.

Learning experience designers need to find new ways of collaborating with academics that promote equity through learning experience design without placing the full burden of implementation on the individual lecturer. Critically, these new collaborations cannot be seen as a technical process of accessibility compliance but must be integrated with course design and pedagogic choices. Grant (2016) makes this point strongly when she argues that it is well understood that good curriculum design is foremost, but it is not yet on many people's RADAR how critical visual, multimedia, and instructional design is to learning success. In turn, Peters (2011) reminds their reader that:

> [d]espite the fact that there's plenty of evidence for its influence (see Richard Mayer's work as a starting point), the front-end can still fall victim to old school prejudices that the visual design is mere decoration or not a serious contributor to the experience. (n.p.)

Lecturers are unlikely to seriously engage with accessibility and UDL if they perceive the value of these practices as separate from curriculum design. Lecturers may feel that these matters fall outside of their domain and that they are not part of their job descriptions. Grant (2016) links learning experience design and online pedagogy through the concept of "design presence". She argues that the missing element of the community inquiry model (Garrison et al., 1999) is design presence. She then proceeds to define design presence as "both glue, cementing the other three presences together, and oil, reducing the friction that causes learners to disengage and disconnect when their learning experiences do not match their needs" (Grant, 2016, n.d.). The concept of design presence enables a focus on the use of interfaces, layout, multimedia, graphics, the configuration of tools within the LMS, and instructional design principles to enable learning.

As long as lecturers are responsible for developing their own online course sites, the lecturer's mindset is likely to remain the primary determining factor in successful implementation. Strategies to implement accessibility and UDL that integrate with curriculum design and course development processes, and that stress the contribution of accessibility and UDL practices to enable learning, seem most likely to engage lecturers. Such strategies could include a resource component to incentivise academics who spend time working on creating accessible course sites, or a capacity component where learning experience designers from faculty or university teaching and learning units are allocated to work with academics who express an interest in accessibility and UDL.

9. Conclusion

South African universities are at a unique moment where lecturers' awareness of inequities in student access to online course material, and focus on building online learning spaces, is elevated because of the ERT period. To capitalise on this momentum requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach.

With regards to web accessibility, a national regulatory framework which includes specific standards or refers to WCAG seems likely to emerge in the near future. Until such a framework exists, we suggest that universities adopt their own measurable standards for the accessibility of online learning environments and materials. Universities could select particular standards from WCAG or adopt WCAG standards in full.

While web accessibility standards are measurable, UDL is a framework rather than a measurable set of outcomes. As such, its implementation relies more on the lecturer mindset than on prescriptive standards. There is limited research on how to successfully scale UDL as a framework. Fovet (2018) argues that:

> UDL remains a mostly individual choice for instructors and departments, and studies have yet to emerge on how such efforts might be scaled up to a whole campus dimension. Management of change has not been appropriately explored in this respect; nor has the implementation of UDL been examined within the relative complexity of the HE organizational lens. (p. 3).

To influence lecturer mindsets, we need collaborative processes which draw lecturers into discussions about UDL while working on activities that fall in the recognised academic domain, such as curriculum design and course development. Given the central position that students occupy in UDL, student voices need to be part of these collaborations and discussions. As Fovet (2018) notes:

> UDL is an inclusive lens, but it will lose relevance unless it is able to evolve and retain a genuine and fresh focus on the main stakeholder in the equation: learners. Any design reflection must be foremost a vehicle for the voice of the user, and UDL must find a way to systematically integrate this perspective through everyday processes of classroom ethnography. (p. 4).

The combination of prescriptive web accessibility standards, and the infusion of UDL principles into course design and learning experience design activities, offers the potential for more equitable online learning environments that work for a wider range of students. While the concept of a truly universal design remains elusive, taking steps towards enhanced accessibility and aspiring to the principles of UDL are important steps on the road to developing institutionally sustainable ways of promoting accessibility and equity in online learning.

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Thematic Area 2:
Context, Students, and Care

CHAPTER 4

EDUCATOR NARRATIVES ON STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH ENACTING A HUMANISING PEDAGOGY AND CARE: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract
In a world that supports individual endeavour, exploring new ways of knowing and being sits heavily on the shoulders of educators. In our view, reflecting deeply both in and on the process is imperative to learn from experiences and enact care-based practices, especially on how the past two years have unfolded. This conceptual chapter promotes a humanising pedagogical lens, with care at the core and highlights some implications for transformational practice. Historically, many educators and students of colour were made to believe that what they know and do, who they are and what they value, in other words, their humanity, have no place in higher education institutions. In a similar vein, care work - unpaid and unrewarded work that is done to offer support and solidarity to peers - has traditionally not been seen as part of the academic project. This experienced dehumanisation, discomfort, and inadequacy is what prompted us to consciously infuse humanising pedagogies into practice. As we conceptualise and report on using an ethics of care, we want to humanise our stories by presenting our voices. We firmly reject decontextualised curricula and mechanistic approaches and practices whilst avoiding being solutionist. We offer few practical implications, indicating potential constraints to the introduction of a caring and or a humanising pedagogy within higher education.

Keywords: care; collaboration; humanising pedagogy; inequities; transformative change

1. Introduction: Inequalities and Inequities Exposed
While "ethics of care" is a well-known concept, there is not much in the literature about an intersection of care and human and authentic pedagogy to reflect on student success, especially in South Africa. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has exposed inequalities and inequities that may henceforth never be unseen, ignored and/or misrecognised (Czerniewicz et al., 2021). These "post-conflict

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circumstances in educational environments [are] characterised by various forms of violence, poverty and discrimination" (Zinn et al., 2009, p. 117) and warrants new tools, theories, approaches, and practices [making humanising pedagogies suitable] (our emphasis in keeping inequalities visible and active in the academic project). We agree with Giroux (1983) and Freire (1970) (cited in Kajee, 2021), that as university teachers, being transformative intellectuals and agents of justice, we need to be able to engage and become advocates for change. However, the problem is that amidst such noble intentions, the desire to return to what is familiar and comfortable or what is known as the so-called normality of pre-COVID-19 teaching and learning, the higher education sector may be tempted to ignore the call for renewal, readjustment and change post-COVID-19. Hence, we fear that, Belluigi. et al. (2022, p. 20) may be correct in their assertion that the "pandemic disruption may not be the moment to unsettle inequalities" or to reimagine South African Higher Education. A further fear is that things will return to the way they were, and this inertia will reinforce the alienation and discomfort felt previously (Jansen, 2017). For too long we have been taught to walk the in-between "nepantla" path to assimilate - what descendants of indigenous Mexicans refer to as the "in-between" state, in-between cultures, languages, and identities (Valadez, 2012).

The gap that this conceptual chapter aims to address is centred on care (collegial and collaborative learning that resists inequities and is relational and context-specific). The care includes a humanising pedagogy that respects and invites students to bring themselves into spaces that are not only "comfortable" but also hopeful, equitable, and socially just. In a quest to work towards transformative change, it is precisely this struggle that university teachers could engage in with students to forge an alternative university culture, while upholding academic integrity. We advance care of each other, of us, and others as an integral part of thinking and doing South African Higher Education differently. We acknowledge the alienation that staff and students encounter when they encounter "a full constellation of organisational arrangements from a mostly white professoriate to a collection of predominately European artworks to names of buildings and institutional culture" (Jansen, 2017, p.92).

The chapter briefly outlines our context and background, followed by a cursory overview of a Humanising Pedagogy as framework focussing on care and student success in the higher education (HE) environment. Next, it introduces author narratives, taking the idea of care further through our own stories and thereafter a discussion of what we as university teachers can do to bring about transformative change in South African Higher Education. The chapter ends with insights and constraints to enact care and in imagining student experiences anew.

2. Background and Context: Wits University

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), 100 years old in 2022, is a university that aims to be "a leading academic hub connecting the Global South and Global North in the quest for an equitable global space" (The University of the Witwatersrand, 2022). In 2019, Wits had 40 881 students, of which 24 916 (60.95%) were undergraduates and 14 825 (36.2%) postgraduate students. The total student population comprised 22 332 (54.63%) females. Wits is a historically advantaged university in a county that is divided by deepening inequality and a government system in decline (Wits, 2022, p. 3). This decline in the state apparatus is felt by reducing subsidies from the government and the need to strengthen democracy and governance. The need to develop socially just and responsible graduates is essential and includes attributes such as, having a broader understanding of human rights, social justice, environmental sustainability, being a team player, being able to engage in independent inquiry, being able to confront life ambiguities and complexities, and solve problems, to name a few (The University of the Witwatersrand, 2019).

Against a backdrop of economic disparities and the COVID-19 pandemic, the university is increasingly becoming an uncomfortable space for students as noted by one student leader regarding the discomfort felt between black and white students (Jansen, 2017). This alleged discomfort is possibly attributable to the intersection of race, culture, values, class, and alienation. The discomfort further shows some of the obstacles to care within a diverse environment and the need for equity enablement so that students have access to resources similar to their peers so that they are empowered to help themselves (Petersen & Nkomo, 2022).

Located within this context, the Blended Tutorial Programme Possibilities 2022 of Wits recommends the use of a resilient pedagogy blend that can withstand disruption and support all students inclusively and equitably (Tam et al., 2022). A resilient pedagogy has a strong learning-oriented focus and is one that can succeed in times of disruptions and future waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The blend incorporates synchronous and asynchronous methods of learning in a planned manner so that the most vulnerable students are not disadvantaged.

We see a useful intersection between a resilient pedagogy and a humanising pedagogy in that both start with student experiences. The latter incorporates history, knowledge, and co-construction learning methodologies (Salazar, 2013). Thus, a high level of educator and student skill is required in an environment fraught with challenges, such as the Wits context in general and SA HE space in particular. Student experiences are shaped by the quintiles the students come from, which serves as a rudimentary indicator of socio-economic background, quality of education, and secondary school functionality (Spaull, 2013). These factors need consideration in course design. Critical to this process is the use of collaborative activities designed to allow for student interaction with diverse peers while working on real-world problems (Herrington et al., 2010). The link to real-

world examples, social, and pedagogical justice and the natural world is another important feature of a humanising pedagogy (Fataar, 2016).

At Wits, we acknowledge that through knowledge (re)distribution (i.e., what is counted as knowledge, how knowledge is viewed, shaped, and formed), the disciplinary, contextual, and relational nature must be moulded in partnership with students. In particular, there should be careful consideration of participation in the teaching and learning process of students so that aspects of Vygotsky's (1978) reflective, experiential, and collaborative learning are incorporated into programme/course design and development. Therefore, the provision of access during periods of disruption is critical. In this way, we enact what Fataar (2016, p. 10) calls, "pedagogical justice whereby education is able to account for the complex social-subjective in education and thereby better enable the emergence of a humanising pedagogy into our educational discourses".

3. A Humanising Pedagogical Theoretical Lens

A humanising pedagogy requires a recognition of the *treasures* that students bring, such as their histories, knowledge, and experiences (Salazar, 2013). The creation of a safe learning space encompasses one where students' diversity is valued, and mutual sharing and trust are encouraged. A humanising pedagogy requires a move away from a one-size-fits-all paradigm and instead focuses on humane approaches so that spaces are created that better accommodate students from all walks of life, especially those from resource-scarce backgrounds. The process involves understanding where students come from, that is, their backgrounds. As such, a humanising pedagogy is seen as transformative. Educators become mediators when they see social justice as part of their value base with a clear recognition that the playing fields are not equal, and that often students do not feel comfortable in these higher education spaces (Leibowitz et al., 2010). While higher education was understood as an equalising force the socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the learning space even more unequal (Czerniewicz et al, 2020; Perumal et al 2021), posing a real threat to a reimagined HE space.

When there is poor recognition of the challenges and circumstances of students, then the most vulnerable students are made to suffer and made to feel less human based on their linguistic and cultural diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2016; Spaull, 2013). For some students, the online education space can be very lonely and isolating (Laher et al., 2021). Thus, working from a humanising pedagogy perspective requires collaborative experiential learning opportunities whereby peers, educators, and experts can engage in conversations. To strive towards a humanising pedagogy requires planning and ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators so that they are exposed to more diverse methods of learning and teaching. We would like to add that a humanising pedagogy also requires care and collegiality to nurture a generous sharing of ideas between co-workers, which includes all staff, from the cleaner to the professor.

3.1. The humanising pedagogy discourse

A humanising pedagogy is one that aims to be learning-centred - a perspective situated in what Agherdien et al. (2007) calls an epistemological home - that shows an understanding of how students learn. Coupled with this epistemology, a student-centred methodology and approach is valued. In this chapter, student-centred refers to Vygotsky's (1978) notion of active, collaborative, reflective student engagement and includes acknowledging who they are and what experiences they bring to the learning space. The process of *humanisation* involves becoming more fully human socially, as well as historically, and participating in and /or with the world (Freire, 1972; 1984). Nonetheless, a humanising pedagogy is not only limited to social and historical becoming.

Also of importance is the principle of "mutual vulnerability" being key in a humanising pedagogy (Zinn et al. 2009, p. 115). This principle – both enablement and constraint - refers to the interdependence of humans and their environment involving a recreation of new vulnerabilities, having agency, being wary of 'othering' students, being self-conscious and self-aware, opening up spaces for participation and emancipation, as well as embracing critical, social justice. Zinn et al. (2009) further draw on principles from Freire's (1972) Critical Theory (being human and humane) and Fanon's (1986) psycho-social well-being and Ubuntu[1] as African philosophy "I am because we are". We believe that this intersectionality supports a South African Higher Education socio-economic-cultural context aptly and could go a long way in reimagining HE.

Fataar (2016, p. 19) offers an alternative view of a humanising pedagogy, one aligned to Nancy Fraser's Social justice dimensions, namely, redistribution (or what he sees as "inducting students into powerful knowledge"), recognition (of the intersecting school and life-world knowledges), and participation (active engagement in their own becoming). He argues for a move to mapping the social-subjective onto the pedagogical to fully embrace the whole humanity (associated with a humanising pedagogy). Such mapping, we believe, includes students continually (re)negotiating their life worlds and learning pathways. To achieve transformative change, it is precisely this struggle that university teachers should engage in with students collaboratively if students are to adapt to ways of being at university (and, in turn, offer an alternative culture).

3.2. Higher education: Student and academic success

Higher education worldwide has undergone huge shifts in terms of its role, purpose, and shared responsibilities. Boughey and McKenna (2021) ascribe many of these changes to globalisation and neoliberalism. They argue that the changes had social and cultural implications, saw a demand for market driven skills, required an increase in diverse student bodies and warranted social justice

1 We realise that Ubuntu as a concept or philosophy can be quite complex and is often associated with much dissent and contestation. We draw on this philosophy due to its resonance with being human and humane, in an African context and are deliberately not delving into its complexities.

concerns to be addressed amongst others. The shifts, however, resulted in being at odds with the purpose of the university that Nixon (2018) describes as follows:

> …the university must recognise that each new generation – and each new individual within that generation – speaks back to previous generations with the unpredictability of new beginnings. (p. 1).

The unpredictability of new beginnings manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2021) when the entire sector had to solve problems that it had not given itself enough time to analyse. Whilst the sector responded to the call to save the academic year by shifting modes and modalities, and rethinking methodologies and strategies, the inequalities and inequities surfaced in a way that could not go unnoticed. The neoliberal view of learning and teaching remained intact, once again ignoring the lived experiences of students and staff. What also came into sharp focus was the notion of quality in relation to student success and throughput rates (see the article by Dison et al., 2022 in which they unpack the shifting conceptions of student success).

Student success at university is not a matter of simply mastering content or the acquisition of workplace skills and competencies. Rather, the call is to embody care to prepare students for the world and to take their place and use their knowledge for transformation in this world (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Belluigi et al., 2022). We wholeheartedly agree with Merckel (2022) who asserts:

> When teachers see the need to act against poverty and injustice, the capacity to act with others, becomes more likely […] Thus, teachers who see their roles beyond the facilitation of knowledge and as activist for social good, can also inspire and encourage others, especially their students, to follow suit. (p. 123).

To inspire, encourage and enact this activism for social good, we see care work as being central. Unlike Zinn et al. (2009, p. 115), who focus on "mutual vulnerability", our focus in this chapter is more on an ethics of care as part of humanising pedagogies.

Scholars such as Noddings (1984; 2013), Tronto (2005), and Slamat (2009) suggest care work (the ethics of care) as a moral obligation. While Noddings (1984; 2013) emphasised values such as justice and equality going hand in glove with values such as care and trust, Tronto (2005) highlights attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. What both have in common is the moral obligation to care for others. What we would like to add to this moral obligation is that of caring for the self, that is, to also receive care. The reciprocal relationships thus mean that educators and students alike should co-create collegial spaces where care is embodied and enacted. One implication

is that quality standards cannot simply be an imposed tick-box exercise. Another implication is that the human aspect needs to be centred (that is, take into account the economic, social, and cultural being, within all related systems). See Boughey and McKenna (2016) and Jacobs (2021) who make compelling arguments against decontextualising learning.

Care work also involves attentiveness, responsibility, (collective) competence, responsiveness, and trust (Bozalek et al., 2014). Caring, is therefore, an activity that encompasses all that is involved in repairing our inequitable world and that comprises "our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto 1993, p. 103). A fundamental part of this weave is valuing relations and connections (Bozalek et al., 2014) as part of care. It is a cooperative process that encourages interdependence and caring (Jansen, 2017).

It would be remiss of us to omit the level of complexity enacting an ethics of care involves. Trust develops over time and a certain level of mistrust might thus hinder true care work. Bozalek et al. (2014) found that apart from mistrust, inadequate self-care could compromise care work. From our collective experience at a particular institution, we have found that what is valued is often tried and tested, solutionist approaches. Additionally, unsustainable efforts to devote to care work and compromising the self is often what deters care work. Moreover, care work for students' wellbeing is not valued as part of the key performance areas of an academic. Instead, most focus is placed on research, teaching, and service, thus, this type of care work is often unrecognised and unpaid (Petersen & Nkomo, 2022). Further, South African Black women academics are more prone to burnout and challenges experienced within our patriarchal society, with institutions giving little regard to the challenges in broader society (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019).

4. Twin Narratives: Humanising the Theory

The purpose of inserting our twin, personal narratives (one social worker/educator and one teacher/scholar) identifying as black, older females, is to highlight a humanising pedagogy (our responsibility to care) and the rich experiences that have framed our thinking and enactment of the academic project. We want to make the disclaimer that being vulnerable and self-aware is not easy but requires a certain (mutual) bravery that we are still grappling with. Yet, brave we must be to humanise the theory itself and enact care (self and for others).

4.1. Reflective praxis work of Schön

Social work requires the integration of theory with practice and is a profession that engages in the doing part of the work with service users at various levels. Teaching is another such profession which involves experiential learning thus both authors agree that a theoretical underpinning for our personal narratives can be found in the work of Donald Schön (1988; 1992). We agree with Kinsella (2010)

who describes Schön's type of reflection as an embodied kind of reflection that has value in professional disciplinary practice. Kinsella (2010, p.565) goes on to describe the work of Schön as having "phronesis (wise action) as a complement to episteme (scientific knowledge) and techne (pragmatic knowledge) in professional life. Thus, the combination of wise action and pragmatic knowledge resonates with us and how we chose to navigate the COVID-19 period from a personal and professional perspective.

Schön advocates two types of reflection, in and on process (1995). Our stories that follow, represent how we went about our days, offering a more distanced view when we later wrote and reflected on what had transpired. We stress at this point that the narratives do not present data analysed using Schön's reflection lens, rather, the narratives are incorporated in this conceptual chapter to show what humanising pedagogies underpinned by care looked like for us in our practice.

4.2. Personal narrative: Agitating towards social justice

For me, a humanising pedagogy begins with students and being able to establish their access to the learning eco-system that was severely compromised as the shift to online education began. See Weller's (2020) chapter on the dark side of educational technology. I was duty-bound to know how my students could access online teaching, what kind of devices they had and what the differences were in their learning spaces. Learning is not possible and cannot occur where students are at risk (even before the pandemic), vulnerable or exploited, and do not have access to online learning. Next, there was a need to find innovative ways to engage in both synchronous and asynchronous teaching, noting that not all students were able to attend the synchronous class. This type of teaching was time intensive particularly, in relation to the creation of additional teaching videos and reaching out to students who were not engaged.

Becoming aware of the huge disparities in access allowed me to add my voice to highlight the plight of vulnerable students within my discipline at my institution and in other institutions. I was part of a group of nine South African social work educators who agitated for a greater social justice focus to the rollout of online education at the start – and during – the pandemic. In an article entitled *Autoethnographic view of South African Social Work educators during the COVID-19: Highlighting social (in)justice*, we put forward the need for more care to be enacted. In addition, I was part of a group of educators who were teaching group work under the auspices of the International Association of Social Work with Groups (IASWG) and later conducted an online group for other educators. Developing a caring, collegial community of practice was helpful. These activities were collectively done and enacted care, collegiality, and collaboration.

As an educator, I ensured that there were multiple methods of communication open to my students, such as the deployment of writing fellows from the Wits Writing Programme to support students in small groups, discussion forums, and even WhatsApp communication with the class representatives. These methods of communication ensured that I kept abreast of the needs of most students, and I could be more flexible regarding teaching and assessment methods (Spaull, 2013). Ethically, communication with students and more especially class representatives on WhatsApp may be seen as a blurring of boundaries, but during periods of transition, this was critical. Similarly, Motala and Menon (2022, p. 22) found that maintaining contact with students "may have assisted in retaining students in the system as well as drawing out at-risk students back into the learning environment". These methods were designed to ensure that there was some pedagogic continuity to all students, especially students who struggled with the new modes of learning.

Concurrently, there was a need to extend care to my colleagues by checking in on them and offering support when they were unwell. As friends and /or educators, we the authors of this chapter shared our own stories at a conference held online by the Wits Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) in 2020, on the strategies we employed to nurture self-care. I am committed to the view that we, as human beings, need to support and care for each other. This care should extend to students as well as colleagues, similar to how the co-author - my (co)creator and collaborator - and I attempt to do at all times, while maintaining a cognitive filter that does not compromise our ability to make fair and informed judgments.

4.3. Personal narrative: Enacting care towards transformative change

In imagining what care work as part of a humanising pedagogy could look like, I reflect on unseeing the harm done by inequality, being invisible (especially during the COVID-19 lockdown) and what transformative change is possible. In my view, unseeing harm (in terms of the marginalisation of student/staff voice, the resource and structural disparities and social and cultural imbalances) meant that strategic planning and implementation of learning and teaching offerings became key. However, key to a reimagined HE, I realised the extent to which such strategic planning could be done, and the importance of building in flexibility, and being responsive to the challenges as/when it occurs.

Keeping our humanity intact as educators, caregivers, and nurturers involves being invested in (co)creating opportunities with and for students to embrace transformational change through care. This resonates with Bozalek et al. (2014) and Tronto's (2001) notion of care work as being both relational and collective. Further, inviting an intersectionality of race, culture, values, and class requires stepping back from a content-focused approach to one that enacts a humanising pedagogy as a relationship of trust [in the sense that Freire (1972) meant it]. I argue that a singular focus on content is tantamount to dehumanisation. Bartolome (1994) captures this so eloquently:

> By robbing students of their culture, language, history, and values, schools often reduce students to the status of subhumans. Therefore, any discussion having to do with the improvement of subordinated students' academic standing is incomplete if it does not address those discriminatory school practices that lead to dehumanization. (p. 3).

As a reflective practitioner at a Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development, I understand fully how difficult little shifts in pedagogies/practices are. Being stuck in an often-inherited curriculum that is outdated and a schooling system that is less than ideal, educators navigate over-extended teaching workloads, unmanageable research expectations and citizenship for its own sake, which leaves little room for care work. Mutual care work by some academics, me included, involves using our agency to defy cultural and structural constraints by going beyond the policy briefs, content focused approaches and narrow practices (e.g., by providing data to students/colleagues, ensuring data-light offerings, being flexible with modes and modalities and being sensitive to student biographies in shaping curricula).

However, I agree with Biesta and Tedder (2006) that agency is not solely an individual accomplishment. Collective and or collaborative efforts are what can get us to transformative change. For this reason, I have steadily shifted to collaborative[2] authorship I see this as part of my care work, as we exercise collective competence (Tronto, 2014), relational care and underpinning social justice values (Noddings, 1984; 2013). These collective practices resonate with the concept of Ubuntu and working together to achieve more.

Noteworthy and especially significant has been my ongoing collaboration with the co-author of this book chapter. We enact care through what Bozalek et al. (2014) and others call collective or team competence. We have collaborated on several articles, book chapters, and projects. We find that pooling our efforts, collectively reflecting on practices, and sharing insights all make for deeper engagement and critical understanding of a very complex world. Our common and intersecting philosophies, equity-focused pedagogies, and by implication social justice concerns, have translated into a caring environment where we trust each other to be vulnerable together, act and write together. We consciously care for each other and propose such collaboration for a reimagined HE.

By establishing critical friends (that are collegial, collaborative, and caring) across geographic boundaries, intellectual spaces, and disciplinary contexts, a more nuanced perspective and what I consider more powerful knowledge(s) are attained. I strongly recommend shifting from narrowly conceived notions of curricula

2 See Czerniewicz et al., (2021); Belluigi et al., (2022) for examples of such collaboration) and collaborative research (a South Africa vs Ireland vs Netherlands project generously sponsored by the Female Academic Leader Fellowship (FALF) and the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDP) Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Project.

matters, student deficit discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions towards care and collaboration as a shared responsibility. For example, the enhancement of the social work curriculum has manifested in the form of reflection on curricula[3].

In my role as Curriculum and Teaching Unit Head, my moral obligation (Bozalek, 2014) is to encourage the relational aspects of curricula, initiate dialogue around student success, horizontalise knowledge and essentially humanise pedagogies. By way of example, through group approaches and collective practices (Agherdien et al., 2022) and a forthcoming book chapter on a Writing Intensive pedagogical approach in a social work course, we slowly and steadily work towards student success and reimagining South African Higher Education.

5. Shifting from the Theoretical to the Practical Implications: Transformation Through Care

Moving from a theoretical discussion to a more pragmatic stance, we offer a few practical implications on student success and highlight some barriers that could constrain humanising care work and/or reimagining higher education in South Africa. The aim is to advocate for more reflective scholarly interventions to complex challenges without offering solutionist approaches devoid of context. As transformative intellectuals and agents of change, university teachers could consider the implications outlined below.

5.1. Humanisation and political ethics of care

Since humanisation involves becoming more fully human and participating in and/or with the world, academic development programmes (or learning opportunities) for university teachers comprise supporting staff as critical agents of change who in turn support the students to achieve academic success. This work means embracing identities, establishing conducive work locations and modes, and essentially inviting and promoting trust. Similar to our stories and to the study conducted by Bozalek et al. (2014), who use a political ethics of care framework, other institutions could embark on similar interventions, noting time, capacity, and resource constraints, as well as the importance of senior executive support. We propose that from a politics of ethics of care perspective suggested by Bozalek et al., 2014, p.11), addressing "critiques of parochialism, paternalism and particularism directed towards other care ethicists" is recommended. A certain broadmindedness is needed that requires criticality and care.

By necessity, the (co)creation of curricula that honour student/staff lives and livelihoods must re-affirm that staff/students are more than simply academic beings (Fataar, 2010) and being respectful of other competing activity systems that they engage in is a useful first step. Trusting that they bring rich experiences with them is another. Significantly, honouring and being attentive to their needs is a key aspect of care (Tronto, 1993) and a humanising pedagogy. We have tried to

3 See for example the collaboration between Agherdien et al., (2022), where they theorised what decolonisation meant to them, serving as a good starting point to design curricula in more intentional and pedagogically sound ways.

model this through our own praxis-oriented work as a team. At a wider and more structural level, this acknowledgement of diversity requires the on-going creation of student-centred university support systems that allow students to equally expand their opportunities (Walker et al., 2022). A constraint to the sustainability of efforts could be the time-intensive nature of such work.

5.2. Promoting quality and care frameworks towards change

Rethinking quality warrants a shift towards a human approach to quality matters. A real constraint is thinking of quality as simply being about pre-established, imposed standards. Moreover, Tronto (1993) argues that one has the responsibility to shift from formal rules and policies to cultural practices. In the words of social work educators Petersen and Nkomo (2022), this change requires a nuanced recognition that "where students, due to apartheid, have an observable disadvantage, social work academics should empower students to draw on all the available and appropriate resources" (p. 111). We endorse a humanising, caring approach to quality that goes beyond gatekeeping and lowering of standards, genuinely responding to student needs in considered ways and providing the necessary resources based on identified disadvantages. Resources such as time, money and expertise need to be allocated to care efforts and humanising pedagogies if higher education is to be transformed and quality preserved.

In our experience, a process that includes an ethics of care, within a humanising pedagogy, is most valuable in working towards change. Such transformation happens "when *teachers see the need to act against poverty and injustice*" (Merckel, 2022, p. 123) and it is precisely these social justice values that form part of care work (Tronto, 2014). We argue that care work is thus more about philosophical values like ethics of justice, fairness, and morality as opposed to being about rules and standards. We realise that not everyone shares the same values and that not all care works. This is thus a potential barrier or constraint that needs more thought. That said, one way to recognise this type of care work would be to insert the thinking and philosophy in assessment policies, Learning and Teaching Plans and university frameworks. Such insertions could show that the institution is serious about the academic project and is willing to allocate resources to it. One example that comes to mind is the Humanising Pedagogy framework adopted by Nelson Mandela University (NMU) to transform curricula.

Walker et al. (2022) speak to horizontal and vertical inequalities. Horizontal inequalities to be aware of include when students feel that they do not belong and are often hard to detect by the educator or the university in a qualitative manner. However, a student self-report survey can be revealing. Focus groups can be held with members of the student representative council, with the members of the readmission committees and the employees at the student counselling centre to understand student needs. Vertical inequalities include the lack of student support systems that are needed. Rethinking student support (technological, emotional, cultural, social, and academic) involves humanising care.

6. Conclusion

Care and enacting care are ongoing activities that require vigilance to ensure all students can be work-ready and are able to contribute to society in meaningful ways, particularly in the South African context where unemployment and poverty are high (Jansen & Madhi, 2022). At another level it requires a humanising pedagogy, as well as care for staff. From the perspective of two black females, we view care work as being more about self-care, care for each other and care for others. We centre care at the intersection of humanising pedagogies - we see care as a moral imperative. Through our collective competence (Tronto, 1993), we hope we have shared this mutual care and vulnerability (as enablement and constraint) needed in reimagining, repairing, and transforming HE.

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CHAPTER 5

TAKING SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT SERIOUSLY: REFLECTIONS FROM TEACHING PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS TO POSTGRADUATES DURING A GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY

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Abstract

This chapter presents three, inter-related arguments based on a critical self-reflection of a postgraduate teaching and learning experience during remote emergency learning. First, the chapter offers insight into and motivates for facilitating a problem-posing and student-centred approach to teaching online. Focusing on a course on Public Service Ethics, the chapter sets out the key pedagogical aims and the specific two-pronged approach of limited, edited recordings of live sessions and follow-up written notes. This argument gives particular attention to challenges of privacy and safety concerns in a politically complex environment and the difficulty of facilitating online participation in live sessions within this context. Second, through a critical reflection on the socio-political context of the course, the chapter illustrates that this breadth dimension of critical self-reflection can be enriched through better attention to the ways that socio-political context can be volatile and layered, influencing both the person-as-learner and the political agent-as-learner. Third, the chapter presents an argument that the approach taken revealed valuable tools, strategies, and insights that can offer guidance for teaching and learning beyond their origins within emergency remote teaching and learning. These include the role that communicating the strategy played in encouraging an inclusive pedagogy, the impact on classroom culture and participation, and the ability to co-create a course narrative with students.

Keywords: engagement; ethics; participation; privacy; problem-solving education; reflection; remote teaching and learning

1. Introduction

Problem-posing education invites us to see the classroom as a space where teachers and students learn together through identifying and solving problems they and their society face (Freire, 2005). This pedagogy informed the approach to teaching Public Service Ethics to public servants who work in a space that has become increasingly an ethically complex one. This teaching and learning experience fell within the blurry line of transition: between emergency remote teaching and

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learning (ERTL) (Hodges et al., 2020) and the emerging new normal of blended and hybrid learning. While in early 2021, there was some discussion of returning to in-person teaching, ultimately, the course was taught fully online during South Africa's third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-2021. In teaching this course fully online several tensions arose between this problem-posing method, the practical challenges of participating online, and privacy and related safety concerns of discussing ethical issues within a fraught political environment. This chapter shares a critical self-reflection on approaches towards meeting these competing demands while teaching Public Service Ethics at a postgraduate level.

The master's level course was taught to two cohorts, both between 12 and 20 students. It was a six-session course that was taught once across six weeks (one two-and-a-half-hour evening session per week) and once in a block release format of six consecutive days (one two-and-a-half-hour afternoon session per day). The majority of students were working full-time in the public sector and studying this programme part-time. These courses took place within the socio-political context of South Africa in mid-2021. This context includes a devastating third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cowan, 2021); civil disorder and rioting throughout KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (Sonjica, 2022); and the related significant economic losses to the country (Statistics South Africa, 2021). As the course lecturer, this was my first time teaching the material and the first teaching experience within this particular context of an interdisciplinary school with a student population of mid-career professionals.[1] This chapter offers then, reflections of fresh eyes. Fresh eyes not only on the conditions of the pandemic and ERTL but also to the specifics of teaching ethics in a politically complex space. While experience and re-iterations of courses offer invaluable insights, this chapter holds that critically exploring first impressions and strategies can also offer new insights into both our theory and practice.

Drawing upon these insights, I develop three inter-related arguments throughout this chapter: first, I offer insight into and motivate for facilitating a problem-posing and student-centred approach to teaching online despite challenges of privacy concerns and the resulting difficulty in engaging students to participate online; second, I identify multiple dimensions of the relationship between socio-political context and teaching and learning and argue that these dimensions both enrich existing theory and motivate for more attention to the breadth element of critical reflection in theory and practice; third, I argue, that the approach taken revealed valuable tools, strategies, and insights that can offer guidance for teaching and learning beyond their origins within ERTL (Hodges et al., 2020).

1 The programmes offered are catered towards those with work experience in the public sector and, since degree programmes are offered part-time or in block release format, many students are currently employed, most often in government departments or agencies, or serving as political representatives.

In what follows, I will first present the theoretical framework of critical self-reflection and the closely related theoretical basis of the course: problem-posing education. Second, I will present the key pedagogical aims of the course and the specific two-pronged approach of limited, edited recordings of live sessions and follow-up written notes that as a strategy to both instantiate this pedagogy and mitigate concerns around privacy and safety. Third, I will critically reflect on this approach and highlight three additional roles it played within the course beyond mitigating privacy concerns: the role that communicating this strategy played in encouraging an inclusive pedagogy, the influence upon classroom culture and participation, and the ability to co-create a course narrative with students.

2. Critical Reflection as Method: On – and within – the Course

2.1. Critical reflection on

This chapter adopts the approach of critical reflection. This approach moves beyond an emphasis on technical rationality which sees the relationship of knowledge to practice as one of one-directional application (Thompson & Pascal, 2012, p. 313). Instead, theory and practice are considered in dialogue with one another, both informing the other. Following Thompson and Pascal, we can see a critically reflective approach to include both thinking about our practice and our position within this practice (2012, p. 319). The aim is to ensure our practice is not mechanical and reactive and that we are alert to opportunities for learning and development for ourselves and others (including theory) that may arise from within our practice (Thompson & Pascal, 2012, p. 319). The critical aspect of this reflection is described as having two dimensions: depth and breadth. Critical reflection can dive below to interrogate the assumptions beneath our practice and our students' responses to the course – it brings a depth of analysis. Critical reflection also draws us out of the (virtual) walls of the classroom to interrogate the broader socio-political context and its impact on our practice – it brings breadth to allow contextual analysis (Thompson & Pascal, 2012, p. 321).

Such an approach is of value at all times, but especially within a context of emergency remote learning where, by its nature, the emergency is a broader socio-political crisis that shapes both key aspects of practice (such as the move to remote learning), and the context in which students are learning (widespread grief and worsening socio-economic conditions). This approach is also particularly apt given the situational nature of the course content: ethics for public servants in the context of a public service in an ethics crisis. The approach thus allows this chapter to offer both reflections on practice, and to highlight the ways that existing theory does not effectively capture some of the relevant features of the broader political context and the impact that such a context can have on practice.

This approach is also intentionally closely aligned with the approach to teaching and learning employed in the course in question. The course aimed to stimulate engaged, critical reflection on public service ethics as it is experienced by the students in their workplaces: a dialogue between philosophical theory and the

knowledge and experience of the students. Problem-posing education invites both student-teacher collaboration in the learning process and a learning process that begins from, and works through, the real problems students face (Freire, 2005) – in this case in facing ethical challenges and dilemmas in their roles in the public service. This speaks to a reflective learning process: a process that allows practice to inform theory and, at the same time, for theory to provide a lens on understanding and shaping practice. It thus encourages both deep critical reflection – upon one's own assumptions that inform learning – and broad critical reflection – upon the way that knowledge gained in the classroom is shaped by, and addresses, the socio-political context in which it is learned. As Rolfe (2002, p. 22) describes it, "reflective learning goes beyond the simple intake of knowledge, and involves a critical awareness of the socio-cultural environment in which the learning takes place".

2.2. Critical reflection within

Authentic reflection, according to Freire, considers "people in their relations with the world" (2005, p. 81). Freire describes the process of problem posing education, or education as the practice of freedom:

> Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. (2005, p. 81).

Problem-posing education is contrasted to the banking model, which sees the teacher as one who follows two separate processes: first, acquiring or developing knowledge and second, narrating that knowledge to others. Instead, problem-posing education requires the educator to be "cognitive" at all times – learning, engaging, and open to the emergence of knowledge (Freire, 2005, p. 80). This pedagogy clearly aligns with a student-centred approach that requires "the academic to be invested in the learning of the students, rather than in the transfer of information" (Blackie et al., 2010, p. 638).

Problem-posing education is student-centred. Its fundamental purpose as a pedagogy is liberatory – to see education as the practice of freedom for the student. It brings student knowledge and experience into the centre of the learning process but, importantly sees education as something that moves the student beyond themselves – the student has meaningful agency within the learning process but is invited outwards to engage with the conditions under which they live. This element of liberation and empowerment, the invitation to hope, takes problem-posing education beyond a potentially narrow conception of student-centred learning in which students participate in their learning but do not necessarily move beyond the

confines of the classroom. The learning process is an emancipatory journey taken together between the teacher and students, a journey that necessarily incorporates not just the students themselves as agents, but also their socio-political context as a subject and object of their learning.

3. Aims and Approaches

In line with this problem-posing pedagogy, the course aimed to create spaces for discussion that provided guidance in interpreting the assigned scholarship but centred on encouraging the incorporation of students' public sector experience into the examination of each issue, debate, or concept. Meaningful engagement on these complex ethical issues in the workplace requires self-reflection, vulnerability, and critical engagement with situations that involve other actors. It requires a culture of trust. To develop ethical reasoning, students need to not just develop theoretical and practical tools for their ethical decision-making, but also to evaluate the ethical decision-making of others. The engagement with other cases not only serves to develop critical engagement skills but also provides an important foundation for discussions on how to respond to unethical behaviour and how to build more ethical public sector environments. In one respect, the online context may encourage this kind of participation given the perceived protection or apparent anonymity of remaining behind the screen. Yet, viewed another way, the online context heightens the sense of class contributions being somehow put on the record through recordings, and potentially leaving the confines of the course. In this way, the online context exacerbates an already difficult ask for students who face real or perceived consequences in their workplace or political environment when they raise their voices on ethical issues. Consider, for example, that recent AfroBarometer data found that seven in ten Africans "say that ordinary citizens risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption to the authorities" (Keulder, 2021, p. 4). The challenge was therefore to facilitate learning that centres on student experience in a way that students perceived as both beneficial to their learning and applicable to their roles in the workplace, and safe for their personal safety and career progression.

In the process of facing up to this challenge, the tension between the value of participation and the validity of privacy and safety concerns emerged as a recurring theme. The main strategy I employed to acknowledge and mitigate this tension between participation and privacy is the focus of this chapter. The strategy had two parts. First, the live sessions were recorded in full. However, the whole recording was not uploaded onto the learning management system (LMS). Instead, short extracts of my input were edited and uploaded: following each live session, between two and four videos were uploaded, ranging from 5 minutes to 15 minutes. In general, the live discussions and exercises were not available for students to return to watch. At the time, there was a strong norm within ERTL that live sessions be recorded and made available to those who could not attend. This informed the decision to record the sessions and make them available on request (with motivation) in a format that expires and cannot be downloaded.

Given the pandemic conditions and the fact that most students also worked full-time, I felt it was important that the cost of missing a live session was not too high. This inspired the idea of "live session follow-up notes" that were posted the day following each class. On this page, I wrote up the key features of the live session discussions without mentioning who contributed which idea or example. The notes also referred students to related supplementary resources that spoke to an element of the discussion and drew connections between past and future themes. Students were then encouraged to return to these notes after the live session to actively consolidate the week's theme before moving on. The course followed a broadly "flipped classroom approach", which expected engagement with materials on the LMS before live session discussions (Bergmann & Sams, 2012); it then required an extra flip back to the LMS to consolidate the learning of the week before building upon it in preparation for the next week.

4. Critical Reflection on the Context and Approach

Research around privacy in the online education space mainly focuses on data protection, with an emphasis on undergraduate classes and the use of social media (Kularski & Martin, 2022). Insights into diverse classrooms frequently focus on diversity of language, race, ethnicity, or gender. In this course, perceived privacy concerns were not centred on personal concern for the privacy of one's grades or personal data; the concern centred on the safety of one's person and career, and the sharing of evaluative opinions or arguments on contested ethical issues or events. The relevant dimension of diversity, in my perception, was not the underlying differences in class, language, or ethnicity but the diversity of positions within the public service, a hierarchy which was at times illustrated within the course discussions. The particular nature of the tension between privacy and participation within this context is not clearly evident within existing debates, thus creating space to consider if this particular context offers new insights into, or applications of, our theory and practice. In this section, I will first illustrate how attention to this particular context provides insights into the breadth dimension of critical reflection. Second, in practising this layered critical self-reflection, I will present three reflections on the specific two-pronged approach of edited recordings and follow-up notes. The implicit dynamic of these reflections follows the Rolfe et al. "reflective model", which invites a series of three inter-connected questions: "What?, So What?, Now What?" (2001). This model allows us to move from an engagement with what happened (What?), to insight into the implications for practice, knowledge building, and theory (So What?), to how this could shape our way forward in practice (Now What?).

4.1. Socio-political context

The encouragement to share personal experiences on complex ethical dilemmas was done within a context where students also frequently commented, both in theory and personal reflection, on the risks and fears associated with speaking out on ethical issues: these risks ranged from a disciplinary hearing to fear of physical

harm to oneself or one's family. South Africa faces an ethical crisis of rife corruption and political violence against whistle-blowers and between political factions (Chetty, 2022; Cruywagen, 2021). In the immediate weeks following the course, Babita Deokaran was assassinated after whistleblowing on political corruption: the culture of fear was not unwarranted (Cruywagen, 2021). In such fraught political conditions, discussions also revealed a cautious approach by some students to expressing views on any particular political issue to avoid aligning or misaligning themselves within their political party or organisation.

A reflection on the "so what?" of this socio-political context reveals that the socio-political context in which this course was run was directly relevant to the course itself. The relevance of socio-economic context to the practice of teaching and learning is well established. For example, in a study on professional development within higher education, Leibowitz et al. (2015) argue that socio-economic context, including the history, geography, and resourcing of institutions, influences the uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching (p. 323). More broadly, the challenges facing the higher education sector in South Africa can also be understood through the lens of layered context: international context with vast power and resource inequality; the national context of a developing economy; the provisional or regional geography (urban or rural); the present and historical context of the institution; and the context of the individual student and how that influences their relationship to an agency within the institution (Leibowitz et al., 2012, p. 4).

Here, we notice again the value of the breadth dimension of critical self-reflection: an engagement with how the socio-political context has shaped our practice. There are at least two ways that reflection on this particular course can add to our understanding of the complexity of this breadth of reflection. First, to notice that this socio-political context is volatile: while it is important to consider more stable socio-political contexts such as gender inequality or wealth disparity, we should not underestimate the impact of more immediate socio-political interjections into the classroom. Consider that the week of the block release version of this course coincided with the July 2021 uprising in KZN and Gauteng (Sonjica, 2022). This was both a frightening event for many who feared for their lives and livelihoods, and directly related to the course, given the uprising was linked to the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court for his failure to appear before the Zondo Commission to give evidence on state capture (Sonjica, 2022). We should also note that the broader ethical crisis and the governmental and societal response to it are unfolding, suggesting the socio-political context is likely to change as we progress through different moments, such as the on-going publication of the so-called State Capture Report and consequent responses.[2]

2 The State Capture Report refers to the final report coming out of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State that was led by Judge Raymond Zondo from 2018 – 2022.

Second, we notice the layers of this breadth. Critical reflection on this course demands attention to the general socio-political context in which the participants (learners and teachers) exist: the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent socio-economic and psychological strains. Research across higher education contexts has shown the psychological strain of the disruptions of the pandemic, prolonged lockdowns, and rapid transitions to ERTL (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Casper et al., 2022; El-Sakran et al., 2022). In the South African context, other existing challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic, such as dealing with limited connectivity, rolling blackouts, and extensive care responsibilities in extended family households (Cooper et al., 2021). The course is shaped both by the COVID-19 exhaustion and grief of its participants and by their positionality within a complex political landscape. These layers are not always clearly delineated, but we might broadly consider this as the influence of context on the "person-as-learner" within the course, and the influence of context of the "political agent-as-learner" within the course.

Personal circumstances shaped the person-as-learner's engagement with the course. The influence of personal challenges is shaped further by gender (Kwapong, 2021) and other elements of the domestic situation, such as, childcare and support from other adults (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). While online learning eased some challenges, such as, travel time, it unequally heightened technological challenges, such as, connectivity (Fiorini et al., 2022). As chiefly part-time students, these personal circumstances combined with work pressure can significantly shape the quality of attention a student is able to pay to the course. The political agent-as-learner will often take the form of learners as citizens, immigrants, or refugees.[3] In this case, students were political agents such as civil servants, political representatives, or members of the military. These more explicitly political roles heighten this dimension of socio-political context, but we should not neglect the role of political agency (or lack of political agency) in a much broader range of cases. For example, the learning in a course on migration could be shaped by the personal experience of a migrant within the course as well their political agency within a contested political issue. The problem-posing approach takes this political agency seriously given a commitment to education as liberatory through the practice of critical engagement with the problems faced by students in their lives and communities (Freire, 2005). Going forward, the heightened reflection on socio-political context prompted by the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic has produced more enduring insights for teaching and learning. In what follows, I reflect on the tools and strategies used to respond to this context and whether these too, can be taken forward to create classrooms that better respond to the layered and volatile nature of the socio-political context where teaching and learning takes place.

3 This characterisation of the student as a political agent is also evident, for example, in literature focused on education towards citizenship (Campbell et al., 2012; Levinson, 2012).

4.2. Tools and strategies

4.2.1. The role of presenting the approach

One aspect of the collaborative nature of the problem-posing approach is, in my practice, to explain my facilitation choices to students. This is not to justify the choices but to situate my actions within a framework that makes the aims and methods of the course evident, thus equipping students to participate in a shared process of knowledge creation between student-teacher and teacher-students (Freire, 2005). My LMS site included a section on my teaching philosophy, and this was reiterated within the classroom. Students were thus both aware of why participation was a key aspect of the course and my understanding of the complexity and risks of participating. I encouraged them to take care to consider the line of sharing generously but not compromising themselves or their colleagues in what information they disclosed. I then shared how I was walking the line of encouraging participation but considering privacy concerns: explaining how their discussions would not be uploaded for future viewing but notes of key ideas would be available.

Reflection on this strategy identified that it was valuable to not just implement measures to mitigate privacy concerns but to pre-emptively acknowledge these concerns and explicitly link this acknowledgement to an awareness of the socio-political context. In a context where the public service receives intense public scrutiny and criticism, I also perceived it to be instrumental to the collaborative relationship of a problem-posing approach to indicate an understanding of the socio-political situation many find themselves in and to welcome further elaboration on this context from their perspective. Drawing out my attempt to recognise students' positionality also, as a consequence, signalled an awareness of my own positionality within the classroom. The uncertainty and change that characterised the context of ERTL prompted me to provide a more explicit articulation of course aims and methods. This proved to be a valuable tool to better practice a problem-posing approach by actively including students in the considerations that shape the course. Going forward, this strategy can be developed to provide space for students to move beyond understanding the nature and shape of the course to participation in this process of course formation.

4.2.2. Classroom culture: Participation and privacy

The approach enabled me to create a culture of participation while still respecting perceived concerns about views being "put on the record". In reality, it is unlikely that students were going to share dangerously confidential information in a class setting – and while participation is encouraged, risky disclosure was actively discouraged. Nevertheless, attention to safety and privacy shows respect to the socio-political context in which the course was running and the potential personal concerns shaping each students' engagement with the course. In a course where we discussed the importance of systems, managers, and leaders who created opportunities to discuss ethical dilemmas and report suspicious behaviour and, most critically, protected those who did so – it seemed important to model, in a small way, the best practice of creating this kind of environment.

I found that I felt more able to challenge students to develop and defend their views because of the knowledge that these conversations would not be uploaded to become a course resource for on-going viewing. This freedom was rooted in framing discussions as a learning activity rather than course material. The ability to challenge students is central to the process of developing critical thinking. Building trust between myself as the course facilitator and amongst the students is pivotal: consider the strategy of asking if anyone in the class would like to respond to something that has been said by a student. This is an important tool for modelling critical thinking that requires active participation and vulnerability. This vulnerability means that this approach contains some risk for the facilitator, a risk that I felt better able to manage in a context where conversations were valued for the tools learned in the discussion rather than primarily as a source of information.

Approaching classroom discussions primarily as learning activities allowed me the freedom to avoid rigid management of contributions and instead afford students a space to bring a range of experiences and opinions into the discussion, even if they were not directly related to the discussion prompt. While I worked within the discussion to draw connections to course themes and literature, as well as previous discussions, the follow-up notes provided a second layer opportunity to root the fruitful parts of the conversation within the course, while letting less fruitful engagements fall away. Thus, the discussions were carefully curated, remaining cognisant of the learning process, but adopting a gentler approach as opposed to one aiming to get to a specific outcome within a discussion topic.

Upon reflection, then, the value of this two-pronged approach was not just in gesturing toward privacy and safety concerns (although this was valuable) but also in the ways that it enabled a two-layer approach to root conversations within the course material that gave both the facilitator and the students more freedom and scope within discussions despite limited time together. While this strategy was developed in the context of teaching online during ERTL, it can also be an important tool going forward: allowing more freedom in discussion can serve to create more space for students to bring in their personal and political context thus respecting the role that such context plays in teaching and learning. The follow-up notes provide an additional way to recognise these contributions while guiding students to bring them into dialogue with the course literature.

4.2.3. Building a course narrative

In reviewing the follow-up notes, it has also become evident that they provided me with a valuable way to explicitly build a narrative for the course: to connect different themes to create a journey with some overarching ideas. Importantly, this narrative was driven by the students' contributions to the discussions. Students being able to recognise their voices within the narrative of the course was an important way to enact a problem-posing approach. It was a tangible way to facilitate learning through curation of student's inputs as opposed to relying solely on my inputs as the "teacher". The two-prong approach also enabled the development of more

useable learning materials that could be curated to support a narrative. Rather than providing a 2–3-hour video to watch, short video extracts were uploaded to the LMS with a comment box underneath for engagement. A glance at the page of the live session videos highlighted, for example, not just a reminder of the theme "Institutionalising Ethics" but the main areas of focus and connection represented in each video "Rules versus Leadership"; "The role of ethical codes"; "The Missing Link: the gap between the personal and professional".

Beyond ERTL (Hodges et al., 2020), a strong co-authored narrative of a course can be a powerful teaching and learning tool that supports learners' ability to understand the course materials, how different themes are connected, and why each theme has a role to play within the course. A narrative can also facilitate engagement with the relationship between the course materials and the socio-political context in which these materials are studied. At the postgraduate level, one might wonder whether students themselves would benefit more from undertaking this narrative-building work. This approach could develop their skills and ensure that the facilitator's curation of the discussions does not undermine the process of co-creation of knowledge intended by the problem-posing pedagogy.

Going forward, this approach can be developed aiming for increased student engagement within different classroom formats (such as contact or blended learning). While the approach requires that in the online format, the video recordings stay in the hands of the course facilitator in order to achieve the privacy aims, this is not the case for follow-up notes. Others have successfully facilitated a shared note-taking activity within an online class format that can provide a baseline model ("Collaborative Note-Taking as an Alternative to Recording Online Sessions | Faculty Focus," 2021; Harbin, 2020). Follow-up notes in this method, however, require not just note-taking of a given discussion but structuring the notes to tie the discussion into the readings and themes of the particular week and the course as a whole. These are valuable skills for postgraduate learners and can enhance their learning by encouraging and facilitating the identification of connections within the course and degree programme. It could also ensure that the course narrative is directly shaped by students rather than the influence of their inputs being mediated by a course facilitator's curation.

In this particular course, the challenge lies in facilitating this learning process over only six sessions with limited time in between to allow for critical reading and reflection. For more explicit integration of these skills into the course learning outcomes, the course would need to make time for modelling and practising the skill with opportunities for feedback. The notes are also important as a class record of the discussions, not just an individual perspective. An approach to student participation would, therefore, need to consider strategies to facilitate an opportunity to learn while still providing the class with a coherent set of notes that speak to the shared journey through the course.

5. Conclusion

The socio-political context of this course was extremely challenging: a devastating third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a general state of ethical crisis in the public sector, and the intensity of the political riots following Zuma's arrest. Critical reflection on the strategies employed within this context has offered theoretical and practice-based insights for those participating in creating a student-centred future of teaching and learning in South African higher education. A closer examination of the socio-political context and the ways in which it can impact and shape the learning experience revealed the value of attention to the ongoing features of the students' socio-political context and the reality that such context can be volatile, with unexpected events significantly impacting on the individuals within the classroom. It also revealed the value of noticing the layers within the dimension of the breadth of critical reflection: that context can impact on the "person-as-learner" and on the "political agent-as-learner". While the personal and the political overlap and intersect in important ways, this distinction can provide tools to begin to notice the difference, for example, between the silence of the exhausted learner and the silence of the learner whose political agency does not allow comment on this content. This critical reflection thus highlighted the need for a more textured approach to reflection on socio-political context. In response to the existing literature, the chapter has illustrated how an examination of more complex, dynamic, and challenging contexts can reveal the value of this heightened and layered attention to socio-political context in both the developing of our theoretical tools of critical reflection and in the development of sound practice for these contexts in which many learn.

While the approach was intended as a response to the tension between online participation and privacy and safety concerns during ERTL, the reflection drew out several further features of this approach that enhanced the course and can be taken forward into new iterations of this course, and others like it. First, it facilitated an open discussion around the approach which signalled respect and understanding for students' context as well as self-understanding of the lecturer's positionality. Second, it created an opportunity for more open-ended discussions and a second-layer opportunity to link student contributions into the course material. Third, follow-up notes provide a platform to co-create a narrative for the course making use of students' input with my theoretical framing. These features emerged as innovative ways to instantiate elements of the problem-posing approach within ERTL. They also offer us strategies and tools for better practice student-centred, liberatory pedagogy in online, blended, and hybrid teaching and learning modes.

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CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: RECOGNISING ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF CAPITAL AMONG STUDENTS FROM RURAL BACKGROUNDS.

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Abstract
Bourdieu proposed four types of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) that contribute to social reproduction. However, marginalised communities also possess a myriad of resources for effective engagement in and with broader society. An alternative to Bourdieu's notion of capital is that of Tara Yosso, who proposes the concept of "community cultural wealth". This notion includes aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital. This chapter explores these alternative forms of cultural capital along a particular axis of marginalisation: rurality. Students from rural backgrounds are often viewed as lacking the knowledge, sensibilities, and capital that characterise urban life. While students from rural backgrounds do indeed face unique challenges as they transition to university study, they also display remarkable resilience and can and do achieve remarkable success in higher education. Drawing on individual interviews and focus group discussions with 18 students from rural backgrounds at an urban institution of higher education in South Africa, this chapter seeks to explore these alternative forms of capital that students bring with them to higher education. It does so in order to recognise the wealth of social and cultural resources that students draw on in order to successfully navigate the institutional spaces that characterise higher education.

Keywords: cultural capital; higher education studies; student academic development; rurality

1. Introduction
Pierre Bourdieu (1977) proposes four types of capital that contribute to social reproduction. These are economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. These forms of capital, in the view of Bourdieu, are generative of social inequalities that are maintained and produced through their transmission. Notwithstanding the enormous power that these systems of capital wield, such a view obscures the fact

that marginalised communities nonetheless possess myriad resources for effective engagement in and with broader society.

An alternative approach to Bourdieu's notion of capital is that of Tara Yosso (2005), who proposes the concept of 'community cultural wealth'. When applied to a higher education context, this notion attempts to overcome issues of racism and other types of marginalisation (e.g., racial, gendered, and a myriad other forms of marginalisation) by recognising the forms of capital that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities. Yosso (2005) argues that cultural wealth gives rise to alternative forms of capital, namely aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital. This chapter explores these alternative forms of cultural capital along a particular axis of marginalisation: rurality and its influence on accessing and succeeding in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Research on the experiences of students from rural backgrounds in higher education recognises that the voices of these students remain underrepresented (White & Corbett, 2014; Mgqwashu et al., 2020; Naidoo, et al., 2020). Moreover, rural students are often viewed as occupying a position of deficit – that is, as lacking the knowledge, sensibilities, and capital that characterise urban life (Masinire, 2020; Mgqwashu et al., 2020). While it is true that students from rural backgrounds face unique challenges as they transition to university study, it is also evident that these students display remarkable resilience and can and do achieve remarkable success in higher education. Notably so, despite the fact that students from rural backgrounds possess cultural wealth that enables them to negotiate their way into and through higher education, the challenges that they face can be overwhelming and may potentially result in poor performance, and difficulty in transitioning to and participating in higher education where the continuing legacy of apartheid and the colonial past is perhaps most strongly felt.

This chapter seeks to explore the alternative forms of capital that students from rural backgrounds bring with them to higher education. It does so to give value and recognition to the wealth of social and cultural resources that these students draw on to successfully navigate higher education spaces.

2. From Cultural Capital to Cultural Wealth

While universities provide educational opportunities, their social role since the massification of higher education is less clear-cut as they can be used to maintain inequalities by advantaging and protecting the elite (Marginson, 2016). Arguably, prior to massification, HEIs (specifically, the predominantly white South African universities) served as springboards for students who access these spaces to obtain the knowledge, skills, credentials, and networks (that is, the social capital) critical in determining access to the best jobs and accompanying economic rewards. However, post 1994, the social role of the university has yet to be defined. This is because, in South Africa, the notion of equal access to higher education

makes assumptions of equality of social and cultural capital (Leibowitz, 2012). Despite the elimination of explicit discriminatory policies that were meant to keep black students out of certain universities, barriers such as unequal funding arrangements, unfair admission processes, financial constraints, curriculum, knowledge, pedagogy, and other socio-cultural factors (Jones et al., 2008; Naidoo et al., 2020) continue to serve the interests of the urban elite. This results in unequal university opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those from poor-rural contexts.

Bourdieu's notion of social reproduction allows researchers and commentators to examine the deeply entrenched ways in which higher education institutional processes perpetuate inequalities – and marginalise certain students. Giroux (1983), building on Bourdieu (1977), argues that education reproduces the hierarchical order of society. This occurs both overtly and through the "hidden curriculum" – "those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom" (Giroux, 2001, p. 47).

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) original exposition of cultural reproduction theory argued that society is socially stratified and that these strata can be distinguished based on the possession of resources (economic, cultural, and social). Economic "capital" refers to those resources that are "convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). "Social capital" refers to the resources "that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Social and economic forms of capital play a significant role in the formation of "cultural capital". In his later work, symbolic capital was included; this takes the form of prestige and recognition and involves distinctive properties, such as expressions of coolness or eagerness, language, clothing, and interior furnishings, which are symbolically translated as lifestyle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013).

Bourdieu contends that family and education are sites for social and cultural reproduction as they serve to selectively reinforce and inculcate social class-dependent dispositions, values, and beliefs. See, for example, the seminal text by Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words* (1983), which addresses the linguistic means by which this cultural capital is differentiated across social class positions. In higher education, specifically, students from rural and urban areas undergo a process of socialisation into the institutional and disciplinary cultures that make up the university. This is of concern given South Africa's history of discrimination, which limited access to disadvantaged communities to HEIs and continues to expect students to realign their class affiliation, value systems, and identities. This realignment can be a challenge for students from rural communities because of the gap that potentially exists between the sociocultural practices of rural contexts and those of HEIs (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). Nonetheless, these students bring

with them learning resources and social dispositions that have gone unrecognised. It is thus necessary for HEIs to acknowledge and consolidate the cultural richness that students from rural backgrounds bring to their learning as well as uncover the barriers that they may face.

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory is not without its critics. Indeed, while it remains important to consider how education systems, as Bourdieu so starkly illuminates, continue to reproduce social hierarchies, it is also important to consider how higher education participants might act as agents of social transformation. Given that South Africa continues to feel the effects of colonialism and apartheid, higher education was profoundly shaped, and continues to be shaped, by social, political, and economic discrimination and inequalities across class, race, and gender. Even though some students may continue to succeed in the highest echelons of the university system, their success often reinforces the idea that university education is open and equal for all. However, this assumption that university education is open and equal for all can perpetuate inequitable academic and non-academic outcomes, especially for those who have been disadvantaged by legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Therefore, as argued by Martinez-Cosio (2010), while Bourdieu's work focuses on the possession of capital by the dominant social class, it ignores the activation of capital by those dominated. We contend that Bourdieu's theory, when applied to the case of students from rural backgrounds in higher education, emphasises those students' own deficiencies and reinforces deficit perceptions of rurality.

This leads us to consider the work of Tarra Yosso (2005), and her notion of cultural wealth. Yosso's work addresses issues of racism and the marginalisation of people of colour in higher education, but we argue that her ideas can be extended to conditions of rurality and higher education as well. Yosso (2005) critiques the concept of cultural capital as considering dominant communities as culturally wealthy and all others as culturally "poor". Instead, Yosso (2005) argues for a shift away from such deficit views. She argues that the outcome of such deficit thinking is then to "top-up" students from marginalised backgrounds with the requisite cultural knowledge and skills. Instead, Yosso argues for recognising and valuing the particular forms of capital that such students already possess.

To this end, Yosso (2005) introduces the concept of "community cultural wealth" – a form of capital that draws on the knowledges that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities. Yosso (2005) argues that the forms of capital nurtured by community cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital.

- Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of barriers, and draws heavily on the notion of resilience. (p. 78-79)
- Navigational capital refers to the ability to manoeuvre through and across social institutions. Importantly, the notion of navigational capital acknowledges

individual agency and resilience and may include strategies to obtain high levels of achievement despite institutional constraints. As such, in this chapter, aspirational and navigational capital are discussed in tandem, due to their strong overlaps. (p. 80)

- Linguistic capital refers to abilities regarding alternative literacies, such as art, music, or poetry, and communication experiences in multiple languages, styles, and genres. (p. 78)
- Familial capital refers to community history, memory, and cultural intuition. Since it adopts a broader understanding of kinship, it may include immediate family (living or dead), extended family, close friends, and community members. (p. 79)
- Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources. Although similar to Bourdieu's original notion of social capital, it is focused on those networks that provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions (Claridge, 2018). In this chapter, familial and social capital are grouped together due to the presence of significant overlaps between them. (p. 79). In the southern African sense, this value system is where the concept of Ubuntu stems from.
- Finally, resistance capital refers to the ability to challenge inequality through oppositional behaviours (Yosso, 2005, p. 80; see also, Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983).

It is important to note that the forms of capital that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities into the university are neither mutually exclusive nor static; instead, they are dynamic processes that build on one another and, in combination, constitute the community wealth that students from rural backgrounds, for example, possess.

Yosso (2005) refutes the assumption that the higher education system is open to all; instead, she argues for a centring of the experiences of students from marginalised backgrounds including, we add, students from rural backgrounds. Centring the experiences of rural students at university will reveal the assets and resources that emerge from the backgrounds of these students. In so doing, it may become possible to better enable students from rural backgrounds to draw on these assets and, in turn, contribute to the transformation of higher education institutions. What we hope to show in this chapter, while drawing on the ideas of Tarra Yosso and expanding on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, is that students from rural backgrounds possess alternative forms of capital that, when used productively, enable them to navigate academic life.

3. Research Design

Drawing from an interpretivist paradigm, this study makes use of a qualitative research design. It has been designed as a holistic single case study (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018; Casey & Houghton, 2010) with embedded units and subunits. In this study, the "case" is constituted by the specific institution in which this research is undertaken. This setting is a large, multi-campus, comprehensive, South African, urban university, consisting of over 50 000 students. A majority of the students are black, and they come from varying socio-economic backgrounds and from rural as well as urban areas.

However, within this broader case, the participants were drawn from the education programmes and STEM faculties. These two disciplines formed embedded units which were useful counterpoints to one another, as they often involve significantly different forms of engagement and outcome. Finally, embedded within the case study are 18 individual students, 7 from the STEM disciplines and 11 from the education faculty. Each of these participants represents a unique experience of rurality and higher education.

The participants in this research were sampled as part of the South African Rurality in Higher Education (SARiHE) project (Naidoo et al., 2020). In this project, student participants were purposively selected based on the fact that they had lived and attended school in a rural area and were in the second year of study. A matrix was used with the following criteria: race/ethnicity, gender, geographical origin, and first generation at university. Targeted second-year classes (initially identified by academic informants) were chosen, and students were then asked to complete a short questionnaire. Students who met the criteria in the questionnaire were then invited to take part in the study. As part of the SARiHE project, the participants were given iPads with which they were required to develop digital documentaries.

For the project on which this chapter is based, permission to use the digital documentaries was sought and granted from the principals of the SARiHE project, and ethics clearance for conducting the interviews and focus groups was obtained from the relevant faculty research ethics committee. The researchers ensured sensitivity to the participants' vulnerability and asked them to only share what they felt comfortable sharing. All participants gave informed consent for their participation and their voluntary participation, anonymity,[1] and confidentiality were ensured throughout the study.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. After viewing the digital documentaries collected as part of the SARiHE project, a semi-structured interview schedule was developed which sought to clarify the silences, gaps, and contradictions that emerged in the digital documentaries as well as in the literature. Each participant was individually interviewed for between 40 and 60 minutes. In addition, two focus group discussions, one each with a

1 Pseudonyms were used to protect the rights and integrity of all the participants.

subset of students from each of the two broad disciplines, were conducted. A semi-structured focus group schedule was developed, and the purpose of separating the students by faculty was to allow the participants to reflect on and share their views on whether their rural backgrounds impacted their experiences of learning in their chosen disciplines.

Both the interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. ATLAS.ti was used in the management, organisation, and analysis of the data collected. The data were analysed using Tarra Yosso's elements of community cultural wealth as an analytical frame, through an initial process of coding. The overall objective of the analysis was to identify patterns or themes in the data that elucidated the forms of cultural wealth that student from rural backgrounds within the selected case study draw on in their studies in higher education.

4. Findings and Discussion

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Tarra Yosso (2005) critiques Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and extends it to include alternative forms of capital possessed by marginalised communities. Yosso contends that higher education can and should learn from the range of cultural knowledges, ingenuities, capacities, and networks possessed by socio-economically marginalised groups that generally go unrecognised (Yosso, 2005: Mathebula, 2019: Mgqwashu, et al., 2020). Our view is that students from rural communities are able to harness complex mediating resources to adapt to their studies in higher education. In the subsections that follow, we discuss the forms of capital that these students bring with them to university, including navigational (and aspirational), linguistic, familial (and social), and resistance capital.

4.1. Navigational and aspirational capital

Navigational capital refers to the ability to develop resilience or academic invulnerability and "skills of manoeuvring through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 44). This includes the strategies and skills that enable students from rural backgrounds to navigate through social institutions and maintain high levels of achievement, despite stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of performing poorly. This relies on these students having strong aspirational capital. Aspirational capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital and, as Yosso (2005, p. 41) notes, refers to the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers".

The university environment requires a greater sense of individual responsibility and work ethos, rooted in a tradition of hard work, frugality, and diligence. Several participants argued that their rural backgrounds had instilled in them characteristics of strength, diligence, independence, persistence, and perseverance. From their perspective, their rural upbringing helped them to adapt to campus life. For example, Max (a second-year education student) explains:

> I came as a very responsible individual… back home they taught me responsibility above all else. Because I learned how to do things on my own, ever since high school everything that I learned how to cook myself, I learnt how to do my laundry, everything by myself […] I think that prepared me as an individual for this phase of life.

This demonstrates the navigational resources that Max was able to harness despite the adjustment required when going to university. A particularly striking experience of navigational and aspirational capital in operation comes from another of the participants, Ann, whose early academic difficulties caused her to drop out of university twice:

> I matriculated 2011, I went to another varsity […] before [...] I went to school in the rural areas, so there there's no information about what to do after Matric […] Now I was fortunate enough that I did well in my Matric and then my teachers from high school organised me a bursary that they wanted me to go and do Computer Sciences.

Because many rural schools struggle to provide adequate career guidance (Walker, 2019), Ann was encouraged to study Computer Science, despite not doing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a subject at school. She continues:

> …the 45 minutes would just pass, I'll just be looking left and right because I do not understand [...] so I would go to my room and cry because I didn't understand, I don't know anything. As a result, I ended up failing the course.

She then decided to change courses:

> I always loved Life Sciences and Chemistry at school. So, […] I decided to take Chemistry and Biology [hoping that] maybe I'll find what I love along the way. Still, I got there [...] 2014 […] I dropped out...

She adds:

> …2015 I decided to take a gap year and then maybe try to find myself and then maybe eventually I'll find what I want to do… I didn't want to just stay at home and do nothing… So, I came to [the city] to look for work, then that's when I decided let me try apply to [research site] for education.

Despite the obstacles that she faced, beginning with a lack of career guidance, Ann exercised significant aspirational and navigational capital, moving across degree programmes, institutions and even cities she was unfamiliar with in order to find work and, ultimately, pursue studies that she felt aligned to her interests. Studies have shown that self-discipline correlates positively with high academic performance (Kim, 2014), and the findings in this study indicate that rural upbringings instilled critical navigational skills in students, which enabled them to successfully manoeuvre through higher education, despite significant obstacles.

4.2. Linguistic capital

Linguistic capital refers to having multiple language and communication skills (Yosso, 2005). But language also entails the intellectual and social traditions of communities, as learned through communication experiences in that community (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009). In South Africa, as in many other places in the world, English is regarded as a high-status language and is the most widely used medium of instruction in higher education in the country (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). However, rural students experience very little exposure to English before entry into the university. For example, Jane describes that:

> …at school we didn't use English like full time, we only used it in English language lesson but in terms of teaching they used our home language we learned Physics in Se-Pedi. Life Science, everything even Maths…

This presents challenges that emerge not because the students do not understand the concepts, but because they do not understand the language, as Jabali explains:

> There is little or no interaction between the lecturers in university because of the language of communication, sometimes you don't get the terminology but when things are expressed in your language that's when you understand better, I personally struggle with understanding academic papers we have to study. This causes poor performance.

These challenges require students from rural backgrounds to exercise significant linguistic effort to cope with their studies in higher education.

The use of their mother tongue – and knowledge of multiple languages – in their group engagements was one of the strategies used by participants to grapple with understanding disciplinary concepts. This enabled them to retain their motivation and persevere in their studies. Terry explains:

> It also helps in knowing a lot of South African languages because [we] have Zulus, Sotho's, Pedi's and Tsongas in my group. We

> may not know how exactly how to respond in their language but so far as we can understand what one is saying in their language and respond also in our language, is interesting because [we] don't struggle when it comes to assignments and practical reports because we are always there to help each other.

Students from rural communities often hail from storytelling traditions and are used to listening to and recounting oral histories, stories, and proverbs. Through these practices, students from rural backgrounds develop skills such as memorisation, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, these students are often well-placed to draw on various languages, registers, or styles to communicate with different audiences. For example, Jane recounts what used to happen in village meetings:

> And then you just gather as a community you dance those rituals dancing and then you sing if you're a singer and then there were some troops play the drums […] they would tell the history of how the place did come […] why did they name them [the place] like so? what happened before they came? and then what made them to live around that area?

Such narratives are conduits for sharing knowledge (Mathebula, 2019) and such linguistic capital enables students from rural areas to engage in the knowledge practices of the academy and make important contributions to society. This is because their linguistic capital enables them to preserve a sense of self-identity and confidence. Linguistic capital depends on and is embedded in familial and community relationships, to which consideration in this chapter now turns.

4.3. Familial and social capital

According to Yosso (2005, p. 48), familial capital refers to "cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, cultural intuition". When a student's family has high expectations, that student has an improved chance of success (Pleet-Odle et al., 2016; Kim, 2014). Across the data collected for this chapter, the participants shared experiences of growing up in families that had little prior experience with tertiary education. Despite this, the participants' families placed significant emphasis on the importance of education, which the participants identified as crucial to their educational success. As Philip remarks:

I had everything I need, and my mother even though she didn't go to school she made sure that when I tell her that they need this at school she gave me. When there is a meeting, school meeting she was there all the time.

According to the participants, their parents and grandparents talked with them about their dreams and hopes and expressed high aspirations and strong support for their education, even though their parents did not get the chance to receive it.

Their family's prioritisation of education was something all the participants shared with regard to their pre-university experiences. However, families demonstrated the value they placed on education in varied ways. For Jane, this meant strict rules about completing schoolwork before participating in other activities:

> …my granny, she didn't go to school but then the way she was too involved […] like seriously she will check your books […] even every time she'll go to school and ask […] 'how is she performing? how is she behaving? where is she lacking? […] what should I do to help her?'

The familial motivation, expectations, and support that the participants received constitute significant familial capital that enabled the participants to manoeuvre through HEIs.

More broadly, social capital refers to the social networks that students utilise to "manoeuvre through the systems" and includes community resources (Yosso, 2005, p. 45). The church was one community resource that played a significant role as, according to Terry, it:

> …even give us some funding, tutors in our church, people who will encourage they will find you someone with the same course who will always guide…

In addition, teachers' support is a form of community or social capital that enabled some of the students to achieve academic success and manoeuvre through the educational system. Although it is often argued that the quality of teaching in rural areas is poor (Mgqwashu et al., 2020; Department of Basic Education, 2005; Hannaway et al., 2019), our research shows that many teachers are extremely supportive of their students' learning and success. Although the students at a non-government school in Maya's village did not pay any fees and the school did not receive any funding from the government, teachers volunteered to teach extra hours for free in order to prepare the learners for the final Matric[2] examination:

> My teachers played a significant role in my learning, they are very dedicated teachers […] like they could give everything, they have for us to be where we are today [...] our classes started at six o'clock in the morning and ended at five, six o'clock first period, each teacher had like two hours for each period.

Ann adds that it was her teachers who helped her in applying for and securing a bursary. This support and motivation continued even during her university studies:

2 At the end of secondary or high school, learners write a final set of examinations which are known by a particularly South African term, Matric – and learners who pass are said to have matriculated.

> So, my teacher […] organised this bursary, so she would call me every time, 'how is everything how do are you doing?' When I complain that the course is showing me flames […] she always motivated […] 'you have potential, you'll pull through'.

These findings contradict Bourdieu's (1986) suggestion that students from working class backgrounds lack parental support. As the participants demonstrate, familial and social capital, in the form of parents, teachers, relatives and the church, positively influence their confidence and aspirations and enabled them to navigate into and through higher education.

4.4. Resistance capital

Resistance capital "refers [to] those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Some of the participants expressed the view that their strong desire to achieve success in higher education was an attempt to counteract stereotypes and others' negative beliefs about themselves and their rural upbringing. For example, Jane argues:

> Yah so even my neighbours […] they even asked my aunty, 'why do you have to tell her about university because she is not going to go there, so you are just wasting your time and energy […] you can even see her mother didn't even go to university so she will join her mother and be a domestic worker'. They were surprised when I went to university because […] they say I can't go to university I'll have to prove them wrong and go to university.

Ann adds:

> Well, I'd say back then when I had dropped out obviously the people in the community were talking oh shame she's giving up in school, these are lot of things that made me not to give up because they were talking.

The need to exercise resistance capital was particularly strong amongst female participants. Some participants argued that there were negative stereotypes about girls, which they sought to counteract. As Nancy argues, demonstrating how familial and resistance capital can align:

> Ah, like the community there were those negative effects like most girls getting pregnant you know, and no one is going to university. People just drop out at high school but then I feel like my grandmother used to protect us a lot from the community.

As such, the students – particularly the female participants – expressed a strong desire to prove "them" wrong and counteract prejudice against rural and female subjectivities. The above comments suggest internal transformational resistance on the part of the participants, in which they seek out opportunities for self-development as a form of conscious critique of oppression (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). This is important, as it demonstrates a political and social conscience that needs to be leveraged as part of a critical university education.

4.5. Community cultural wealth

What emerged strongly in the data collected was a desire on the part of the participants to not only draw from but also to contribute to the cultural wealth of their rural communities. In the same way that the participants benefitted from the navigational, familial, social, and other forms of capital within their rural contexts, they expressed a desire to grow these forms of capital for future students. In the case of Philip, this includes giving back familial capital:

> I'm planning to take my sister to varsity to study Transport and Supply Chain Management […] as soon as I finish, I want to make sure that she goes to varsity…

For Willy, this involves growing the broader navigational and social capital of his rural area:

> …the plan is to go back in rural area and to help [the learners] in applications and also I just want to teach in rural area…

It is important to note that this was not mere lip-service to the idea. Willy explains how he has already made attempts to funnel the navigational capital he has gained back to his community:

> …when I was doing my practicals [teaching practice] in January, I drafted a two page of guidance then I took a period on this other teacher I spoke to him and then I said to him 'I did this for the Matric'. And then it was the information about the varsities […] the requirements, everything that they need to know, of course I won't know all the information because I'm at [research site] but through the internet I managed like to get some stuff even if is not enough.

And for Jane, the ambition is to contribute to the economic and objectified cultural capital of her rural village:

> Like, I want to change teaching system […] we said we don't have libraries, we don't have labs at least I can create one through sponsors […] funding where I can change whereby learners learn

> so that when they come to university it is not going to be the same struggle.

In her study of rural Tasmanian students' perceptions of community, Schmidt (2017) demonstrates that her participants felt an important sense of belonging within their rural community. Our findings, in addition to giving recognition to the wealth of resources that students from rural backgrounds draw on to achieve success in higher education, demonstrate the extent to which returning graduates are an important resource within rural communities (Sowl et al., 2022). As Yosso (2005) argues, while cultural capital is accumulated, cultural wealth is shared. The cultural capital that these rural students draw on in their transition into higher education fosters ever-expanding cultural wealth as it is ploughed back into their rural communities of origin.

5. Final Note: A Continuation Rather than a Conclusion

In this chapter, we problematised the prevailing view of students from rural communities regarding their access to and success at university. Although these students experience significant social, intellectual, and emotional challenges as they transition into university, they nonetheless draw on their cultural and social resources to successfully navigate higher education institutional spaces. Despite this, higher education institutions continue to frame rural students and their backgrounds as deficient in essential academic and cultural resources. The failure on the part of these institutions to acknowledge and legitimate rural forms of capital shifts the blame to inadequacies on the part of students rather than the inadequacies and under-preparedness of higher education institutions to meet the needs of students from rural backgrounds and harness their rich capitals. We posit that students from rural backgrounds possess important forms of capital that can be utilised in their teaching and learning at university. While we acknowledge that there are no ready-made remedies to the challenges faced by these students, higher education institutions need to develop context-specific responses informed by appropriate situational analysis if they are to make strides towards greater social justice within higher education.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend construction of a more just learning environment. This requires changing unequal social structures through more egalitarian policies. A good place to begin is to create greater awareness of the impact of rurality in higher education and develop a more inclusive ethos in higher education institutions. Therefore, critical steps towards social justice in education provision should begin by creating spaces for knowledge pluralism with a view to establishing broader, inclusive, critical, creative, and engaging curricular and pedagogical approaches. This suggests adopting strategies and structuring teaching in ways that expressly draw upon students' cultural practices, including their linguistic practices and common cultural experiences. Recognition of other forms of knowledge is integral to creating space for cognitive justice. However, the

continued absence of African cultural epistemological content, ways of knowing and practices of being in the academy is what contributes to cognitive injustice and the epistemicide of African knowledges within formal educational systems.

Students' active engagement in their own education is key to their epistemic becoming. In order for students to benefit from membership of the academy, universities should deliberately provide opportunities for students to establish communities of practice around courses in their programme of study. In particular, this would mean actively creating peer group communities to meet the learning support and emotional needs of students from rural contexts. These peer groups should be made up of other students from similar backgrounds and who are facing similar challenges. In this way, the students would provide mutual support to each other and try to make sense of their academic milieu and the role that their backgrounds play in their academic trajectory.

In conclusion, higher education institutions need to do more to enhance the learning experiences of students from rural backgrounds. This should go beyond the provision of laptops, data, and the like (though these remain important), but also include overcoming underlying cultural deficit perspectives and recognising and harnessing the capital that these students do possess as suggested in this chapter. The forms of capital investigated in this chapter have thus provided a lens for revealing and theorising ways to restructure higher education institutions around the knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks accrued and/or utilised by students from rural communities.

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Thematic Area 3:
Student Learning Reimagined

CHAPTER 7

WHEN PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY MEETS ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT LEARNING: REFLECTIONS ON POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract

During Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL), the course lecturers of a large third-year course for pre-service education students had to rapidly find workable teaching strategies for putting a course on the topic of Assessment online. The course introduced students to the purposes and forms of assessment underpinned by a perspective on assessment for learning. This chapter is a critical reflection on why we think we were able to respond rapidly to re-design and teach a "successful" (under the circumstances) course that modelled reflective teaching and learning principles and practices. Much of the support available to others and us at the time of ERTL was of a technical nature. Useful as this was, it was not this focus on technology that enabled us to deliver this course in the way we did. We were equipped to respond because we individually and collectively have built up a pedagogy that is deeply rooted in learning and educational theories for enhancing epistemological access to adult students from vastly diverse educational backgrounds and enabling high levels of student engagement. In this study, we reflect on what knowledge and expertise each of these underpinning prior fields gave us for imagining a way forward under ERTL and operationalising it under difficult conditions. We reflect on the teaching approaches we adopted, the principles and assumptions that guided our approaches to pedagogy, and how this enduring pedagogic knowledge can be reconfigured for blended/online futures. We consider implications for working with lecturers and tutors to strengthen their capacity to respond creatively during disruptions.

Keywords: assessment for learning; curriculum design; disruption; pandemic pedagogy; responsive pedagogies; reflective practice

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1. Introduction

The novelist Elif Shafak (2020), in her essay "How to stay sane in an age of division", critiques the prevalence of groupthink and social echo chambers that constrain possibilities for creative and forward-thinking. She argues that we should not go back to the way things were before the pandemic and suggests that we use our new technological tools to develop socially just ways of thinking and practising in our societies. This chapter critically reflects on the processes and principles for transitioning this large undergraduate course. We consider the implications of our modelling of reflective learning and teaching principles and practices (Ashwin et al., 2015), to mitigate the temptation to go back to pre-COVID "normality" and build on the strengths and affordances of our teaching approaches for students to thrive in a post-COVID higher education future.

In higher education institutions, the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated rapidly developed emergency remote modes of delivery requiring many lecturers to instantly convert courses designed for face-to-face delivery to fully online ones. As designers and implementers of a course on assessment for third-year Education students at the University of the Witwatersrand, we were now faced with the rapid adoption of a "pandemic pedagogy". In this chapter, we engage in a critically reflective process of questioning and analysing our theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings to re-conceptualise the course during COVID-19. It uncovers our thinking about how we were able to respond rapidly to teach a "successful under the circumstances" emergency course. This chapter is a critical reflection on the intended curriculum rather than an evaluation of the course and curriculum.

Much of the support available to us and others at the time of ERTL was initially of a technical nature. Useful and necessary as this was, the focus on technology was not the driver that enabled us to deliver this course in the way we did. In this chapter, we argue that it was theoretical underpinnings and praxis – based on resources accumulated through our shared and individual teaching histories – that most strongly informed our ability to offer a rapidly developed and strongly student-centred online course. In making explicit some of the principles that underpin our practice, we hope to contribute to discussion and debate about what could/should underpin online/blended course design. This could inform the approach to preparing future lecturers for designing blended and online courses.

2. Pedagogic History, the Course, and the Intervention

In the course we discuss in this chapter, third-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) students are introduced to the principles of classroom assessment for learning. In its original face-to-face mode, the design of the course was already underpinned by some of the pedagogic, and assessment for learning principles that were key to being able to transition suddenly to an almost totally asynchronous online mode when COVID-19 struck. We were fortunate to work with a course that

already came from a tradition of ongoing re-imaginings by and with colleagues[1] in response to changing student needs, diversity, massification, and instability in South African higher education. As two of the members of the original team teaching the course, we became responsible for the rapid transition online. The process of doing so provoked considerable reflection on our assumptions about effective teaching, particularly in relation to inclusion, epistemic access, and optimal support for students. It also provoked dialogic reflection on the collective resources (intellectual and practical) that we could draw on rapidly from both our shared and varied pedagogic histories.

We present several intellectual and practical teaching traditions over decades of adult-centred teaching experience, course design, and development of teaching materials. We both have educational experiences with diverse groups of students to enhance the quality of their teaching and assessment practices. Our "practitioner-researcher" (Jacobs, 2015) response to ERT was informed by the principles of reflexive practice, transformational learning, academic literacies, attention to language and modes of communication, explicit pedagogies, and dialogical feedback. We were able to re-imagine alternatives strongly informed by overarching principles of enabling epistemological access and providing supportive environments. We use epistemological access (Morrow, 2009) in its broadest sense of an intention to move "beyond physical or formal access to *meaningful* access to the `goods' of the university" (Muller, 2014, p. 255). For us, these meaningful "goods" are the theories and scholarly positions that underpin the "subject" (or discipline) and the ways of speaking, writing, and demonstrating "being" in the subject – both the "know that" and "know how" of the subject in Winch's (2013) terms.

Working within this context of increasing numbers of undergraduate students we have played a role[2] in working collaboratively with lecturers to develop responsive pedagogies and approaches for use in lectures and tutorials. We argue that this was possible because we were informed by sound higher educational principles that have underpinned our engagements with adult learners throughout our teaching careers.

We have identified the key intellectual constructs we discuss in the next section for analysing the changes we made to the course in an online, predominantly asynchronous, mode.

3. Redesigning the Course: Our Theoretical Underpinnings and Praxis-Based Resources

3.1. Assessment for learning as a social practice

This assessment course has been informed by a view of assessment as a social activity that considers the cultural, economic, and political contexts in which

1 Dr Carola Steinberg, Ms Bronwen Wilson Thompson, Dr Preya Pillay, and Dr Tanya Bekker.
2 Dison in her capacity as Assistant Dean: Teaching and Learning, and both Dison and Hewlett as part of teaching and learning committees.

it operates (Gipps, 1999). We have challenged the dominance of standardised testing within schools and promote the principles of the Assessment for Learning movement that emerged in the late 1990s. From this perspective, assessment is used to help learners to progress as part of the learning process rather than only satisfying the demands of accountability (Carless, 2015). Formative processes including feedback have been effective in shifting the role of assessment away from something being done to students by teachers, to assessment as a collective activity (Winstone & Boud, 2019).

In shifting to an ERT course we built on the broad principles of constructive alignment that underpinned the face-to-face course. We outline the key theoretical concepts of these underpinning ideas in the next section and then go on to explain course and activity design in the transition to online delivery.

3.2. Constructive alignment

The principle of balancing appropriate learning and how this is translated into support and intellectual challenge to accommodate the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, has underpinned our approach to designing an aligned system of teaching, course design, and assessment. The premise that underpins our use and understanding of "alignment", is that without a clear connection or alignment between what we want students to know and be able to do by the end of the course (the outcomes or curriculum objectives) and the teaching methods and assessment tasks that are used to reach this goal, learning and epistemological access is compromised for many learners. In using constructive alignment, we draw particularly on the early work of Biggs (1996, 1999) prior to its "claiming" and "repurposing" as an audit and quality assurance tool for teachers to demonstrate alignment in defending their outcomes-based education courses (Loughlin et al., 2021). In its early usage in higher education, constructive alignment was strongly focused on designing appropriate activities to promote optimal learning and it is in this sense that we use it in informing the design of learning tasks and activities that are aligned to overall course objectives and assessment tasks and criteria.

3.3. Approaches to writing and reading

As with many face-to-face undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in higher education, the entrance to the "goods" of higher education is predominantly through engagement with written texts and displays of academic literacy are mainly through essayist writing. Drawing on our disciplinary exposures to applied linguistics, approaches to teaching writing (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993) and debates about academic literacies (Street, 1994) we take an understanding of academic reading and writing as involving specific cultural and social practices rather than being exclusively individual and cognitive (Lea, 2017). This informs thinking about students as novices when they start to engage with academic discourses in disciplines and disciplinary fields (Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006) and as academic literacy best being approached by being contextualised in disciplinary practices rather than teaching reading, writing, and language skills in discrete ways.

These broad debates about academic literacies and writing provided a frame for the development of this curriculum and the pedagogic approaches we employed, particularly in relation to how we embedded writing in the tutorial tasks, what we selected to focus on and highlight in the texts we prescribed, what we prioritised in giving feedback on written work, and how we approached the demands of different written genres such as descriptions and reflections. From these perspectives, we addressed the obstacles to epistemological access by finding ways of closing the gap between student and lecturer expectations of what constitutes understanding of texts and appropriate demonstration of that understanding in writing, illustrated in the examples below. We argue that the emphasis on writing for learning throughout the course strengthened students' understanding of the course concepts and developed their assessment literacy.

3.4. Transformative learning

As one of the foundational theories of adult learning (Merriam, 2017), transformative learning considers and informs approaches to learning that focus on the individual growth or development (learning) that emerges from reflecting on experience. In Mezirow's (2000) conception of individual development, it is through questioning and unsettling the assumptions and values that make up the filter or lens that adult learners use to make sense of experiences. The goal of this reflexive process is the development of more independent and critical thinking. Having adopted this approach while working with adults in formal and informal education, we drew on the possibilities afforded for enabling students to interrogate significant critical incidents and to make new meanings from different perspectives.

3.5. Critical reflective practice

We have consistently foregrounded the principle of critical reflective practice as a key thread in our pedagogical approach. Drawing on reflection scholars (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Ashwin et al., 2015) the fundamental goal of instilling critical reflective practice needs to be consciously and explicitly integrated into the course pedagogy and assessment. We have encouraged the team of lecturers and tutors in weekly planning sessions to think more deeply about what we are trying to achieve, how our course is designed and what assumptions and values underpin our thinking about assessment and transformative learning. As discussed by Mavroudi and Papanikolaou (2022), the transition to online teaching was stressful for tutors' self-efficacy and capacity to engage meaningfully with students. They required further opportunities to explore ways of enhancing their online communication with students and to understand online pedagogical strategies.

After outlining the context and the course in the next section we explain how we drew on these intellectual traditions and theoretical framings to inform the specific strategies we used to make changes to the course and the learning materials. We focus on the enduring principles of explicitness, going "meta" (promoting reflective thinking) and feedback that allowed us to facilitate the social aspect of teaching and learning during ERT and that will enable us to work in new learning spaces beyond the pandemic.

4. The Context and the Course

The course on *Assessment* to which we refer is one module (seven weeks) of a full year-long course, the other components being *Curriculum* and *Pedagogy.* This course aims to introduce students to some of the key concepts for understanding assessment and to distinguish between assessment **for** learning and the more globally dominant theoretical tradition of assessment **of** learning (Carless, 2015). It examines using assessment tasks for assessing outcomes and for helping to promote and improve learning. What makes this particular course interesting is that it aims to introduce students to the purposes and forms of assessment and also has to assess their progress i.e., perform the "double duty" (Boud & Falchikov, 2007) of assessment as both measurement and as learning oriented. At the same time, there is pressure on the lecturers and tutors to model pedagogically sound assessment practices that develop students' capacity for evaluative judgment (Carless, 2015).

The course has run in contact mode following the structure of an "anchoring" weekly lecture for the whole cohort of 500 students, (1) designed and delivered by the full-time lecturers (2) with accompanying tutorial tasks provided in a consolidated booklet. The large numbers in the cohort means tutorial classes are large (50) and are mostly taught by postgraduate student tutors (10) with limited experience. These numbers and staffing remained the same for ERT.

The assessment structure and tasks before and during ERT (2020 and 2021) are briefly summarised in Table 7.1. The shifts will be unpacked later in the chapter.

Assessment tasks	Before ERT	ERT Year 1 (2020)	ERT Year 2 (2021)	Nature of feedback on assessment task
Coursework task 1 (formative and graded)	Description of an assessment critical incident (about assessment) observed during workplace Teaching Experience while in a school.	As per *Before ERT*	Description of an assessment critical incident experienced during Senior Phase when in school (students had no in school practical during the previous year under COVID conditions).	Individual feedback comments with rubric. Generic, formative feedback to whole group based on patterns in student submissions. Feedback aimed at enabling students to write a better description that would form part of the exam/take home assessment.

Assessment tasks	Before ERT	ERT Year 1 (2020)	ERT Year 2 (2021)	Nature of feedback on assessment task
Coursework task 2 (formative and graded)	6 x tutorial tasks. Completed and submitted as a small group portfolio.	4 x tutorial tasks. Completed and submitted individually. Short non graded tasks submitted for individual feedback.	Class test based on tutorial tasks 1-4. MCQ, short answer and paragraph questions. Limited time to complete from start time.	Generic written and oral feedback based on common patterns
Optional task for individual, formative feedback	N/A	Short non-graded tasks submitted for individual feedback.	N/A	Feedback to individuals and generic feedback to all who submitted.
Examination/ Take home assessment (summative and graded)	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 (F2F exam).	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 – submitted assignment – 6 days to complete and submit.	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 – submitted assignment – 6 days to complete and submit.	No feedback unless queried/ disputed marks. Marking rubric given to students prior to submission.

Table 7.1: *Summary of Assessment tasks before and during ERT (Authors' generated summary of the course)*

In the first year of ERT delivery (April 2020) we were faced with two weeks to prepare the online course for a large class of students distributed around the country with limited connectivity, difficulties in accessing sufficient data, ongoing power outages, and variable access to laptops/computers or tablets (many were relying solely on smartphones). In the second year more students had access to laptops/tablets, but the connectivity, data, power, and distance issues remained. In 2020, lectures were asynchronous pre-recorded videos but uploaded at the same times as scheduled lectures would have taken place to try and reinforce the stability provided by familiar sequencing and pacing. Revised tutorial tasks on the Learning Management System were redesigned to be completed individually and discussion forums replaced face-to-face tutorials (we tried both synchronous and asynchronous delivery). Examinations shifted from face-to-face to a take-home assessment with six days to complete and submit online.

5. Key Shifts in the Course Materials and Methods

In line with our understanding of constructive alignment, we questioned our processes of selecting and designing materials and assessment tasks to inform our reflection on how to change the course in light of a changed mode of delivery. Working with these broad considerations we focused on prioritising only the most key concepts, reducing the scope and number of tutorial tasks and improving the scaffolding of assessment tasks. Drawing on the intellectual traditions we outlined previously and how we operationalised them through principles of explicitness, going meta and attention to feedback, we use examples from the revised course to illustrate and justify some of the learning-focused changes we made.

5.1. Explicitness

Our understanding of explicitness in relation to this course draws on Bernstein's conceptualisation (Bernstein, 1977) of visible pedagogies and how their use presents difficulties for students who struggle to decode or recognise the expectations and implicit rules for performance encoded in the pedagogy and realised through assessment demands. In Bernstein's work, invisible pedagogic practices make it particularly difficult for some students "to be able to 'see' what is being asked of them" (Barrett & McPhail, 2021, p. 2). We draw this insight together with insights from genre theory to inform our approach to making more explicit the features of texts (both written and oral, such as lectures), their organisation and expectations for, and in, academic writing. We realised that this "visibility" became even more important when working online where the presence of the tutors as mediators of texts and expectations in face-to-face modes were not able to be replaced in the synchronous or asynchronous online discussions. We discuss how we approached this explicitness in relation to lectures and in the main, written assessment task.

5.1.1. Explicitness in asynchronous lectures

There is considerable debate about the role, relevance, and value of the lecture (French & Kennedy, 2017) and the changed purpose of the lecture in post-ERT modes of delivery (Brodie et al., 2022). Before COVID-19, face-to-face mode lectures were one activity in a course with greater attention given to careful design and scaffolding of accompanying tutorial activities and assessment tasks. During ERT, we strengthened the lecture as[3] the central organising device of the course for several reasons. In recognition of the disruption characterising many students' lives and their lack of preparedness for online learning, the pre-recorded narrated online lecture[4] provided a "familiar" structure to the week, and an opportunity for modelling how to work in intertextual ways with the readings, tutorial tasks and the key content. The final course lecture exemplifies this approach where tutors and lecturers critically analysed key components and concepts of the course under the imposed constraints at the time. In so doing we demonstrated reflective

3 With ongoing guidance from online/ blended learning specialists on how to develop interactive PowerPoint slides.

4 Low resolution videos of voiceovers with minimalist PowerPoint slides due to student download and data constraints.

and critical engagement with assessment practices and an "assessment literate" approach expected of students in the final take-home assessment task.

The need for greater explicitness in a context of reduced interactions with students resulted in the creation of shorter and more directive lectures that dealt with only the key concepts and theories. The lecture established both cognitive and social presence (Garrison et al., 1999) – a sympathetic and welcoming voice, reassurance and "holding of anxiety" that others have also argued was important in the rapid transition to ERT (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021).

In contrast to the preference for "chunked" short instructional videos evident in instructional design advice, we saw the value of using the lecture to demonstrate the building of a sustained argument – modelling the behaviour we expect in longer assignments. Without being able to take "live" questions from students, interaction was structured dialogically within the lecture through reflective questions and providing prompts for discussion in tutorials (synchronous and asynchronous). In doing so we drew on strategies we had developed when writing distance education materials from a design perspective (Mavroudi & Papanikolaou, 2022). This experience allowed us to pre-empt conceptual misunderstandings and reading difficulties through explicit modelling of interactive reading and writing practices. Engagement with the readings became even more important than in face-to-face mode as this is where the key course content was located.

These changes in our approach to lecturing left us with a stronger awareness of interrogating the purpose and value of the lecture rather than the business-as-usual, face-to-face lecturing. In particular it heightened our focus on careful selection, pacing, and scaffolding as well as explicitness in instructions and the development of a structured learning path through a series of lectures.

5.1.2. Explicitness in critical incident task to promote transformative learning through reflection

The assignment below enabled students to reflect on their acquisition of assessment literacy in relation to a key critical incident on assessment practices at school. Students were required to describe the critical incident that they would later analyse and reflect on (see Figure 7.1) after getting feedback on the first part. In the instructions we explicitly modelled the criteria for selecting a generative, critical incident; for writing a description and the beginnings of moving into reflecting (that were taken further in the second, main part of the assignment). We demonstrated the importance of appropriate scaffolding to develop the capacity to analyse the incident using a theoretical and critical lens.

When reconfigured for ERT delivery we drew on genre theory (Hyland, 2004) more explicitly to distinguish between descriptive, analytical, and reflective genres, their intentions, and their features. The first step was for students to describe a critical incident that they would later analyse and reflect on (see Figure 7.1) and examine it carefully by being guided through a set of steps moving from a descriptive genre

to an analytic genre through to a critical reflection. Our experience of developing critical reflective practice is that it needs to be explicitly integrated into the course pedagogy and assessment, as students at this level are not always proficient at "doing reflection" and tend to conflate description and analysis. It became even more important to communicate and convey expectations clearly in an online mode. This task was incorporated into the final take-home assessment to validate reflective practice and to give students a powerful entry point into theoretical work (Brookfield, 1995).

Course assignment 1: Describing a critical incident related to assessment
Think about a learning experience when you were in High School, related to assessment, which was a significant turning point or change in your life. This turning point could be a change in the way you think, feel or act (or all three). It could be a positive or negative experience, but not neutral. In other words, the incident must have some personal meaning or significance to you.

Write a page to one and a half pages (*no more*) describing the incident.

Include in your description what actually happened, who was involved, and the setting or context. What was your immediate emotional or physical response? What did you learn from the incident?

You do not need to refer to prescribed readings at this stage as this is a personal reflection that will form the foundation of further discussion later. In the discussion you may explain your concerns but at this point you must focus on a clear description rather than making a judgement about what you observed.

Here are some questions to guide your thinking. Do not simply answer the question in point form but use them to think deeply about the assessment. They may not all apply to the incident that you are describing.

1. What was the context of the assessment? E.g., which subject or level, was the work done in class or at home, who was involved, etc.
2. What was the major purpose of the assessment?
3. Was it a good or poor assessment?
4. Did the incident have anything to do with:
   - Communication
   - Marking,
   - Feedback
   - Promotion (to the next grade, or class or level)?
5. As a teacher in training why is incident important/significant for you now? Why is it `critical' in the sense that it makes you think?
6. Has the incident changed the way you see assessment?

Figure 7.1: *Part 1 of reflective task*

5.2. Going meta – promoting reflective thinking

In this course, we have always favoured more authentic activities which allow for student engagement during assessment, and the involvement of teachers in the assessment process. An important assessment principle (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007) is that assessment should encourage metacognition and promote thinking about the learning process and the learning outcomes. Many of the tutorial tasks

have required critical reflection to develop in students a second order of thinking through a variety of self-awareness and self-questioning strategies. A Tutorial Task (Figure 7.2) required students to analyse their own question design by using the revised Bloom's hierarchy of learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001) which they had worked on the previous week. This strategy took students through the process of developing assessment questions and evaluating their effectiveness, preferably with others. As this was challenging to achieve under lockdown conditions, students were referred to a support guideline developed during this time to assist them with giving and receiving feedback on their task design.

Self-Analysis of assessment task (see document Guidelines on how to work with giving and receiving feedback).

1. What level of the taxonomy table does this task fall under?
2. Do you think the learners will understand what is expected of them in the question, i.e., is it clearly expressed? Please explain by referring to the taxonomy.
3. If it is possible, you can ask someone in your group for some feedback on your question and include their feedback here.

How would you re-design the question? Explain these changes by referring to the material on assessment criteria.

Figure 7.2: *Tutorial task*

The online materials strengthened this reflective element as in some cases it was the only way of providing opportunities for students to assess their own understandings. As the isolation worsened for students, we introduced additional free-writing activities that required them to articulate their experiences of receiving feedback as university students before connecting these ideas to those in the theory on effective feedback principles and practices. Figure 7.3 provides an example of such a task.

Free write [max 200 words]

Share your experiences of receiving formative assessment feedback as students at the School of Education.

a) Identify 2 positive experiences of feedback and explain what made them positive.
b) Identify 2 negative experiences of feedback and explain what made them negative.

Figure 7.3: *Tutorial task*

We emphasised the importance of self-regulation for improving the quality of understanding and written work. As mentioned above, students were constantly reminded of the value of assessment criteria in making explicit how they would be assessed.

5.3. Attention to feedback

A key approach to developing criticality and the capacity to self-regulate is dialogic feedback (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Our intention was for online feedback to play a strongly formative role and for the course to model many of the

core feedback principles in achieving student success. Amongst these is Hattie's feedback loop (2012) which focuses on how students are approaching the activity, the processes they used to achieve the task and their self-evaluation of the task as well as the distinction between descriptive and evaluative feedback. A key text was Brookhart's (2008) framework for giving effective feedback to students. There was a strong emphasis on applying these frameworks to case studies presented to students in the tutorial materials as in Figure 7.4 below.

Effective feedback practices
Use the criteria for good quality feedback as presented by Brookhart (2008) on page 6 to:
a) Analyse the quality of the feedback given below by the teacher Tim.
b) Discuss one good aspect of the feedback and one bad aspect of the feedback given by
the teacher in relation to Brookhart's framework.

[max 200 words]

Figure 7.4: *Tutorial task*

Our ultimate goal was for students to become more adept and confident in making informed judgments about their own and others' work. After students were exposed to the principles used to formulate sound assessment criteria and design rubrics (e.g., Biggs's (1999) SOLO taxonomy), they were required to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of rubrics for providing explicit criteria for evaluation and for assessing a student's piece of writing. The questions modelled a framework for them to reflect critically on the affordances and limitations of the rubrics for enhancing student understanding. Figure 7.5 provides an example of such a task.

The differences between the three rubrics (mark memos):
Analyse the three rubrics by answering the following questions. There is no one correct answer – you need to justify your answers.
a) Compare your marks using the three rubrics. Which version of the criteria gave higher marks? Why do you think that happened? [max 200 words]
b) Which version describes the range of ability within each criterion? [max 200 words]
c) What does the weighting of marks tell you about which criteria are more highly valued than others for each version? [max 200 words]
d) Which version do you think is the best? Give reasons for your answer, e.g., consider about how the range of ability is assessed. [max 200 words]

Figure 7.5: *Tutorial task*

This process-oriented approach is underpinned by a sociocultural view and requires the design and integration of student dialogue into feedback. This was a limitation of the course because of the reduced capacity for training of tutors (who would be giving formative feedback online) and some of the practical obstacles in creating dialogue involving interaction between students and tutors, students and students, and students and the content (Mavroudi & Papanikolaou, 2022). Students were invited to work with their peers but the feedback we received was

that less than half the class could do so. We introduced a self-reflective activity (Figure 7.6) for students to submit alongside their final take-home assessment to give them an opportunity to consider their strengths and areas for development (interaction between students and content).

- What do you think the best aspect of this take-home assessment is?
- What (if anything) did you struggle with in this assessment?
- What would you expect your mark to be for this assessment?
- What do you think might have helped you to get a higher mark?
- If you'd had another two hours, what might you have improved?

Figure 7.6: *Self-reflective task that forms part of the final course assessment*

Despite the limited opportunities to evaluate the impact of our pedagogical shifts in the course during COVID-19, we could ascertain that the online tutorial materials succeeded in eliciting some high-level reflective and analytical responses by students in the final assessment task in 2020 and 2021. This was encouraging given the absence of face-to-face activities for enhancing the quality of meaningful conversations and developing language to discuss assessment issues with peers and tutors. The positive outcome however suggests that the sequential and scaffolded activities described above resulted in academic and professional growth for most students who were able to connect to Wi-Fi and who had functioning devices for participating in the course in an online mode of delivery.

7. Critically Reflecting on Change: Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

The sudden transition to ERT forced us to interrogate our teaching approaches and practices and the principles and assumptions that guided our course design and delivery as we did what we could do best under those conditions. This chapter is an attempt not to lose some of the learning and assessment gains and to demonstrate and argue for the principles that should underpin technology-enhanced learning. We argue that our approach, built on solid theories of learning and teaching, has the potential to enable transformative learning experiences for students in virtual and real contexts. Weller (2016) proposes that we need to "think critically about how we prepare and scaffold these activities, both technically and socially, in ways that ensure students are participating in constructive, challenging, and productive learning experiences" (p.179).

It is evident from this self-analysis of our changing materials and methods that we will continue to use many of the metacognitive, dialogic, and explicit strategies described above to engage with students. Our reflections on the process and learning outcomes of the learning materials in an online mode have shed light on possibilities for expanding our repertoire of in-person and online teaching resources within a blended learning approach. This approach involves blending traditional face-to-face teaching/tutorials and synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning. Decisions are based on learning affordances about which

elements of the course should remain online and which can move in and out of contact mode. Although we have argued that our assessment for learning purposes enabled greater flexibility in line with our changed practices, we have identified many constraints, especially in relation to dialogic and collaborative group activities. Some activities like tutorials and seminars also work better face-to-face because of extended dialogic peer and group learning. Contact amongst peers and between peers and tutors will be re-introduced as part of the blended learning approach adopted by the university going forward. We have also concluded that re-formulated interactive and narrated lectures work better online as students have more time to engage actively with the slides and supplementary material.

The shifts emphasised in this chapter are also part of the move towards authentic assessment principles adopted during ERT as they represent the way information is synthesised and applied in real-life situations and encourage the development of evaluative judgment.

In our attempt to retain the benefits of the strategies used during COVID-19, we have identified a few key practices that need to be refined and bolstered within the parameters of a blended learning philosophy.

Firstly, we need to find ways to support independent study and interaction by engaging students in collaborative tasks, asynchronously and synchronously online. This requires substantial effort on our part to create a more effective online social presence and to include a range of modes for assessment that encourage students to engage with ideas from their peers, the lecture material, and the readings. We support Laurillard's (2002) contention that it is more effective to use online spaces to facilitate conversations and high-quality learning. She argues that students can develop and integrate complex concepts and practices through different types of learning (acquisition, inquiry, discussion, collaboration, practice, and production).

Secondly, we need to strengthen dialogical processes of feedback, even with large classes of undergraduate students. As mentioned previously, the purpose of freewriting activities was to guide students through various thinking processes and expression of ideas without focusing on error correction. Students were seen to participate in the feedback process itself rather than being on the receiving end of a one-way transmission of ideas. Winstone and Carless (2020, p. 25) make a strong case for developing a deeper understanding of students' "sensemaking" of feedback both for knowledge and process improvement purposes or as a "learning device in its own right". The challenge of developing feedback literacy in students who are future teachers requires an in depth understanding of feedback (on knowing **how** their understanding is developing) and feedback **for knowing** (further developing their knowledge and skills) (ibid, 26). This necessitates the explicit design of feedback literacy within the curriculum and legitimising peer feedback as a common practice. The implications for the development of lecturers and course tutors is a priority if we wish to develop sustainable self-regulating practices.

Thirdly, we realised that in large courses which rely almost entirely on tutors as mediators of both the course content and the online experience, explicitness, and communication with tutors was as important as with students. Prioritising ongoing education and training of constantly changing (annually) teams of tutors who mediate the course in terms of the educational principles and practices underpinning the course is key. While this was the case in face-to-face modes the ERT experience highlighted how important constant communication, explicitness about objectives across the course, methodologies, assessment rationales, and key messaging about content were and how this needs to be built in explicitly as an aspect of course planning, design, and delivery. While the role of the e-tutor is similar in some ways to the face-to-face tutor, ongoing professional development is also needed to engage with the Learning Platform and needs of the students (Goold et al., 2010) as well as the common teaching skills that are needed for both face-to-face and online modes of delivery.

7.1. Allowing for the affordances of online learning

How we were able to respond under extraordinary circumstances to produce something that worked under ERT conditions should not be conflated with the time and process needed to develop *quality* offerings for better use of blended and online modes of delivery. We worked with a course that was strongly informed by educational and design principles. The technology cannot be assumed to be the driver for developing better courses either designed for, or adjusted during, ERT conditions. Arguments for the primacy of the educational rationale over technology are not new (see Salomon, 2016 for example). Similarly, we argue that for quality blended courses, educational theory might enable future transitions in a re-imagined higher education future to enhance learning experiences for all students. In addition, in paying greater attention to the research that is now being published on diverse student experiences during ERT in South Africa and elsewhere (e.g., Cranfield, 2021; Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Marquard et al., 2020) we need more attention to the student experience in designing for blended learning within the constraints in a South African context of unreliable power supply, limited access to data, fiscal and educational instability, and inequitable student access. How we find productive ways of working within this may come to define the nature of our re-imagined higher education future.

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CHAPTER 8

SOUND MATTERS: PODCASTING AS A LEARNING AND TEACHING INTERVENTION TO ENHANCE READING AND WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract

In this chapter, a group of student-researchers and their lecturer discuss their findings relating to a podcasting intervention which took place in an Ethnomusicology third- and fourth-year class at Rhodes University in Makhanda, Eastern Cape, South Africa. As part of a larger project, in which the class explored podcasting in general, they experimented with the medium in order to ascertain in what role it could be used as a learning and teaching aid in tertiary pedagogy. Audio recordings of the lecturer discussing journal articles relating to the module were sent to students. They listened to and used them in different scenarios, orchestrated to research their effectiveness in diverse learning and teaching situations. Using a qualitative case study research design methodology, the student researchers and their lecturer present these findings through a participatory lens. They analyse the podcasts' efficacy and limitations from various perspectives through coding responses. Finally, they discuss future usage of the medium as a way to enhance students' understanding of academic readings.

Keywords: case study; ethnomusicology; learning and teaching; literacy intervention; podcasting

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1. Introduction

Studies in Ethnomusicology are represented as much by words as they are by sound. In undergraduate teaching of this subject, therefore, it is imperative that each student understands the value of the written word and how to use academic language which interprets the relationships between humans and musical output. As universities in South Africa see students from various backgrounds enter tertiary education, ensuring that courses empower all students with adequate and equal literacy skills is vital. The use of podcasting may seem inappropriate because this medium utilises only sound to share knowledge, stories, music, and more, however, as stated above, in the field of study through which this empirical research was produced, sound and writing are valued equally. Therefore, the study approached the development of academic language in this course using podcasts.

In this chapter student researchers and their lecturer describe a learning and teaching intervention where they used a sonic or sound-based approach, in this case podcasts, to assist in cultivating a nuanced approach for reading and understanding academic articles relating to Ethnomusicology themes. Although there are several studies on language development (Abdi & Makiabadi, 2019; Edirisingha et al., 2007; Nikolou & Darra, 2018) and listening skills expansion (Davydenko, 2021; Gonulal, 2020; Mirza Suzani, 2021) through podcasting, this intervention was aimed at developing specific academic literacy rather than general language skills. Podcasts play an important role in content dissemination and knowledge production at Rhodes University, and specifically at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) where the goals of the institute include community engagement and community–based education. Lecturers and students at ILAM believe that podcasts can link the knowledge the archive holds and collects, to the communities from which it comes in a more efficient and accessible manner. Therefore, in undergraduate and Honours classes, ILAM teaches students to produce their own podcasts with the intention of disseminating their academic knowledge and output in a sonic manner, along with their written work. At this stage, ILAM produces two podcast series with an educational theme. These include *African Music Activists*, a series which focuses on African music pedagogues who have changed the path of African music education on the continent, and *Afroloops*, an educational podcast aimed at high school learners which introduces African instruments (all the students in this intervention were part of this series).

While producing *Afroloops* in 2021, the students and lecturer in the Ethnomusicology class decided to experiment with using podcasts as an educational tool to assist with the development of reading and writing skills. They took guidance and analysed results from other researchers on the effective integration of podcasting in learning and teaching (Pachagadu & Nel, 2016; Saxena, 2013; Van Zanten et al., 2012). This research speaks to the importance of technology in education while Pachagadu and Nel (2016) list podcasts as being beneficial specifically as audio archives for lectures and supplementary course materials. This was an important point for this team of researchers because archival materials at ILAM are considered

living, breathing, and interactive resources that open opportunities for students to co-create new knowledge. These articles and the results of the intervention were so insightful that it spurred the team on to interrogate their research further. As a research team, they met weekly to co-produce a conference presentation, thus creating new opportunities to use the very skills that the intervention was developing. Using a qualitative case study methodology and thereafter coding the reflections, they found that integrating podcasts to enhance academic reading skills was not only effective but that it was a tool that could be used to augment analytical writing and reading skills in tertiary education in general. The final result, the co-writing of this chapter by the student researchers and the lecturer, shows that the use of technology and a novel approach to improving writing skills can have impactful results.

2. Contextualisation

Swiatek (2018) writes, "Podcasts are a means of communication that generate a sense of intimacy among listeners who are physically separate from each other, thus enabling boundaries of knowledge and context to be crossed". This definition proved to be the closest to the student-researchers' experience of the medium. However, starting with analysing several articles where podcast interventions were explored (Besser et al., 2021; Reyna et al., 2018), they jointly defined podcasts as audio files that can be downloaded and played on digital audio players which can be used to disseminate a variety of sonic outputs. The word podcast can refer to either the content, or the technique of distribution, and the latter is also known as podcasting (Jham et al., 2008). Podcasting is a term that combines the words iPod and broadcasting, and the word Podcast was named the 2005 word of the year, defining it as "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or comparable program made available on the internet for download to a personal audio player" (Johnson & Grayden, 2006). Podcasts also have the advantage of being a push or subscription technology, rather than a pull technology. This means that rather than requiring the listener, or in this case the student, to seek out and download the content, it is sent straight from the original source or internet location to the portable device. This ease of technology is a driving factor in podcast popularity, where a listener's time spent searching for, locating, and retrieving material, is considerably reduced. While downloading podcasts to a portable device provides the greatest benefit, they can also be listened to on a computer, making them an excellent tool for listeners without mobile devices (Evans, 2008). In addition, the medium has opportunities to be accessed safely and comfortably because of relatively small bandwidth requirements (Zellatifanny, 2020). Statistics on podcast listening in Southern Africa are vastly different from those in the Global North where Apple estimated over 2 million active podcasting shows with more than 48 million series and over 50 billion episodes were downloaded and streamed in 2019 (Winn, 2021). The challenges and barriers to podcasting in Africa are both technological and educational. Weak mobile and internet access, though increasing, stifles the ability of the industry to flourish since internet strength is not as robust as it could

be. In addition, the large amount of data consumed by podcast listening presents a problem as the field attempts to develop as an emerging media on the continent. Though popular podcasts on media platforms where many listeners consume podcasts are in English, in Africa, where it is estimated that there are at least 1500 languages, podcasts are produced in various languages, and this substantially limits potential listenership expansion (Fox & Karianjahi, 2021).

Nevertheless, students, as personally experienced by the researchers, are more mobile than ever. They are frequently multitasking, working part-time jobs, or on professional practice placement at a distance from their institutions, and as a result, having access to knowledge without being tied to a specific physical location is appealing. Therefore, the number of educational podcasts such as recordings of lectures, interviews, and academic readings is rapidly growing (Palmer & Devitt, 2007). Student-created podcasts have been shown to improve reading, writing, and listening skills (Smythe & Neufeld, 2010) and stimulate engagement and collaboration which lead to gains in literacy development (Morgan, 2015). According to Vandenberg (2018), podcasting aids students in learning to use storytelling techniques that feature the importance of logical and coherent thinking. Storytelling is an important technique for the learning and teaching of language as well as a vehicle for cultural transmission (Barrett & Cocq, 2019). Additionally, incorporating either audio or video podcasts allows for a greater ability to personalise and accommodate learners (O'Bannon et al., 2011). One of the most obvious uses for podcasts in higher education is the recording of lectures: academic staff record lectures and disseminate them as an audio podcast on the internet, complete with visuals from other applications like Microsoft Word or PowerPoint. In this way, podcasts offer students opportunities to revisit classroom content while providing greater critical thinking opportunities (Evans, 2008; Shumack & Gilchrist, 2009). Thus, the delivery of podcasting must be refined to suit the needs of the specific class.

Older methods of disseminating educational audio materials via compact disc (CD), video or digital versatile disc (DVD) are costly and limited, but the internet has lowered these costs, allowing specialists in their field to distribute audio-visual material to anybody with an internet connection at a minimal cost. The push technology explained before has significantly reduced technological hurdles for students with access to computers and smartphones (Jham et al., 2008). This is done through Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology which automates the downloading of podcasts by pushing through new audio samples to the listener's subscribed streaming format as soon as they are uploaded (Cold, 2006).

As highlighted before, the student-researchers and lecturer experienced this technology first-hand when they developed new episodes for their educational series *Afroloops*. While recording those podcasts and researching the efficacy of the medium as a learning and teaching tool, the team decided to test the research presented which resulted in the intervention.

3. Approach

To examine the effectiveness of podcasting for higher education, the Ethnomusicology class, composed of third-year and fourth-year students, participated in a pilot study where the lecturer made a podcast for two of their weekly article readings. There was a total of six participants (five students and one lecturer) involved in this study, all of whom were part of the Ethnomusicology course at Rhodes University from February until December 2021. Utilising a participatory approach, the students and the lecturer were involved as both researchers and participants in the project, analysing and writing about the findings together. Bergold and Thomas (2012) write, "The participatory research process enables co-researchers to step back cognitively from familiar routines, forms of interaction, and power relationships in order to fundamentally question and rethink established interpretations of situation" (p. 192). Thus, the student-researchers had the opportunity to experience the new learning and teaching intervention as well as analyse its efficacy, resulting in a holistic understanding encompassing every angle of the research. As the method of using podcasts was novel to the lecturer and students both parties had to negotiate the learning and teaching space from a new, collaborative perspective. According to Dillenbourg (1999, p. 1), collaborative learning involves "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together". The re-negotiation of this space took some compromise and real effort had to be made to create a sense of partnership between all the parties. Student-lecturer partnerships can be defined as "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation or analysis" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7). However, the reality is that power dynamics, agency and cultural norms can disrupt this relationship and undermine effective communication and collaboration (Collins et al., 2022; Seale et al., 2015). Despite trying hard to hand over final decision-making, the lecturer found that she had to take responsibility as a mediator and guide, and certain student-researchers found themselves in a more dominant position than others. This was not, however, a defining factor in the results and opportunities were created for each researcher's ideas to be heard and their research to be shared. The classroom became a boardroom, a negotiated space where creative ideas were put forward, some kept, and others discarded. As tasks were shared each member took on a specific section of the research which contributed to the final product.

The first practical task relating to the research intervention, was the production of the podcasts, which the lecturer recorded on her smartphone. The content was presented in a semi-structured manner, where the lecturer occasionally offered her opinion on certain aspects of the article, highlighting, or emphasising important sections, and explaining or contextualising the more difficult areas to understand. Each recording was approached differently to ascertain if the reading style made a difference to the listening experience. The first podcast was made by the lecturer without reading the article before the recording, which meant that she read through the whole article without a specific structure to the podcast. Her approach

was informal and included asides and passages where she was clarifying meaning for herself. In some sections, she rushed, and one could hear she was skimming the reading. For the second podcast, the lecturer read the article first before recording it, which allowed her to structure her presentation. In this second podcast, she did not read the whole article but focused on sections she felt were important for a deeper understanding of the content. The students then received the podcasts and listened to them utilising a particular approach, outlined below. The results were analysed by the student researchers themselves and this analysis became the focus of the research.

4. Objective and Methodology

The objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using podcasts as a learning and teaching intervention where academic language cognition was the focus. In addition, the study aimed to identify characteristics of an effective educational podcast from the perspective of students.

After consultation and group discussion, the research team decided that a qualitative case study was the most appropriate research design for the project. This was because our intention for this project was to gain a deep understanding of the unique nature of a particular context, setting, and participants. Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 544) state that the use of a qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their context. A definition of a case study is offered by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) who state that "in a case study, the researcher seeks to fully understand a phenomenon in depth, regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study" (p. 316). Thomas (2003) writes that a major advantage of using a case study design is that it "permits a researcher to reveal the way in which a number of different factors have interacted to produce the unique character of the subject of research" (p. 35). Baxter and Jack (2008) offer, in addition, that using such an approach allows close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, "while enabling participants to tell their stories and to share their experiences resulting in useful qualitative data that can then be analysed" (p. 545). The case study approach thus allowed the student-researchers the freedom to comment on their experiences as both recipients of knowledge in the intervention, but also as researchers and producers of new knowledge.

Although the case study, with only six participants, was small, the results were extremely insightful. The researchers, therefore, decided to formulate all the information and data collected into a research paper and presented the initial findings at the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) (Un)Conference 2021. This opportunity led to deeper analysis and discussion which enabled them to further understand the responses and develop the insights gained. As stated earlier, the population selected for this study was the five Ethnomusicology students enrolled for the course at Rhodes University, and their lecturer, who created and shared the educational podcasts. Although the

participants were not specifically selected for this study before it was conducted, they became central to the project in terms of providing first-hand experiences of the phenomenon being studied. The Ethnomusicology lecturer agreed to assist and guide the research and writing process and supervised the study. This required the lecturer to collaborate with the students and to incorporate podcasting into her teaching methods during the Ethnomusicology course. Both the students and lecturer had not used podcasting as a learning and teaching resource before and were thus equally positioned to respond to the data.

A qualitative survey was administered as one way to collect data, and each participant offered their perspectives and experiences on the effectiveness of using podcasts in an educational setting to supplement reading and learning. The feedback from each participant provided a general picture of how the students evaluated the use of podcasts to learn. Data was also collected through focus-group type discussions. The students had weekly meetings with their lecturer over the course of the study in which the participants involved discussed, analysed, and elaborated on the podcasting experience. These focus-group type discussions allowed the student researchers to explore multiple perspectives on the experience of listening to a podcast **before** reading an article, listening to a podcast **while** reading an article and listening to a podcast **after** reading the article. Each person was allowed to choose two of the three approaches. Finally, each participant gave feedback on their podcasting experience, which was recorded through reflective writing, a skill that the lecturer was working on as a curriculum goal. These reflections were important data for the research and were read out loud to the focus group and discussed in detail in class following each iteration of the intervention.

Using this kind of interview strategy allowed exploration of students' thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and feelings regarding podcasts and not just their behaviour (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). Furthermore, focus group discussions provided "a unique, socially enhanced platform that encourages students to share their ideas and disclose information regarding their learning experiences with podcasts that they may have forgotten" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 360). A shared Google Drive was created for the student researchers and the lecturer to allow for collaborative and interactive analysis of the data as well as for co-editing of the resulting research text and presentation.

To analyse the data, the students and lecturer used a coding strategy. Coding is the examination of distinct parts of data for differences and similarities (Miles et al., 2018) "to form explanations and comprehensive themes in the data" (Akinyode & Khan, 2018, p. 166). As Akinyode and Khan (2018) write, data coding in qualitative research involves labelling or assigning codes to different sections of data in relation to the different problems or topics. Therefore, once all the responses were saved into the shared Google Drive, the students were asked to read through all the data and code the collective responses using a set of questions provided by the lecturer. Upon reflection, colour codes were assigned to help participants who identify with visual analysis tools. The questions and colours included:

1. What are the common themes? – Blue
2. Which responses deemed the intervention helpful? – Green
3. Which responses were unique or different from the others? – Yellow
4. What recommendations were made? – Orange
5. What did respondents not want to do again/What did they say did not work? – Red

This helped the students categorise the responses of each participant into categories or themes so that the data could be easily organised and compared. Each participant was given a number from one to five so that the recorded responses for reporting purposes were anonymous. As the research was conducted by the researcher-participants, ethical risk was low, due process was followed and the student researchers discussed the risks involved in the study during the course of the intervention. In the shared Google Drive, a table was developed which allowed for the development of the analysis based on personal reflections and responses. These colour-coded reflections led to many lively discussions at weekly meetings about personal preferences regarding where, when, how, and why people learn the way they do. This was interesting as it highlights the importance of ensuring that students are given opportunities to experience learning in different ways. In these discussions, the student-researchers shared their initial thoughts and were then given instructions by the lecturer regarding the approach to the coding and analysis of the data, as outlined above. The coded responses were recorded and yielded the findings on the effectiveness of using podcasts for learning purposes in higher education as well as what each participant believed made an effective podcast.

5. Findings

A table was collectively developed which depicts the results of the analysis. Three vertical columns illustrate the listening approaches, while the horizontal columns portray which student-researcher the data comes from. The participants' two choices of the three different approaches to listening to the podcasts highlighted their distinct preferences of engagement with educational content. Students 1 and 3 decided to read the article first and then listen to the podcast later. These students also chose the third approach of reading and listening to the article simultaneously. Students 1 and 2 also chose the first approach (reading then listening). The other approach that Student 1 chose was to listen to the podcast then read the article afterwards. Student 4 chose to listen to the podcast and thereafter read the article in their first iteration and then later chose to read and listen to the article simultaneously. Student 5 only chose the first approach. The table below illustrates their choices regarding the approaches to listening to the two podcasts whilst also colour-coding the responses.

Helpful = [Green] Not Helpful = [Red] Recommendations = [Orange]
Similarities = [Blue] Differences = [Yellow]

Note: This table was originally designed in full colour, but it has been adapted to appear in greyscale for ease of access.

APPROACHES	READING, THEN LISTENING	LISTENING, THEN READING	LISTENING + READING SIMULTANEOUSLY
Student 1	• Reading before listening was helpful. [Green]. • Appreciation of "casual" tone of podcast. [Green]. • Tips on efficient article reading and analysis. [Green].	N/A	• Detailed analysis of podcasts helped clarify things. [Green] • Casual approach was fun and conversational. [Green]. • Academic nature of article was retained. [Green].
Student 2	• Reading before listening helped identify missed information. [Green] • Appreciation of "casual" tone. [Green]. • Podcast encouraged full engagement, time-efficient reading. [Green].	• Listening before reading made him "lazy" to read, decreasing the learning value and article engagement. [Red]. • Prefers podcasts as "supplementary learning materials". [Orange]. • Time-efficient. [Green].	N/A
Student 3	• Immersive and reassuring experience. [Green]. • Time-efficient reading. [Green]. • Reading first encouraged full engagement with article. [Green].	N/A	• Beneficial supplementary content. [Green]. • Natural absorption of article while listening. [Green]. • More personal experiences, conversational. [Green].
Student 4	N/A	• "Difficult to follow" without being able to note as she read. [Red]. • Audio was supplementary. [Green]. • Podcast should not replace written course work material. [Orange].	• Insightful experience. [Green]. • Better understanding and article engagement. [Green]. • Appreciation of guidelines for important and unimportant section. [Green]. • Time-efficient. [Green]. • Listening was more natural. [Green]. • Audio was supplementary. [Green].
Student 5	• Used podcasts as reflecting experience after reading. [Green]. • Helped identify information she had missed or misunderstood. [Green]. • Would be "more enjoyable" to listen to audios of readings before reading it herself. [Orange]. • Prefers shorter podcasts. [Red].	N/A	N/A

Table 8.1: *Tabulated responses (developed by authors)*

The five coding questions were answered by the five students in relation to the approaches they chose when listening to the two podcasts. Blue depicted the similarities in the responses of the students. Three overall similarities were noted by the students. The first similarity was that the two podcasts facilitated time-efficient engagement with the articles they read. The second similarity was that the second podcast, which was more detailed compared to the first, aided them in obtaining significant information that they had overlooked during the reading process. Student 1 affirmed this point by stating that the lecturer "went into detail on certain aspects of the article and that made things clearer and understandable". The third similarity that they picked up on was that the casual tone of the lecturer in both recordings made the podcasts seem personal as if they were having a conversation with the lecturer. Student 1 alluded to this saying, "What stood out to me was how casual she was when going through the article, it made me relax and it felt as though she was in the same place that I was in".

Green was used to colour code the responses that students viewed as helpful. The table shows how the majority of the responses from all the students were deemed this way; hence the colour green dominates the coding table. The students who initially read the article and listened to the podcast were mainly positive in their responses. Student 1 noted that they learnt tips on how to read efficiently while Students 2 and 5 both stated that reading before listening helped to identify missing information. Both Student 1 and 2 stated that this technique demonstrated a time-efficient reading of the article. Students 3 and 5 both commented that listening to the podcast allowed for a better reflection of, or engagement with, the content. There were also green-coded responses to the listening and then reading approach. Student 2 commented that, like the first approach, this was time-efficient while

Student 4 noted that the audio was supplementary. We assume this student meant that it was positive and helpful. The final approach was only coded in green, thus showing that the students were most positive about this method which was reading and listening simultaneously. All three students who used this approach said that the experience was "natural", "personal" or "conversational". It must be noted that the podcast in each of these cases was presented by the lecturer after she had read the article and had the opportunity to plan the reading. Nevertheless, the students all stated that their engagement with the article was amplified in some way or another. Student 1 wrote, "The detailed analysis in the podcast helped clarify things", while Student 3 responded that there was a "natural absorption of the article while listening". Student 4 commented that they had an "appreciation for guidelines for important and unimportant sections". A complaint from students that often arises is that when they read academically dense articles, they find it difficult to understand what is most important and what is not. Having a lecturer point this out was therefore very important to the students and something that they felt guided their understanding of the content.

However, not all aspects of the interventions were considered helpful. The colour red was used to code not-helpful responses. Student 5 retorted to the first, unprepared reading where they used the first approach of reading and then listening that they, "Prefer shorter podcasts". In class discussions after the interventions, the participants all agreed that if a reading is very long, the podcasts need to summarise the content rather than "drone" out the full article. When Student 2 reflected on their experience of listening to the podcast and then reading the article later, they mentioned that it made them less interested in engaging with the article. The student said, "The second podcast where I hadn't read the article, it made me a bit lazy because it felt as though the work was done for me. So, I didn't learn as much from the article nor was I invested in it". Student 4 noted that listening to the podcast first, "...was difficult to follow because I wasn't able to note things down as I listened". Although these were the only negative comments that were recorded, they were very helpful as these points are vital to the development of successful podcasts as supplementary materials for courses in the future.

The colour yellow was used to code the responses that stood out as being different from the group or unique to an individual. Two participants had contrasting responses when reflecting on their experience of listening to the podcasts. Student 2, as noted above, wrote that listening before reading discouraged full engagement with the article, but Student 5 thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and remarked, "Through listening to the reflections recorded by the lecturer, I noticed that it would be more enjoyable for me to have audio of someone reading an article before reading it myself". This was another important point to note. Due to students having different approaches to learning, it is not possible to prescribe when or how the educational podcast should be used. However, it is important for the lecturer to provide guidance regarding how and when the podcast can be used. This will provide the listener with an understanding of their options.

The colour orange was used to code the recommendations that the student-researchers made about the whole podcasting experience. All the student-researchers recommended that podcasts be integrated in the learning process as an aid to the academic content. Student 4 stated that they "…found that the podcasts were beneficial when used to supplement learning but should not replace other learning methods" and Student 3 added "I personally prefer educational podcasts as supplementary learning material to aid me to have a better understanding of the article I'm reading or read."

The lecturer involved also stated that the experience had changed her thoughts on how to approach learning how to read academic articles. She wrote, "The podcasts were so easy to record and the results so immediate. I can't believe I haven't used this before". She continued that she used the recording of the podcast to prepare herself for the lectures and thus saved time in the process. Therefore, the resounding theme which was highlighted in the analysis of the reflections made by all the researchers was that the podcasts were a great aid to their learning and teaching experience. It helped the students engage with the academic content in a casual manner that did not diminish the academic significance of the articles. All the participants came to a consensus with regard to how they felt podcasts should be used in higher education institutions. They all stated that podcasts should not replace reading material, but that they could be used for many purposes including reviewing material, supplementary resources, and guidance for clarification.

6. Future Prospects

Lessons learnt through this research can be implemented in effective learning and teaching strategies for future face-to-face, online, and blended learning environments. The efficiency of podcasting can be utilised to target student-oriented information dissemination. Making study resources more accessible is vital and offering a way for students' education to fit around the rest of their lives is desirable. Thus, the fact that podcasts can be downloaded and listened to from students' smartphones while commuting or during a spare moment is very important. This means that students who do not have access to the internet all the time, and those whose private lives are busy, can use the resource. In addition, instead of having to return to campus when sick to catch up with work, students who are indisposed can use podcasts to remain up to date. The research shows that podcasts are also a novel way to introduce additional content after hours, thus freeing up valuable classroom time for more active learning and group discussions. Importantly, once a podcast is made, it is always available and thus can also become a valuable revision tool.

There is no perfect way to record a podcast or a set format that is considered better than another. This means that even simple recordings of lectures or, as in the case of this research a reading of an article, can also become valuable review material. Setting up a platform to disseminate podcasts is also very cost-efficient and easy. University open-source learning sites are perfect for this and, once uploaded by

the lecturer or tutor, will mean that students will not even have to pay for the data related to downloading.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to ascertain the effectiveness of educational podcasts as a learning and teaching tool to enhance academic writing and reading skills at tertiary level. In addition, the study aimed to identify characteristics of an effective educational podcast from a student perspective. The five Ethnomusicology students, under the guidance of their lecturer, used a qualitative case study research design followed by data coding to grasp how everyone was assisted by podcasting within their subject at the Music Department at Rhodes University. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that each student gained different benefits from the various approaches to the podcast intervention. The inclusion of podcasts, according to the results of the intervention, allows for time-efficient engagement with reading content since most of the students agreed that their use alongside reading material helped identify important information quickly. Podcasts are also beneficial because they promote casual engagement with academic content which leads to more confidence from students when tackling academic scripts, theses, and articles. The choice of when the podcasts were used differed from person to person. Certain students prefer listening to podcasts after reading an article, while others prefer reading and listening to the article at the same time. The study found that if podcasts are free-flowing and natural, they allow for a more relaxed listening experience, and all agreed that the shorter the podcast, the better the learning process. The research also showed that all the students needed the written article to fully grasp the content and that the listening materials should only be used as supplementary materials.

It was found, however, that preferences for podcast style and approach differ, as it may in different university departments and for different lecturers. Nevertheless, this study recommends that podcasts be implemented in university faculties and departments as a supplementary approach. This is because podcasts are a form of technology that students are comfortable with and are easy to produce and disseminate. In light of this, the researchers also concluded that a future study should be conducted where the student-researchers themselves record podcasts and share them with the class. This approach to co-learning has great potential.

Finally, this research further finds that podcasts could constitute a standard part of higher education learning and teaching approaches and become essential, supplementary learning materials that could aid effective learning at tertiary level by supporting face-to-face, blended, and online teaching. From the researchers' personal experiences and discussions, they all agreed that they would actively promote podcasting as an academic intervention and use this form of technology in their own learning and teaching practice. It can be an essential aspect of learning that should not be overlooked.

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CHAPTER 9

TOWARDS IMPROVING THE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

While poor postgraduate throughput, slow completion, and supervision capacity are areas of concern in South Africa, the nature and quality of the postgraduate researcher experience also deserve attention. Challenges in the postgraduate research environment impact negatively on both the success and well-being of postgraduate researchers. The radical changes to educational provision brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to the already dispiriting experiences of the many postgraduates who are isolated and disconnected from the university. In this chapter, the argument that research degrees should be seen as spaces for teaching and learning, not just research, is taken up, with the aim of improving postgraduate outcomes. Insights from research on postgraduate education are drawn on in order to propose changes to current practice in research degrees that could contribute to the quality of the postgraduate researchers' experience. Proposed changes include: adopting a comprehensive, long-term and systematic approach to researcher education, implementing more structured learning in research degrees, promoting community, and placing writing at the centre of a "curriculum" that is common to all research students.

Keywords: postgraduate researcher education; learning community; postgraduate researcher experience; research proposal; research writing

1. Introduction

While the problems of poor throughput, slow completion, and lack of supervision capacity in South African postgraduate education are widely acknowledged and discussed (CHE, 2022; Cloete et al., 2015), the nature and quality of the postgraduate researcher experience also deserve attention. Given that a third of all supervisor research respondents indicated that they did not give students sufficient attention (Cloete et al., 2016, p. 116), that doctoral provision is unequal across institutions and campuses (CHE, 2022, p. 16), and that there is a lack of support programmes for doctoral students (CHE, 2022, p. 72), it is safe to assume that the quality of the postgraduate students' experience is uneven. The increased reliance on online interaction, given impetus by the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in there being fewer opportunities for students to meet on campus to interact with other postgraduates (CHE, 2022, p. 20), and their being cut off and possibly even

alienated from the academy.

Awareness of the importance of wellness and mental health for postgraduate researchers, particularly PhD candidates, has grown significantly in recent years. In a scoping review of studies investigating the influence of the doctoral environment on mental health, Mackie and Bates (2019) analysed 26 articles from studies conducted in North America, Europe, and Australia, noting increasing calls to mitigate risks to postgraduates' mental health. Aside from financial insecurity and career uncertainty, the factors in the doctoral studies environment shown to impact doctoral candidates' mental health were: supervision, lack of transparency in university procedures, and "role conflict" regarding work or family responsibilities (Mackie & Bates, 2019, pp. 566-567).

It is possible that students in South Africa have even more wellness challenges than their counterparts in the developed world. Funding is scarce, resulting in a large proportion of the postgraduate population having to work to pay for their studies or to supplement limited research funding (CHE, 2022, p.68; Cloete et al., 2015). In addition, many students have extensive family responsibilities. Consequently, having six to eight full hours a day for research and writing with a fresh and focused mind is not a reality for a substantial proportion of South African postgraduates.

Fuelled particularly by external government funding, in the form of University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) grants (CHE, 2022, p. 21), which are dedicated to improving negative educational outcomes, universities are in the process of implementing strategies to address postgraduate researchers' challenges and developmental needs, but much more can be done to develop and support postgraduate researchers.

In South Africa, all levels of university education from Honours up are considered to fall into the category "postgraduate". However, only postgraduate **research** education is addressed in this chapter. While it is acknowledged that some of the concerns expressed here about postgraduate education are as relevant for honours and master's by coursework, these levels are excluded from the discussion. In the rest of this chapter, ideas about how to contribute to more positive student researcher outcomes and experiences are considered. Global trends in researcher development are explored, and promising theoretical strands are brought together in a proposal for more systematic researcher development.

Two distinct strands are identifiable in literature on improving postgraduate education. One strand focuses on supervision, and the other focuses on student researcher development. While it is acknowledged that supervision is an important area, only researcher education is considered in this chapter. Although most of the literature referred to in this chapter is focused on doctoral study contexts, the insights generated are generally relevant to master's by research only contexts too.

2. Global Trends and Themes in Postgraduate Researcher Education

The idea that once students are accepted for postgraduate study they already have the capacity to complete the programme is less prevalent than it was when scholars felt the need to debunk the myth of the "autonomous" scholar (Johnson, et al., 2000; Manathunga & Goozee, 2007). It is now widely recognised that student researchers need to learn during their candidature, and that they benefit greatly from initiatives that are designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they require. Two discourses are evident in the researcher development literature. One is a skills-development discourse, arising primarily from concerns about growing the economy, and the production of knowledge workers; the other is educational discourse that is grounded in concerns about the researcher experience and learning. Only the latter will be drawn on in the rest of the chapter.

There is a robust literature, dating back to the end of the previous century, that focuses on researcher education as a specialised form of pedagogy. Green and Lee observed that research tends to take precedence over teaching and learning, to the detriment of research education (Green & Lee, 1995). Boud and Lee (2005, p. 502) highlighted the tensions between research and teaching, and argued for "[s]ystematic attention to the space of research learning as pedagogical space" (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 504).

Given the competition between higher education institutions and the resultant pressure to increase research publications (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 88), it is likely that there is even more danger of research being privileged over teaching. Consequently, this chapter is aligned with the calls to consider postgraduate studies as a form of education that can benefit from the incorporation of insights from research on teaching and learning (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 503). Postgraduate education is not generally viewed as a context for teaching and learning, since it falls within the research domain, and (in most cases) is managed and staffed by academics who have no qualifications in education. This means that insufficient attention is paid to how postgraduate research students **learn** to do research, write about it, and interact with communities of scholars. The argument is that pedagogical ideas drawn from teaching and learning research could be incorporated into postgraduate programmes to improve the student experience.

In the next three sections, postgraduate well-being is considered, and scholarship with a broadly sociocultural theoretical framing is used to consider the role of community, and of writing in research education.

3. The Role of Emotion and Well-Being in Postgraduate Education

The affective turn in education has resulted in a growing recognition of the role of emotion in learning. The long-standing image of the rational detached scholar is slowly being eroded as it is acknowledged that postgraduate researchers are "emotionally engaged and socially embedded" (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016, p. 14). Indeed, the idea that affect may be just as important as cognition is gaining

traction. High expectations in the postgraduate environment can lead to self-sabotaging behaviours, such as overcommitment, perfectionism, procrastination, and lack of organisation or effort (Kearns et al., 2008, p. 80). Also, it has been recognised that the strong emotions experienced by students who are personally involved in the organisations or issues that they are researching can impact negatively on the research (Herman, 2008, p. 100).

Generally, a more holistic student-centred view of research students is taking hold around the concept of well-being (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). It is increasingly acknowledged that postgraduates are complex beings whose personal relationships, commitments, and motivations affect their ability to do research, and that attention to their well-being can have positive effects. Well-being is being explicitly linked to postgraduate success (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Some of the most powerful emotions generated in research are centred on writing (Cotterall, 2013, p. 183) and receiving feedback on writing (Carter et al., 2020, pp. 24-26). Writing scholars have shown that academic writing is bound up with a sense of self (Ivanič, 1998) and even desire (Lillis, 2001). In an account of multiple writing workshops with different postgraduate groups, Wellington reported that the students discussed their feelings about research writing "with enthusiasm, reflexivity and care" (2010, p. 146). While they experienced both positive and negative emotions regarding their research writing, words frequently used were: "stress, fear, isolation and anxiety" (2010, p. 146).

In order to write with an authoritative voice, doctoral-level students need to develop confidence (Clarence, 2020, p. 51). Doctoral candidates, particularly those not writing in their primary language, have very little time to develop a suitably authoritative scholarly voice, and having to pass themselves off as confident results in their feeling anxious and "fraudulent" (Casanave, 2019, p.58). It is not surprising therefore, that imposter syndrome is recognised as a common feature of the postgraduate experience (Addison et al., 2022; Casanave, 2019; Cisco, 2020). Consequently, calls are increasing for academics to be more aware of the importance of the affective domain in postgraduate research.

4. The Role of Community in Postgraduate Research

One strategy for improving postgraduate outcomes that features extensively in postgraduate education literature is the harnessing and development of community. Social learning theory is drawn on to support arguments for a greater focus on community. The concept of the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) is used to explain how new research students can learn from their more experienced peers and those who are at later stages of research candidature.

Drawing on social learning theory, scholars of postgraduate education point out that research learning is "distributed" (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 503), meaning that students learn not only from their supervisors, but also from other academics and peers in their scholarly communities (Parker, 2009, p. 44). Boud and Lee

are critical of the entrenched institutional practice of "individualising" research students rather than seeing them as part of a community (2005, p. 512). They point out that peer learning occurs in research communities both informally and in "structured pedagogical events" (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 513). Students learn in situations "where they can be supported by peers and those already in the 'zone' in moving from novice to expert, or newcomer to core member." (Kiley, 2009, p. 302). Participants in supportive communities, such as a doctoral programme, in which they can talk about their work and take intellectual risks, are enabled to cross the conceptual thresholds that are part of doctoral learning (McKenna, 2017, pp. 463-464).

Student communities are also seen as a way to counter the isolation that research students experience. Johnston eloquently highlighted the problem of isolation and loneliness that research degree students experience, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences, and part-time students, because, unlike those who do coursework as part of their degree, they do not have structured opportunities to meet with each other (Johnston, 1995, pp. 280-281). She noted that such students had little sense of belonging to an academic community, arguing persuasively for course coordinators to establish processes to induct students into the academic community. As the role that departments play in the socialisation of postgraduates is one of the most significant factors that impact their well-being (Sverdlik et al., 2018, 372-375), it is not surprising that scholars argue that conscious efforts – whether by departments or institutions – should be made to induct postgraduates into communities (Brown, 2021; Buissink-Smith et al., 2013; Wisker et al., 2007).

As the need to write about research is common to all research students, no matter their discipline or methodology, writing is the focus of many of the postgraduate communities that have been documented in the literature. The insight that scholarly writing is inherently social (Murray, 2015) has bolstered the impetus for postgraduate students to come together to write and talk about their writing. The most common and well-documented provision for such group activity comes in the form of writing retreats (Davis et al., 2016; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2020) and writing groups (Aitchison, 2009; Kumar & Aitchison, 2018). Such groups are valuable spaces for student researchers to "rehearse" their emerging scholarly identities (Chihota & Thesen, 2013, p. 131). Some of the benefits of participating in social writing initiatives are: "increased motivation, confidence, engagement and pleasure in writing", as well as less writing anxiety (Kornhaber et al., 2016, 15), increased commitment to degree completion (Maher et al., 2013), personal transformation (Wilmot & McKenna, 2018), and agency (Oluwole et al., 2018).

5. The Role of Writing in Research Education

Writing plays a central role from the very beginning of the research process – and it encompasses all the ways in which researchers use language, images, tables, and graphs for conceptualising, operationalising, and representing research. In their body of scholarship, Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler draw convincingly

on their supervision experience, as well as scholarship on identities and academic literacies, to argue that "research and scholarly identities are co-constructed in and as writing" (Thomson & Kamler, 2010, p. 149). Their work has had a profound effect on subsequent scholarship on postgraduate writing, and on practice, shifting it from "handy hints" technical approaches to show how research writing is a practice that is profoundly shaped by the disciplinary context and which, in turn, shapes the researcher (Kamler & Thomson, 2006).

Not only in research education, but at all levels in higher education, language and writing have been side-lined. Turner powerfully argues that in higher education "the role of language, and the concomitant performances of languaging […] are underestimated, undervalued and marginalised" (Turner, 2011, p. 4). She points out that language is always seen as secondary to content, and observes that language is noticed only when it is perceived as faulty (Turner, 2011, pp. 4-6). This dominant view of writing in higher education has given rise to the widespread perception that when students have difficulty with writing, they are deficient and that the solution to writing problems is to offer remedial support. Consequently, literacies provision has tended to be offered in decontextualised spaces that are separated from the mainstream curriculum (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Jacobs, 2007).

Academic literacies scholarship developed in opposition to the prevailing forms of literacies provision referred to in the previous paragraph, the key foundational principles being that writing is a social practice impacted by power relations, that writing is inextricable from knowledge construction, and that writing is a key site for scholarly identity development. It follows that writing development is best situated within the specific institutional, disciplinary, and social contexts of the students, and should be focused on the texts that students are required to read and write for their studies (Lea, 2004; Lea & Street, 1988). Another insight is that writing development is slow, incremental, and ongoing: "student writers must constantly develop, particularly when they enter a new learning context, such as postgraduate study" (Fergie et al., 2011, p. 236). These insights have been influential beyond a writing or language-specific focus, and have informed undergraduate teaching in all subjects. It is now widely understood that development and support initiatives aimed at improving learning are more effective if they are fully integrated into the formal curriculum (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). Although academic literacies scholarship speaks more directly to undergraduate teaching, the principles apply to the teaching of writing in the research education context and have been taken up extensively in writing development initiatives in postgraduate contexts (e.g., Wilmot & McKenna, 2018).

An important point to note is that writing about research is difficult – even for experienced scholars. Producing an extended piece of writing such as the thesis is an immense undertaking. In the editorial for a journal edition devoted to postgraduate writing, Paré comments that "the dissertation is a profound rhetorical, linguistic, intellectual, emotional, and psychological challenge" (Paré,

2019, p. 81). In response to the understanding that research writing is challenging for everyone, the last twenty years have seen the introduction of writing support for postgraduate students in the form of writing consultations and writing groups, but only recently have scholars shown awareness that such initiatives are best embedded within "larger instructional efforts" or linked to "classroom or laboratory activity" (Paré, 2019, p. 83). In South Africa, such writing support is increasingly being implemented in universities, but embedding it within formal postgraduate education provision presents challenges because the research domain, generally, is kept separate from the teaching and learning domain.

6. A Proposal for Improving the Postgraduate Researcher Experience

Against this backdrop, I offer a proposal for improving the postgraduate researcher experience, guided by the questions that follow. What could make starting a postgraduate research degree less daunting? What could be done to increase the chances of success for new master's and doctoral students? What would make the postgraduate research experience more satisfying and enjoyable? And – importantly – what kind of development opportunities should be prioritised in a funding-scarce environment? My background as an academic development practitioner working in the postgraduate-studies context has shaped my approach to these questions. University staff who work between academic and professional roles can be conceptualised as working in a "third space" that straddles both academic and professional roles (Guerin, 2021; Whitchurch, 2008). My ideas about how postgraduate education could be configured differently draw on my third-space experience at two large urban South African universities, in a centralised postgraduate school and in a large faculty, where I have engaged with both the concerns of postgraduates and the imperatives of university management.

In this section I draw on the scholarship referred to in the previous sections to propose some changes aimed at improving the postgraduate researcher experience, and consider some of the challenges to implementation. The approach proposed is centred around three broad strategies: integrating development and support initiatives into postgraduate education programmes, promoting collaboration and community, and placing writing at the centre of an informal "curriculum" that is common to all research students.

6.1. Formal integration of development initiatives

Although it is widely acknowledged in South African universities that even doctoral researchers have a lot to learn in order to complete their studies successfully, and that development initiatives are necessary (CHE, 2022, p.37), such provision tends to be ad hoc and extra-curricular. The perception that only underprepared students need such support is still widespread. Generally, opportunities to learn are in the form of decontextualised "support" that is provided by external departments, junior academics, or third-space professionals who have little or no interaction with postgraduates' academic departments, or their supervisors, with a consequent

disconnect between research and learning. Not-for-credit courses or workshops tend to focus on research design and methodology. Supervisors are often ignorant of the content of such initiatives and may be unaware of what their students make of them and whether the learning is integrated into the development of their students' own research designs.

A first step towards improving the outcomes of research programmes would be for universities to acknowledge that teaching and learning is as important as research, and that such programmes require as much pedagogical oversight as undergraduate or taught postgraduate programmes. Despite the critique of the traditional "master-apprentice" approach to supervision (Parker, 2009; Sverdlik et al., 2018), a common practice, especially in the humanities and social sciences, is student-supervisor dyads working in isolation from the department and the wider research community. Consequently, students are set up to learn only from their supervisors. Although there are exceptions (see McKenna (2017) and Samuel & Vithal (2011)), full research programmes generally do not have a formal curriculum with courses or taught components; there is no common curriculum and no structure to the learning experience.

There are good reasons why the introduction of a formal structured curriculum would benefit students. The lack of structure in research degrees results in there being few times, aside from meetings with supervisors, dedicated to focusing on studies. Particularly for part-time students with very limited time for their studies (CHE, 2022, p. 38), this places a huge responsibility on them to make the time to focus on their research. Such students do not have the luxury of time on campus with the possibility of serendipitous encounters with academics or peers to inspire and motivate their learning (CHE, 2022, p. 38). The likelihood of such students becoming disengaged from their studies is high. More frequent opportunities for postgraduates to engage with the research community and each other would help to make research activities a more real part of their lived experience.

Even where excellent initiatives designed to support students, such as writing groups or retreats, have been implemented, they are not necessarily part of a coordinated set of activities that are understood and appreciated by everyone who has a stake in postgraduate outcomes. Since such activities are not compulsory and are not seen as part of the formal programme, students may not appreciate their value and may not see the benefit in engaging with them. It could also be the case that staff who are in contact with the students know little about such support initiatives and, consequently, some students are not aware of available support. Even when students are aware of ad hoc support, the students who most need it are not necessarily the ones who take advantage of it.

For the reasons discussed above, and since strong arguments have been made that academic support that is integrated into a programme is more effective than stand-alone decontextualised support, it is worth considering how to move away from the provision of ad hoc support in order to direct resources to the creation of

learning opportunities that are integrated into the framework of a more structured curriculum. Such an approach could involve a formal course at entry level, such as a proposal development course, but need not involve formal courses at all. Instead, it could involve consideration of the learning that needs to take place in the postgraduate programme in order for all students to have an equal chance of being successful, and the implementation of activities that promote such learning.

Ad hoc support tends to be uneven, for example, focused on only one of the stages of research, with the result that students who are supported for a limited period of time may feel abandoned when that support is not sustained. Ideally, a comprehensive long-term approach to implementing learning opportunities should be taken, allowing for layers of differentiated support that extend across the years of study. The advantage of considering the student learning experience across the whole of the research programme is that it is possible to create continuity between the stages of learning. For example, an intensive focus on the conceptualisation of research in the proposal phase could be followed by ongoing writing groups or one mandatory writing retreat per semester, with a final retreat focused on writing for publication. Regular colloquia where students present their research would also provide development opportunities. Such provision could be flexible enough to allow for student agency and the self-directed learning expected from independent researchers (CHE, 2022, p. 87), but still ensure that students are exposed to people, ideas, and resources that they would not necessarily find if it were left to chance.

A major challenge to the integration of learning opportunities into currently unstructured postgraduate programmes is that it requires a coordinated approach, involving all role players in postgraduate education. Faculty and departmental leaders, postgraduate programme coordinators and administrators, supervisors, teaching and learning/support staff, and the students themselves all contribute to the postgraduate research "ecosystem" (Boud & Lee, 2005; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). Since the structures and systems that affect postgraduate researchers are interdependent, synergy between them is essential if change is to take place. However, persuading different sectors within the university to collaborate is difficult, especially if such collaboration is perceived as an infringement on much-prized academic freedom, or interference in the "sacred" space of supervision. Implementing more formal learning programmes will take not only strong leadership and a change of mind-set but also willingness on the part of everyone to engage in time-consuming discussions about what changes to make and how to effect them.

6.2. Prioritise community

Given the numerous references to student isolation in the literature on postgraduate education, there can be no doubt that it is worth considering how to counter the seemingly inevitable experience of loneliness. The creation of learning communities is one obvious strategy and, as Section 4 highlighted, there are emotional, social, and educational benefits for students who belong to scholarly communities.

While research shows that postgraduates are resourceful in mobilising the support of others (Elliot, et al., 2016; Hopwood, 2010;), there is much that can be done to give students opportunities to meet and interact. Departments that intentionally bring research students together have better retention rates than those that do not (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Arguably, a degree of top-down organisation is needed if the aim is to grow a community from the bottom up. Unless departments are very large, it may be more efficient for a top-down organisation to be done at faculty level.

A crucial time to bring both master's and doctoral students together is at the start of their postgraduate programmes. While it is ideal to have welcome and orientation sessions on campus where students can meet each other in the flesh and socialise before and after the formal proceedings, this is not always possible. Rather than simply sending information to students to access online in their own time, bringing students into the same room, whether it is online or on campus, gives students the opportunity to see and interact with each other and staff members other than their supervisors.

Although it is relatively standard to have orientation or welcome sessions, subsequent formal activities that bring students together are less common. Ideally, especially in the research conceptualisation stage, it would benefit students to meet regularly in sessions that focus on problem and purpose formulation, literature review, and research design and methodology. Research seminars at which students do oral presentations of their draft proposals for feedback from their peers are another way of promoting a sense of community from the beginning. Bringing cohorts together periodically once students' proposals have been accepted would also strengthen community. The focus of sessions could be to mark milestones, such as the end of each year of candidature, or to share observations that supervisors are making that are relevant to most of the students. Opportunities for smaller groups within a cohort to meet, such as organised writing retreats or writing group sessions are also valuable ways of keeping students connected to their research and each other.

While the research on postgraduate wellness referred to in this chapter was mostly conducted in the developed world, there is no reason to assume that postgraduates in Africa are any less vulnerable than their global counterparts. Scholarly communities provide a space for participants to share their study-related difficulties and setbacks with peers who understand and can give encouragement. They are also spaces for sharing progress and celebrating small steps towards thesis completion. Barring serious mental health issues, this engagement can mean that group members are less likely to need help from professional counsellors or psychologists. Consequently, scholarly communities can contribute to the building of resilience and mitigate against some of the risk factors that can impact negatively on postgraduate well-being.

If cohorts are brought together for interaction in such a way that a sense of community develops, favourable conditions are created for the formation of

smaller peer-initiated communities and friendships and study partnerships. Within broader groupings, there is space for students to exercise their agency to form relationships with others who share similar research interests or contexts that make regular engagement desirable or practical. As smaller groups develop naturally and become self-sustaining, the number of formal structured meetings in a programme could be gradually reduced.

When new-intake students are brought together, they need to be welcomed into an already established scholarly community. This requires a team approach. Ideally, the students' supervisors, as well as the other role-players in postgraduate education, such as research methodologists, research writing specialists, librarians, and administrators, should be introduced to the group at the start. At least a small group of supervisors should be involved in subsequent activities. Research students who are further along in the process could also contribute substantially to such events. While postgraduates learn about the discipline and the methodology primarily from their supervisors, events that provide opportunities for students to learn from other academics and supervisors are valuable. Experienced supervisors and NRF-rated researchers could be involved in sessions where students discuss their conceptual frameworks and research design before they are finalised. A more collaborative environment can develop out of the sharing of knowledge at such events, where students and less experienced supervisors can benefit from the expertise and experience of research leaders.

However, there are challenges to a more community-centric and collaborative approach to postgraduate education. A practical problem is the way the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted universities. Post-COVID, the number of on-campus activities, and campus visits, have decreased as institutions have made more provision for online interaction (CHE, 2022, p.20). Relationships form more easily in face-to-face interaction and a sense of belonging is strengthened by "physical presence" (Pilbeam et al. 2013, p. 1484). While it may be possible to use digital technologies to bring students into the same conceptual space and to keep them connected, it requires determination and creativity to make such interaction as effective as face-to-face meetings. In this regard, a blended, rather than online-only approach is advisable.

Research culture tends to be competitive, and the culture of the individual prevails (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 512). Given the current nature of research degree study, and the competitive and individualistic nature of academia, bringing cohorts of postgraduates together with academic and professional staff is a difficult undertaking. This approach goes counter to the prevailing culture in a stressed and unequal higher education environment (CHE 2022, p. 13). Asking academics to make time available for collaborative activities is difficult. Even postgraduates with responsibilities competing for their time may need to be convinced of the value of time-consuming group activities. As much as we know that postgraduates enjoy interacting with each other, it may still be difficult to convince part-time students

to commit the time required. Of course, supervisors can play an important role by supporting such initiatives and explaining the underlying reasoning and the benefits of participation. Since the call for more collaboration and sharing has much in common with the spirit of ubuntu, which values "human connections and interdependency" (Oviawe, 2016, p. 3), ways to draw on the philosophy of ubuntu in the postgraduate environment could be explored, as suggested by Samuels and Vithal (2011).

6.3. Writing as the common core

Just some of the signs that writing at postgraduate level in South Africa is a source of concern that merits more pedagogical attention include: the uneven quality of written expression in the theses and dissertations publicly available via university online portals, the growing problem of "outsourcing" external editors who may overstep the mark and address higher-level issues such as structure and argument, and the increase in cases of plagiarism. While some students may have genuine difficulty with achieving the high level of literacy required for representing their research, in many cases these problems are the result of insufficient attention being paid to the writing by both students and supervisors, or writing being left until very late in the process when there is insufficient time to revise and craft the language for clear and convincing expression of ideas.

Deficit discourse about writing is as present in postgraduate education as it is in undergraduate education. Postgraduate writing support at many universities tends to be in the form of voluntary writing centre consultations, a model that has been described as "clinical intervention at the point of crisis" (Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 266). While there is value in such provision, especially since writing is not necessarily the focus of interaction with supervisors (Fergie et al. 2011), ideally, the writing development should be fully integrated into research education (Paré, 2019).

Since research writing is a crucial site for the development of scholarly practices, community, and identity, it is worth considering how to infuse writing development systematically into the overall course of study for particular cohorts from the very beginning. This proactive approach depends on an understanding of language as the principal resource for conceptualising and representing knowledge, and of writing as being integral, not just to the representation of the research, but to the thinking and activities that are part of the processes of research. Even when students within the same field have vastly different research topics, and use different methodologies, what they share is having to write a proposal, followed by a thesis or dissertation, or a set of articles for journal publication. Thus, writing is the common thread that connects all postgraduates. Writing can be used as the rallying point for the cohort community and as the structuring principle of any research programme.

Even students who have produced good research and achieved top results in the master's degree are likely to find writing a thesis challenging at certain points of the process. In the South African context, where most students, whether local

or international, use the lingua-franca of research, English, as an additional language, writing presents another layer of difficulty to negotiate. Consequently, it is important to make research writing a focus of formal learning in postgraduate programmes, with occasions for all research students to engage in the practices and processes of writing, and to reflect on and discuss writing. When the challenges and joys of research writing are "surfaced" and students learn that their struggles are not the result of their inadequacy but, rather, are an inevitable part of the challenging process of making knowledge, a culture of writing is likely to develop, so that writing is no longer a private and lonely activity. When writing is no longer pathologised, more students may begin to see writing support, such as consultations and writing groups, as a normal part of the research process. For these reasons, an early writing intervention, such as a series of workshops or seminars that guide proposal writing and prepare research students for writing the thesis is recommended.

Ironically, if writing comes to be acknowledged as an important focus in researcher education, and research students come to expect opportunities to learn how to become better writers, a different challenge will emerge: sourcing the expertise to teach research writing. Even supervisors who are experts in their field and have mastered the conventions for representing knowledge in their fields may not be good at teaching others how to write, since "senior scholars can employ the specialised rhetoric of their fields without being able to speak about it" (Paré, 2019, p. 82). The fact that it is difficult for supervisors to articulate the tacit knowledge that they have developed over many years of apprenticeship in a disciplinary community is a strong argument for the involvement of writing specialists who can work in collaboration with disciplinary experts to find ways to make implicit conventions explicit.

7. Conclusion

No matter what measures are taken to improve research education, not every student who registers for a research degree will complete it. However, if even a few of the insights that research on postgraduate education has generated are carefully considered, adjusted for context, and implemented, the postgraduate researcher experience will be improved and the chances of more positive and equitable outcomes for postgraduates will be increased.

In this chapter it has been proposed that postgraduate researchers would benefit from the implementation of more structure in the postgraduate research curriculum, the creation of scholarly communities in which a spirit of collaboration prevails, and the systematic embedding of writing development activities in postgraduate education programmes. While such changes would make demands on academic departments and supervisors, it should be clear that having students who are less stressed and isolated, and less dependent on their supervisors for learning and support, would make the challenging role of supervisors less burdensome. Should supervisors be willing to participate in the learning communities envisaged, the

isolation that they too may experience could be diminished and they could enjoy opportunities to learn and share their expertise and experience. Despite the post-COVID period bringing stress and disruption to the lives of academic staff, surely the value of contributing to positive changes in the postgraduate environment will be worth the investment in time and energy?

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Thematic Area 4:
Student Advising and Staff Learning

CHAPTER 10

ACHIEVING STUDENT-CENTRED ADVISING USING HERMENEUTIC THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVISOR TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Advisors need to be responsive to students' needs and their changing context in order to address student success. Theory has a role to play in supporting advising practices and the induction and inclusion of theories in training and professional development is essential. The pandemic led advisors to re-imagine existing social science theories and explore hermeneutics as an alternative innovative, novel, and contextually relevant approach to advising. Incorporating hermeneutic theory in professional development training programmes creates a common knowledge base for advisors and adds to their repertoire of tools. However, a paucity of empirical studies exists on the application of hermeneutic theory in advising. In order to address students' changing needs during the advising process, the purpose of this study is to explore the application of hermeneutic theory in advising in the South African higher education context and its possible inclusion in advisor professional development. The argument advanced is for theory-led advising practices using hermeneutics as well as for hermeneutics to inform academic advising practices. A qualitative research design using hermeneutic phenomenology informs this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with eleven advisors who received training prior to and during the pandemic. This study enhances hermeneutics in advising by including evidence-informed advising, continuously monitoring student's progress, knowledge and effective communication and reflections by advisors and students. Taken to scale and through the incorporation of an evidence-informed hermeneutic theory approach to advisor professional development and training, this theory is able to create conditions for a student-centred future that foregrounds equitable student support in a reimagined higher education context.

Keywords: academic advising; hermeneutic phenomenology; hermeneutic theory; professional development; student needs; student success

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1. Introduction

Advisors need to be responsive to students' needs and their changing context in order to address student success. Students' needs are identified during the advising process since advising typically involves guiding students through their university career with issues such as finances, curriculum planning, scheduling classes, understanding degree requirements, referral to resources and setting personal and career goals. Advisors' responsibilities are thus broad and include the entire university experience (Moosa, 2021). Advisors' ability to adapt to address students' changing needs is dependent on the repertoire of appropriate theories that they have to draw on to inform their knowledge base. Advising as a profession in South Africa is gaining momentum in part due to the efforts of the Siyaphumelela student success initiatives and ELETSA, a non-statutory professional association, which holds allied membership to the Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) in the United States. NACADA is devoted to spearheading the professionalisation of advising (White, 2020). In South Africa, no formal training exists, such as, a bachelor's or master's in advising, and advisors join the profession from different disciplinary backgrounds. In order to support the professionalisation of advising, training and professional development are essential. The University of the Free State is the only higher education (HE) institution in South Africa that offers a weeklong training programme in advising. This training programme is based on the NACADA professional development model and has been in existence since 2018. Advisor training and professional development are viewed as conceptually different, where training refers to activities undertaken in the first year of an advisor's employment and professional development refers to the ongoing education and learning of experienced advisors (Duslak & McGill, 2014). Both training and professional development are applicable within this study. Inducting advisors into their advising role is crucial for their development and retention. Advisor training and professional development expose advisors to different social sciences theories that may inform advising practices, such as, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Marcia's ego identity development, and Chickering's theory of identity development (CTL, 2019). Emanating from the humanities, Champlin-Scharff (2010) proposes Heidegger's hermeneutic theory as a theory that could add value to advising. Hagen (2019) also argues that it is necessary to explore hermeneutics in advising. However, a paucity of empirical studies exists on the application of hermeneutic theory in advising in the South African context. Consequently, guidance on how to incorporate hermeneutic theory in advisors' training and practice is lacking. In order to address this, this study provides an overview of the theory, advisors experiences addressing students' needs and a conceptual model for using hermeneutic theory in advising.

The problem informing this study is that most theories are based on international studies with students and contextual issues that may differ from those found in South Africa. Additionally, advisor training and professional development have only recently been formalised in South Africa. A variety of theories should thus be made available to advisors, not only those emanating from the social sciences.

This study focuses on the importance of hermeneutic-informed student-centred academic advising practices in order to address students' changing needs as well as the benefit of including hermeneutic theory in advisor training and professional development. In order to address students' changing needs during the advising process, the purpose of this study is to explore the application of hermeneutic theory in advising in the South African context and its possible inclusion in the training and professional development of advisors and to contribute to enhancing advisor training and professional development. The argument presented is for theory-led advising practices using hermeneutics as well as for hermeneutics to inform academic advising practices. The research question posed in this study is: how might experiences with hermeneutic theory be used during advising to understand students' needs and changing context and inform advisor training and professional development?

2. Theoretical Framework

Hermeneutics is described as the interpretation of meaning (Butler, 1998). Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy presents an opportunity to conceptualise an understanding of students' needs during the advising process (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). This study focuses on a contextualised interpretation of Heidegger's hermeneutic theory in advising as operationalised by Champlin-Scharff (2010), which includes interpretation, connectedness, being-in-the-world, time, context, ongoing investigation, and advisor reflections.

2.1. Interpretation and context

According to Heidegger, human beings (Dasein) use the conditions of their existence to understand and make sense of experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). As such, interpretation shapes our identity, our understanding and how we make meaning (Butler, 1998). Butler (1998) argues that interpretation involves construction, conflict, and ambiguity. Understanding students' needs is thus crucial. Champlin-Scharff (2010) argues that the advisor is the interpreter who listens to students' needs and subsequently makes meaning and tailors advice. For Heidegger, existence is contextualised, and meaning is derived from the social and historical context in which humans find themselves, which is subject to change (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Context shapes the meaning of events and how experiences are interpreted in particular spaces (McConnel-Henry et al., 2009). A student's everyday context is something that an advisor should be aware of. Contextualised, tailor-made advice is preferable to prescriptive generic advice (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). A student's context is thus central to any advice generated in consultation sessions and advisors should allow students to share their contextual realities.

2.2. Connectedness (being-with-others)

Heidegger stresses the importance of connections with others (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Interpretation in relation to others or connections to others as members

of a group, assists individuals to make sense of their experiences. Butler (1998) argues that connections are able to facilitate setting and achievement of goals. Family and friends would influence students' decisions due to the connections that are established even before the student connects with an advisor. Connections and disconnections with others (McGill, 2021) in the context that students find themselves in, affects how they make sense of things. Advisors are thus able to facilitate connections between students (McGill, 2021). McGill (2021) argues that advisors are able to connect students to the purpose of attending a HE institution, a programme, a career, and the associated values.

2.3. Being-in-the-world

According to Heidegger, humans construct reality from their own beliefs and experiences (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). For Heidegger, the nature of being and understanding is complex, and being-in-the-world involves a variety of social actions (Butler, 1998). Personal awareness is important (Reiners, 2012); therefore, the advisor should be in a "reflective state of understanding" (Butler, 1998, p. 288). Hermeneutics relies on interpretation and prior knowledge (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). However, advising is not objective: the advisor brings their background and experiences into the advising process, which, in turn, influences the advisor's interpretation and understanding. Advisors should not negate their prior experience of the world or students, and therefore, bracketing experiences and biases does not come into the advising process. Meaning-making occurs through consultation between the student as the narrator and the advisor as the interpreter. In Heidegger's framework, interpretation and meaning are shaped by where an individual is located contextually. For Heidegger, context is broader than location, it includes the historical and social context in which an individual is located (Butler, 1998). The implication of this for advising is that the advisor needs to acknowledge that a student's framework is multi-faceted. The importance that a student places on certain issues is thus shaped by their connections and experiences in their context over time.

2.4. Time

For Heidegger, time is not a chronological issue; it relates to a significant phenomenon and being in a particular space where time connects the past, present and future (McConnel-Henry et al., 2009). Time is central to understanding changes in an individual's life, connections, and world (Sloan & Bowe, 2014), and advisors should be cognisant of this. In their relationship with students, advisors should be aware that grief and the loss of a loved one, represent a change in connection or a possible disconnection and affect performance and what is considered important for a student to accomplish in a particular semester (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Students' needs change as their world changes over time. Champlin-Scharff (2010) argues that interpretation, connectedness, time, and being-in-the-world are thus interrelated when advisors use hermeneutic theory.

2.5. Ongoing investigation

McGill (2021) argues that advising facilitates conversations. Continuous conversations in sessions with students are recommended, in order to understand students' context (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). These could be logged and referred to, but the essence of gathering such information is for advisors to use contextual information during the advising process. Hermeneutic theory is a tool to understand students during the advising process and through story telling advisors are able to use hermeneutic theory to better understand students in their changing context (McGill, 2021). Additionally, hermeneutic theory enables a continuous process to understand, interpret and make meaning of students' needs within their context over time (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Continuous investigation is thus advocated when using hermeneutic theory in advising.

2.6. Advisor reflections

Understanding students' context is important when drawing on hermeneutic theory in advising, and advisors should engage in self-reflection and understand their own contextual backgrounds. Reflections on how advisors conduct their advising sessions, how they promote an understanding of students' context, and how they interpret how students make meaning is encouraged when using hermeneutic theory (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Hermeneutic theory enables an understanding of the continuously changing situations that students find themselves in, while emphasising the advisor's subjectivity. This subjectivity necessitates reflection because the advisor brings their context and experiences into the advising process. The benefit of advisor reflections is more effective advising (Champlin-Scharff, 2010).

3. Research Context and Methodology

In order to institutionalise advising at a research-intensive university, in 2014, advisors received initial training primarily on how to support and refer students who were identified as being at-risk. When national training became available in 2018, advisors volunteered to attend a professional development training programme at the University of the Free State. The training programme focuses on various components; however, the conceptual component is of particular interest, since it focuses on theories and provides a common knowledge base across the HE sector. Advisors are thus able to provide improved support to students, and theory serves to strengthen the professionalisation of advising within HE (Pasquini & Eaton, 2019). Participants used hermeneutic theory in their practices, and the operationalisation of hermeneutics as a viable theory in advising will be elucidated in the next section. This study thus attempts to produce an argument for a theory-led advising practice using hermeneutics, as well as for hermeneutics to inform academic advising practices. As such, hermeneutics is proposed as a theory to inform advising practices and is also used as a theoretical lens to understand advising practices.

A qualitative research design using hermeneutic phenomenology according to the philosophical perspective of Heidegger (Sloan & Bowe, 2014), formed the basis of this study. Phenomenology enables a researcher to understand the common meaning of a phenomenon that several individuals ascribe to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on creating meaning located in text and understanding the subjective consciousness of human beings (Cohen et al., 2002). The phenomenon in this study is the application of hermeneutic theory in advising by advisors in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic at a research-intensive university in South Africa. The purposively selected sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018) consisted of eleven advisors, two male and nine female who all experienced the use of hermeneutic theory in their advising practices. Advisors were informed that ethics was obtained and participated in the study voluntarily. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews are appropriate for a phenomenological study. Due to the lockdown, electronic semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams. Participant advisors were introduced to the theory of Heidegger's hermeneutics and used hermeneutics in their advising practice. Advisors read literature on Heidegger's Hermeneutics as well as its application in practice (Spanos, 1976; Schmidt, 2016; Warnke, 2016; Sayapova & Arsenteva, 2014; Lafont, 2015; Clark, 2011; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). The researcher was thus able to enquire about participants' experiences using hermeneutic theory in advising during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to address students' needs. The interview schedule included questions such as:

- Based on your experiences during the pandemic, what would you say were the most important student needs that you addressed?
- In your advising practice during the pandemic, how were you able to make use of hermeneutic theory?
- How did the various aspects of hermeneutics allow you to address students' needs?
- Given the remote context that you are working in, how would you characterise the advice that you gave to students?
- In your experience since we went into lockdown, were students' needs constant in the four terms?
- What role did the performance dashboards play in your advising?

Interviews were recorded on an independent recording device to assure participants' anonymity and confidentiality and were transcribed verbatim. An abductive approach, which combined a deductive and inductive approach, was used to analyse data (Bryman, 2016). The deductive method involved using hermeneutic theory to interpret the data, and the inductive method, allowed original themes to be derived from the data. During the data collection and analysis process, the researcher's personal views were not bracketed, instead they were employed in the interpretation of the transcript text in which advisors' experiences were located. Evidence provided in the findings thus reflects a first-person, verbatim account of how participants communicated and how the researcher interpreted advising experiences.

4. Findings

The findings highlight themes related to hermeneutic theory in advising, such as, interpretation, being-in-the-world, context, connectedness, continuously investigating students' needs, and time. Unique themes that emerged include continuously monitoring students' progress, knowledge, effective communication, and advisor and student reflections.

4.1. Interpretation and making meaning

Interpreting and making meaning of students' changing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic was an issue which advisors were confronted with. During consultation sessions, students posed "difficult questions" and communicated issues related to not having "data, connectivity, and electricity" to challenges with "learning online", "returning to campus", as well as, "financial issues" (Interview 8). Advisors needed to make meaning of students' context and as such, understand students' context-guided advice. Comments from advisors included, "I'm just gonna assist the student just to get an understanding of what their thoughts exactly are, of what the situation really is" (Interview 8). One advisor reported making "inferences" while interpreting students' needs (Interview 5). Making meaning is dependent on how students express themselves, and this was expressed by an advisor as not giving students "standard responses", but "delving deeper, putting yourself, you know, in the students' shoes" (Interview 2). Most advisors tailored their advice to students' "particular needs" and "particular circumstances" (Interview 1). This included "having a sense of empathy towards their situation and just being invested [and] curious about what else could be going on" (Interview 2). Generic advice was frowned upon because students' "context and background differed" and the success of advice or an intervention was dependent on contextual factors (Interview 5). One advisor stated that, the "factors that contribute to that can never be the same for any student … then you address according to their own challenges, not a generic kind of advice" (Interview 7). An advisor thus stated that, "one advises in a tailored approach" (Interview 10) according to students' individual circumstances, others used "generic advice" such as referral to university support structures (Interview 9). It must be noted that some generic advice could still be tailor-made to students' needs even though students may need to be referred to student support structures. Making meaning of what students said based on their context was regarded as "the most critical" advising skill, which was acquired "over time" (Interview 9).

4.2. The world of the student

Awareness of the multifaceted context of the student's world allows advisors to gain an understanding of their world and to draw on their own experiences, age, context, and educational background to address students' needs without feeling the need to bracket these aspects. Due to the pandemic, students experienced deaths in their families and communities and needed to mourn the deaths of their loved ones. Advisors noted with concern that "the number of emails relating to

bereavement were overwhelming" (Interview 4). One advisor reported looking "at the students' needs" and respecting "how students wanted to deal with their loss" (Interview 7) as important considerations. Making the various support options available to students assisted with meeting students' needs. Advisors tried to, "just understand [students'] thoughts … where they are, … align the kind of thinking they had at that particular time, try to motivate them, and to really not give up" (Interview 8). It was important for advisors to allow students to "take time off to mourn and to heal after sorting out their academic issues" (Interview 3). The advisor's understanding of the "academic space and that assignments, lectures, and tutorials continue" even if the world of a student changes, was an asset in advising students (Interview 3). While "containing situations" was crucial, most advisors felt that "understanding the boundaries of the advising role was important even if they were trained as psychologists who were now working as advisors" (Interview 2). One advisor noted that advisors sometimes need to, "act as psychologists in that particular moment although our job is not being a psychologist … in advising" (Interview 7).

4.3. Connectedness

Connections were formed between advisors and students including peer-advisors. Advisors are ideally placed to form connections with students. One advisor stated that, "as a peer-advisor and as an advisor, you make connections with students" (Interview 10). The pandemic limited the process of establishing connections with students. Due to "limited internet connectivity and data", consultations with students took place "after hours" putting a strain on advisors (Interview 3). Advisors commented that they made an "effort to connect with students" and "introduce themselves to students in a manner that would indicate that they were approachable" (Interview 11). Forming connections also enabled students to go on a "discovery journey" (Interview 11). Some advisors encouraged students to "form groups with their classmates and friends" in an attempt to create connections between students especially in the context of online learning (Interview 3). Advisors also formed connections with peer-advisors. These "very positive relationships" (Interview 3) enabled peer-advisors to become "the main contacts for students" (Interview 7). Advisors viewed peer-advisors as "not only the first port of call for students but that peer-advisors shared the advising workload" and that they "were an integral component of the advising team" (Interview 1).

Strong connections also existed between students and social structures such as their families and communities. Advisors felt that family had "a lot of influence in terms of students continuing their degree", but that students were also "able to exercise their agency when they experienced challenges" (Interview 10). The negative influence that family had on students related to which degree parents would fund. One advisor's experience was that a student persisted in the degree because the "family was like you have to do this degree and complete this degree, we will only fund you if you do this degree" (Interview 10). Communities also had expectations of students since students would sometimes "be the only actuarial

science person", so they could not "drop out" (Interview 8). Advisors reported that some students who were "the first in their families" and may even have been "the first in the community" to enrol for a certain degree, experienced pressure from their communities (Interview 3). The expectation from families and communities was for the student to succeed because they carried the hopes and dreams of their family and community. Advisors felt that these students "find themselves trapped, trying to please their parents whereas they'd like to do something else" (Interview 3). The "pressure" placed on the student related to earning potential and changing family situations, by getting "enough income to come back and change the situation at home" (Interview 3).

4.4. Continuous investigation of students' needs

Students use their agency to identify their own needs. Most advisors felt that they were in a position to identify students' needs because they drew on their "previous experiences" but that "understanding the students' context, understanding their needs obviously does come from the students themselves" (Interview 1). Advisors recognised that students had multiple needs and that, "it's not only one subject, it's multiple subjects and multiple like social issues as well" (Interview 1). Investigating students' needs within their context was required on a continuous basis due to changes in students' individual situations. External changes in the lockdown levels also necessitated continuous interaction with students to address their needs.

4.5. Change over time

Time, in the context of the pandemic brought with it its own challenges. What the students needed over time, from one semester to the next, differed as their environmental context changed. One advisor was of the opinion that some first-year students did not consult because "they would still think that they are the best things since sliced bread" (Interview 5). Another advisor reported that students "come late in the year" (Interview 10), making it extremely difficult to assist them. This happened during the pandemic despite the "extension of advising hours" that were afforded to students (Interview 8). One advisor reported that students' "emotions were not that high, they got used to the new normal" (Interview 3). Extensive notes were taken, and advisors reported that they "refer back to the notes" when students attended follow-up sessions (Interview 9). Time was also an issue for students who were on conditions because they needed to "catch-up with all the courses that they did not do well in, in the first semester" (Interview 8). Advisors thus noted that students' needs over time were not "stagnant" and that "whatever phases that our students are going through" were dependent on the time of year (Interview 3).

4.6. Continuously monitoring students' progress

Advisors used the student persistence dashboard to monitor students' academic performance throughout the year. Some advisors used it to gauge how COVID-19 was affecting students' "academic performance" (Interview 1). The dashboard

provided data on which students were "at risk, highly at risk and those who were borderline" (Interview 3). The dashboard was also able to identify those students who were "performing well" and who needed to be acknowledged for their excellent academic performance (Interview 4). Regarding monitoring academic progress, one advisor outlined this process as, "we identify like what are the causes and then, you know, you suggest what you possibly can do and then the student goes and tries to do that" (Interview 10). The intervention site dashboard served as a case management tool to allow advisors to log the various aspects undertaken during advising. Advisors reported capturing data on the quick capture portal, and although they "didn't find it very difficult to use" some "didn't use it a lot at the beginning of the year" (Interview 1).

4.7. Knowledge and effective communication

Knowledge about the university was regarded as essential for an advisor. A recently appointed advisor stressed the importance of "extensive knowledge about the university's structures" because being new was "a little bit challenging to adapt especially in terms of, you know, certain rules with the university" (Interview 1). During the pandemic, the advising situation was "different to anything anyone's encountered" (Interview 1). This necessitated being able to advise the student in a "holistic" manner that demanded "knowledge of the university structures, rules and regulations and different contact referral points" (Interview 7). Knowledge was also viewed as the basis for effective communication. Knowledge of "career options" and "how to use a degree", was regarded by advisors as an issue that needed to be part of their communication with students (Interview 3). The pandemic allowed "different avenues of communication", which were regarded as a means to "reach out to more students" (Interview 4), because students "just needed to be heard" (Interview 1). Communication and consultation with tutors were essential. Advisors mentioned that they listened to the tutors who "were very helpful because they are students … so we were able to find out what other challenges we might have missed" (Interview 4). Communication with tutors revealed that student challenges were best identified by listening to the "students' voice" (Interview 10). Communication with students also served to create a space where students were empowered. One advisor's experience was that students said, "thank you for the conversations, they really helped me, they uplifted me" (Interview 10).

4.8. Advisor and student reflections

Advisors communicated their reflections regarding their advising practice, student reflections, and well-being during COVID-19. Upon reflection, advisors admitted that advising was not an easy task, especially during the pandemic. Reflectively, one advisor noted that a combination of theories could be used when advising, depending on the student's context. This was phrased as, "I don't think I adhere to one particular theory, but it depends on the circumstances and the challenges that the student comes with" (Interview 10). Reflection also allowed another advisor to reimagine advising in a "post-COVID period" (Interview 4). Reflection was

noted by one advisor as "something that was learnt on the training course and subsequently adopted as a practice" (Interview 1). This advisor saw reflection as, "something I definitely considered after the training and in my advising as well" (Interview 1).

Using hermeneutic theory, one advisor created "space" in advising sessions for students "to just reflect" (Interview 2). This allowed advisors to gauge from student reflections, "if students have achieved what they wanted" (Interview 7). According to one advisor, reflections have "nothing tangible to show" (Interview 7). However, student reflections revolved around changes in their perspectives, approaches, and behaviour. This advisor added that reflections included "what they [students] needed to change" (Interview 7). An important reflection was that student reflections "can always turn into a developmental experience for students and make sure they come away having learnt something" (Interview 1).

5. Discussion

The findings revealed the applicability of hermeneutic theory as a theoretical lens in advising and the emergence of a conceptual model from its incorporation in practice in order to advance hermeneutic-informed academic advising. The contextual realities of advising during the pandemic necessitated innovative, student-centred ways to address students' needs. Evidence-informed advising and continuously monitoring of students' progress, as the incorporation of hermeneutic theory in advising practice and in professional development are also important findings emerging from this study.

5.1. Applicability of hermeneutic theory in advising

Advising as an emerging field was foregrounded in a special issue of the Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (Tiroyabone & Strydom, 2021). Obajei and Jeawon (2021) used cognitive-development theory and, de Klerk (2021) used social realism to reflect on their advising practices. However, none of these studies focused on hermeneutic theory. While Hagen (2019) acknowledges that theories from the humanities are not often used in advising, the applicability of aspects of hermeneutic theory in advising such as interpretation, context, being-in-the-world, connectedness, time, investigation of students' needs, and advisor reflections were explored in this study during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The adoption of hermeneutic theory in this study indicates that it is a descriptive rather than prescriptive theory, and as such, processes are described without solutions being prescribed. As suggested by van den Wijngaard (2019), hermeneutic theory is able to enhance advising practices. The contextual framework that emerged in practice from this study incorporates evidence-informed advising, continuously monitoring students' progress, knowledge, and effective communication and advisor and student reflections (see Figure 10.1).

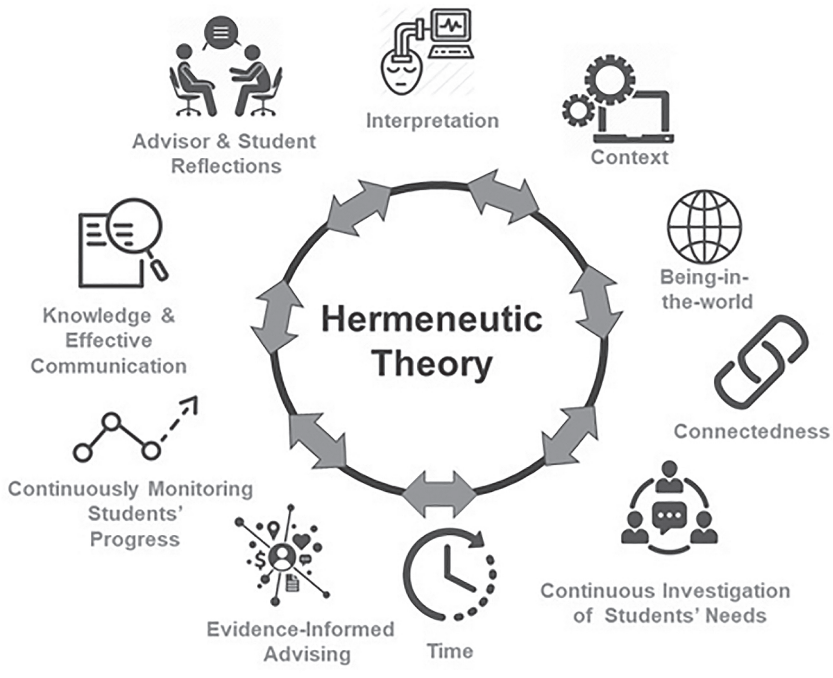


Figure 10.1: *Contextual model for using hermeneutic theory in advising (developed by the author)*

Advisors are encouraged to interpret and make meaning of students' needs in context. Although the model is circular, advisors are able to draw on the various aspects depicted in the model at any point in the advising process. The impact on student success is that the application of theory from a student lens is addressed by allowing students to reflect on what their needs are and how they could be assisted. Student and staff reflections enable a journey to be undertaken which locates the student at the centre of the advising process based on the connections that advisors make with students, the knowledge and communication channels that are established, the continuous monitoring of students' progress and the evidence-informed approach that is undertaken to contribute to student success. This study highlights the application of hermeneutic theory and its ability to provide equitable student support by addressing students' needs. Using hermeneutic theory in academic advising enables a student-centred approach that proactively addresses students' needs thereby contributing to student success.

5.2. Evidence-informed advising

Advising is an evidence-informed practice, and hermeneutic theory is able to foster this. This study indicates the essential nature of data to support advising. Institutional data from course performance and feedback sessions all supported advising geared to meeting students' needs. Extant literature also highlights the benefit of using student persistence software systems and data-informed advising to promote student success (Moosa, 2021). Advisors used data to inform advising, before, during, and after the advising process to continuously improve advising practices (see Figure 10.2).

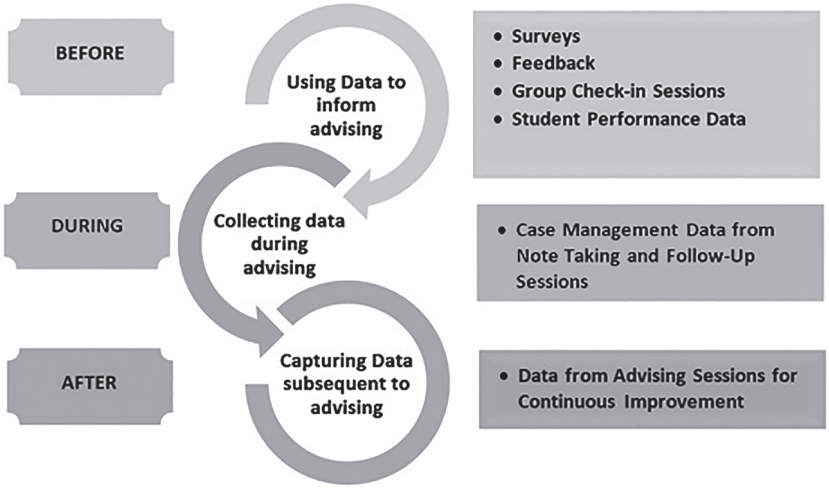


Figure 10.2: *Evidence-informed advising process (developed by the author)*

5.3. Advisor training and professional development

The professionalisation of advising is essential (White, 2020). Within HE, staff expertise is critical to the operations of a university (Blackmore & Blackwell 2003). As such, the effectiveness of advising is at the heart of training and professional development (Ford, 2007). Effective advising is also able to increase student success (King, 2000). Theory has a role to play in supporting advising practices. Blackwell and Blackmore (2003) thus argue that tools and artefacts, which include theories, are a means to support advising. De Rijdt (2011) contends that staff development is able to facilitate change. Hermeneutic theory in advising is able to influence how advising is conceptualised and practised. The inclusion of hermeneutic theory in practice and in professional development and training of advisors could benefit students and advising as a practice. This study indicates the usefulness of hermeneutic theory in advising and its appropriate incorporation into advisors' repertoire of tools. However, it is acknowledged that translating theory into practice is a complicated task for advisors (Creamer & Creamer, 1994). Hermeneutic theory can also be used in isolation or in combination with other approaches. Victoria (2019) argues that professional development involves objective reflections that nurture innovative and effective practices. Hermeneutic theory in academic advising, as gleaned from this study, indicates the importance of reflection. Professional development and training are reflexive practices (Victoria, 2019), which could contribute to student success. Hermeneutic theory provides advisors with a way of seeing and understanding students and their needs. Stebleton (2011) thus argues that advisors influence student success and retention. Hermeneutic theory also enables a student-centred lens to be applied, which creates conditions for student success. The inclusion of hermeneutic theory in practice and professional development and training of advisors could thus benefit students and advisors, but advisors need to be exposed to it. This study indicates how advisors used hermeneutic theory to better understand students'

needs. The benefit of training and professional development should be for those who offer it as well as those who partake in it. This study thus reveals the ability of hermeneutic theory to enhance advisor training and professional development.

6. Conclusion

In this study, scholarly work using hermeneutic theory has contributed to the development of a theoretical base, which includes a theory that academic advisors are able to draw on in their student-centred advising practices. Hermeneutic theory in this study contributes to its application in advising by addressing students' needs through the inclusion of evidence-informed advising, continuously monitoring student's progress, knowledge, and effective communication and reflections by advisors and students. Hermeneutic theory provides advisors with a way of seeing and understanding students and their needs. Advisors are able to use hermeneutic theory as a stand-alone theory or in combination with other theories and approaches in times of disruption and beyond. This study indicates that hermeneutic theory is conducive to advising in general and in the South African HE context. The pandemic led advisors to re-imagine existing social science theories that inform their practices and explore hermeneutic theory as an alternative innovative, novel, and contextually relevant approach to academic advising. Taken to scale and through the incorporation of an evidence-informed hermeneutic theory approach in advisor professional development and training, this theory is able to provide a critical lens to address students' needs in context and to create conditions for a student-centred future that foregrounds equitable student support in a reimagined HE context.

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CHAPTER 11

TOWARDS STAFF DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the needs assessment of staff who work in student development, support, and services[1], also called Student Affairs and Services (SAS), and its importance in enhancing student success in the South African university sector. The objective of the training needs analysis (TNA) undertaken by Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM), was to explore the development needs of this domain within universities by gathering data via a survey using a convenience sample. The results of this study (N=362) suggest there is a compelling need for staff development in this sector. The identified needs focus on the development of 1) general leadership and management competencies, 2) communication and digital competencies, 3) competencies related to social justice, transformation, and gender equality, 4) understanding of the higher education sector, and 5) theories and practices of the Student Affairs and Services domain. While the needs are framed as competencies, these are not understood, here, as discreet or performative, but reflect a deeper need to reflect on and feel confident to navigate the complexities at the intersection of multi-disciplinary and cross-boundary spaces in which Student Affairs often is located. This chapter contributes towards advancing a student-centred higher education sector by exploring the needs of the staff who provide student development, support, and services in higher education institutions in South Africa upon which a staff development programme can be premised.

Keywords: paradigm shift; staff capacitation; staff development; student development; student services; student support

1 Student Development, Support and Services is also called Student Affairs and Services, Student Life, Student Engagement and variations of these terms (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). For the purposes of this chapter, the terms Student Affairs and Services are used and are abbreviated as SAS.

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1. Introduction

The theory and practice in the SAS, student development, support, and services domains in higher education have developed unevenly across institutions, countries, and the globe for many reasons (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). The reasons for the variations include different levels of higher education sector development, differences in the historical origins and trajectories of institutions, differences in the roles of universities in the national development plans, differences in social-economic resources and social welfare provisions in the national contexts, and a wide diversity of students' level of readiness, demographic profiles, and needs. Not only are the models and practices highly diverse across and within the domains, but so too are the nomenclature, the epistemic community, and scholarship for SAS, as well as the discourse and the underlying assumptions (Mandew, 2003; Torres et al., 2019).

This kind of disciplinary, conceptual, and practice medley complicates the development, professionalisation, and capacitation of the domain, and generates several diverse trajectories and models of how, mainly elsewhere in the world, this domain is capacitated (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013). Seale and Cross (2015) confirm that leadership development can be an enabling and empowering instrument of change in South African universities. Burgoyne et al. (2009) support the claim that leadership development, if conceptualised, planned and managed responsively in an enabling organisational setting, may enhance student success and contribute towards a student-centred institutional development. However, in South African universities, approaches to leadership development tend to neglect contextual complexity and underemphasise student-centred approaches to student and institutional success (Seale et al., 2021).

2. Student Affairs and Services

The domain of SAS is located in the "third space" of higher education, often located in academic management and institutional leadership, that is constructing and reconstructing its identity in line with increasing competitiveness and globalisation of higher education (Whitechurch, 2019a). These "third space professionals", positioned between formal leadership and teaching staff, are emerging as a critical staff component in higher education. This domain, wedged between academic and administrative domains, often works in cross-boundary and multi-disciplinary contexts, deals with complexity and ambiguity, and provides critical functions and occupies vital roles for higher education institutions to compete in the national, continental, and global landscape (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Whitechurch, 2019a, 2019b). Bernstein (2000) speaks about this 'third domain' as a re-contextualised field of knowledge and discourse that is "next to" or "beside" the disciplinary-academic domain and the administrative domain. Bhabha (2004) adds hybridity as a characteristic of this third space, and Behari-Leak & Le Roux (2018) emphasises the ambiguity of this space.

Student Affairs and Services (SAS)[2], also referred to as Student Development, Support, and Services, usually include a wide range of services, offices, programmes, and units that are positioned on a continuum from in-curricular, to co-curricular or non-academic in nature (Broido & Schreiber, 2016; Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010; Morrison et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These student services, student development opportunities, student support functions, and Student Affairs departments typically comprise provisions that focus on academic development, psycho-social wellbeing, graduate attributes and living and learning spaces[3], and many more that focus on the living and learning context of students, from entry to exit (Ciobanau, 2013).

According to Mandew (2003) the "nomenclature, definition, scope, configuration and modus operandi of these services and functions differ from institution to institution depending on a variety of factors, not least the availability of resources (human and financial), facilities and infrastructure" (p. 90). Usually, SAS divisions and departments are managed by an executive director, director, or dean of students, who reports to the vice-rector/deputy vice-chancellor. Staffing level ranges from entry, middle, senior, and executive, and appointments are administrative, academic, or professional. The divisions or departments are guided by a range of principles, professional guidelines, and theories, which inform practice. Moreover, divisions and departments are centrally managed or de-centralised into faculties (Botha et al., 2005; Morrison et al., 2006; Schreiber & Lewis, 2016; Schreiber, 2012).

SAS divisions in South Africa are important role players in addressing and changing the vicious cycle of universities reproducing existing and pervasive inequalities (Bawa, 2014; Luescher et al., 2021; Mandew, 2003). SAS needs to "critically reflect upon and consistently review the assumptions, content, delivery and appropriateness of student development programmes, support structures, services and initiatives" (Bawa, 2014, p. vi). According to Bawa (2014), this critical self-reflection of SAS must include propositions of solutions that contribute towards student development and success. Understanding the development and training needs of the SAS staff, as discussed in this chapter, is such a proposition that seeks to advance student development and success via staff development for staff in SAS domains.

3. Professional and Staff Development in Higher Education

A multitude of influences, such as massification, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, urgency around social justice, access, equity, increasing complexity and importance of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and various other factors impact SAS in higher education, not only in South Africa but across the

2 See footnote 1 on page 1.

3 List of functional areas and services: student academic development and support, career advancement and career counselling services, psychological and personal counselling, disability services, life skills and mentoring programmes, community engagement, residential and catering services, health and wellness services, student governance and leadership, student societies, sport and orientation programmes, international offices, HIV-Aids and vaccination services, food security and gender equality, street law and volunteering, and many more such services.

world. Student success, at the centre of higher education, is the key focus area of SAS (Botha et al., 2005; Mandew, 2003; Moja et al., 2015; Nyar, 2020; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

In South Africa, no professional or staff development programme offers comprehensive, in-depth staff capacitation in the domain of SAS (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020; Mandew, 2003). This might be related to the absence of a normative national framework that defines requirements, norms, and standards for SAS, or because, in essence, the legislative or regulatory framework is unclear on the scope, role, and responsibility of SAS (Schreiber, 2012).

One response to the changes in higher education has been for SAS to improve its impact on student success via professional development in the form of strengthening capacity, competencies, skills, knowledge, scholarship, and developing relevant theories and coherent practices (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013; Schreiber, 2014; Nyar, 2018; Moja et al., 2015). In this regard, a review of development trends and models in universities reveals events-based interventions rather than systemic and comprehensive staff development programmes (Seale & Cross, 2015). Although most universities have recognised and responded to the need for leadership and staff development, these interventions are mostly episodic, and issue-driven rather than aligned to institutional strategy and performance objectives (Seale & Cross, 2015). There have been some attempts to align leadership development for specific roles, like deans, with strategic objectives and performance requirements in international and local universities, but much more effort is required to develop higher education leadership and management more systematically and sector-wide (Seale et al., 2021; Seale & Cross, 2015). To respond to the South African higher education sector's capacitation needs, Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) at the Universities South Africa (USAf) is mandated to develop national capacity for the higher education sector. It is under the auspice of HELM that this research is conducted.

The professionalisation and staff development of SAS have taken on different trajectories in different regions across the globe (Carpenter & Harber-Curran, 2013; Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). Europe, for instance, with Germany and France as social welfare states, are not focusing on SAS *per se*, but provide much of their SAS services and functions integrated into and as part of the welfare and caring state, thus equipping and capacitating SAS, such as they are, with different professional development programmes, often linked to 'Bildungswissenschaften[4]' and higher education management (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). A very different approach is followed in the USA, where the SAS domain is professionalised and developed in MA and PhD programmes, via research, scholarship, and professional associations, and in Canada, where competency development models focus slightly more on the personal leadership competencies of SAS staff (Cacuss, 2017; Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020).

4 Bildungswissenschaften – the English translation is 'educational sciences'.

Some of the programmes in South Africa that contribute towards aspects of SAS capacitation are in the Education Faculties, offering master's or doctoral programmes (for instance, a master's in higher education leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal and Stellenbosch University), or specific thematic capacitation (for instance, the Association of College and University Housing Officers' [ACUHO] Student Housing Training Institute, an immersive two-week long staff development programme), or professional training for registered psychotherapists or social workers via Continuous Professional Development as required by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Further informal and quasi-formal initiatives are offered by Professional Associations[5], usually linked to their annual conferences.

At a national sectoral level, the South African higher education umbrella body, Universities South Africa (USAf) Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) is mandated to capacitate the higher education sector. USAf HELM has adopted an approach to leadership and management development that is bespoke for the personal, role-related, and institutional-contextual requirements of participants. Systematic leadership development involves more than training and includes developmental experiences that are meaningfully integrated with one another, focussing on skills and competencies, but more so on personal development and in-depth understanding of roles and responsibilities not only of the individual but also at a sectoral level, foregrounding the contextualised learner in a complex higher education environment that locates itself in a local and global context.

Since its inception in 2002, HELM has identified and responded to the leadership and management development needs in the South African higher education sector. The fundamental premise for a SAS staff development programme is to develop highly competent SAS staff who understand and function in a complex and changing higher education context and advance student and institutional success via engagement with and impact on the student, the institution, and the context into which these are embedded. HELM's programmatic epistemology and pedagogy are informed by an executive education modality, which includes self-directed learning, contact sessions, group engagement, and content-related exercises.

HELM programmes are premised on the notion that through staff capacitation, knowledge, and competencies, the participants are emboldened and equipped to provide effective and impactful support and development to students, and to contribute towards shaping student-centred spaces that recognise the contextualised student (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) and advance student success.

5 There is a medley of professional associations in South Africa (for instance: South African Association of Counselling and Development in Higher Education [SAACDHE], Higher Education Disability South Africa [HEDSA], National Association of Student Development Professionals [NASDEV], Association of College and University Housing Officers [ACUHO-SA], South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Practitioners [SAASSAP]) which define and guide their scope and practice and have a variety of specific professional development events and initiatives, such as workshops and conferences.

Professional and staff development, in the context of this chapter, is not defined as a static finite event, as a training process leading to accreditation with set norms and standards, or a process concluding with exclusionary criteria (Schreiber & Lewis, 2020). Rather, we propose a process of staff development for the SAS domain in the form of a national capacitation programme, which continuously re-imagines, re-constructs, and re-examines itself to evaluate relevance and impact in an evolving, pluralist, and complex higher education context. Through capacitation based on the expressed needs of this sector, we promote student-centredness by focussing on the needs of staff who are directly linked to student success. This chapter contributes towards shaping not a *re*-imagined staff development but a first iteration of a national sector-wide staff development for SAS that locates the student at the centre of support and development.

4. Notions of "Student Centredness" in Student Affairs and Services

Notions of student-centredness have been present in education since the time of enlightenment (see for instance the origins in writings by Rousseau [1712-1778] and Pestalozzi [1746-1827], and more recently in Montessori Education and Carl Rogers [1902-1987]), but precise definitions are somewhat elusive (McKenna, 2013; Tangney, 2014; Taylor, 2013).

Debates also surround the implications flowing from different terminology, either using learner-centred, learning-centred, or student-centred. The semantic connotations of "*student*-centred" may suggest a role and identity focus, whereas "*learner*-centred" may conceptually include notions of life-long and life-wide learning and puts emphasis on the inclusivity of the term "learning", including staff, students, and everyone else who seeks to learn in their context, their space, and time. For the purpose of this chapter, we use the term student-centred.

In Student Affairs and Services (SAS) the notion of student-centredness is canonical, infused, and implicit. The notion is characterised by several assumptions about students, assumptions about the facilitator-teacher-practitioner, and by practices that reflect this understanding (Blackie et al., 2010; Schreiber, 2013; Schreiber, 2018). Taylor (2013) offers a synthesis of the complexity that surrounds student-centredness and distils several principles that inform student-centredness. The list provided here is not exhaustive but provides key aspects of this term as we understand it for this chapter and within South African SAS.

The practices that reflect student-centredness include:

1. Build on prior knowledge and personal experience.
2. Affirm students as experts in their lives, and promote the inclusion of their lived and diverse experiences.
3. Enable and promote active choices, autonomy, self-paced and self-driven activity, and engagement.
4. Construct opportunities that explore and challenge.
5. Maintain explicit high expectations.

6. Promote collaboration, cooperation, and group engagements.
7. Include reflection and focus on deep processing and understanding.
8. Shape engagements that are relevant and contextual.

The focus on student-centredness has profound implications for staff development (Blackie, et al., 2010). In line with the principles of "learner-centredness", to build on prior knowledge and personal experience, including the lived and diverse experiences of the learner, a thorough training needs analysis was conducted on the staff of SAS. This has implications on two levels: the identified needs provide the basis for shaping a response for the SAS staff who are the learners in such a staff development programme, and secondly, the response (i.e., the staff development programme) locates itself within student-centred pedagogy.

5. Training Needs Analysis of SAS in South African Higher Education

Training Needs Analyses (TNA) are useful tools to collect data on activities that inform decision-making in relation to training and development, how this might improve performance, who needs training and development, and possible content of training and development interventions (Clark, 2003). TNAs assist in exploring not only specific development needs but also offer ways to explore the domains' understanding of the scope of agency and purpose of work (Zahid Iqbal & Khan, 2011). The HELM TNA across the 26 public universities explored perceived training priorities, gaps, and needs. It also enabled a view of the staff's understanding of their scope and role, and the internal and external contextual factors that staff perceived as relevant to their work, knowledge, and competencies. The TNA was developed focussing on four areas: 1) identifying training and development needs, 2) deriving information on the participants' understanding of their role and scope of their work, 3) collecting information on the priority of development, and 4) gaining information on demographics to understand where the need is the most pronounced.

6. Methodology

This South African National Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey investigated the training and development priorities and needs of staff and professionals working in the domain of SAS across the 26 public institutions in South Africa.

6.1. Research setting

HELM is mandated to conceptualise, design, and deliver relevant and responsive leadership development interventions for capacitation of staff across various leadership and management levels in South African higher education. As part of this mandate, HELM undertook a national, sector-wide TNA to explore what training, development, and capacitation needs exist in this domain. In addition, and subsequent to the TNA, the aim is to shape a staff development programme that equips and emboldens SAS staff to provide student-centric, impactful and relevant SAS across the higher education sector.

6.2. Method

Our research used an online questionnaire designed in SurveyMonkey, with closed response question on Likert scales. Given this was an explorative survey, we did not perform statistical analysis to verify hypotheses or theories but sought to illuminate insight and understanding. No identifying data was requested of participants, and by acknowledging the information about the survey, participants consented and were enabled to proceed to take part in the survey.

6.3. Survey tool, data collection, and analysis

The TNA questions aimed to explore a spectrum of training and development needs and contained 17 questions exploring, 1) demographics, 2) generic leadership and management capacitation needs, 3) content, role, and thematically specific needs, 4) higher education and institutional related understanding and skills, and 5) governance and regulatory framework training needs. Not all questions needed answering and a variety of question types were included, such as closed-choice options (using Likert scale), ranking, and graded questions (e.g., full, partial, no/none). The survey was open for two months during October and November 2021. The data results were summarised and analysed using SurveyMonkey tools, which offered the use of frequency tables.

6.4. Sampling

Survey respondents were sourced by virtual snowball sampling, also called chain sampling, or referral sampling (Creswell, 2013), which is a nonprobability sampling technique. The sample generated is a non-random, non-representative but stratified convenience sample and does not represent a statistically representative group. This kind of sampling enabled us to seek information from potentially hard-to-reach groups. This kind of sampling enables hypothesis development rather than hypothesis testing.

Our potential respondents were reached via emailing relevant leadership in SAS domains in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, including using the researchers' virtual social and professional networks, via emailing professional associations, and via acquaintance pathways. Recognising the diversity of services, staff, and disciplines involved in the SAS domains, the participants were recruited from a range of departments, including Student Affairs, Student Support, Student Services, Transformation and Equity, Health and Wellness, Residences, Communications and Marketing, Registrars and Administration, and many more (see table 11.1 below). This method facilitated rapid responses that reached a level deemed adequate for statistical purposes and for meaningful interpretation (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

6.5. Sample

The total population of this sector is hard to quantify as the boundaries of the SAS sector are fuzzy. Nonetheless, we decided that if each public university (South Africa

has 26 public universities) has 50 SAS staff, then a N of 362 would be sufficient, representing more than 25% of that population (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). The realised sample were 362 SAS staff and practitioners who responded, either in full or in parts, to the online questionnaire, completed the consent form, and closed their responses, thus consenting and including themselves in the survey. The valid set of 362 responses included responses from 26 universities and all university types were represented, traditional (73,6%), comprehensive (15,3%), as well as universities of technology (11,1%). Respondents were recruited at all levels of practice, with entry-level practitioners making up 19,5% of the sample; those in middle and senior management constituting 72%; and executives at 8,5%. The female-to-male ratio of the survey respondents was 69:41 (3% of respondents chose not to disclose gender). Staff from a diverse and wide range of SAS domains responded, self-identifying as working in the domain of SAS as illustrated in Table 11.1.

SAS domain (self-identified)	% Of total sample	Number of persons who identified from this domain (33 respondents did not complete this item)
Student support	21,70%	46
Student Affairs	15,57%	33
Faculty administration	12,26%	26
Student services	11,32%	24
Library	10,38%	22
ICT	8,49%	18
Orientation	8,02%	17
Research office	7,55%	16
Postgraduate office	6,60%	14
Sports	6,60%	14
Health and wellness including counselling & HIV-Aids	6,13%	13
Residences	5,19%	11
Human resources and staff wellness	4,72%	10
Registrar	4,72%	10
Transformation and equity	4,25%	9
Communications and marketing	3,30%	7
International office	3,30%	7
Infrastructure and operations	3,30%	7
Community engagement	3,30%	7
Student leadership & Student Representative Council	2,83%	6

SAS domain (self-identified)	% Of total sample	Number of persons who identified from this domain (33 respondents did not complete this item)
Student societies	2,83%	6
Legal and procurement	1,89%	4
Bursary	0,94%	2

Table 11.1: *Respondents from a range of SAS domains*

When snowballing the survey to the HEIs, we intentionally left the invitation as open as possible, to explore who would self-identify as providing student development, support, and services across the institutions. In addition, we recognised that the terminology used in HEIs is diverse, and we sought to be as inclusive as possible. The data reveal that 33 persons did not complete this item, suggesting that they might work within a domain not listed here and yet is within student development and student support, according to how they understood their function and role.

6.6. Limitations

Creswell discusses the inherent limitations of online surveys (Creswell, 2013). Online surveys, by definition only include those who have online access, which may bias the sample. Although this method increases participation, bias might be towards participants who comfortably use online media, neglecting responses from subjects who are either not using online media readily or do not have access to online media, as might be the case in some areas where WiFi is fragile or only intermittently available.

A second limitation is the sample size relative to the unknown total population. We aim to develop hypotheses and generate insight into the needs of this SAS population to shape a meaningful development programme. Given our aim is to generate insight and understanding, and we are not making statistical hypothesis testing or aiming to predict within a certain margin of error, a sample size of over 300 is considered sufficient (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

7. Findings

Our national HELM Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey investigated the training and development priorities and needs of staff and professionals working in the domain of SAS across the 26 public universities in South Africa. The data is reflected in percentages, and the findings are discussed in five emerging needs to develop competencies in:

1. Management and leadership.
2. Communication (digital, IT, diverse groups, etc.).

3. Transformation, gender equality, and social justice.
4. Contextual, sectoral, and institutional understanding.
5. Theories and practices in SAS.

Table 11.2 below shows responses to the question: *How important do you believe are each of the following competencies, skills, and knowledges in your current role, work, and context?*

Skills, competency, understanding and knowledge	% Of respondents who indicated high (4) or very high (5) for this item
Having adequate administrative and resource management skills for my current position.	89.42
Being able to use IT to communicate and perform work functions effectively.	87.44
Being able to manage my work and life balance effectively.	86.89
Being able to engage and communicate with diverse internal and external groups.	85.50
Being able to manage my own leadership/professional development.	85.02
Being able to manage my team's leadership/professional development.	84.13
Understanding, applying, and accelerating online engagement, support, and advise.	81.25
Understanding how universities plan strategically and operationally.	80.58
Understanding, applying, or accelerating diversity and equality.	78.85
Understanding, applying, or accelerating transformation notions, processes, and imperatives.	75.85
Understanding the higher education policy and regulatory environment.	72.56
Understanding the performance management system and how to implement it.	69.90
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements of academic planning for teaching and learning.	66.50
Understanding how universities are funded and financed.	64.25
Understanding the labour relations legislation and process.	63.91
Understanding the role of risk management and business continuity in universities.	63.60
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements for community engagement.	60.39

Skills, competency, understanding and knowledge	% Of respondents who indicated high (4) or very high (5) for this item
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements for research development and management.	60.20

Table 11.2: *Responses to question about the importance of skill, competency, understanding, and knowledge in SAS work*

Participants indicated how important they believe each of the competencies, skills, and knowledge appear in their current role, work, and context. Participants could indicate 1-5 on a Likert scale, from low (1) somewhat (2), medium (3), high (4), and very high (5). Table 11.2 above shows the results of the sum of scores 4 (high) and 5 (very high) on the Likert scale. The table is read as follows: for the first item, for instance, item 1, having adequate administrative and resource management skills, was given scores 4 or 5 by 89,42% of participants. In other words, 89.42% of the participants indicated that this competency ranks as high or very high in their current role. The following five themes are not mutually exclusive and represent a tentative grouping of competencies that appeared as important to the participants.

7.1. Management and leadership

Needs around leadership and management competencies are reflected in item 1, 3, 5, 6,12, 14 and 15 in Table 11.2 above. These reveal that generic leadership and management competencies are rated very highly by the participants.

7.2. Communication

As Table 11.2 above shows, competencies around communication, using IT, being able to communicate with diverse internal and external groups, employing online engagement for support and advice were rated as high (4) or very high (5) (see items 2, 4, and 7).

7.3. Transformation, gender equality, and social justice

As Table 11.2 above reveals, the competency around how to advance transformation, gender equality and justice, equity, and diversity were rated as highly important with item 9 and 10 speaking to these competencies.

7.4. Contextual, sectoral, and institutional understanding

Understanding universities, the sector and context, and the overall regulatory frameworks, organisational processes, institutional planning and financial processes, and various other such issues related to the context into which universities are embedded were also considered as important. This is reflected in item 8, and 11 to 18 in Table 11.2 above.

7.5. Theories and practices in SAS

Participants rated their knowledge of theory and practice in SAS. Rating was possible on a 4-point Likert scale (1=not really, 2=low, 3=medium, and 4=high). Almost a quarter of participants (22.6%) indicated that they felt they are "not really" familiar with theoretical frameworks and functional areas of SAS, and almost a quarter assessed themselves to have "low" (25.42%) knowledge. A larger group of participants (37.85%) indicated that they felt they have a medium level knowledge, and 14.12% indicated a high level of knowledge of theoretical frameworks of SAS.

Not really	Low	Medium	High
22.60%	25.42%	37.85%	14.12%

Table 11.3: *Respondent knowledge of theoretical frameworks and functional areas of SAS*

Participants were asked to rate their experience with research and scholarship in SAS. Rating was possible on a 3-point Likert scale (1=I'm fairly new, 2=I have working knowledge, 3=I'm experienced). A third (32.95) rated themselves as fairly new to the area of SAS research and scholarship, half of the participants (51.71%) said they have working knowledge, and 15.34% indicated that they are experienced in this area.

Fairly new	Working knowledge	Experienced
32.95%	51.71%	15.34%

Table 11.4: *Respondent interest in research and scholarship in the areas of SDSS and/or SAS*

8. Discussion

Ciobanau (2013, p. 169) states that "supporting and enhancing the student experience (academic, social, welfare, and support) from first contact through to becoming alumni is critical to success in higher education today for both the student and the institution". Enhancing the student experiences, their sense of belonging, participation, and engagement are essential to advancing student-centred higher education spaces and, ultimately, student success. Hence, to improve the South African higher education sector's performance, and more specifically, to make the sector, more student-centred, requires the capacitation of staff working in the Student Affairs and Services (SAS) domain within universities. For the capacitation of this domain, it is essential to understand the domain's needs for training and development. To this end, the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) of this domain was undertaken and is reported on in this chapter.

While staff needs are discussed here in terms of competencies, this discussion risks a simplification and instrumentalisation of the role and function of SAS in higher education. The competencies, hence, are just *one* aspect of staff development and need to be augmented with a more profound understanding and analysis of the role and position of SAS and its role in the higher education sector (Carpenter

& Haber-Curran, 2013; Gansemer-Topf, 2013; Selznick, 2013). Selznick (2013, p. 11) highlights the importance of incorporating "an awareness of the complex and diverse nature of African student affairs work", and any staff development programme would need to include dimensions of critical self-analysis, socio-political positionality, wider issues in the socio-cultural and economic context and how SAS positions itself as agents and role players within a wider context into which higher education is embedded.

Our study reveals that the sector's need for capacitation, development, and training is widespread, explicit, and compelling. The priorities and needs range from general leadership competencies and management capacitation to skills-based needs such as digital communication and online engagement, as well as priorities to accelerate the sectors' goals of transformation, access, equity, and diversity. Needs also include capacitation to understand the higher education sector and respond to university-specific issues, such as financing and funding, risk management, research and knowledge management, and labour relations. Participants in this survey also expressed the need to understand Student Affairs theory and practice to advance their impact on student and institutional success.

The themes emerging from this survey are grouped into and discussed in five clusters of competencies and needs: 1) needs and priorities around leadership and management development, 2) needs and priorities around communication competencies, including digital engagement, IT, and communication with diverse others, 3) competencies to accelerate transformation, advance equality and social justice, 4) understanding higher education context, organisational and institutional aspects, and 5) competencies around theories and frameworks of SAS and practices related to functional areas of SAS.

These clusters correspond to Student Affairs and Services competencies listed elsewhere across the globe, specifically the USA, where these competencies are part of the ten professional competency areas against which the SAS domain is measured in the USA (ACPA-NASPA, n.d.). In Canada the competency model for SAS staff is slightly more focused on personal leadership competencies (Cacuss, 2017) and Botswana, as the first country in Africa, has a set of National Norms and Standards for Student Affairs and Services which also reflect a similar list of competencies as the ones that emerge from this survey (HRDC, 2017). The cluster of development needs, as was found in this study, correspond largely to the competency frameworks from these international regions (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2017).

The specific competencies and needs listed by the South African SAS respondents which appear unique to this context and are less pronounced in other countries and regions focus on the need to accelerate transformation, diversity, and equality. More than three quarter of our respondents indicated that understanding, applying, and accelerating diversity and equality (78,85%) and understanding, applying, and accelerating transformation notions, processes, and imperatives (75,85%) features highly on their list of needs.

The need to understand how to accelerate transformation, equality and social justice is reflected in the South African sectoral aims and strategy and the national development plan (NDP, 2013). The need to develop competencies to advance transformation, diversity and equality is complex and requires knowledge, insights, and understanding, as well as a particular personal awareness, stance, and attitudes. The transformation competencies are not discreet or performative but require challenging prevailing implicit and explicit normative assumptions. This need might be unique to South Africa, more research is required to explore this.

The need to have leadership and management competencies is perhaps not unusual in the sector (Seale et al., 2021) and emerges here clearly as a priority. Overall, participants indicated that in their current work leadership, management skills, and competencies take on a highly important role, including having adequate resource management skills (89.42%), being able to communicate effectively, either via IT (87.44%) or with diverse internal and external groups (85.50%). Leading self and others also emerged as an important aspect of their work (85.02% and 84.13%) and addressing work-life balance (86.89%) emerged as a very high priority, perhaps because of COVID-19-related changes to blurring work-life distinctions. COVID-19 might have amplified the need for competencies in the online communication space (87.44%) or the competency to manage work-life balance (86.89%).

Competencies and skills that are related to the specific higher education and university context also emerged as uniquely important. This includes understanding university strategic planning (80.85%), understanding the higher education regulatory environment (72.56%), having knowledge of university funding (64.25%) and understanding higher education aspects around research (60.20%).

The respondents in this study also indicated that knowledge and understanding of the SAS theories and models for good practice, research, and scholarship is an important part of their work and occupies a priority for their role in supporting and developing students. This reflects the need to improve and enhance their work, their engagement with the principles that inform the work and their need to reflect on the underpinning values that frame their thinking and practice. It is pivotal that staff are grounded in SAS theory and good practice models, so that their engagement with students and the institution is more than intuitive or administrative, but is premised on evidence, theory, and good-practice models. The question around how existing theories and practices are contextualised and situated, are articulated to local indigenous experienced contexts presents itself when engaging with theory and practice models that are generated in other contexts.

In addition, transforming higher education into student-centred living and learning spaces requires not only staff competencies to deliver particular kinds of functions as discussed above, but a more reflective and critical engagement with

the role and function of SAS with regards to students, the institutions, and wider social justice issues and socio-economic context that impact on academic success.

Given the discussion of the results of this national training needs survey, the next steps might be to use this data to shape relevant and meaningful staff development opportunities which develop competencies – not discreet and performative skills, but competencies that are grounded in understanding, stance, and attitudes. But perhaps most importantly, a staff development opportunity needs to enable SAS staff to put the student at the centre and offer contextualised, relevant, and impactful engagements that support and challenge students, and in addition, assist the institution in changing culture and climate towards a student-centred higher education sector.

9. Conclusion

The Student Affairs and Services, student development, support and services domain are key contributors towards promoting contextual factors that enable institutions to become student-centred spaces in which students can thrive. Staff who deliver in this space require support, development, and training. The needs intersect and include leadership and management competencies, understanding of sectoral and institutional processes, competencies to advance and accelerate transformation and understanding of specific student support and development competencies.

This chapter contributes towards knowledge and scholarship on developing staff capacitation within a student-centred paradigm. It describes the kinds of competencies that capacitate staff, professionals, management, and leadership in this "third space" of the higher education sector which is characterised by ambiguity, complexity, multi-disciplinarity, and hybridity (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Bhabha, 2004; Whitechurch, 2019a).

We assert that developing competencies is only one, albeit vital, aspect of a meaningful SAS staff development programme. Moreover, it is essential that such a staff development programme promotes a critical, insightful, and reflective stance, so that staff can contribute compellingly not only to student success, but towards a student-centred context that enables contextualised, relevant, and impactful development for students and institutions. A staff development programme, that develops competencies as discussed in this chapter, needs to reflect on wider social and cultural issues into which the universities are embedded and embolden staff to interrupt the vicious cycle of reproducing the pervasive inequalities that persist in our society (Bawa, 2014).

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CHAPTER 12

UN-DISCIPLINING OURSELVES THROUGH AN ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM INNOVATION: TOWARDS SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN SCHOLARLY WRITING AND TEACHING

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Abstract
As we move into an unknown future in higher education, the ability of university teachers, students, and the curriculum to be responsive and innovative is critical.

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This need was tested during the pandemic with the expectation of pivoting toward online modes of learning and teaching, when academics had to learn on their feet as they moved their students to online classroom spaces. These moments highlight the need for academic professional learning to support ongoing growth for teachers in higher education. The purpose of this chapter is to share the story of a specific academic professional learning course, which provided opportunities for human connection in times of extreme crisis, such as the pandemic. Framed as a creative curriculum innovation, the course re-imagined scholarly work on learning and teaching as a form of social justice and activism. Using WhatsApp as a pedagogical platform, the facilitator and participants (the authors of this chapter) engaged in a 12-week process of individual and collective learning to stimulate a process of re-imagining new ways of learning and teaching in higher education. We used multi-ethnographic methods to reflect individually and collectively on our experiences and to analyse these collectively. This chapter exemplifies how such curriculum innovation and design are able to trigger deep and meaningful change towards re-imagining academic scholarship of learning and teaching that embodies a socially ACTivist stance. We found that these academics are empowered to introduce these new practices and pedagogies to their students through re-imagining their own repertoires.

Keywords: autography; decolonial; public intellectual; scholarship; social inclusion

1. Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of our experiences of a novel academic professional learning (APL) innovation, which ran as a non-accredited short course over 12 weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are seven academics from four disciplines, namely the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), Occupational Therapy, Information Systems, and Law at the University of Cape Town, ranking from senior clinical educator or lecturer to dean.

When the COVID-19 pandemic ripped the proverbial rug from under our feet, academics and students were left on shaky ground. The unpredictability of delivering tertiary education during a pandemic (see Islam, 2021) meant that academics were constantly navigating the slippery slopes of a 'new normal'. Enabling and ensuring the APL of academics in the context of crisis and change is like painting a bus while it is moving. There was pressure on academics to be innovative and responsive, especially in online teaching, which, if not mediated intentionally, could have a de-humanising effect (Laura & Chapman, 2007; Laura & Hannam, 2017). Holding the pedagogical space with integrity and humanity was critical in our attempts to leave no students behind.

As academics, we found ourselves exhausted and focused on the urgent redesign of the new virtual learning and teaching space. However, we simultaneously recognised the need for our own replenishment and creativity, prompting us to sign up for an APL course that could contribute the necessary "sustenance' we

describe and reflect on in this chapter. The APL course was grounded in our participation in an academic development programme offered by the CHED at the University of Cape Town for mid-career academics. Ironically, it was not focused on online support but on discussions of the importance of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (see Boyer, 1990; Trigwell et al., 2006) as social activism through academic teaching and writing. By signing up for the course, we acknowledged that this form of APL is the very pool from which academics have to draw as they expand and extend themselves during and beyond times of crisis. In other words, we assert that the APL of academics as social activists has the potential to act as both a lever and catalyst for change.

The APL course described in this chapter provides an example of curriculum innovation, which is responsive to a time of crisis and relative to the affordances of participants (academics as students) at the time. Using decoloniality as a theoretical lens, we, as participants and facilitator of the course and authors of this chapter, reflected on how the course unearthed our ability to dive deeply into our own sense of self as academics, to connect with and find our metaphorical and authorial voice and vision, and to teach and write in ways that foreground scholarship as a call for action, re-centring Africa as a locus of enunciation.

2. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as Social Activism WhatsApp Course

The SoTL as Social Activism course forms part of the Established and Seasoned Academic Practitioners' Programme (ESAPP), which persevered amidst the conditions of lockdown and physical distancing during 2021. The ESAPP is an example of an institutional professional learning programme aimed at mid-career academics to facilitate the ongoing culture of learning. It is designed to strengthen learning and teaching practices at postgraduate level, to navigate the perplexed field of academic scholarship and its challenges.

As a sub-project of the ESAPP, a group of participants opted to join the SoTL as Social Activism cluster, to deepen their understanding of scholarship from a decolonial perspective. Our identity and agency as SoTL authors with a social activist disposition is critical to challenging the SoTL reproduction of scholarly processes, and traditions that privilege dominant forms of ahistorical and decontextualised knowledge-making and knowing in learning and teaching (Behari-Leak, 2022). Reproducing oppressive academic practices as we bring SoTL into public contexts requires a commitment to critical self-reflection to reimagine SoTL work, seeking various types of justice (Chick & Friberg, 2022). As a way of challenging reproduced practices, we included our reflections on this aspect of the course. This forms part of the data set for the entire chapter (see methodology section).

2.1. Aims of the course

The main aim of the course was to re-focus academics' academic writing to respond to issues affecting higher education – and all its component parts – in ways that engage the academic and the social as entangled parts, always in interplay. The course was designed to enable participants to find their own authorial voices. It intentionally provided the space to connect with those issues that are close to their heart, but to engage with those as a form of legitimate academic scholarship. It was anticipated that, through the deep process of internal deliberations and soul searching, the participants would be able to explore new pedagogical ideas while amplifying social justice concerns. Please note that all quotes are reproduced verbatim and unedited.

> My particular interest in creating this short course […] is to develop a cadre of impactful writers in academia who can engage the social imaginary and rewrite a new social compact for HE and society. By this I mean that we need to think and imagine widely and wildly what a new, inclusive, socially just higher education could be. I believe we can do this by imagining how we can be different, authentic, relevant, and responsive to our students and our contexts and disseminate this through our scholarship. [Facilitator].

The intended outcome was the infusion of participants' "academic" writing and teaching as social activism, a perspective much needed in academia today, as the boundaries and borders between the university and society become blurred and porous.

2.2. WhatsApp as an APL platform

The novel aspect of the SoTL as Social Activism course was using WhatsApp as a cost-effective platform for delivery. In many ways, the short course modelled online learning practice with low bandwidth, low-cost data connectivity, and any-time-any-place accessibility as constraints. The choice of WhatsApp was deliberate, as it offered a safe and relaxed space that was intended to divert from the formality and conventions of "writing for publication" courses that suppress a relaxed and generative way of thinking, feeling, doing, being, and writing. In other words, participants were encouraged to be themselves and express themselves honestly and creatively without fear of failure. WhatsApp has been used extensively in educational contexts (see Durgungoz & Durgungoz, 2022) to enable participants to learn differently (see Robinson et al. 2015), create a sense of belonging (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014), and provide a context for social and emotional support for peers (Timmis, 2012). This has significant links with the social justice aims of the APL course where social activism is the key focus of participants' SoTL writing. Before the facilitator established the WhatsApp group, she shared the course outline and guide with participants via email and invited all participants to a ZOOM meeting to discuss

the course overview and methodology. WhatsApp was used for all communication and the upload of course instalments, as well as for checking in when submissions were completed. Participants texted the facilitator in a private message with clarification questions, the exception being when they were specifically asked to post to the group chat. The course encouraged accountability, as participants had to check in every two weeks to indicate that the tasks had been completed.

3. Theoretical Reference Point

The course was informed by the Latin-American scholarship of (de)coloniality of being (see Maldonado-Torres, 2007), which intended to shape the authorial voices and scholarly thoughts in authentic ways, irrespective of the publication pressure placed on academics in higher education (Callaghan, 2016; Von Solms & Von Solms, 2016). From a decolonial perspective, power-wielding journals use their conventions, traditions, and hegemonic writing practices to reject submissions without considering who academics are and where they are writing from (Moya, 2011). By not being supported to assert their geographical and cultural location and ethos, academics voices are further marginalised. Ironically, those voices from the margins are critical to the centre and the socio-cultural revolution discourse in higher education globally. This revolution has enabled others from different spaces and places to expand their global (read: mainstream) understanding of critical theory in praxis and has provided all with a vocabulary to express and understand their own lived reality. This becomes poignant, especially in Africa, where the genealogies and histories of who we are and from where we speak are intertwined and cannot be sanitised or clinically sculpted. The decolonial movement challenges academics in the global South to engage in epistemic disobedience – that is, to reject Western epistemology as being neutral, universal, and detached (Mignolo, 2009; Miles, 2019; Morreira, 2017). Epistemic disobedience calls on academics in the global South to consider drawing on epistemologies that are contextually relevant to producing and using knowledge from Africa. Academics need to re-centre and remember what it means to be human in this space as a form of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2013). Re-authoring and re-authorising our self-narratives and the histories that pre-date us, are critical in the current context where fake news, duplicity, cloning, and social engineering compromise the testimonial justice of those who have been marginalised.

4. Course Design

The WhatsApp course was designed as an asynchronous intervention with a bi-weekly instalment, providing a range of prompts to ignite writers' creativity to dive into who they are as academics, and what they are passionate about as human beings. The course duration was 12 weeks, with the facilitator sharing a different set of inputs – including poems, photographs, memes,



Figure 12.2 *Course calendar*

voice notes, songs, movies, and academic articles that she curated with a thematic focus in mind – every two weeks. Each theme brought attention to an aspect of learning and teaching with the (de)coloniality of being (see Mignolo, 2009) in mind. For instance, our usual practices and ways of doing were called forth for reflection using decolonial ways of thinking. Some of the prompts called on participants to meditate, draw, listen to a podcast or song and/or use these as stimuli to respond to a written task. The facilitator used short voice recordings for instructions and tasks that we had to complete. Learning was largely independent.

> There was no course registration, fees, course outline, assessments, or even a detailed schedule. Just the commitment to participate in the course and an "I'm in" at the start of a roller-coaster journey of self-discovery [Participant 1].

The focus was on deep engagement as opposed to outcomes. This was facilitated by the exclusion of formal evaluation from the course. Self-discipline was required to maintain accountability and commitment.

> The bi-weekly check-ins helped me to be accountable and encouraged me to complete the tasks. Where I really could not complete the task for that 2-week period, I knew I could communicate with [the facilitator]. [Participant 2].

> Engaging was important and learning through this was important. It was not about outcomes; it was about engagement. But it was committed engagement, which stood in place of usual outcomes in the form of assessment. This set the stage for what was to come and built the container in which the rest of the course could emerge. [Participant 3].

We were empowered to regulate our time, input, and outcomes as part of a less formal learning experience. This allowed open, honest, and authentic reflections, resulting in uniquely curated written and creative pieces. The learner-centred nature of the course encouraged freedom to develop perspectives and voice in authentic ways. Whilst much of the learning experience was individual, there was also recognition of the 'collective journey' that provided significant motivation. Participant 3 noted the intentionality of this approach by describing the online, synchronous introduction to the course that occurred before its start:

> The facilitator used the analogy of being part of "weight watchers" – a (mostly) easily identifiable cultural reference to a weight loss programme, but importantly, one that happens in a group context. While the weight loss is individual, the journey is collective. I see now, in retrospect, the parallels this has to the experience of the SoTL Whatsapp course. The change was individual, but the journey was collective. [Participant 3].

5. Methodology

In developing our collective voice, we drew on the tenets of a multi-ethnographic approach, which entailed three or more researchers collaboratively analysing and evaluating their understanding of social issues to arrive at new insights after various rounds of interpretation (Gagné et al., 2018). This allowed us to explore our experiences of the course and our contextualised responses to its provocations. The diversity of perspectives by having all authors involved arguably produced a rigorous data generation and analytic process (Orton et al., 2019). In this context, we acted as both the "researchers" and the "researched" (see Gagné et al., 2018).

After the course had concluded, we met to reflect on our participation. We felt that the course had enabled the development of our thought processes towards social activism in our scholarly writing and teaching. During these conversations, we decided to generate individual vignettes about our experiences. Each vignette was uniquely constructed but paid attention to the question: How did engagement in the course enable social activism in scholarly writing and teaching? To construct our vignettes, we each drew on three sources:

- reflections generated as part of our 12-week engagement in the course (May 2021–Aug 2021);
- our response to a set of reflection questions that we had answered as part of evaluating the course (reflection sheet contributions); and
- a short paragraph that each of us constructed in direct response to the above question (March 2022).

The facilitator generated a vignette about her experience designing and facilitating the course. We used the vignettes as our dataset, which further prompted a critical dialogue about our experiences. During these dialogues, we deliberated reflexively, choosing to follow a two-level analysis process (Table 12.1).

First-level analysis	Second-level analysis
We coded our vignettes independently, highlighting engagement, enablement, social activism and thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. We then grouped these codes together to identify emergent ideas. Afterwards, we met face-to-face to share the first-level analysis. An overall theme emerged from the deliberations that best captured the experiences of all participants: "ACTivist" stances – digging up the parts to bring ourselves together.	We constructed a consolidated thematic table that included the emerging theme and the key ideas. After that, each of us added the data from our vignettes, which supported the ideas co-created through our face-to-face dialogues. This allowed us to re-engage with the raw data and served as a further mechanism for consolidation.

Table 12.1: *Levels of analysis*

Given that we drew on our personal experience of the course and no third parties were affected or risks involved, we did not pursue ethics approval.

6. Co-Creative Sense-Making

Academic conventions tend to straitjacket authors into specific modes of rigidity and sterility, which often belie the rich texture and nuance (see Yoo, 2017) that are vital parts of courses such as this one for participants to think, act and live "outside the box". Inspired by the tone and tenor of the course itself, we chose to infuse our writing of this chapter with a similar scholarly innovation to include our previously silenced, unique, individual, and collective voices. We see the intentional focus on our authorial voice as a decolonial gesture intended to de-link from the conventions of academic writing that render certain people silent, invisible, and marginal. We wanted to develop the inspiration to find and strengthen our authentic voices in the hope that what we say will not bear punitive consequences from publishers, if not by our institutions as well. We see voice as part of our individual and collective authenticity to illustrate and assert our own signature style and insights that allow us to breathe in academia. As we present and re-member our re-flections and our sense of who we are in sense of who we are in "Afrika" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2009) through the collective analysis of our vignettes, we aim to provide enough structure to allow the reader to follow our argument, but we do so by example and by performatively enacting what we say. We believe that it is in the act of being new that the new is born. We hope that this newness finds a captive audience.

6.1. Reflexive deliberations

Our reflective conversations prompted an important question: How did our experiences of the course inspire us to be activists in our disciplinary and teaching spaces? In attempting to respond to this question, we realised a disconnect between our actions and what the university or our disciplines expected us to do, thereby surfacing a tension that we needed to negotiate. In our dialogues, we reflected on how the course had carved out a space through which we were able to explore and learn how we might navigate our own sense of identity, voice, and agency differently. The ongoing process of generating activism in scholarly writing and teaching was recognised as dynamic, disobeying the "boundaries" of the course experience. There was acknowledgement that none of us had in any way "arrived", and that the introspection and navigation triggered through the course continued. In the sections that follow, we share the key ideas that emerged as part of these deliberations.

6.2. "ACTivist" stances – digging up the parts to bring ourselves together

Engagement in the course prompted the generation of "ACTivist stances" – the product of digging up ourselves as a way of bringing our identities together and reclaiming our voices. We acknowledge the important interplay between agency, identity, and discipline in generating these stances. Critically understanding and negotiating this relationship was prompted through the different course instalments. We could see how this influenced our scholarship and ways of being in the academic space.

> As I stand now and stare out of a clear glass window, I am grateful for the experiences that have shaped who I am today. Deeply rooted in how I choose to ACTivist and enact my own sense of agency, is a form of liberation in response to an environment that is saying to you every day to BE someone else. The value I gained from this reciprocal relationship in this course can be described as a symbolic one of growth and change. Because the structure of the course was what it was, and reciprocal exchange of knowledge was structured as triggers that afforded opportunities that valued deep reflection. [Participant 4].

Participant 4's experience resonated with many of us.

> The course offered this opportunity for introspection and reflection at a really critical time. We were coming out of years of student protests and in the midst of a pandemic. There is this persistent questioning of academia and whether we perpetuate the harms of the past. The course offered a curated space in which you could contemplate and grapple with issues rather than just seeking to work through it yourself – or not grapple with it because you were so overwhelmed with work and daily tasks. It was directed and intentional which elicited a much deeper engagement with issues. [Participant 5].

Participant 5's idea of a curated space was made possible because of the contextually relevant prompts that forced us to think about ourselves, our thinking, and how this connected to our positionality. Similarly, students' positionality is important in understanding the historical constraints they face as a result of who they are, where they come from, and how they are predisposed to opportunity and challenge in higher education. This foregrounds a student-centredness in our engagements in class.

Participant 3 described the experience of introspection as "digging yourself up" in her vignette, drawing a parallel with the idea of the course operating as an "archaeological dig site" through its pedagogies:

> The pedagogical approach continuously worked to bring to the surface (expose), understand and work through myself and its relationships to my teaching and research (process), and then to reflect on and document these in ways that helped me to further process this learning into my teaching and research moving forward (record). [Participant 3].

Some of us connected with how we might extend this learning into our own teaching spaces.

> The prompts required me to explore these questions at a deeper level by asking me to reflect on "who I am" and how I greet my students in a socially inclusive way. From this reflection, it appears as if the more authentic our "check-ins" in our classrooms are, the more included our students will feel. On reflection, I realised that if we as educators take a deeper interest in our students and their identities the course becomes more meaningful to them. [Participant 1].

The prompts were recognised as exceptionally powerful triggers for introspection. Participant 5 acknowledged how the organisation of these prompts was critical.

> It is a song I had heard before, but never had the same impact. I think the prompts and the song in particular had the impact it did because of the overall way the course was curated. In the sense that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. So put together the prompts could trigger feelings and lead to a greater reaction than if you simply listened/read them alone. [Participant 5].

Different prompts resonated differently for each of us, but we all agreed with Participant 2's reflection of their significance for the overall introspective process:

> A vital part of this journey was the purposeful way in which the content was curated and the bridging between each instalment which helped me make the links on a personal level. The use of multiple media to evoke emotions and the reflective tasks to capture my thinking (which I knew were for me only) were powerful in leading me deeper to bring things to the surface and helped me find my critical voice. [Participant 2].

The experience of introspection during the course elicited the realisation that some of us had become disconnected and needed to reconnect with our authentic selves. Participant 4 reflected on how daunting this can be:

> The thought of exposing my authentic self was very daunting. How would I possibly respond to students who look and act differently to me? [Participant 4].

Whilst often uncomfortable, introspection also generated hope by facilitating a reconnection with the past, to find oneself again in the present and in doing so, to re-discover one's voice.

> This course has helped me see that my voice is still there … I had to make this voice of mine known again, dig it out of its dormancy. It had been filed away … It needed to be heard once again. [Participant 6].

The facilitator offered an image in her reflection, which captured the intention of the course to allow the authentic self to emerge through this process of introspection. By sharing our experiences, we discovered that it was possible to work with the discomfort evoked through this process because of the safe space to reflect honestly, as it was produced intentionally as part of the course design. Participant 5 captured this in her vignette:

> I dislike exercises that require you to share private details publicly. The exercises worked so well because there was no pressure to do so. The exercises which required you to be honest could be done so well because no one would judge you and you would not be forced to reveal details to perfect strangers. What you took from the course was really determined by how prepared you were to be honest with yourself and go through the exercises. I think the private reflection allows for real honesty. [Participant 5].

The course also prompted us to think through and use our agency differently in response to the experienced "disconnect", which strongly affected those of us in leadership positions.

> Negotiating the academic environment is difficult. In a leadership position I was struggling to reconnect – the struggle is the tension between making the 'right' decision vs. this is what the university is saying, this is what you should be doing. [Participant 4].

Collectively, we reflected on the process of navigating through the discomfort that arose when it dawned on us that what we were required to "do" did not match who we really were. This was related to the realisation of how the academic environment can be dehumanising, resulting in our personal activism being repressed. Participant 2 reflected on this experience:

> Understanding at a deeper level how the tension I have experienced between me, the person, and me, the academic (with all the expectations that go with that) and how that has repressed the activism part of me because of fear of judgement from colleagues and the possible repercussions on my career trajectory. So, I have largely towed the line. [Participant 2].

The process of learning how to navigate and challenge this disconnect could be described as a balancing act, which we captured metaphorically as walking a tightrope.

> During this process of finding myself, I was also at the same [time] negotiating the academic environment to reconnect. Reconnecting the self was a critical turning point, as I had to walk

> the tightrope in balancing my negative and positive traits to find the right me. [Participant 4].

The course enabled us to see how we were conditioned and constrained by ideologies within our academic disciplines. Disciplines give us boundaries within which to operate, but also restrict our freedoms. By adopting decolonial thinking strategies, academics may foster the learning and teaching that could facilitate students to be involved in diverse activities. This has the potential to bring about change and transformation, which may enhance participants' freedom to reflect on de-linking through acts of epistemic disobedience. Re-connection required a sense of discomfort so we could move out of our comfort zones and trigger the learning required to "find your unique voice".

> Through this process, I came to the realization that I need to find my own voice, both in my teaching and research, to break out of the mould [excavate] that the discipline and institution expects me to fill. [Participant 1].

> I think the timing of the course was critical for me in finding a voice. For so long the rules of the university and academy seemed set. You either did things in accordance with the rules or you would not succeed. The pandemic revealed how flimsy those rules [are] and how they could be challenged and changed when needed. [Participant 5].

The course created the space for academics – often overwhelmed by the demands of the profession – to consider social justice concerns within the pedagogies of learning and teaching. The vignettes of participants revealed that the course ignited much more:

> An unintended outcome [of the WhatsApp course] was the deep revelation each participant unearthed about who they are as academics and how they want to shape higher education (HE) positively in this crisis and beyond. Focusing the short course on scholarly ways to imbue SoTL with a keen sense of social responsiveness to tackle challenging societal issues through courageous scholarship, meant that we were learning to engage as public intellectuals with SoTL in Action, not just as academic researchers for journals, publishers, and rankings. Like Chick (2019), I believe SoTL needs to be broadened to engage those we consider to be our public(s). We need to use our research and scholarly writing to create a different ethos, where the public out there (society) can engage with the public in here (university) in a healthy, reciprocal, and robust relationship. By opening up our audiences to include students, peers, society and communities,

> we can learn to write with a sense of purpose and the goal of positive change for all concerned. This activism is needed to raise consciousness about solutions and interventions that can add value to our pedagogical problems currently. [Facilitator].

It was clear that the experience of participating in the course marked the start and/or continuation of "un-disciplining" ourselves within the university space. The course offered the opportunity to de-link from and challenge the coloniality of being that is most often prescribed for us within the HE terrain. This was not about finding ourselves anew; rather, it was about re-claiming what had been "put aside" in order to breathe again.

6.3. The course experience

Our experience described in this chapter provided an opportunity to re-imagine how students might be centred more intentionally within the HE space. The course, and its facilitation, intentionally disobeyed the usual criteria for a legitimate course within higher education. This happened in two critical ways:

- by intentionally removing peer and teacher scrutiny of participation in the course; and
- by engaging us, as students, in a novel, easily accessible and stimulating learning platform, without formal assessment practices.

This focused our learning within the realm of "being human", where the intent was for students to find their voices, not for anyone else's gain or approval, but for our own development as humans who are also academics. Significantly, it demonstrated how "becoming through learning" is intimately intertwined with course design, structure, and content. This compelled us to consider whether innovation in higher education is best served through complying with the usual course conventions. It exemplifies what might emerge when course construction – or any student learning experience – focuses on contextual relevance and student and societal needs when determining how to design learning experiences that are student-centred.

7. Implications for Reimagining Student Success in Higher Education

Imagine a HE system free from the legacies of the past, where success is measured by students' degree of personal change and transformation with reference to their own starting point, and not by grades, course averages, throughput, or compliance with pre-determined outcomes. The APL course discussed here challenged some of these colonial beliefs (and us as students and academics) by way of a novel course where the only measurement for success was the voluntary participation and bi-weekly check-ins to announce the completion of activities.

Nature of the prompts	Need to: ■ resonate deeply with the facilitator's own being to be effective; ■ trigger a deeper level of reflexivity in students; and ■ provide a broad range of media, including texts that resonate with the facilitator and the students.
Student attributes and dispositions	Willingness to: ■ dig deep in order to surface their own false beliefs and identities; ■ engage with the prompts to develop their own voice; and ■ deeply reflect on the insights gained from the prompts and activities.
Structure of the course in effecting learning	Enable students to: ■ reconnect with their latent identities (in this case as educators in higher education); ■ see how the predominantly colonial beliefs in higher education constrained their own beliefs; and ■ tap into new ways of social responsiveness and activism in their own HE contexts.

Table 12.2: *Key insights in the course and its delivery*

Using decoloniality as a theoretical reference point, we reflected on our ability to dive deeply into our own sense of self as academics, teachers, researchers, and disciplinary experts to connect with and find our voice, presence, and vision. This process also actioned us to find ways to re-centre Afrika as a locus of epistemological enunciation and pedagogical innovation as part of our scholarship. As part of the process of writing this chapter, we, the facilitator, and participants, were able to de-brief with each other on our experiences during the course and share our discomforts in a safe space without having to share the intimate details of our responses to the tasks and activities. This safe forum provided us with some key insights about the course and the nature of its delivery, which can be drawn on for re-imagining learning and teaching in higher education. Whilst the outcome of the course is a collective voice, we deliberately prioritised each of our own analyses of our experiences and were careful not to erase some voices and spotlight others. We recognise that our positionality as individuals, who identified as established or seasoned academic professionals, is different to that of many students in the HE space. Nonetheless, we believe that our experience of the course holds insight into how the HE space could enable social activism in learning and teaching.

8. Conclusion

The past two years have re-emphasised the need for academic professional learning (APL) of academics in the context of online and blended learning. This chapter has presented the experiences of academics as students participating in a 12-week WhatsApp course that aimed to re-position APL as social activism. Using decoloniality as a theoretical reference point, we reflected on and analysed

our experiences of participating in this course. The course allowed each of us to find our metaphorical voice and un-discipline ourselves from how we have been professionalised in our respective disciplines. The significance of the contextually relevant prompts in the course, the deep and meaningful experiences that the reflections provided, the discomfort of sharing these experiences, and the freedom of the WhatsApp platform to navigate and explore this disconnect, resulted in the unintended consequence of delving deeper into ourselves, as academics. The chapter illustrated how curriculum innovation and design, offered through a WhatsApp course, can trigger deep and meaningful change and provide a new possibility for a rich learning opportunity for students towards re-imagining the scholarship of learning and teaching that embodies a socially ACTivist stance. Even though it was never the intention for the participants in this course to replicate the WhatsApp course with their own students, it is hoped that in some ways, the legacy of the SoTL for Social Activism course will continue in our own teaching practices.

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CHAPTER 13

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CENTRING STUDENTS: INTENTIONALLY INTEGRATING ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS PRACTICES

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Abstract

Academic Learning Professionals (ALPs) and Student Success Professionals (SSPs) play a key part in the way higher education responds to and grapples with complex contexts and disruptions to learning and teaching. In this chapter, the authors argue for a more intentional and structured integration of the work done by ALPs and SSPs, drawing on their insights and reflections from working in these areas over several years. They contend that to make a meaningful shift to student-centredness as the South African higher education sector transitions to blended learning and teaching, the work of ALPs and SSPs must be made to intersect. Through critical reflection and by drawing on Gibbs' (1988) cyclical reflective model, the authors explore how integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs, through the intentional centring of students' holistic needs, is key to equipping academics with the insight and awareness required for student-centredness, with the aim of enhancing students' prospects of success.

Keywords: academic advising; academic development; academic professional learning; reflective practice; student centredness; student success

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, South Africa's higher education terrain has been characterised by an increase in student numbers resulting from the removal of barriers to access (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). This massification (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Adetiba, 2019) has brought to the fore numerous learning and teaching considerations. The urgency to centre student needs and experiences during the tertiary learning journey is one such focus area. This is hardly surprising, considering the pervasive and radical restructuring of the university student demographic over the last thirty years (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Against this backdrop, the lockdown period that transpired from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) (Hodges et al., 2020) across the South African higher education sector (Badat, 2020; Motala & Menon, 2020; Krull, 2022). This meant that higher education institutions (HEIs) whose learning and teaching was predominantly predicated on contact/physical interaction had to adapt their ways of learning and teaching to occur virtually and/or remotely (de Klerk et al., 2021; Krull & MacAlister, 2022).

In the wake of the pandemic, there is a focus on how affordances from the pandemic could inform a reimagined higher education future (Dison et al., 2022; van Staden & Naidoo, 2022). To this point, institutions continue to focus on the design and offering of blended modes of learning and teaching (L&T). When it comes to programme and course design and the development of student-centred approaches to L&T, the adoption of blended learning approaches brings its own complexities (Brodie et al., 2022), with Academic Learning Professionals (ALPs)[1] and Student Success Professionals (SSPs) playing a key part in highlighting the difficulties associated with changing practices during complex contexts and the considerations affecting curriculum decisions.

The authors hold L&T positions within the Teaching and Learning Unit of the Commerce, Law, and Management Faculty at the University of the Witwatersrand, a research-intensive public university in South Africa. The Unit includes the faculty's student success and support functions (e.g., academic advising and postgraduate writing development) provided by SSPs, and ALPs that focus on support and professional learning for faculty staff regarding blended and online L&T. While there are centralised services in these areas provided within the university, the faculty offerings aim to extend these and provide more contextualised support to address the needs of staff and students in the faculty.

In this chapter, we argue for a more intentional and structured integration of the work done by ALPs and SSPs, drawing on our insights and reflections from working in these areas over several years. We contend that to make a meaningful shift to student-centredness as the sector transitions to blended L&T, the work of ALPs and SSPs must be made to intersect. Through critical reflection and by

1 Commonly referred to as Academic Development Professionals in the literature.

drawing on Gibbs' (1988) cyclical reflective model, we explore how integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs, through the intentional centring of students' holistic needs, is key to equipping academics with the insight and awareness required for student-centredness, with the aim of enhancing students' prospects of success.

2. Student Success

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) frames student success as "[e]nhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable" (CHE, 2014, p. 1). This broader notion of student success and what it aims to achieve can be tied to a more nuanced definition offered by Spark et al. (2017), which highlights the complexities involved in the notion of "enhanced student learning", as captured in the CHE (2014) definition. Spark et al. (2017) define student success within the South African higher education context as a student's capability to:

> …cope with the transition from high school to university (McGhie & Du Preez, 2015); progress through the first year of study (Andrews & Osman, 2015; Manik, 2015); graduate from their degree of choice (Andrews & Osman, 2015; McGhie & Du Preez, 2015) within five years of first registration (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007); manage the psychosocial, socio-economic, cultural (McGhie & Du Preez, 2015), and academic demands (Potgieter, Harding, Kritzinger, Somo & Engelbrecht, 2015) posed by university studies; and access relevant academic and non-academic support structures on university campuses (McGhie & Du Preez, 2015). (p. 76).

Important to this chapter is the way Spark et al. (2017) incorporate the broader student experience while at university, moving beyond just the academic learning dimension, as well as the way in which the CHE (2014) definition looks beyond the time students spend at university and towards their future potential (whether personally, professionally, or socially). We therefore adopt an amalgamated interpretation of student success, drawing on both the CHE (2014) and Spark et al. (2017) definitions, when referring to it here.

3. Academic Development

The work of ALPs and SSPs falls in the broad categorisation of academic development (AD) in higher education. In the South African higher education context, AD has a rich history, and is a growing and varied field (e.g., McKenna, 2003; Volbrecht, 2003; Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; Scott, 2009; Boughey & Niven, 2012; Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Collett et al., 2018). It includes the support of academics as university teachers, the scholarship of L&T, support for curriculum development and innovation, the integration of technologies for L&T, and support for student success (McKenna et al., 2022). Leibowitz (2014) defines AD as "the

creation of conditions supportive of teaching and learning, in the broadest sense" (p. 359). Often this work is undertaken in support of improving student retention and throughput, which remain significant challenges in South African higher education (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Lourens, 2020). However, McKenna et al. (2022) argue that a transformative approach to AD is required, where prevailing assumptions, the roles of universities, and current AD practices are challenged. This includes engaging with institutional policies, practices, and cultures, and making spaces available for conversations about:

> …what resources and structures are needed to ensure that all students and staff are able to access, participate in, and succeed in higher education; how students and others can be recognised in educational interactions; and how students and others can be more fully represented in decisions about curriculum and pedagogy. (McKenna et al., 2022, p. 7).

Boughey (2010) explains that AD within the South African context initially focused on student support through study skills and academic literacies development. Over time, this focus on student support extended to academic staff support and institutional development (Boughey, 2010). Our argument in this chapter is that some of the variations and focus areas within the broader field of AD must be (re) integrated more intentionally, to support and advance student-centredness and student success.

The term *academic development* itself may be perceived as being problematic, as it could be interpreted to imply a deficit (what Boughey & McKenna (2016) would refer to as decontextualised) view of staff or students. For that reason, we have chosen to use the term *professional learning* in our discussion about the work done by ALPs. Consequently, when ALPs are mentioned in the chapter, we refer primarily to individuals within the university who support the professional learning of academic staff involved in teaching (e.g., learning experience designers, curriculum experts, and L&T professionals). Similarly, when referring to SSPs, we refer to those members of staff primarily dedicated to supporting university students (e.g., academic or student advisors, academic writing specialists, and curriculum advisors).

We posit that ALPs have unique insights about academic professional learning and are positioned to influence the trajectory of what happens in physical and virtual L&T spaces at university. Similarly, SSPs have a unique understanding of the student experience and student needs. By intentionally enabling the work of ALPs and SSPs to intersect, we argue that the former could work to address what is learned from SSPs when engaging with academics about curriculum design and assessment. We contend that to make a meaningful shift to student-centredness, L&T support needs to be considered holistically, and the work of ALPs and SSPs must intersect through collaboration and the intentional integration of practices.

4. Student Centredness in Higher Education

The notion of student-centredness, although ostensibly self-explanatory, proves quite complex (even ambiguous) when deconstructed (Farrington, 1991; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005; Baeten et al., 2010; Tangney, 2014). The literature shows that for many in the higher education context, a student-centred approach (also referred to as student-centred learning), applies specifically to teaching, the learning environment created for students, and how students learn (e.g., O'Neill & McMahon, 2005; Baeten et al., 2010; Blackie et al., 2010; McCabe & O'Connor, 2014; Tangney, 2014). In other words, there is an intentional shift away from lecturer-centredness in the design and delivery of curricula and assessments, towards student-centredness (Elen et al., 2007; Blackie et al., 2010). The purpose of creating this kind of learning environment is to enable active participation and responsibility on the part of students, as opposed to focusing on the lecturer or on content (Cannon & Newble, 2000, pp. 16-17). This is important for the advancement of equitable learning where the needs of all students are considered; from the most vulnerable student to those who are better resourced. Importantly, McKenna (2013, p. 1) warns against two potential blind spots of student-centred learning: the risk of losing sight of the knowledge being taught and learned; and the risk of perpetuating the discourse that implies success and failure is inherent to the student, rather than being constructed within complex social contexts.

Within the student-centred learning discourse, some approach student-centredness by adopting a co-creation lens where students become co-creators of curricula and assessment activities (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018), or highlight the importance of garnering student input about student-centred learning (Lea et al., 2003). Generally, student-centred learning is achieved by adopting teaching methods that allow students to actively participate in the learning process (Baeten et al., 2010). These include, among others, problem-based learning, project-based learning, case-based learning, and collaborative learning (Baeten et al., 2010, p. 245). In either case, the approach to student-centredness is positioned in relation to the L&T dimensions of students' higher education experience, with the aim of enhancing students' prospects of academic success.

In relation to this framing of student-centredness, Blackie, Case, and Jawitz (2010) highlight that a student-centred approach includes but moves beyond skills and knowledge acquisition, to focus on "the emergent being of the student" (p. 637). They draw on the work of Rogers (1983), who expounds that student-centredness aims to create environments where students grow to (eventually) become active members of a society through learning (Rogers, 1983; Blackie et al., 2010, p. 638). One may argue that this Rogerian conception holds bearing to a broader interpretation of student-centredness within higher education contexts. Case (2015) contends that:

> [i]n the arena of higher education, we are centrally focused on the morphogenesis of student agency; we aim for students to

> leave higher education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered. (p. 843).

To this end, there are arguments that posit student-centredness means placing the student at the centre of the *entire* higher learning experience. This would include the L&T dimension as discussed above, but also extends beyond it. From this perspective, the implication would be that an institution or the higher education sector would align all its endeavours, policies, and decisions to best serve students, with the aim of enhancing student success. Clewes (2003), for example, adopts a student-centred model for evaluating higher education service quality, thus extending the notion of student-centredness beyond the proverbial classroom. Xulu-Gama et al. (2018) argue for a shift away from deficit perceptions of students entering higher education (i.e., where the student is viewed as inherently lacking certain skills and abilities (Boughey & McKenna, 2016)) to focusing on what institutions can do to be responsive to the needs of their students, regardless of the diversity thereof. They conclude by promulgating for a holistic, student-centred higher education environment that will enable student success (Xulu-Gama et al., 2018, p. 1309).

An institutional approach to centring the student (Kember, 2009) in this way is not impossible, at least not structurally as Grayson (2020) shows, although implementation and cultural shifts may be harder to achieve (Naidu, 2019). Correspondingly, Boughey and McKenna (2021, p. 133) note that "structures require complementary cultures to be effective". In turn, a sector-wide approach to centring the student may prove far harder to achieve within the infinitely complex overlapping contexts (Leibowitz et al., 2015) that constitute the South African higher education sector. Yet, this should not mean abandoning such an ambitious task.

Scott (2018) proposes such a sector-wide centring of the student by asserting that the country's existing higher education system is not designed to foreground a commitment to student success. Correspondingly, the author proposes intentionally designing "the South African university education system to focus unequivocally on student success and equity of outcomes" (Scott, 2018, p. 3). Ultimately, Scott (2018) argues that if student success is the end goal of higher education, it must be "at the heart of the higher education agenda" (p. 4).

With this chapter, we aim to contribute to this broader interpretation of student-centring, by offering a possible approach for enhancing student-centredness within South African higher education contexts. As mentioned earlier, our argument revolves largely around the siloed ways in which higher education stakeholders (whether within an institution or on a more systemic level) tend to operate. Consequently, we propose an intentional and systematic integration of elements of the work ALPs and SSPs do, with the aim of enhancing the holistic student learning experience and students' prospects of success.

5. Reflective Theory and Method

This chapter is the result of our personal and collective reflections on the challenges and opportunities that emerged during our institution's move to ERTL amid the COVID-19 pandemic and thereafter. Reflective practice has a long history in the context of education, with Dewey (1933) being the first to highlight its usefulness (also see: Paget, 2001; Chong, 2009). In more recent times, the work of Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988), Boud et al. (1985), and Schön (1992) have provided the basis for a variety of reflective approaches and practices in higher education contexts. These include, but are not limited to, those offered by Rolfe et al. (2001), Brockbank and McGill (2006), and Van Manen (2006).

5.1. Reflective model and method

Out of the range of reflective theories and models mentioned above, we have chosen Gibbs' (1988) Reflective Cycle to underpin and guide our critical reflections. Within this cycle, we have also brought in aspects of the work of Rolfe et al. (2001) by considering not only what has happened, but rather to attempt to make sense of what is happening, as well as looking forward. We have found Gibbs' model a useful reflective tool during previous projects, both large and small, within the Teaching and Learning Unit where we work. The model's purpose is to provide a guiding framework for experiential and reflective learning, and, most importantly, to result in a plan of action. Its reflective process moves through six stages: experience, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan (Gibbs, 1988). For the purpose of this chapter, we sub-divided these stages into two phases, with phase one covering the first three stages and phase two covering the remaining three.

During the first phase, each author embarked on an individualised critical reflection exercise through means of freewriting (Li, 2007), exploring their experience of and emotional responses to L&T in the institution and faculty, both during ERTL and in the period immediately thereafter. These reflections were then evaluated and refined by the individuals, before being shared with the other authors via a shared folder in the cloud.

In phase two, all four authors followed an iterative, inductive approach (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) to analyse each of their co-authors' reflective pieces, making comments and observations about categories (or focus areas) emergent from the data (p. 133). This was done both to ensure rigour during data analysis and to mitigate against potential researcher bias by having fellow authors review and moderate one another's reflection data and inferences. Several recurring themes and novel ideas were identified for further analysis during this iterative process, which the authors subsequently explored in more depth during a collaborative meta-analysis (Timulak, 2014) session. Finally, conclusions were drawn from these explorations and have led to the discussion and arguments proposed in this chapter, which are intended to stimulate ideas for further research and form the foundation for acting on (i.e., implementing) the proposed approach.

5.2. Criticisms of reflective practice

Various criticisms have been levelled at the use of reflective practice in both professional and educational contexts. Brookfield (1995) argues for the use of critical theory in reflective practice in order to examine the nature and influence of power dynamics and norms of institutional culture. Finlay (2008) levels a similar criticism at Gibbs, in particular pointing out that the model is too basic as it does not include a critical component. In order to mitigate this challenge, we (the authors) adopt the dual role of researcher-participants to explore the proposed integration of the work done by ALPs and SSPs, strongly guided by a critical reflective approach. While Probst (2016, p. 85) highlights that it may be uncommon for researchers to hold dual roles in a study where they both provide and analyse data, she explains that their mutual transparency and shared experiences can allow for enhanced insights into the topic being studied (Probst, 2016, p.90).

6. Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present the synthesised meta-commentary from our analysis of the reflective free-write pieces, which are used to make inferences and draw conclusions. Our observations are clustered into three broad thematic areas, each of which has two or three sub-categories. Collectively, these findings are used to support our argument for the intentional integration of ALP and SSP work to advance student-centredness within South African higher education contexts.

6.1. Theme 1: Decontextualisation and silos

6.1.1. Continued decontextualisation of students

A continued challenge in the university sector seems to be the lack of meaningful shifts in the way institutions (or even the sector) respond to concerns about student wellbeing and mental health (Martin, 2010; Van der Walt et al., 2020; Bantjies et al., 2021; Ruswa & Gore, 2021), and the impact this, as well as broader socioeconomic factors, have on student success (Bantjies et al., 2021; Essop, 2017; Ruswa & Gore, 2021). While some of these realities were foregrounded and amplified during COVID-19 (Czerniewicz et al., 2020), they existed long before the pandemic. Students who do not succeed in their studies appear still to be viewed through the lens of their own identities, backgrounds, and worldviews by some higher education stakeholders. This serves to perpetuate decontextualised notions of students (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). To this end, Author 1 observes:

> [i]n this day and age, there are still lecturers who view students as having deficits, who lament the poor quality of students coming to university […] who do not believe the way they teach or assess could possibly change their students' prospects of success. [Author 1].

This highlights some academics' sense of institutional and academic identity, their assumptions of the roles of lecturers and students, and the way in which that identity is fostered within the culture of the university. Author 3 asserts that some:

> [l]ecturers do not see the need for any sort of insight into the lives of their students and the lived experience of the students at university […] there is a need for a shift in academic identity and institutional culture […] what it means to be an academic. [Author 3].

Equally, students should be encouraged to explore their own identity, assume responsibility for their own success, and should be supported to play an active and collaborative part in efforts to shift towards student-centredness. For example, the pandemic highlighted the need for students to be more self-directed in their learning (Krull, 2022). To this point, Author 3 poses a series of critical questions to be explored:

> What is the sense of identity amongst academics when they are interacting with students? Is this identity separating them from their students? How are they characterising their students? How are they characterising support staff? What is their idea of student identity? What is the students' sense of identity? How are the students characterising themselves? [Author 3].

For meaningful shifts towards student-centredness to occur, further discussions about the multiple and complex roles of the lecturer and the student in a changing world are required. ALPs and SSPs could play collaborative mediating roles in facilitating these discussions.

6.1.2. Siloed support efforts

While concerted efforts were made to support staff and students to transition to emergency remote L&T within our university, the support interventions for staff (Krull & MacAlister, 2022) and for students (de Klerk et al., 2021) were largely siloed in our own faculty, with separate strategies and approaches adopted to orientate and support each group. This mirrors a general trend in approach across these areas pre- and post-pandemic. In relation to the fragmented way in which the transition to ERTL occurred, Author 1 contends that:

> [t]he problem with this is that the risks of gaps or oversight is not mitigated. SSPs, arguably, had unique insights into the lived realities of students. By working with ALPs and academics, SSPs would have been able to advise on matters of design and implications for student L&T during the pandemic. [Author1].

In addition to the reality that some lecturers inevitably failed to consider the lived realities of their students, the siloed approach to student and staff transition could mean that ALPs also failed to comprehend the lived realities of students (both during ERTL and more generally). Author 2 (a practicing ALP) observes:

> I often feel a sense of disconnect in terms of what is happening for students in the faculty, how they are learning and what the students' learning experiences are really like. [Author 2].

This could be addressed by integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs. As a starting point, the ALPs and SSPs in our faculty are starting to plan joint research projects and future staff and student support opportunities in an attempt to dismantle these established silos.

6.2. Theme 2: Enhancing learning and teaching

6.2.1. Realising holistic and contextually relevant learning and teaching approaches

In an attempt to mitigate some of the challenges raised in the previous section, there should be a shift towards more holistic and contextual approaches to the ways in which L&T is practiced. In terms of curriculum development, Author 3 reflects that:

> …the focus should be on how students learn and for lecturers to consider multiple means of access and engagement. [Author 3].

To this end, lecturers could start the process of curriculum design or facilitation by getting to know their students. Consider this reflective observation by Author 4:

> Who are our students? This seemingly straightforward question is not asked nearly enough as it should be by lecturers and course designers. [Author 4].

Often, courses (or even programmes) are designed and facilitated without serious consideration of the intended and actual students who will be engaged in the learning. As students are diverse and have different and varied needs, there must be a shift in approach where ALPs and SSPs work collaboratively to help course designers and implementers:

> …become aware of these different [student] needs and what can be done to be responsive to these needs, in a way that does not overload lecturers themselves. [Author 2].

One of the most viable avenues for meeting the diverse needs of students without overburdening lecturers, is to shift institutional culture by incorporating equitable L&T practises that support both staff and students. The American Achieving the Dream (ATD) Network (in their holistic student support toolkit), explains that:

> [f]ully embracing and sustaining the shift to a holistic student supports approach often requires deep and broad changes to an institution's culture. (ATD, 2018, p. 9).

Yet shifting institutional (or even sectoral) cultures are notoriously challenging (Benvenuti et al., 2022). Another challenge is that courses are often designed around content and topics rather than learning activities, which makes it easier to decontextualise courses from the students that take them. However, the integration of ALP and SSP work could support both shifts towards more holistic and contextually relevant L&T approaches, while also working to counteract the decontextualization dilemma discussed in thematic area one.

6.2.2. Adapting to new forms of learning and teaching

The post-pandemic period has seen the university where we work advance on its strategy to transition to blended L&T, where some learning activities take place online and others take place face-to-face (Bates, 2022). However, our experience has been that many students and staff within the university have struggled to adapt to the online dimensions of L&T, which seems to have been the case at other institutions as well (Coman et al., 2020; Moorhouse, 2020). A particular challenge experienced by some students appears to be the integration of both in-person/contact and online L&T. Author 2 observes:

> …some students have struggled adapting to blended L&T. Some students have not made the connection or are able to integrate what is happening in the face-to-face and online learning environments. Some students may only watch the pre-recorded videos and then feel that they do not need to come to class. Or other students attend face-to-face lectures or tutorials but do not prepare for these by engaging with the readings, videos, or other prescribed resources beforehand. [Author 2].

It appears that both staff and students need more support than is currently being provided to succeed in a blended L&T environment. This requires an integration and expansion of the support work by ALPs and SSPs. Importantly, there is a distinction between being present (simply attending face-to-face lectures and tutorials) and learning. A key consideration is that ALPs and SSPs working together could support lecturers to use more active learning strategies and support students to transition to more active forms of learning in a blended environment (Armellini et al., 2021).

6.2.3. Forms of communication and engagement

Another important dimension to enhancing L&T is to address how important information is communicated within the institution. While lecturers may be more accustomed to email as the primary mode of correspondence, the way in which students are communicated with and how they engage with official correspondence, remains less than ideal. Author 1 observes that:

> …there is a disjuncture between how the university communicates (mostly emails or through pushed to email [via the institutional Learning Management System]), yet students do not seem to use email much. One told me they had thousands of unread emails. [Author 1].

Effective communication among students, lecturers, and management is essential to dismantling entrenched silos and ensuring all university stakeholders remain informed about strategic shifts and decisions, like the transition to blended L&T at our university. Lecturers communicating with their students must ensure that key messages unambiguously relay why certain L&T approaches and methods are being used, as well as the value such methods and approaches hold for learning. This includes what is expected and required of students to be successful. Author 4 also explains that both what and how we communicate with our students is vital:

> …if you want students to engage effectively with what is being communicated, it makes sense to communicate in a "language" they speak. [Author 4].

This may mean in all official languages to which the institution is aligned but could also mean broadening communication methods to include more visual forms of correspondence (e.g., infographics) and multi-media (e.g., short videos). ALPs and SSPs are positioned to sensitise lecturers to how communication occurs, learn from students about preferred modes of communication, and amend the ways in which they themselves communicate and engage with staff and students.

6.3. Theme 3: Context and belonging

6.3.1. Consideration of broader context

As noted earlier, there is a danger of decontextualising students from their lived realities. Any L&T environment or support thereof cannot be devoid of context, with different contextual factors affecting and influencing L&T in complex ways:

> Asking the questions of what is happening and what has been happening allows us to think more broadly as we assess the circumstances surrounding student support and its evolution on a global and local basis. The question of 'what has been happening' also provides the lens needed to look at the relationship between student support and students' academic learning, and how it

> has evolved or stagnated and how this affects students' academic progress. [Author 4].

This requires SSPs and ALPs to formulate a deliberate approach to understanding the complexities of the higher education space and interrogating the roles of ALPs and SSPs in enabling or constraining student success. In our context, we need to critically reflect on the ways in which our support may help and not hinder student success. In turn, the affordances gained from realising this approach, could then be articulated to engagements with both students and staff.

6.3.2. The relationship between belonging and student centredness

Many factors within higher education affect students' sense of belonging, feeling seen, and their overall tertiary education experience[2]. Part of that extends to a sense of belonging in a course and to a discourse community (i.e., to the community of their discipline) (Hyland, 2004; Northedge & McArthur, 2008). Author 1 observes that:

> [l]ecturers have a crucial role to play in this regard. If students do not feel like they belong, they are likely to feel alienated and lost. This is proven to affect their chances of success. [Author 1].

An integration of ALP and SSP work could help sensitise lecturers to student realities, but also help them adapt their teaching approaches and methods that support a more student-centred approach that can enable a sense of belonging both in formal academic spaces and the broader institutional context.

7. Implications for Practice and Key Considerations

Without plans for practical implementation of the proposed integration, the risk remains that the status quo will be perpetuated. Consequently, realising the intentional integration of the work done by ALPs and SSPs will require a plan of action, a process for monitoring and evaluating progress, and the intentional link of theory and practice. An example of how this could be achieved is found in open and distance learning literature, where curriculum or course design is done as a team rather than in an individualised manner (Youngman et al., 2000; Bates, 2022).

Following on from our findings and discussion, we offer four key considerations towards the implementation of an ALP-SSP integration approach to advance student-centredness within the South African higher education context.

2 See, for example, the special issue of the ***South African Journal of Higher Education*** on belonging (Volume 36, Number 6, 2022).

7.1. Key consideration 1

There is merit in integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs more intentionally, to the benefit of student learning and success, and to enable the centring of the student within the broader higher learning context. Collaborating in this way offers the opportunity to merge the world of the student and the world of the lecturer, and to look for ways to involve students in curriculum decisions. In this way, some of the current challenges associated with a decontextualised view of students and siloed support efforts can be mitigated. The relationship between belonging and student-centredness needs to be foregrounded.

7.2. Key consideration 2

To address the concern of siloed support efforts, integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs more intentionally could begin by identifying areas or spaces for intersection. For example, SSPs could benefit from engaging in academic professional learning opportunities for staff to be able to provide better pedagogical support to students. Similarly, ALPs could benefit from SSP involvement in the design of academic professional learning initiatives. Collectively, these roles could collaborate around supporting the implementation of active blended learning and teaching practices in specific contexts.

7.3. Key consideration 3

Integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs more intentionally supports a shift towards a team-based approach to curriculum development, thus deliberately enabling lecturers, students, and other stakeholders to work together. This could contribute to dismantling entrenched silos, counteracting the decontextualisation of students, and centring the student in the higher learning experience. This also requires the realisation of holistic and contextually relevant L&T approaches and the adoption of additional forms of communication and engagement with students.

7.4. Key consideration 4

Within the broader sectoral context, the ALPs and SSPs driving the integration, as well as their managers, must commit to the approach. This will require appropriate planning, orientating all stakeholders involved, regularly engaging with stakeholders throughout the process to identify challenges and implement mitigation measures, and executing a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress, and make amendments where necessary. This means a critical reflective stance is required, while considering structural and cultural enablers and constraints. It also requires the alignment of support efforts at university, faculty, and departmental levels.

8. Conclusion and Further Research

In this chapter, we drew on Gibbs' (1988) cyclical reflective model to explore the notion of intentionally integrating the work done by ALPs and SSPs, to enable more meaningful shifts to a student-centred South African higher education future.

We acknowledge that ours is but one perspective, limited to our own institutional context, and that further research into how integrating the work of ALPs and SSPs can be realised (and the impact thereof), is necessary. To this end, one possible line of inquiry could be to explore the function and potential of pre-university schools (or initiatives), and how collaborations between ALPs and SSPs at this early stage in the student lifecycle could set the tone for continuous partnership. Another possibility is to include ALPs, SSPs, lecturers, and students in curriculum (re)design retreats, where courses or programmes are designed collaboratively with the aim of foregrounding the student in the learning experience. Regardless of the angle from which such an integration is approached, our intention with this chapter is to open the door to possibilities for ALP and SSP collaboration to the benefit of student success.

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Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future provides progressive approaches and innovations that challenge readers to rethink student learning, engagement, support, and teaching. The book offers examples of evidence-informed and scholarly approaches to centring students through enhanced learning and teaching practices that are relevant to the South African context and those Global South contexts similar to South Africa.

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