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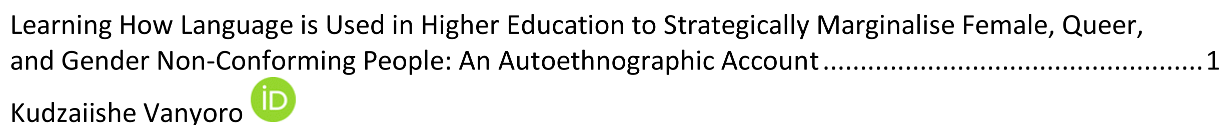

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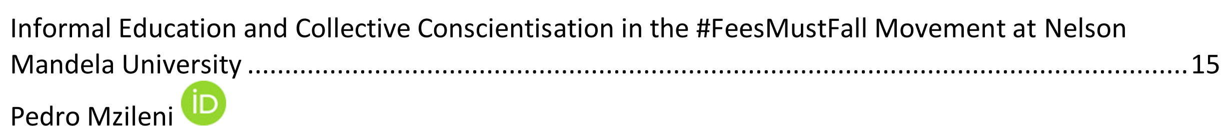

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Editorial Special Issue

Dancing on the Waves of Change: Transforming Learning, Teaching and Leadership in Higher Education

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This issue comes at a time when the whole world is dancing to the tune of the coronavirus or COVID-19. The arrival of COVID-19 heralded a new rhythm to life and being, with the inequalities and injustices in the waves of life being magnified. As institutions of higher education, we are committed to an equal and sustainable world, learning, teaching, and research that contribute to transformative change. But in the face of such embedded inequalities and injustices what must we do to make this commitment a reality?

South Africa instituted a state of disaster in March 2020 to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The country shut down all businesses except for essential services. Travel was restricted, and borders were closed for international travel. Who ever thought a tiny thing like a virus could bring the whole world to a standstill? Whey! One could hear the universe breathe a sigh of relief as the whole ecosystem had time to refresh and heal. The environmental justice that humans had been crying for came because of a virus. However, as ecosystems healed, human beings got sick and died in huge numbers, globally. Economies crashed and workers became insecure! With everyone being forced to stay home, the numbers of gender-based violence and femicide cases increased in South Africa. Humanity started fighting other "viruses" like systemic racism, police brutality, and other forms of state-sanctioned brutality. This was evidenced globally as governments tried to control the spread of the virus. The deaths of George Floyd in America and Collins Khosa in South Africa got people chanting "Black lives matter!" Another slogan that came up was, "All lives matter!" This was to accommodate all excluded groupings facing injustices worldwide.

Due to the coronavirus, education institutions experienced a different rhythm. Online and distance education took over face-to-face teaching and learning. This highlighted the inequalities in the education system, with some being able to afford studying online while others had no way out! To

address this injustice, schools and institutions of higher learning had to rethink reopening. Which schools and institutions could afford the “new normal” of constant hand washing, hand sanitising, wearing face masks, and social distancing? This tiny virus made South Africans realise the inequalities embedded in their lives, and which had become normal. Who deserves education more than others? Is completion of the academic year more important than saving lives? Who stands to lose the most in the South African education system under the new normal? Which music should be played to create a rhythm that all can dance to without fear or prejudice? These are all important questions as South Africa marks 44 years after the Soweto uprising when youth protested the demeaning “Bantu” education—with fatal consequences. Can we look back to that group of youngsters and tell them that we have turned the tide in South African education systems?

Bruce Springsteen once said: “My advice to teachers today is to keep your eyes on the ones who don’t fit in. Those are the ones that can think out of the box. You’ll never know where they’ll be going” (Phillips & Masur, 2013, p. 4).

Which intelligences do we privilege in higher education institutions? The coronavirus made it clear that, to survive, we all had to work together irrespective of status or education level. Different intelligences came to the fore to address the immediate needs of communities in dealing with ever-increasing cases of infections. What was deemed not essential before, became an essential service. The tides were indeed turning, and the waves were crashing against the shores of humanity, changing comfort zones to discomfort and war zones. The education landscape in South Africa has shown that there is need for skilled captains to steer the ships and boats safely to shore, avoiding the imminent icebergs of increased inequality and exclusion.

This special issue was born from the HELTASA conference of 2018 titled, *Dancing on the Waves of Change: Transforming Learning, Teaching and Leadership in Higher Education,* which focused on the many waves of change that higher education institutions navigate continually. These changes include fee-free higher education; financial sustainability in the face of shrinking government funding; producing graduates who function effectively in a globalised, connected world but who are also locally relevant; and decolonisation and transformation of curricula, academia and academic spaces. Thus, this issue highlights the need for constant engagement of academics, academic development professionals, students, academic leaders, and industry in innovative and creative ways to systematically and organically transform learning and teaching.

Noluthando Toni and Anne-Mart Olsen reflect on the HELTASA conference and highlight the value of the different sessions. They discuss how delegates identified and deliberated on factors that serve as enablers, hindrances, or both in navigating the changing tides of learning and teaching. They also bring forth that commitment to the course of working together is essential for development and transformation. It is through collaboration that multidisciplinary approaches and flexibility can be nurtured and, ultimately, turn the tides for the better in higher education.

In line with the decolonisation thread of the conference, **Luan Staphorst** reviewed the book *Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge* edited by Jonathan Jansen. According to Staphorst, the book is concerned with knowledge and the relationship between knowledge, decolonisation, and the university sphere. He argues that the collection situates decolonisation within the realm of knowledge and curriculum, rather than regarding it as a broad and ill-defined abstraction. He also states that all the contributors provide support for decolonisation as an intellectual project. While some contributors are optimistic of the decolonisation project, others are sceptical, questioning whether decolonisation will eventually become one of the regimes echoing those preceding it. One of the critiques presented by Staphorst on this collection is the heavy presence of influential academics

and the absence of younger voices. Another critique is that the book does not provide a truly meaningful overarching theory or framework pertaining to the decoloniality of knowledge.

Moving on, we meet **Kudzaiishe Vanyoro** and **Pedro Mzileni**, each providing a reflection on their personal experiences of higher education institutions during the #FeesMustFall uprising. Using the colonial matrix of power to show how coloniality upholds gender and sexuality norms in universities and academics, Vanyoro, in his article, "Learning How Language is Used in Higher Education to Strategically Marginalise Female, Queer, and Gender Non-Conforming People: An Autoethnographic Account," explores the manifestation of heteropatriarchy in the language used in lecture rooms and beyond through an auto-ethnographic reflection that shows how critical diversity literacy can be helpful in realising the complicity of language in dominance. On the other hand, in "Informal Education and Collective Conscientisation in the #FeesMustFall Movement at Nelson Mandela University," Mzileni provides a personal experience of the #FeesMustFall uprising as a student activist. He discusses the debates, knowledges, learning experiences, and theorising efforts that went with the protests that the #FeesMustFall student-worker alliance movement organised. Mzileni hopes for the decolonisation of university learning spaces by centring alternative "classrooms" provided on the university margins by student social movements as pioneering platforms in the sociopolitical rollout of critical intellectual development and decolonisation of higher education.

These personal reflections are followed by an article entitled, "The Academentia of ECAs: Navigating Academic Terrain Through Critical Friendships as a Life Jacket" by a team of early career academics examining their critical friendship to navigate the challenges in a higher education institution. **Mbatha, Msiza, Satimburwa, and Zondi** used self-study to share their personal narratives of marginalisation and how their critical friendship became a life jacket in enhancing their practice. These authors elaborate on the pleasure, power, and possibilities of collaboration among early career academics and how this may open opportunities for professional development leading to social change and academic success.

With the massification of education in higher education institutions, the next group of early career academics explore assessment practices of lecturers in one teacher education institution in their article, "Sausage Factory, in and out": Lecturers' Experiences of Assessing in an Era of Massification in a Teacher Education Institution." They used conversations to generate data with five lecturers from various disciplines. According to **Msiza, Raseoka, and Ndhlovu**, the lecturers invoked their experiences to reflect, learn, and imagine possibilities for teacher education institutions to enact sustainable assessment and to navigate massification.

The next article "Connecting the Classroom to the Business World: Evolvement of a PALAR Journey in a Disciplinary Environment," is brought by experienced academics who used PALAR (participatory action learning action research) to explore how they could address the increasing demand for skilled graduates who can integrate and apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world context. **Salomien Boshoff and Naquita Fernandes** present a three-year journey of learning between lecturers, students, and business to attain the desired levels of practical learning. They show how their personal PALAR journey, and reflection thereon, proved not to be rigid in nature but, instead, fluid and highly adaptable. These authors provide lecturers in similar positions with insight into how they can use a PALAR process when designing their modules and assessments, to foster employable graduates.

Finally, dealing with leadership in her article, "The Rise of the Executive Dean and the Slide Into Managerialism," **Sioux McKenna** discusses how the changes in university leadership and management towards managerialist approaches work against a shared responsibility for the academic project. Using the example of one South African institution, she presents the differences between deans selected by

faculties and executive deans appointed by selection committees. McKenna argues that we do not have to choose between patriarchal management and compliance-based managerialism—we can choose shared responsibility for the academic project instead.

This special issue thus provides a timeous discussion regarding the tides in educational leadership, learning, teaching, and research. The importance of including all voices in innovative and creative ways to systematically and organically transform learning and teaching is highlighted across the articles. Transformation of education systems and the decolonisation of curricula require a rethinking of the tunes we have been dancing to in academia. Dancing to the tune of the coronavirus has meant that the learning and teaching landscape had to change accordingly. Lecturers have had to relearn how to teach with technological media and blended learning platforms, homes became classrooms and offices, leaders have had to relearn leadership and management styles to accommodate uncertainties, and graduations became virtual. However, while all this is happening, the numbers of unemployed graduates, or graduates who are not suitably skilled for the workplace, keep increasing. This implies that there is strong need for transformation of learning, teaching, and research in higher education institutions to address the crumbling economy, to stabilise the job market, and improve health systems.

Our education system has been enslaved by colonialism and apartheid for centuries. Unless we decide to actively free ourselves from the legacies of these structures, we will remain in mental slavery. It is high time that we take this message to heart and emancipate our education systems from colonial structures and thought processes to free our minds of limiting ways of being. Hopefully, the articles in this issue will spark the necessary debates around the transformation of education and decolonisation of curricula so that we create positive tides within higher education.

In conclusion, let us remember the words of the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, regarding the coronavirus: “It is now in our hands!” Not only is the coronavirus in our hands, but our education system, livelihoods, and futures. We can make it if we all lend a helping hand!

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Learning How Language is Used in Higher Education to Strategically Marginalise Female, Queer, and Gender Non-Conforming People: An Autoethnographic Account[1]

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how language informs the systemic and structural manner in which the university space not only marginalises, but also exploits female and gender non-conforming people. I base my account on my experiences in two universities in southern Africa—one in Zimbabwe and the other in South Africa. I aim to show how gender and sexuality borders can be permeated by gaining critical awareness of the working of power and privilege in language that normalises the oppression of one by the other. I do this through a reflective autoethnographic account of the temporal trajectories involved in my experience as an academic of gender and sexuality in universities. I explore the notion of university as a social site where power relations of privilege and marginality can be found to be vivid if not violent. I reflect on my positionality and complicity in exploitative power relations in the university. I also make use of #FeesMustFall diaries as archival data to account for dynamics of exclusion. Theoretically, the article employs the colonial matrix of power to show how coloniality upholds gender and sexuality norms in universities and academics. The purpose of this paper is not to propose strategies for other institutions to use for unlearning pedagogies. Rather, the role of the paper is to document my and others' experiences of how heteropatriarchy manifests in the language used in the lecture room and beyond. In conclusion, the article shows how the author found critical diversity literacy, a learning pedagogy that promotes discomfort, helpful in realising the complicity of language in dominance.

Keywords: language, gender, sexuality, pedagogy of discomfort, critical diversity literacy, coloniality

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is not to propose strategies for other institutions to use for unlearning pedagogies. Rather, this article serves to highlight the finer details of how sexism and homophobia are entrenched through the language used by lecturers during teaching and learning in the classroom. It also seeks to add to documented individual experiences of misogynistic language in the lecture room. It does so by drawing on elaborate, autoethnographic observations made during learning at two southern African universities by a black, male, cisgender, and heterosexual person. The article examines the systemic and structural manner in which the university space can be a site of coloniality that not only marginalises but also exploits female and queer people. It departs from the observation that, while significant research has been carried out on gender (Barnes, 2007; Bennet, 2002; Gaidzanwa, 2000; Mama, 2003; Ndhlovu & Masuku, 2004; Okeke, 2003; Otunga & Ojwang, 2003; Pereira, 2007; Zindi, 1994) and sexuality (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Msibi, 2009, 2013) in African universities, there is a paucity of reflective literature on heterosexual men's experiences of gender and sexuality in these spaces—in what Msibi (2013, p. 1) called the "the silencing of queer issues in higher education." While they dealt with coloniality as a system implicit in epistemic injustices, scholars (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Mpofu, 2013) barely accounted for how it informs the gender and sexuality-based oppressions that take place in the university as a result of the hierarchisation that coloniality enforces. Meanwhile, those scholars who deal with gender and sexuality relations in the university (Barnes, 2007; Bennet, 2002; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Gaidzanwa, 2000; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Mama, 2003; Msibi, 2009, 2013; Ndhlovu & Masuku, 2004; Okeke, 2003; Otunga & Ojwang, 2003; Pereira, 2007 ; Zindi, 1994) lack an autoethnographic voice from the men who are agents of gender and sexuality-based discrimination.

Lastly, previous research on the topic has rarely grappled with how the colonial matrix of power enforces colonially established exclusion of women and queer people in the university. A colonial matrix of power heuristic (Mignolo, 2008) allows one to read intersecting race, class, gender, and sexuality power relations in the university. The colonial matrix of power operates through control of the economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of knowledge and subjectivity (Mignolo, 2008). This article, therefore, shows how "domination is not just economic, but it operates at all levels of interrelation between the different domains of the colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo, 2008, p. 15). The colonial matrix of power speaks to all forms of domination and considers them products of white European Christians' classificatory system that ranked human beings differently (Mignolo, 2008). During the conquest of Africa, white men positioned themselves as the greatest standard of human. Women and children became the template for the description of the inferiority of non-Europeans (Mignolo, 2008). Hence, to be a woman or a man who is feminine in a space such as a university that was originally structured and systematised for the sons of Empire, not sons and daughters of black people and former slaves, is punitive. That said, the article also shows how the author found critical diversity literacy (CDL), a discomfort promoting pedagogy, helpful to understand the complicity of language in dominance.

Methodological Considerations

The data in this paper can be divided into two sections. The first data set is based on my personal diary and autoethnographic reflections of learning at a Zimbabwean university. The second data set is based

on my experience at a South African university and from accounts from an anthology by fallists[2] entitled, *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of Wits Fallists* (Chinguno et al., 2017). The latter became important as supporting evidence of the university's gender and sexuality politics because #FeesMustFall was an exhibition of problems affecting students and staff in the university. I was not actively involved in the #FeesMustFall movement; hence, I used the accounts of these fallists as archival data to support my argument. The book is probably one of the most comprehensive anthologies of experiences by university students who participated in the #FeesMustFall movements. Their stories help to elucidate experiences of black, female, and queer students because all the book contributors have experienced or were associated with the # FeesMustFall movement in 2015–2016.

In this article, I reflect on my experiences and the observations of life and society that I made in the university space. The use of the autoethnographic data in the paper, however, raises methodological questions as to how one can use experiences from different physical and temporal spaces to (re)think understandings of (un)learning in another space. However, this way of "performing autoethnography" draws from Spry's (2001, p. 709) recommended "process of integrating the 'doing' of autoethnography with critical reflection upon autoethnography as a methodological praxis." This approach understands that the body is a politically inscribed site of meaning making (Alexander, 2000; Spry, 2001). "Informed by recent work in autobiography, autoethnographic methods recognise the reflections and refractions of multiple selves in contexts that arguably transform the authorial 'I' to an existential 'we'" (Spry, 2001, p. 711). Hence, there is potential in autoethnographic accounts from other disciplines and spaces to provide multiple accounts through which people from different locations can use to identify with, and empathise with, others. "In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns" (Spry, 2001, p. 711). The ethnographic accounts I make use of in this article also allow me to disrupt bordered thinking to understand challenges faced in various higher education institutions in Southern Africa as different but similar in their genealogy.

Bainbridge (2007, p. 9) argued that indigenous researchers can employ an "epistemology of insiderness" to construct and theorise knowledge where one assimilates their life and understandings into the research. The "inward gaze" adopted in autoethnography (Bainbridge, 2007, p. 8) is a way through which researchers can create the self who has crossed and lived between borders (Neumann, 1996). That self is the present writer, seeking to use my experiences to help readers understand personal and collective complicity (if any) in the university's power relations. In the following quote, Bainbridge noted how as a "complete insider" she was able to perform autoethnography: "I interrogated my connection to the research phenomenon by writing memories of my life story, which allowed engagement with the research phenomenon on both an experiential and intellectual level" (2007, p. 9). The contact between the experiential and intellectual is, therefore, an opportunity for the production of different praxis tools.

Rooting Heteropatriarchy in Neoliberalism and Coloniality

This section shows how heteropatriarchy is rooted in coloniality and neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a system that is "hostile to any kind of progressive social redistribution, that is to say, distribution in favour of the popular classes" (de Sousa Santos, 2017, p. 243). Neoliberalism promotes individualism, which leads to the exponential growth of inequality. For scholars like Maldonado-Torres:

[2] The name "fallist" was used to refer to activists who took part in the #FeesMustFall protests.

> *Generally speaking, liberal societies, including universities and their liberal arts and sciences, strive to create a world to the measure of ambiguous and incomplete legal changes that perpetually postpone, if not seek to eliminate, any serious accountability, justice, and reparations. (2016, p. 4)*

The university can, therefore, be thought of as a neoliberal space because it abides by the free-market model that commodifies education and stresses individual capabilities as key to attaining recognition. Neoliberalism can be considered an outcome of coloniality. Coloniality refers to structures and systems that outlive the end of formalised colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Coloniality is the domination that remains long after the end of the formalised political domination of Western Europe over its formerly colonised (Quijano, 2007). According to Grosfoguel, we still live under the same "colonial power matrix" and through juridical-political decolonisation, former colonies were simply brought from a period of "global colonialism" to the current period of "global coloniality" (2007, p. 219). It is this global coloniality that is embodied in many present institutions of higher learning, worldwide. The university in the Global South in particular, noted Grosfoguel (2007), remains not a university of the Global South but a Westernised university in the Global South. In a way, the university in Zimbabwe and South Africa might be different institutions in different countries, but they are both subject to learning discourses shaped by neoliberalism and coloniality.

It can be argued that coloniality is also a highly heteropatriarchal system. This was seen in how decolonial movements such as #FeesMustFall and its agitation to decolonise the university in South Africa spoke to something much more than the financial politics that the face value of the hashtag suggests. Apart from it being a call for free education for black students, #FeesMustFall was also a struggle against heteropatriarchy and cisnormativity in South African universities. In *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of Wits Fallists*, activists Crispen Chinguno et al. defined decolonisation as "The rejection of white supremacy and heteropatriarchal order along with other forms of prejudice that characterise the ongoing colonial project, as well as the quest to redress the socio-economic, political and spiritual depredations of colonial history" (2017, p. 18). Consequently, they also defined a fallist as someone who defies the heteropatriarchal order (Chinguno et al., 2017). This is because the university in Latin America and Africa, as a structure and system of power and knowledge, retains coloniality and the tendency to produce victims in the shape of powerless and marginal peoples (Grosfoguel, 2007). Decolonisation in South African universities and beyond need not be thought of as just being about race and class, but also about the gender and sexuality censures that the university facilitates.

The South African university is a historically white university, based on the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This apartheid act was designed to exclude black people from the white education system. The Act also led to the institutionalisation of historically black universities (HBUs; Almeida & Kumalo, 2018) such as the university currently known as Fort Hare. All these factors make the South African university Westernised by design. "The power dynamics inherent in the knowledge productions system within the westernized university allow for people and voices of whiteness to be legitimized while people and voices of indigenous scholars continue to be marginalized" (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018, p. 6). These authors saw the black person's role in the Westernised university as often that of apprentice (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018). Using an intersectional lens, I call for a much more nuanced definition of the term "black person." This is because a black person is not only black but is also black and gendered or sexualised. These other identity markers coconstitute the facticity of blackness that leads to dismemberment. Hence, Robert Kriger (2016) wrote of how universities in South Africa were founded by colonialists for the education of the sons of Empire, not black people or women and other marginal peoples who were considered disposable during and, indeed, after apartheid. For the latter, the university space is a punitive site of coloniality.

This article, therefore, considers those intersecting problems that coloniality and neoliberalism have established in universities located in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. Here, I provide a brief background of coloniality and neoliberalism's influence in the Zimbabwean higher education (HE) landscape. The funding mechanism of the current education system in Zimbabwe is shaped by the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) adopted from 1991 to 1995 after the government finally conceded that socialist orientation was not a viable option in Zimbabwe (Zvobgo, 2003). Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the government had agreed to strengthen the economy along the free-market route (Zvobgo, 2003). Through ESAP, international finance organisations, supported by their funders such as Britain and the United States of America, dictated a complete reform of the government's economic policies (Zvobgo, 2003). This move marked the neoliberalisation of the Zimbabwean economy, including the education system, by calling on every Zimbabwean to bear the cost of education. ESAP stated that all educational institutions would institute cost-recovery measures to reduce the financial burden created by increasing costs (ESAP, 1991 cited in Weaving, 2019).

That said, the introduction of other state universities in Zimbabwe to complement the University of Zimbabwe, which was established during Rhodesia, significantly marked the rise in neoliberal market-driven degree-granting institutions along with a massive commodification of education in Zimbabwe. This is because the degrees offered at these institutions, which include the Midlands State University, the National University of Science and Technology, and Great Zimbabwe University, were specifically tailored to link with the demand for skills in the labour market. The emergence of these universities was also accompanied by a shift from state-assisted education, characterised by the provision of student grants and subsidised student accommodation, to capitalist-driven fees that left many students out of university or in debt. It suffices to say Zimbabwean universities "went from producing knowledge and professionals for the market to becoming . . . a market of tertiary education . . . being run like a market organization, a business organization" (Santos, 2012, p. 4). The new universities marked the introduction of degrees different to the University of Zimbabwe's Bachelor of Arts programmes in what can be read as a shift from the social relevance of the university to a market needs-based approach (Santos, 2012). News of the profitability of universities led to a government-led expansion of universities such that by 2004, Zimbabwe boasted over 13 universities with more the pipeline (Ndhlovu & Masuku, 2004). Due to their market value, most of these universities' institutional educational programmes are not rooted in transformation. Rather, they support the heteropatriarchal capitalist system present in the neoliberal policies and institutions within which they are rooted.

Many African feminist thinkers like Mama (2003) have argued that colonialism was a gendered project, and it can also be argued that the neoliberalisation of universities through ESAPs in Zimbabwe reinforced heteronormativity in HE institutions. This is because the neoliberalisation of education in Zimbabwe led to the further entrenchment of the "dog-eat-dog" mentality among students as excellence and affordance defined who was able to obtain value for money from the university. Neoliberalism is a form of coloniality that brought to Africa the idea that learning is a combative and aggressive process (Barnes, 2007). This competition is also highly gendered. Barnes (2007) posited that African universities are marked with codes that define men as thinkers, aggressive debaters, athletes, and boys becoming men. As an educational space that is characterised by hegemonic neoliberal and heteropatriarchal learning discourses, the university in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) has largely been constituted as a site of formation of transnational elites—who have, for the most, part justified and continuously elaborated coloniality as a global organising principle (Suarez-Krabbe, 2012). There is now a vicious exercise of dominant masculinity in academia that made the institutional culture of the university in Africa (Mama, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) "of the new-men for the new-men" (Barnes, 2007, p. 12). Therefore, to be a cisgender, heterosexual man in these institutions means being a signatory to the oppression of the weaker women, men, or queer people.

Theoretical Considerations: Why Gender and Sexuality Matter

This section shows the relationship between gender and sexuality and why they matter in neoliberal institutions. Sex and gender are imbricated in one another in identity politics. Sex consists of physical organs such as the male organ (penis), the female organ (vagina) or ambiguous organs (intersex). These sexual organs are used to socially assign specific roles and attributes to different bodies at birth. The assignment of roles based on one's surface sex biological configuration is called gendering. Butler (1986, p. 35) "underst[ood] sex to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas gender, is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires." The distinction between male and female serves as a basic organising principle for every human culture (Bem, 1981). By being reliant on the binaries of male/female, strong/weak, intelligent/dumb, academic institutions are guided by tacit assumptions of masculinity and femininity (Gaidzanwa, 2000). Barnes (2007, p. 8) described how the colonial association of masculinity with the labour of the mind, and femininity with the labour of the body, was transmitted into the university in Africa, "along with the senates, the vice-chancellors, the graduation robes, the funny flat hats and the rituals of examination." Therefore, because today's social organising principle is based on gender, the neoliberal university has conformed to the same protocol.

Scholars like Thabo Msibi have written on how queer people experience the South African university, arguing that "South Africa is still very much a patriarchal society, with ideas around manhood still deeply entrenched" (2009, p. 51). Msibi (2009) posited that apart from being a gendered environment, the university in Africa is also hostile towards non-heterosexual identities. Recent research conducted in South Africa has shown that university residences remain one of the most homophobic spaces, deeply entrenched in heteronormative cultures that exclude queer students (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). Bennet (2002) suggested that the higher education environment in Africa is a site for the performance of heterosexuality as a major route into resources, stability, identity, and citizenship. Because heterosexuality is privileged in the university, gender non-conforming people are ostracised or punished. Francis and Msibi (2011, p. 159) posited that "societal and organizational institutions are designed to award privileges and benefits to members of the dominant group (heterosexuals) at the expense of members of the subordinated group (GLB)." All these factors inform the oppression of queer people who are marginalised in the university by their failure to conform.

In the next section, I show how I experienced the use of language that sought to epistemically discipline women in the classroom. I then analyse how language can be used to sexually harass students in universities. This will be used to show how heterosexuality is normalised as the legitimate sexuality in the university. Through support of evidence from #FeesMustFall (FMF) movements, the section will also show students' experience of homophobia and sexism in the institution.

Between 2014 and 2020: Brief Reflections on Zimbabwean and South African Lecture Room Dynamics

This section reflects on two incidences that took place in the lecture rooms of two universities, one in Zimbabwe and the other in South Africa. Between 2012 and 2015, I was studying towards an honours degree in Zimbabwe and, in 2013, I joined a South African university as an exchange student for a semester of studying human rights. In 2018, I returned to South Africa as a master's student majoring in critical diversity studies (CDS). In some sections of my discussion, I refer to my student diary notes from Zimbabwe in 2014 and, in some instances, I rely on my memory to reflect on what happened. In some cases, I refer to media reports of certain issues to support my thoughts. While more experiences could have been mentioned in this section, I believe the two experiences mentioned here will help flesh out the similarities between two universities located in different countries.

March 2014 (Zimbabwean University)

The university campus that I attend in Zimbabwe is located in a high-density suburb. The campus is small but densely populated. At this campus, there are barely any student protests due to the proximity of a military base to the campus. These spatial arrangements confirm Maldonado-Torres' (2016) assertion that universities can be centres of command and control, which make them easy to militarise when opposition rises. My first impression of the campus is as follows:

> *Oppression and Space! The administration block is the first thing you see when you enter the campus. One sees the Zimbabwean national flag and the university flag, symbols of phallic state power. The campus is built next to a military base, further into a "ghetto" where students who are off campus stay. Although the military is never present on campus, rumours of their wrath spread viciously. This makes it hard for people with various struggles to protest on campus. (Personal diary, 2014)*

Most of the buildings are old, bearing witness to the colonial British style that the builders used. This is typical of most universities in Zimbabwe, which inherited structures built during colonialism. The lecture I attend during this particular week is an introduction to media course. The lecturer is a black male who likes to crack jokes. His name is Mr Matambo[3] and he always talks about his wife and children. At this particular point in my life, I barely think about his sexuality. For me, sexuality is rigidly heterosexual and there is no other way of looking at it.

Looking back to that day, I realise that the control of gender and sexuality, which uses the bourgeois secular family as a model and standard for the universalisation of heterosexuality (Mignolo, 2012), had a significant impact on my identity. I had come to know heterosexual marriage as the only legitimate social and sexual union.

> *Out of nowhere, he cracks a joke in class! The joke is about Matambo's sexual prowess. He hails from a clan whose totem is Soko Mukanya [monkey] an animal which is fondly known Makwira-miti [Kukwira meaning to climb to the top. Miti means trees]. During the lecture, as several other male lecturers pass through the lecture room to access their offices, one greets him saying "maswera sei makwiramiti? [How are you makwiramiti?]" This scene plays out as an endorsement of makwiramiti's identity. Matambo goes further and speaks of how he is not only good at climbing to the top of trees (like the monkey), but also of how he is also good in bed. He further alludes to the fact that he is also good at "kukwira [fucking] knowledge." Kukwira (in makwiramiti) is a slang word for being on top of a woman. Several classmates and I burst into tears of laughter! It does not once occur to me that this lecturer is being sexist or misogynistic. Yet at this moment, the lecturer and his colleagues have just strategically employed analogies that speak to the African idea of totems to objectify women in the classroom. Later that day, I have a conversation with other senior students about the lecture and I am told that this is how Matambo conducts his classes. Throughout that semester, Matambo makes misogynistic jokes and examples without disciplinary consequences from the university. Matambo is never charged for any form of sexual harassment by the university. If anything, his behavior is normalised as part of institutional teaching culture.*

There are many reasons why male toxicity goes unpunished at universities. One could be that neoliberalism emphasises individualism making any lecturer's conduct pass because we think "this is just their character, as long as they don't kill or touch anyone it is okay." This is despite the fact that rape and harassment begin as a language before becoming physical. While the language used by

[3] Mr Matambo is a pseudonym.

Matambo in the lecture room may sound innocent, particularly to the complicit male students, it has dire consequences. To elucidate, at Zimbabwean universities, we call ourselves the University Bachelors Association (UBA) while female students are called University Spinsters Association (USA). These names already picture the heterosexual normative family which both male and female students are expected to embody. These names also create a binary of fixed male and female heterosexuality that epistemically erases gender non-conforming and homosexual identities. The control of gender and sexuality that uses the bourgeois secular family as a model and standard for the universalisation of heterosexuality (Mignolo, 2012), is at the core of this hegemonic project. The titles UBA and USA, therefore, endorse compulsory heterosexuality. When they coined the term *compulsory heterosexuality*, “lesbian feminists emphasized heterosexuality as an institutionalized part of the social order that fashions a world of gender binarism and hierarchy” (Seidman, 2009, p. 18). By the time I started engaging in relationships at university, I knew, without being told by anyone, that it had to be with a woman. This experience is also linked to findings in Hamlall's (2018) research on heterosexuality among men at a HE learning institution in KwaZulu-Natal where he found that “romantic relationships with girls, deriding homosexuality, and fear of being perceived as gay served as a means of establishing the young men's heteronormativity and created boundaries of social distance between themselves and homosexuals” (2018, p. 312).

At the Zimbabwean university, these discourses and attitudes do not end in the lecture room but also trickle down to the halls of residence, including the suburbs where students who fail to secure campus accommodation stay. Life in these suburbs, in one of which I stay at the time, often involves cohabiting with permanent residents who become students' landlords. In 2014, I note the following:

> *This is Marange,[4] a students’ residence ghetto. For some who are not as privileged enough to pay full fees at once to stay at campus residences, this community is an orientation to adulthood. Most cases of rape and misogyny among students go unpunished here. I think Marange is a diverse community that privileges the survival of men at the expense of the safety of women. The women fondly known as “USAs” (University Spinsters Association) are blamed for everything especially the high levels of sex in the community. (Personal diary, 2014)*

In fact, the media portray female students who live in such suburbs negatively. For example, the Midlands State University (MSU) located in Gweru is often in the news regarding the behaviour of its students. In an article I come across in the Southern Eye titled, “MSU Students’ Woes Boon for Landlords,” the journalist stated that:

> *High levels of immorality associated with the university have seen locals christening the institution More Sex University which has harmed children growing up in this community. . . . A woman of Senga says she has never allowed MSU students to stay in her home to keep her children and husband at a safe distance from the “immoral students.” “If you give them half a chance, they will take your husband just to avoid paying rentals or to make a quick dollar for goodies and clothes, so I stay away from them as much as I can,” she said. (Mhlanga, 2013, n.p.)*

This newspaper article demonstrates the portrayal of female students as infidels by residents and the media. MSU female students are constructed as loose in the university, even in the afore-cited newspaper article in which they are depicted as “whores” who sell their bodies for monetary favours. Even male students actively construct this negative representation by referring to MSU female students as loose. This is why MSU is “affectionately” known as “More Sex University,” a space where

[4] Pseudonym for one of the high density residential areas that house university students.

one is “bound” to meet loose women. There is no denying the fact that some MSU female students do engage in transactional sex with multiple partners. However, my analysis considers this sex exploitation. Although describing slavery, Campbell and Elbourne (2014) captured the intersection of sex and slavery. For them, there are ties between slavery, the control of sexuality (including a slave's lack of self-ownership and the corresponding obligation to provide sexual labour), and perceptions of honour and dishonour. When these women are involved in transactional sex, the sex that is remunerated for becomes labour. The “obligation to provide sexual labour is rape” (Gqola, 2015, p. 40) because sex for monetary gain or in return for marks, presents them with constrained choices. The high financial demands of HE institutions, and the expectation that if you do not please a male lecturer you will fail, mediate institutionalised rape.

December 2019 (South African University)

Years later, at a South African university, a similar scenario to Mr Matambo’s incident also plays out. The only difference is I am not there to witness it. One morning, I receive news of a male professor who is accused of using an inappropriate sexual example in class. The lecturer equated the length of an academic literature review to a woman’s skirt that “should be short enough to attract attention, but long enough to cover the subject matter.” The same lecturer is also accused of breaching reasonable professional boundaries through evidence brought forward by a female student that she was undergoing some personal difficulties and he tried to comfort her by commenting about her beauty. Although the lecturer is later found guilty of sexual harassment by the gender committee of the university, he is reinstated (Fengu, 2020, n.p.)

Commenting on how the statements made by witnesses on this case reveal the tolerance of sexual harassment within a university department, a report stated that:

> *Their testimonies depicted a school with a patriarchal culture, where invisible power is concentrated in the hands of men who are senior in academic ranks and constitute an ‘Old Boys Club’ or network,” the ruling reads, adding that “the handful of women who had managed to rise in academic rank appeared to adopt or at least tolerate the status quo. The toxicity of that power lies in its lack of appreciation by those who have it . . . and their blindness to sexism and sexist behaviour confers privilege. (Fengu, 2020, n.p.)*

This example shows why it is difficult to eradicate sexual harassment in HE institutions. Innocent as the comments made by the lecturer may appear, they objectify women. Gqola (2015, p. 39) opined that “part of violent gender power is in celebrating attributes associated with the masculine and ordering the world in terms of opposites, or binaries.” The male lecturer assumes a form of hegemonic masculinity that enables him to use the female body as an example of anything—with little to no consequences from the institution. The lecturer's institutional authority is disguised as a scholarly authority (Santos, 2012). This scholarly authority is, of course, phallic and heteropatriarchal. This professor uses the woman's body as a sexualised example of how to write a literature review. It can be argued that this language is rapey because it subtly implies that women should be attractive to men, but still behave within accepted social norms. It also implies that if they do not, they deserve whatever happens to them. Therefore, sex jokes such as these are used to conceal the masculine and patriarchal, the systemic and structural, and to control the behaviour of women and other gender non-conforming people (Gqola, 2015). To elucidate, Gqola (2015) reminded us of how in South African colonies such as the Cape, slavocratic society created the stereotype of black women's hypersexuality to authorise and justify the institutionalised rape of women. By language or by force, women are systematically and structurally raped in such lecture rooms.

Issues of sexual harassment and homophobia are also raised during #FeesMustFall (FMF). According to Chinguno et al. (2017, p. 17), "The FMF movement further raised questions on racial identity, social class, positionality, gender, sexuality, the hetero-patriarchal order and the significance of an intersectional paradigm on how to 'do' and understand popular struggles and resistance." The shared experience of both the Zimbabwean and South African university is that, while both black men and women students are "at the bottom of the food chain," women are more vulnerable in both institutions. Andile Mthombeni wrote that, at Wits, "I was very much aware of the class, gender, sexuality and racial divide that exists within the campus" (2017, p. 50). While it was part of some sectors of the Wits FMF movement's goals to achieve gender and sexuality equality, the movement itself demonstrated how deeply engraved heteropatriarchy is among cis/hetero men on campus. Sello Mashibini wrote that "men sought to dominate the space and take credit for all the work that women were doing. They said it was time to confront the stereotypes that men are better leaders than women" (2017, p. 42). Simamkhele Dlakavu described how men dominated the space while women and queer men had to make food for the protestors. She also witnessed that questions such as "When is the food coming?" and "Why is the food so dry?" were made by the cis-het "men of our movement" (Dlakavu et al., 2017, p. 110). Hence, language was also used to organise how women conducted themselves in the university during FMF. In the next section, I discuss my journey in realising the need to unlearn deeply ingrained misogyny and homophobia through the adaptation of a new CDL vocabulary.

January 2018–2020: Reconsidering "Fixed" Meanings of Gender and Sexuality Through CDL and Pedagogy of Discomfort

During my master's, I was introduced to the reading practice of CDL. CDL made me aware that what often happens in universities is violent. It also equipped me to be able to read instances of violence at both the Zimbabwean and South African university. This is because CDL allows one to read prevailing social relations as one would a text (Steyn, 2015). Instead of "celebrating" or "tolerating" diversity as neoliberal learning models do, CDL is committed to uncovering "assumptions that obscure more penetrating understandings of historical and current social realities" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381). These assumptions include the essentialisation of womanhood and queerness. Through CDL, I realised that power determines which differences make a difference (Hall, 2007; Steyn, 2015). CDL is a reading practice initiated by Steyn (2015) and one of its 10 criteria was central in my journey to embracing queer and feminine presenting people and other differences. The criterion is "the possession of diversity grammar and vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of privilege and oppression" (Steyn, 2015, p. 385).

I found that this criterion intersects with the *pedagogy of discomfort*. The pedagogy of discomfort outlined by Zembylas and Boler (2003) is an educational approach towards the comprehension of norms and differences by having those conversations that render one uncomfortable. CDL is a pedagogy of discomfort because it requires personal reflection on one's own positionality and complicity in domination. While CDL helped me develop a vocabulary to name privilege and oppression, it also allowed me to observe my emotional reactions and responses to difference, begin to see unconscious privileges, and the invisible ways through which I comply with the dominant ideology (Zembylas & Boler, 2003). An example is how during my first CDS classes I began to notice my agitation at my female classmates who called out patriarchy. Later, I realised how this agitation revealed my investment in male domination of women. This process also evoked emotional responses such as feelings of anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance (Zembylas & Boler, 2003).

Through further engagement with classmates on the reason why my positionality led to the oppression of women in the space, I was able to call myself out. The vocabulary to name systems such as heteronormativity and cisnormativity was empowering for this process. These concepts exposed the

historical power relations that underpinned my normalisation of heterosexuality and gender conformity. In the core CDS course we were given readings such as De La Torre's (1999) article "Beyond Machismo: A Cuban Case Study" that showed how in Cuban machismo, it is the *cojones* [testicles], not the penis, that are the cultural "signifier of signifiers" in male domination. The reading of such articles was followed by writing a reflective response paper that would be discussed openly in class. During the discussions, all views and personal stories were allowed, and this led me to listen to others who occupy a more vulnerable positionality than mine. I began to understand that power was at the fore of my positionality, which was laden with gender privilege(s). In the process, I was capacitated enough to name and critique systems such as "cisgender," "heteronormativity," "heteropatriarchy," "toxic masculinity," and so forth. With time, I began to reevaluate my worldviews. CDS course readings evaluated social movements such as FMF and #MenAreTrash with open discussions on why these movements matter. Initially, my critique to #MenAreTrash was the thought, "But it isn't all men that rape or beat up women!" However, through such open discussions, I learnt that this movement was necessary because all men are complicit in the violation of women by virtue of being born into that gender.

Today, I imagine how the situation in the Zimbabwean lecture room would have played out differently if Mr Matambo had gone through the same CDL course that I did. I also wonder if any lecturer would make inappropriate examples in class if universities made it compulsory for lecturers to go through gender sensitivity workshops and uncomfortable conversations on rape and sexual harassment. Would some of the hypermasculine male leaders of FMF have handled women and queer people differently if they had been made to understand gender and sexuality differently in their lecture rooms? The answer to these questions is that we will never know. However, at least both universities would be able to attest to the fact that something was being done to make cis-heteronormative men conscious of gender and sexuality differences on campus.

Thinking of a Way Forward

In this article, I have provided a concise context of the impacts of coloniality and neoliberalism on the gender and sexuality imperatives in universities, concretising them through a brief reflective narrative of the use of language in my learning experiences in Zimbabwean and South African universities. Through an outline of the colonial matrix of power, the article has shown how global colonial and neoliberal power relations shape current gender and sexuality trends in the university. By acknowledging that heteronormative and cisnormative individuals and communities are implicated in the exclusion of women and queer people, I have also shown how CDL as a pedagogy of discomfort informed my learning and unlearning in the space I currently find myself.

The purpose of this paper has not been to propose strategies for other institutions to use for unlearning pedagogies. Rather, the role of the paper has been to document my and others' experiences to show how heteropatriarchy manifests in the lecture room and beyond it. By referring to the two examples of male lecturers who normalised misogyny, the article hopes to show how that which is considered innocuous can become toxic. While the normative role of academic articles is to produce strategies, measures, and pedagogies for institutions to use, this paper has a different aim and conclusion. If anything, this article is pessimistic about the grand potentials of pedagogies of discomfort for institutional transformation. It, rather, points towards the individual commitment required for pedagogies such as CDL to be able to inspire individual changes. By dealing with gender and sexual norms as individuals, activists and lecturers can seek to educate individuals who form part of bigger institutions. This is a great starting point. From here moving forward, I think there is more work needed in the shape of autoethnographic or reflective articles that document how heterosexual men experience heteronormativity and cisnormativity in HE institutions in southern Africa.

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Informal Education and Collective Conscientisation in the #FeesMustFall Movement at Nelson Mandela University[5]

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to the intellectual life of the #FeesMustFall movement, highlighting how it became a student platform for critical informal education. Freire's concept of *conscientisation* is utilised to frame the social movement as a learning space of dialogue, critical thinking, knowledge exchange, and formulation of practical political action against higher education injustices. The Nelson Mandela University in South Africa is the site under study where informal education, conscientisation, and active learning occurred in its #FeesMustFall uprisings. Although the #FeesMustFall movement broadly took on a national temperament, each university campus had its own local unique experiences of the agitation. For Nelson Mandela University's microenvironment, the movement took on strong student-worker alliance organising principles and solidarities that yielded promising and continuing material transformations within a short period of time for its low-income university workers and black students. As one of the student leaders of this social movement, I provide here a personal activist experience from that period and space, emphasising the debates, knowledges, learning experiences, and theorising efforts that went with the protests that the #FeesMustFall student-worker alliance movement organised. This study contributes to the decolonisation of university learning spaces by centring alternative "classrooms" provided on the university margins by student social movements as pioneering platforms in the sociopolitical rollout of critical intellectual development and decolonisation of higher education.

Keywords: student protests, informal education, #FeesMustFall, Freire, conscientisation, university labour

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[5] No ethical clearance was required by the Nelson Mandela University to conduct this study.

Introduction

The #FeesMustFall movement was a watershed moment in the political economy of South Africa generally, and that of the Nelson Mandela University, specifically. This social movement was mainly a student youth-led protest movement and a first of its kind in post-1994 South Africa at such a magnitude (Habib, 2019; Swartz, 2015). To maintain its national momentum, students utilised mainstream media and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter (hence, its name carries a hashtag) to mobilise each other across universities; and this further included the mobilisation of a broader section of the working class. As this social movement established a national foothold, each university campus obtained its own micro-contextual experience of the protest. For Nelson Mandela University, the focus of this paper, the movement leaned towards a student-worker alliance that bred uniquely heightened efforts in the development of its intellectual life. Within the broader archiving attempts taking place around the #FeesMustFall movement, this paper focuses on the knowledge-making processes of the movement during and within the protests, centring on how the protest space in Nelson Mandela University became a liberating location anchored on critical informal education, contemporary political debates, historicised and diverse learning methods, and scholarly theorising competencies.

Freire's concept of *conscientisation* (2005, p. 33) offers tools of comprehension to make sense of how the movement facilitated active learning in which students acquired knowledge from each other and from the experiences of others (the workers) through dialogue, critical collective thinking, organising, speaking, singing, writing, and protest action. These learning activities in a protest environment cannot be compartmentalised because they take place separately and concurrently in a mass collaborative environment. Active learning is social and such learning spaces are different from traditional classrooms of the university where the focus is on grading individual students through assessments of information generated and monopolised by the professor and deposited into the supposedly empty head of the student for purposes of reinforcing nonaction, compliance, submission, and domination (Freire's notion of banking education). The protest conditions of the student movement, on the other hand, offered an alternative break with the university centre, where the margins became transformative spaces of intellectual development for students. This offered informal and nonformal knowledges as theoretical and praxis tools to surface political action against the injustices of the higher education system.

I divide this paper into four sections: first, I draw on historical material of student youth activism traditions, mainly from the African continent, to show that social movement theorising and active learning through political education were at the heart of the struggle against apartheid colonialism in the continent (Morrow et al., 2004). Educational work in social movements that fight against injustices is an activity that is not new, especially in the African context. Second, I substantiate the utilisation of my own involvement and engagement experiences in the #FeesMustFall movement as a methodological note combined with document study and online social media video interpretation. Third, I describe the political economy of higher education in South Africa and position the microenvironment of Nelson Mandela University as a political and contextual space that created the conditions that allowed the student-worker #FeesMustFall protest movement to emerge. Last, I examine features that made the social movement a conscientising space for activist education in Nelson Mandela University. This provides conceptual instruments to stretch existing work and understandings of alternative active education spaces as cocreated and coinhabited settings on the university margins for the political purpose of social change in higher education and beyond.

The Intellectual Traditions of African Social Movements

The history of youth activism and student movements on the African continent is entangled in the broader struggles against colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, and capitalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Oppressed African people have consistently organised themselves into social movements to fight for their human rights. Thus, the liberation struggle on the African continent was deeply embedded in the formation of these protest social movements by young people as students, working in solidarity with other oppressed groups such as workers', women's, and community-based movements for broader national liberation. At the centre of these struggles were the construction and cocreation of knowledges, ideas, slogans, theories, and action strategies to bring about social change. The organising work done through social movement education in Africa entailed the writing, active researching, and distribution of documentation of various kinds in different platforms, sometimes under challenging conditions of colonial state repression—the underground movement—for purposes of conscientising oppressed groups of people "through popular education for people's power" (Sisulu, 1987, p. 25).

The maturity of the conversation on theory and praxis in the struggle for the Pan-African unity and independence of the continent and its people can first be traced to the 1960s. This is the period when the African continent was at major political, socioeconomic, and intellectual crossroads. The north and east African regions were gaining political independence while the southern Africa region was experiencing heightened state military violence from white minority rule. Political figures such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau, to mention a few, were at the forefront of constructing theories and knowledges for Africa's independence along with other activist scholars such as Frantz Fanon, who was eloquently making sense of the postcolonial era in Algeria in his pioneering manuscript, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Cabral's notion of activist education practice is acknowledged in African social movement pedagogical praxis—he advised the people and the youth to "learn from life, learn from our people, learn from books, learn from the experiences of others. Never stop learning" (1969, p. 5).

Nyerere's (1962) essay, *Ujamaa,* was the foundation of the economic development policy of the postcolonial government of Tanzania whereas the formation of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in 1963 is credited to the ideological and activist leadership of Kwame Nkrumah who, in his and Ghana's inaugural independence speech, proclaimed that "our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the continent" (1957, p. 1). Nkrumah went on to organise a series of conferences between African leaders to forge African unity from 1958 to 1962—until the formation of the OAU in 1963.

What was intellectually significant about the period of the 1960s was, firstly, the immeasurable societal and revolutionary changes it created in its immediate and global contexts and, secondly, the international reach and influence of its theories and knowledges across the African continent—from both theoretical and praxis standpoints (Sahnoun, 2010). These African intellectuals of the 1960s thus stand out as pioneering figures of political activist education in the 20th century. To emphasise this view, Gibson (2008) disclosed that South African anti-apartheid student activist, Steve Biko, was influenced by the writings of Frantz Fanon, which he read informally whilst he was a medical student at the University of Natal in the 1960s: "Steve Biko recreated the kind of praxis that Fanon suggested in the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*, namely, that the working out of new concepts cannot come from the intellectual's head alone but must come from a dialogue with common people" (p. 684). Furthermore, in Biko's biography, it was acknowledged that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), a mass-based anti-apartheid youth social movement formed and led by Biko was "incorporating in its ideology both the influences of African leaders such as Julius Nyerere but also Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire and the black nationalist movement in the United States" (Mangcu, 2014, p. 15).

In a conversation with the author of Biko's biography, Xolela Mangcu revealed to me that:

> *Biko wrote most of the papers that are currently made chapters in his book, I Write What I Like, through handwriting and when he died, Hugh Lewin and Aelred Stubbs took the papers and smuggled them out of South Africa to London where the first edition of the book was edited and printed. Had those two comrades not done this, there would not have been a book called, I Write What I Like, written by Biko today. (Personal communication, July 26, 2019)*

In other words, the pillar of the freedom struggle in Africa was the formation and organisation of social movements by African leaders and ordinary people, and the informal exchange of ideas, nonformal handwritten papers, visions, and insights across African borders.

The 1970s in South Africa saw the emergence of a black youth social movement that had its own intellectual life (Tiro, 2019). In light of heightened military violence by the white minority government in South Africa towards black people during that period, black students formed a movement that was theoretically encapsulated with philosophies of *black consciousness* (Mangcu, 2012). This concept was coined by black university student activists organised under the South African Students Organisation (SASO), which also had political alliances with high schools and community organisations in black townships (Biko, 2004). Township schools that black students attended became spaces of organising for student-led social movements to conscientise black students about their learning conditions under the apartheid government (Tiro, 2019). The Soweto uprising was a student youth social movement attributed to the intellectual influence of young high school teachers at the time such as Onkgopotse Abram Tiro:

> *You get to 1975 and 1976, you know the debating topics [were] reflecting the political consciousness and again that is in the high schools and for that there is no way you can overlook Tiro in this new political conscientisation that was taking place among students. (Steve Lebelo as cited in Tiro, 2019, p. 144)*

In the late 1970s, black consciousness as theory and praxis also made an impression on Nelson Mandela whilst he was serving prison time on Robben Island (Mandela, 1995). He recalled a shocking experience when young leaders of the BCM were arrested and first arrived at the prison island:

> *These fellows refused to conform to even basic prison regulations. One day I was at head office conferring with the commanding officer. As I was walking out with the major, we came upon a young prisoner being interviewed by a prison official. The young man, who was no more than eighteen, was wearing his prison cap in the presence of senior officers, a violation of regulations. Nor did he stand up when the major entered the room, another violation. The major looked at him and said, "Please take off your cap." The prisoner ignored him. Then in an irritated tone, the major said, "Take off your cap." The prisoner turned and looked at the major and said, "What for?" I could hardly believe what I had just heard. It was a revolutionary question: "What for?" The major also seemed taken aback, but managed a reply. "It is against regulations," he said. The young prisoner responded, "Why do you have this regulation? What is the purpose of it?" This questioning on the part of the prisoner was too much for the major and he stomped out of the room, saying, "Mandela, you talk to him." But I would not intervene on his behalf, and simply bowed in the direction of the prisoner to let him know that I was on his side. This was our first exposure to the Black Consciousness Movement. (Mandela, 1995, pp. 577–578)*

This submission by Mandela specifies the value that people obtain from conceptual orientations and knowledges generated in young people's collective and disruptive struggles against oppression (Mangcu, 2012). In this instance, Mandela had first-hand experience of the praxis obtained from the nonformal and informal teachings of black consciousness.

The 1980s saw the Southern African region gaining independence with their own prominent mediums of intellectual communication and activist dialogue such as Radio Freedom and the journal, *Sechaba,* which featured articles by leaders and members of the region's liberation movements (African National Congress, 1968). These knowledge resources were banned by the apartheid state, but they were created by Pan-African leaders of the liberation movements to conscientise ordinary people across the continent and abroad. Radio Freedom was broadcasted in over 11 countries in the southern African region, targeting communities of oppressed black people and young activists, particularly those in South Africa and in exile (Lekgoathi, 2018). Its studios were located in Zambia and its purpose was to communicate the strategies and tactics of liberation movements in their noble attempts to surface the freedom struggle (Mbete, 2019). One of its listeners at the time, Lebogang Hashatse, who is currently deputy vice-chancellor at Nelson Mandela University, stated that "the January 8th statements of the African National Congress (ANC) were annually broadcasted on Radio Freedom to brief us as the youth on the political strategy to follow for the year" (Personal communication, October 30, 2019). *Sechaba* and Radio Freedom were activist communication settings that generated grassroots knowledges from ordinary people and "impacted on political consciousness and created the space for some dialogue among [their] listeners" (Lekgoathi, 2018, p. 551).

This period of the 1980s also had intellectual leaders in the form of Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, Ruth First of the South African Communist Party, and Neville Alexander of the Congress Alliance in South Africa. What is significant about these three figures in the freedom struggle is the scholarly rigour of their social activism and the qualitative authority of their publications—both in formal academic settings such as universities and in the nonformal social movement spaces where their liberation credentials were widely respected. Ruth First was a sociology lecturer at Durham University in England and was later appointed as a professor at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique. She utilised the formal university classroom space and nonformal activist meetings to critique the apartheid state (Motlanthe, 2011) and was most notably accredited by grassroots movements for her underground writings such as *Libya: The Elusive Revolution,* published in 1974. For these struggle efforts, she was assassinated in the same way as black consciousness leader Onkgopotse Abram Tiro—by a letter bomb whilst in exile (Motlanthe, 2011). Thomas Sankara is another African activist and intellectual organiser of the 1980s, recognised for his liberation principle that "the revolution cannot triumph without the emancipation of women" (2007, p. 335)—a principle that subsequently mainstreamed gender emancipation as a social justice canon of the sustainable future of contemporary African states (African Union Commision, 2015).

Neville Alexander, like Ruth First, was an activist scholar and university professor who died in 2012 when director of a research institute affiliated with the University of Cape Town. He is recognised in social movements as an emancipatory educationist (Porteus, 2016), and his prominent manuscript *One Azania: One Nation* was written and published whilst he was under house arrest in 1979 (Cairncross, 2016). He was a sound advocate for nonformal and informal endeavours of collective theorising as an effective practice of enabling active learning. In a reflection on his decade-long stay on Robben Island, he had the following to say about its forms of political education:

> *We taught one another what we knew, discovering each other's resourcefulness. We also learned how people with little or no formal education could not only themselves participate in education programmes but actually teach others a range of different insights and skills. The "University of Robben Island" was one of the best universities in the country. It also showed me that you don't need professors. (Neville Alexander as cited in Choudry, 2015, p. 40)*

What comes through strongly from Alexander's thoughts is that intergenerational exchange of ideas, shared documents, and mutual support in movements of resistance were valuable methods of maintaining organisation. As other literature (Hirson, 1988; Jonas, 2019; Labuschagne, 2016; Manenzhe, 2007; Suttner, 2005; Turok, 2014; Willian, 2001) reveals, social spaces where black people gathered during apartheid, such as trains, workplaces, prisons, funerals, taverns, sports stadiums, rallies, schools, and stokvels were all utilised to educate, theorise, learn, and struggle. The apartheid government banned mass gatherings of black people in public spaces and, as a result, black people strategically used every social space they could find to actively conscientise one another (Jonas, 2019; Turok, 2014).

Accordingly, the nonformal organisation of political gatherings during the #FeesMustFall protests by students for purposes of dialogue, teaching, learning, writing, and theorising with one another are all instances of an African political tradition—the intellectual heritage of youth struggles and national resistance for many decades. In this paper, I elaborate on this form of education practice to formulate the defining features that the #FeesMustFall movement took in organising student agitation under postapartheid, democratic, urban, and globalising conditions in higher education. Active learning in social movements has been a contested idea in postapartheid South Africa and elsewhere. Habib (2013) argued that the Constitution of South Africa has enabled civil society and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to formally and actively participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of government initiatives. He centred the ability of these civic organisations to hold the state accountable as a significant measure of their social impact (and, they are successful), and he holds this as evidence that the quality of democracy in South Africa is strengthened and consolidated (Habib, 2013). But he goes on to juniorise informal grassroots movements as being less significant by virtue of their not being in close proximity to the state:

> *The third set of structures is survivalist and informal, [it is] organised mainly in marginalised communities, and with no relationship to the state. These organisations are preoccupied with assisting people to survive the ravages of neo-liberalism. They have no resources, nor do they covet recognition from the state. (Habib, 2013, p. 159)*

That view is not in accord with Choudry and Kapoor (2010) who argued that the obsession with determining social movements a "success" tends to overlook the intellectual work that takes place in them; regardless of whether a social movement is a success or not, there is a powerful idea or theory that it produces or stands for. Choudry (2010) further added that the *NGOisation* of social movements is another means of quantifying them to fit the neoliberal containment of material outcomes that can only be measurable through compliance surveys and questionnaires. This professionalisation of social activism and social change places hierarchies of power on social movements, and has the potential to compartmentalise them along "privilege" patterns of inclusion and exclusion and, ultimately, weaken their strength to oppose oppressive systems (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). Thus, the juniorisation of grassroots movements that Habib's notion contributes to is part of the problematic template of the professionalisation and NGOisation of social movements that have the potential to erase community knowledges. Madlingozi (2019) argued for an alternative pedagogy that recognises knowledges produced in micro-democracies of ordinary people on the ground such as *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, a shack-dwellers movement that is actively involved in the decolonisation of law and society,

questioning through protest action, the hegemonic ways of social being in the world. My argument in this paper is consistent with these traditions of grassroots knowledge-making platforms given that it deliberates on how the student-worker #FeesMustFall movement in Nelson Mandela University tabled its own orientation of alternative university spaces of informal education and knowledge development.

Methodological Note

Madlingozi (2019) observed that published writings about the #FeesMustFall movement largely stem from the senior professoriate and academics based in universities and students—especially those who were directly involved with this student-worker movement. Manuscripts generated by the likes of Heleta (2016), Booysen (2016), and Habib (2019), amongst many, are generally cited authoritatively in the South African cohort of the #MustFall critical university studies discipline, alongside those of the student activists themselves who were actively involved in the protests, such as Chikane (2018) and Ngcaweni and Ngcaweni (2018)—which is important, from the student perspective, to take control of the narrative about their activist experiences. Thus, the #FeesMustFall archive has been an intergenerational space of knowledge making, which recognises diverse perspectives that converge in collaborative interpretation of the movement.

This study seeks to add to this body of knowledge by theorising from the picket lines. I draw from my personal involvement and engagement experiences in the #FeesMustFall collective movement at Nelson Mandela University. I provide my activist experiences from that space (Wolcott, 1994) specifically by highlighting the debates, knowledges, and learning practices that went with the protests that the movement organised, and the contradictions it encountered. This methodological approach was also used in production of the classic manuscript, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire wherein he stated:

> *These pages, which introduce Pedagogy of the Oppressed, result from my observations during six years of political exile, observations which have enriched those previously afforded by my educational activities in Brazil. I have encountered, both in training courses which analyse the role of conscientisation and in actual experimentation with a truly liberating education. (2005, p. 35)*

The same methodological approach was advanced by the vice-chancellor of Wits University, Adam Habib, in the writing of his book, *Rebels and Rage: Reflections on #FeesMustFall:*

> *This is the story I tell in the pages that follow. When Ester Levinrad of Jonathan Ball Publishers first approached me to write this book, I was sceptical: I recognised that I could not be dispassionate, being a prominent participant in the protest events . . . it would be a participant's account . . . I recognise that I have a particular window into the student protests. (2019, pp. xiv–xv)*

My student political organising and activism in Nelson Mandela University stretches over a period of seven years during one of which I was the president of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and a member of the University Council at a time (2017/2018) when the university was at major crossroads around questions of free education and worker insourcing. To produce this paper, I merged my activist experience with knowledges that were cocreated and archived with other involved student activists in the form of existing documents, commentary, and social media material. These resources are publicly available and I, as the researcher, interpreted them using narrative examination (Kim, 2016) informed and guided by Freire's (2005) concept of collective conscientisation, which entails the capacity to engage in dialogue and to actively learn, develop, and be equipped with critical thinking competencies, and to imbibe the courage to liberate oneself and others in actual practice.

The qualitative approach of personal observation, document analysis, and media examination is conceived from the body of ethnographic methods in sociological, anthropological, and education studies (Kawulich, 2015). The key aspect of coworking with participants in an ethnographic activism study is to engage extensively and intimately as collaborators and active agents of the research enterprise instead of being mere research subjects. This is the unique power, in my view, that student activist spaces provide. Data extracted from social media video analysis was transcribed and followed up with a comprehensive reading of such transcribed narratives. This was done repeatedly by the researcher to properly ascertain the meaning that the transcripts convey, as Creswell (1994) advised. These videos were stored on the official Facebook page of the South African Students Congress (SASCO) branch of Nelson Mandela University—one of the student formations that actively participated in the archiving and agitation exercised by the #FeesMustFall student-worker movement. This social media account is publicly accessible to anyone who has a Facebook account.

Stewart (2017) reminded us that conducting research using social media as a tool offers decentralised flexibility that is free from formal academic gatekeeping. But he also cautioned that the digital space has its own forms of power, privacy settings, and access control. For this specific Facebook account though, such securitisation measures did not pose challenges. Fortunately, the #FeesMustFall movement space consisted of university students, university workers, and pockets of community leaders who were all socially literate individuals able to eloquently communicate in English and isiXhosa in private meetings, public gatherings, and on social media. Also, given that the political discussions between these different stakeholders took on a learning and epistemic contestation format from different schools of thoughts and experiences about mutual interests (Johnson, 2002), the engagements between these participants were anchored on trust and enthusiastic participation (Marvasti, 2004). These values were maintained with utmost integrity by the researcher in conducting this study. The methodological developments established from this activist environment have potential to transform and extend current research methods that can be utilised in other informal, multi-sectoral, and transgenerational settings in the fields of decolonised education and curriculum studies, sociology of education, and transformative microeconomic theories.

The Political Economy of Postapartheid Higher Education in South Africa

Nelson Mandela University is a postapartheid merger of five previous institutions of higher learning. The rationale for the democratic government to merge higher education institutions was an attempt to end the binary system of higher education inherited from apartheid, and which had advantaged white universities and disadvantaged black universities (Bunting, 2004). The goal was to create a single system defined along the lines of a nonracial, nonsexist, democratic, equal, equitable, and quality higher education system (Department of Education, 2001). This exercise introduced the phenomenon of universities in South Africa having multiple campuses, especially those that merged with previously black technikons. Nelson Mandela University was also product of this arrangement and became a sizable institution with over 27,000 students dispersed over six campuses (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016).

The political economy surrounding these developments was another complex challenge that postapartheid universities had to contend with. Given the high levels of racial exclusion that apartheid had imposed on the black majority, keeping them from attaining higher education and gaining skills for social mobility, the postapartheid government placed its socioeconomic investment on higher education as means to unlock the material fortunes of the disadvantaged black majority (National Planning Commission, 2011). This entailed the black majority having to access universities post-1994 as a large group and all at the same time. The idea of the university being an exclusive space for the minority, privileged class that enjoyed small classrooms and homogenous student communities with abundant infrastructural capacity suddenly became the university of the past (Habib, 2019). The new

postapartheid university was characterised by massification of access, an unprecedented growth in demand for off-campus accommodation, increased workloads for the academic and administrative staff, and an inadequate infrastructure capacity of the university that was not imagined for such radical and rapid changes (Swartz, 2017).

The fiscus also proved unable to prioritise and meet the pressing and emerging demands of running an internationally competitive public higher education system in a postapartheid epoch (Habib, 2019). University subsidies from government decreased in real terms because public resources were being placed elsewhere or being put under immense pressure (Bond, 2016). The ripple effect of this significant depression of university budgeting by government left universities with little room to financially manoeuvre without increasing student fees (Pillay, 2016). Annually, universities increased student fees above the inflation rate in order to keep up with the cost of running international, research-intensive universities (Habib, 2019). Another measure that universities employed to save costs was the outsourcing of some of their service functions to contracted private companies—specifically, cleaning, security, catering, gardening, and transport logistics. The Nelson Mandela University also went ahead with these austerity measures (Nelson Mandela University, 2016). The private companies contracted by universities to carry out services increased their profit margins by saving on operational costs, mainly through hiring low-income service workers who were poorly compensated with low wages, precarious working conditions, and short-term contracts (Swartz, 2015). From a microeconomic point of view, these issues ignited the national protest movement calls for free education and for low-income university service workers to be insourced.

The Sociopolitical Context of Nelson Mandela University

The "facilities mapping" of the Nelson Mandela University as a physical space inhabited by staff and students on a daily basis is a personal exercise that I want to critically observe in this section in order to draw the underlying socioeconomic contradictions that pulled students and workers together to form the student-worker alliance in the #FeesMustFall movement. In the main, the movement consisted of students and service workers—cleaners, gardeners, catering staff, and security guards. Marx and Engels (1932) referred to this phenomenon as the working class coming to terms with its material world and material conditions, its standing relationship with the mode of production and, ultimately, being conscious of that reality for purposes of organising and formulating transformative action. In the context of Nelson Mandela University, and from my own social reading of the university space, the low-income labour force and poor students are organised by the university's mode of production as follows.

First, security guards are largely deployed to on-campus residences of the university where black, poor students also spend most of their time. This organisational design means these two groups—security guards and students—interact with each other constantly. Second, the catering staff also has a daily interaction with black, poor students in residence dining halls. Black students eat at least three meals a day prepared by the catering staff, and they stand in queues in the dining halls. This daily and constant exposure of students to the catering staff sees them build personal relations and exchange political views with them. Third, cleaning staff interact with students in their residences and classes constantly. The social and class arrangement of the university system, therefore, has the lowest paid workers interact constantly with low-income students as they enter each other's spaces in the university campus daily.

Socially and culturally, low-income workers and low-income students are also bound together by their pre-university relationships established in the communities they come from. Black students, when they see the low-income workers, see their parents and relatives; the workers, in the students, see their children and grandchildren. This is derived from the values of the African community where *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* [a child is raised by the entire village].[6] In addition, seniority and wisdom in the African household are measured by age (Magoqwana, 2018). Therefore, regardless of whether someone is a cleaner or a dean in the university environment, if they are older than the black student, the black student sees a senior member of their African household and community and, as such, they afford respect to that person. Terms of African seniority are used by students to refer to workers because most of the university services workers are close to retirement age.

These cultural, economic, and social conditions that the low-income service workers shared with students heightened their consciousness; as one Marxist educationist once proclaimed: "Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompletion" (Freire, 2005, p. 43). The rest was history.

The Social Movement as a Conscientising Space in Nelson Mandela University

The 30 days of protest at Nelson Mandela University between 21 October and 21 November 2015 consisted of persistent engagements between workers, students, and university staff. These engagements were in the form of mass meetings, formal political school sessions, and informal lectures—all for purposes of exchanging knowledges and for these different stakeholders to persuade and conscientise each other. Social media and mainstream media were useful platforms to organise workers and students locally in the campus and nationally in other universities. Workers and students also exchanged crucial skills such as communication etiquette, writing competencies, and critical thinking abilities, which enabled all these groups to be politically conscious in their activism practices.

Active learning in the movement for all its participants circulated this kind of knowledge and these tactics proved to be effective in achieving the strategic objectives of the movement. For instance, the following statement issued by SASCO, one of the component student formations that was part of the #FeesMustFall movement, demonstrates the skill of persuasive writing, critical thinking, active learning, student-worker alliance collaborative consciousness, research, and theorising effort:

> *The South African Students' Congress has, after assessing the political situation on campus, decided that it is necessary for students of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to embark on a mass protest. This decision is informed by an assessment which we have made regarding issues that affect the general student populace, children of the working class in particular, and the exploited workers within the university. This is in light of the #FeesMustFall campaign demands which we have made to the university, such as the decolonisation of the curriculum content, insourcing of service workers, and the delivery of free education. (Algoa FM, 2016, para. 5)*

The #FeesMustFall movement in Nelson Mandela University was a "flat" political space that entailed different student formations and workers: SASCO, the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command, the newly formed Black Students Stokvel, and various independent radical black feminist networks. In Nelson Mandela University's context, these student organisations had officially existed for less than three years on campus when the #FeesMustFall movement emerged—with the exception of SASCO, which has been organising in public South African universities including Nelson Mandela University

[6] Direct translation: A person becomes a person through the humanity of other people.

since the 1990s (Department of Education, 2008). The political experience of SASCO in student organising made it the key source of activist reference in the #FeesMustFall movement, especially through grassroots recruitment, organising cultures, conscientisation, and general political education in the form of strategy and tactics. SASCO positions itself as a Marxist-Leninist student movement and as "an intellectual hub of the Mass Democratic Movement" (2016, p. 2). SASCO has stated its commitment to informal and nonformal active learning practices offered to its student members, and taught by other senior student leaders in a social movement space:

> *SASCO's strategic duty is the grooming and development of young and progressive intelligentsia that will occupy the political and the critical intellectual space in society in the advancement and defence of the progressive agenda. . . . The Branch Sub-Committee shall also be entrusted with the responsibility of identifying comrades and individuals that will be responsible for delivering classes on different topics. (2016, pp. 23–25)*

Social movement active learning and activist knowledges are the trademark of Marxist-Leninist formations in the historical context of the African continent, and this is the sociological footprint that the #FeesMustFall movement was obtaining its consciousness resources from. Elsewhere, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) has stated that students attained their comprehension and language tools of writing, speaking, and theorising from the decolonisation scholarship of African liberation theorists such as Biko and Fanon. These scholars, including Nyerere, Nkrumah, Sankara, Freire, Alexander, and Ruth First, had an appreciation for the guiding frameworks of Marxism-Leninism and they provided historical memory and various intellectual traditions to the #FeesMustFall movement. These teachings, as Freire (2005) indicated, were attained from educational activities conducted under challenging conditions of underground activity and political exile where informal education was central.

When addressing senior executive staff of the Nelson Mandela University in a mass meeting held in an open field, called and addressed by the #FeesMustFall movement, student leader, Lufefe Mkutu, spoke on behalf of workers and students, demanding the immediate insourcing of workers and for student funding models to be transformed:

> *The announcement of a zero percent fee increment by government does not mean that free education has been attained. Even if there is a zero percent fee increase, does that mean we now afford? [Audience responds: No!]. There are learners currently in high school who must come here [in the next academic year] who cannot afford. So, this institution as an autonomous university must assist government by clearing the debts of students, and provide free registration for the academic year. We have no doubt that the struggle for free education will be won. Workers must be insourced because it pains me to see my mother clean my room in the residence, doing a great job, but does not have money to go home . . . and if the vice-chancellor is unable to deliver our demands, we call upon him to summon a special seating of Council immediately, and table our demands. If not, we will shut down this university [Audience cheers]. (SASCO, 2015)*

In response to this mass meeting, a day later, the university adhered to the demands made by the students and workers, and published the following statement:

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) Council has called for an urgent Council meeting on Saturday, 21 November 2015 in order to examine recommendations from University management regarding the student and worker representations to in-source certain services to the University which are presently outsourced. The meeting will deliberate and find a constructive way forward in managing this aspect taking into consideration its sustainability and preventing major job losses. (Nelson Mandela University, 2015, p. 1)

The special council demanded by workers and students sat on 21 November 2015 and it took the following resolution:

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) Council has resolved to commit the University to ending outsourcing of service workers as this practice leads to exploitation of labour and unethical practices not in line with NMMU's core values. Council furthermore calls on Government to ensure an effective and adequate system for debt relief for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and that this be put into place for 2016 and beyond to ensure access of the poor to University education. Council has also instructed the University management to expand mobilisation of funding from external sources to support poor students wishing to study at post-graduate levels in 2016 and beyond. (Council of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015, p. 4)

The submission by students and workers in the mass meeting environment, as well as the positive response by the university to call the special council meeting, demonstrates the concurrent process of active learning where dialogue, writing, speaking, activist action, persuasion, critical thinking, speaking, teaching, and organising all take place in the protest movement space for purposes of delivering social changes to the material lives of students and workers as a whole. The complete execution of this function, the mastering of the proper message to convey in an appropriate moment, could not have been possible without collective and social conscientisation of the student activists and workers.

Reflecting on this historical moment achieved by the intellectual agitation of students and workers in the #FeesMustFall movement in Nelson Mandela University, then vice-chancellor, Professor Derrick Swartz, acknowledged the superiority of the scholarly argument that the student-worker movement tabled and the short period of time it took to achieve the results of its protest action. He had the following to say:

This quarter has witnessed perhaps the most momentous and far-reaching developments in South African higher education since the period just before and immediately after the collapse of the apartheid system in the early 1990s. In a remarkably short period, we have seen the emergence of a wide coalition of student organizations, across political affiliations, in some cases supported by groups of academics and workers, taking a militant stand against fees increases, and calling for "free higher education" and far-reaching transformation in the entire higher education system. . . . We believe that the force of these events over the last month or so will in all likelihood induce a starkly different set of conditions—a "new normal"—within the sector in the future. At the very least, it would not be "business as usual" . . . within the sector and society. (Swartz, 2015, pp. 1–2)

Concluding Remarks

This paper has positioned the #FeesMustFall movement at Nelson Mandela University as a collective learning period for students and workers through informal education, conscientisation, active learning,

and practical political action. Workers and students as members of the black working class used the social movement as an alternative classroom to conscientise each other about their daily conditions of cultural, social, political, economic, and epistemic subjugation in the university environment. The paper has argued that the injustices of South Africa's higher education system and the disappointing postapartheid socioeconomic transition created humiliating experiences for students and workers in the university, and these material conditions shaped their critical thinking competencies and appetite to initiate protest action as praxis. This decolonial pedagogy and political education transmitted through activist writing, speaking, dialogue, critical debate, and disruptive theorising, inspired practical agitation against the status quo and was instrumental in the continuing demand for the transformation, Africanisation, decommodification, and decolonisation of higher education and the insourcing of low-income service workers.

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The Academentia of ECAs: Navigating Academic Terrain Through Critical Friendships as a Life Jacket[7]

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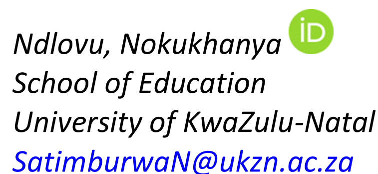
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Abstract

In this paper, we explore our experiences as early career academics (ECAs) and examine how we forged a collaborative, critical friendship to navigate the challenges that we faced in a South African higher education institution. Our inquiry is guided by the following question: "How are we learning to navigate the organisational academic space through critical friendships?" Grounded in the self-study methodology, we use personal narratives to share our experiences of marginalisation. We use liminal and intersectionality theories as lenses to highlight the formation of our critical friendship. The narratives suggest an organic formation of our critical friendship, which has become a life jacket to enhance ourselves and our practice. Through exploration of our critical friendship, we elaborate on the pleasure, power, and possibilities of collaboration among ECAs that might open up opportunities for professional development leading to social change and academic success.

Keywords: Early career, intersectionality, liminality, self-study, critical-friends

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Introduction

> *Being the youngest in my cluster and discipline, I remember in the 1st semester of employment, that I had a difficult relationship with a contract staff who was a friend with my discipline coordinator. The contract staff member was supposed to work with me but refused to take any directives from me, and wasn't afraid to tell me to my face. When discussing this with my discipline coordinator, who was also a man, I was advised that in the contract staff member's culture, women are not leaders; therefore, he struggles to take instruction from me. I was also politely advised that since I am new and young, I shouldn't be too pushy with the people I found here. —Nosipho*

We write this paper as early career academics (hereafter ECAs) employed at a teacher education institution in South Africa. We are writing about our experiences and learnings of how critical friendships have served as a life jacket and assisted us to navigate the academic space. We draw from a foreword written by Professor Magubane to *Black Academic Voices: The South African experience* (Magubane, 2019). For Magubane, the book is not a "pity-party or a celebration of victimhood" (2019, p. iv); we share the same sentiments about our paper. In that vein, we reflect on our experiences as ECAs and how we (as critical friends) navigate power and structural systems that are unfavourable to ECAs. Nosipho's story exemplifies the dilemmas we have experienced as ECAs, where we have been marginalised due to age, gender, lack of experience, and even culture. In this paper, we highlight some of these experiences and illustrate how they have pushed us into liminality—and how we have turned that into an opportunity to thrive.

Our Dilemma as ECAs

When initially appointed as teacher educators in 2016, 2017, and 2019, we came into a space that was fast-paced and had different demands compared to our former employment. Because most of us were school teachers, the only key performance area (KPA) that we could readily identify with in the school of education was teaching. KPAs come with the pressure of accountability because they are closely monitored in our institution to measure efficiency in the enactment of teaching, research, community engagement, and administration (Debowski, 2012; Foote, 2010). All academics are expected to perform all these activities. In addition, those without doctoral degrees are expected to enrol and complete their doctoral studies within a prescribed period of time (Nathane, 2019). We do not have doctorates, we have had no prior experience of supervising students, writing research papers, and establishing community engagement projects (thus, we have a shared interest in developing professionally).

This meant that we had to devise a strategy of ensuring that the missing aspects of our KPAs were addressed in order for us to flourish in academia. Our intention is not to lament the challenges we face, but to make a scholarly contribution by sharing how we are navigating the academic terrain. This may be useful for other ECAs who may not have found a way to cope with the overwhelming expectations and frustrations in the university workplace and may need a life jacket (Casey & Fletcher, 2017; Kensington-Miller, 2018; Masinga et al., 2016). We further wish to problematise the current definitions of ECAs (Bosanquet et al., 2016; Price et al., 2015; Teferra, 2016) given that associating it with the prerequisites of having a doctoral degree, being a permanent staff member, and having five years of uninterrupted research development (Bosanquet et al., 2016; Misiaszek, 2015; Teferra, 2016) no longer suffices. Guided by the research question: "How have we used critical friendships to enable us to navigate academic spaces?" We will elaborate on our use of liminal space and how forming a critical friendship through our intersecting identities kept us afloat and worked as a life jacket, contributing to our professional learning.

Literature Review

> *In one of our cluster meetings, it was announced that all academic staff, including professors, should teach undergraduate modules. There was an uproar. I remember one professor responded: "I am willing to take undergraduate modules, but I will have to reduce my PhD supervision load as well as the extra mentorship work I do for the university." This changed the mood of the meeting. What I took from this meeting was that supervision had more currency than teaching as the professor did not take any undergraduate modules. They were given to junior and contract staff members instead. —Vusi*

We find ourselves entering higher education when it is in a state of flux, particularly through massification, which has reshaped the academic space. Academics have had to adapt to teaching large class sizes (up to 510 students per class), and providing instruction to a diverse student population with differing needs, capabilities, and expectations (Hlengwa, 2019; Teferra, 2016). These challenges, although affecting all academics, are a burden predominantly on ECAs who are given more modules to teach because senior academic staff members are typically unwilling to teach undergraduate modules (Phaswana, 2019). This is illustrated in Vusi's experience—the assertion of power by senior staff members that ensures that junior staff are given what no other academic wants.

Although not explicitly stated in institutions, publishing is arguably the top determinant in defining success in academia (Hemmings & Kay, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2013) and, for ECAs, it is crucial to building their research profiles for career progression and recognition in the academic field (Eley et al., 2012; Moodley et al., 2015). This becomes a great advantage for senior staff who have published, and are supervising students because they already have academic capital. However, it is a daunting task for ECAs because they are still at the phase of cultivating their research skills (Hemmings, 2012). It is a greater frustration for those who are still in the process of obtaining their doctoral degree because they enter these positions with even less research capital (Teffera, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that narratives such as "publish or perish" (Moodley et al., 2015) and "sink or swim" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016; Ssempebwa et al., 2016) often dominate scholarship on ECAs—as if being an ECA is some extreme sport that threatens survival (Kensington-Miller, 2018; Merlo, 2016).

As ECAs, we face the predicament of having limited support from those who view the phase of being an ECA as a rite of passage, and see academia through the "survival of the fittest" mentality (Foote, 2010). Those who employ this lens believe that if we cannot do well without help and support, then we do not have the talent and pedigree to be in the academy (Foote, 2010). We know too well the utterances that we are dead weight because we are unable to generate the desired income for the university through research publications. Overall, more often than not, we feel overwhelmed, confused, isolated, and sometimes even inadequate as we grapple with teaching, research, service, and having to complete our doctoral studies (Masinga et al., 2016; McKay & Monk, 2017). We seem to be in a state of what Tomaselli (2015, p. 63) referred to as *academentia*.

Without a doctoral qualification, we are made to feel that we are not certified academics. However, we are still expected to carry out a full workload except for supervising doctoral dissertations. Being supervised by our colleagues creates a dichotomy; they see us as their star students in supervision cohorts but as sub-academics in staff meetings. Being in a predominantly black campus, we experience intersections within one race—the nuances in these intersections are those of ethnic identities and age. Senior academics and ECAs who are older in terms of age find it acceptable to infantilise/juniorise us by asking for coffee or making comments such as "you are of the same age as my child." Black young women who are ECAs experience extreme levels of patriarchy, sometimes even through female academics in positions of authority. Through ageism, young female academics are marginalised by a

patriarchal culture that expects them to be submissive. The experiences of Vusi, the only male coauthor, do not relate to gender but more to age.

In our corridor talks, we realised that we all had similar frustrations of belonging because we felt typecast in the academic space by our lack of a doctoral qualification, being doctoral students, our lack of experience in academia, and our age. We had also observed seasoned academics excelling in meeting their KPAs, while others rejected them, arguing that they identify themselves as dissertation supervisors and teachers, not researchers who publish. Unhappy and frustrated by this typecasting, we felt we did not belong to the dichotomic spaces available to us. As a result, we created an alternative space for ourselves—fit for us—with no norms or organisation. We identified it as a liminal space, detached from the fixed organisational structures and practices (Ratiani, 2007). Our liminal space was new to us and had no formal validation or location in the workplace (Turner, 1969). It was thus invisible and ambiguous, a vacuum of uncertainty, and uninformative. It was the *in between and betwixt* space (Turner, 1969). Our liminal space, undefined and ambiguous, allowed us to find refuge—our safe space where we all belonged. The vacuum allowed for possibilities of being and belonging in academia, the way we chose to, an alternative to what we were forced to choose in the dominant organisational structure of academia.

> *Late 2017, the dean of the school hosted academics according to their age, group, and rank. In attendance, were those at lecturer level and below the age of 40 years. Dominant in the discussions were the dean's plan and support for the group. Each person shared their challenges either in their studies, department, or in the school. At the end of the meeting, I met with a progressive few of the attendees. Driven by our common challenges such as teaching and assessing large classrooms, workloads, and aspirations to thrive in academia, we established a young academics writing group. The group was not only "shut up and write" but we provided each other constructive feedback on our studies, conference presentations, and draft manuscripts. This was a point where I began to realise that these were critical friends. —Vusi*

During the course of the years, other members of our group who had completed their doctoral studies exited the group. Those who remained saw the need to continue and encourage the scholarship we were trying to develop because we had committed to a long-term collaboration, even beyond our doctoral studies. We had to reevaluate the necessity and purpose of the group. Once we came to this awareness, we were deliberate about our intention. We reframed our thinking and what we wanted from our partnership—reinventing ourselves as teachers (LaBoskey, 2004; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). The process of reestablishment occurred organically. We shared our goals regarding our career aspirations and spoke of the various pathways to achieve them. We formed a WhatsApp group where we communicated paper calls, shared resources, and motivated each other. In our meetings, we provided support, care, and critical feedback to each other. We started recording our meetings and discussions. One of the enablers was our dean, who motivated us and provided us with resources and support. We are fortunate to be under his leadership because it is part of his vision to develop the future generation of academics.

On the basis of this experience, we identify critical friendship as a collaborative, supportive, and challenging relationship between professionals (Swaffield, 2007). It is collaborative and supportive because, through discussion and constructive critique, it provides a different lens on one's practice (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996). The friendship is also challenging because constructive criticism is often uncomfortable, yet enhancing, because through the engagements shared, understandings and alternative perspectives on learning and unlearning emerge that would otherwise not have been possible (Fletcher et al., 2016). Through constructive feedback, an openness to sharing one's

scholarship, and willingness to learn from others, the friendship itself becomes educational because it teaches about integrity, accountability, and discipline (LaBoskey, 2004).

Transitioning Through Spaces

This paper is informed by two theoretical concepts. First, we use liminal theory (Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1960) followed by intersectionality theory (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). Liminality emanates from Arnold van Gennep's pioneering work, *Rites de Passage* (1960), in which he formulated the three rites of passage that accompany almost any change in state or position in one's life. Victor Turner (1969) also extended liminality, positioning it as the between and betwixt space. Shortt (2015) and Dale and Burrel (2008) identified a liminal space as one that is on the border, somewhere in between—a space at the boundary of two dominant spaces, and which is fully part of neither. Liminality is a transitional process of becoming where an individual is temporarily separated from the dominant or mainstream organisational forms (Cook-Sather, 2006; Ratiani 2007; Turner, 1969). The liminal space is also the between and betwixt space (Turner, 1969) that bridges the "what is and what can/will be" and, as such, creates a "realm of possibility" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 110). In the liminal period, the secluded space becomes a transitional, invisible, or visible dwelling place without arrayed conventional forms where the individual may detach, unlearn, and learn through being dispositioned into the liminal space (Vinz, 1997).

Shortt (2015) identified how liminal spaces in the workplace are under-researched; they have become a fluid space conducive for productivity that warrants attention for these non-normative spaces. For the purposes of this paper, we identify the dominant space as the university workplace and the liminal space as the alternative space we created for ourselves. Our liminal space is understood on two levels. Firstly, as an undesignated "ignored" physical place on the university premises; we identified a space that had not been used for a long time, which we called, Room 32. The second level of our liminal space is embodied space. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) described embodied space as allowing the space to be occupied by the body—locating the human experience to consciously take on material and spatial form. The experience of the space expands to a person's state of mind and self. In our friendship, the liminal space connected us through lived experiences in the dominant space. It allowed us to inhabit it subjectively and to embody it.

Our liminal space, undefined and ambiguous, allowed us to find refuge, comfort, and to settle. Its establishment allowed for multiple forms of collaboration such as studying and writing together, mock presentations to each other for conference presentations and proposal reviews, establishing a dissertation writing cohort for our students, advice on professional work issues that we encountered individually, celebrating academic and personal achievements together, and the occasional social lunch. In these multiple forms of collaboration, we were critical in bringing our lens to every issue tabled by each person. We viewed our liminal space as a continual transitional space where the liminal space was a place that we used for professional productivity, therapeutic remediation, and relational fastening. Consequently, we were teaching ourselves about the academy and capacitating each other on ways to keep afloat, which, in turn, was strengthening our professional practice.

What influenced our agency to seek the liminal space was our common identities (Gee, 2000) and the need to move away from the hegemonic space in which we felt we did not belong. We used intersectionality to study the complexities that are produced by intersecting identities, structural systems, and power (Collins & Bilge, 2016; May, 2015) as ECAs in a teacher education institution. We concur with May's (2015) argument that intersectionality should not only be restricted to gender, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity; age and ableness should form part of the intersectional categories of analysis. Given that we carry multiple identities, including being an early career academic, intersectionality as a framework enables us to delve deeper into our lived experiences of navigating

the academic space. According to Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 135) "identity is central to building a collective we," therefore, intersecting identities, power, and structural systems produce not only marginality but also privileges (May, 2015). Intersectionality for us as ECAs is "not simply a method for doing research, but it is also a tool for empowering" and educating ourselves (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 37).

Self-Study Methodology

This study was conceptualised under the self-study methodology that is a critical feature to social action (Pithouse et al., 2009), focusing on collaborative self-study and its fundamental feature of critical friendships (Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Freese, 2006). In our informal self-study approach, we regularly meet three times a week for the purposes of writing our dissertations, working on research papers, reflecting on the week, or carrying out the group's administrative duties. In these meetings, we selectively audio record relevant conversations that include challenging experiences faced in the workplace, any feedback, or conceptual session we may be having. Therefore, to generate data, we used the stored audio recordings and each wrote a personal narrative specifically to contribute to this paper.

Personal narratives focus on particular events that do not necessarily cover the full trajectory of an individual's life (Nash, 2004). Hence, they were relevant for this paper because we present select lived experiences of our academic journey. Personal narratives are a creative approach to self-study used to engage those participating in it. Working collaboratively is important because it encourages individuals to move beyond their thoughts and views about their own practice while providing support and new perspectives on their work (Samaras & Freese, 2006). We draw from Nash (2004), who engaged in-depth about the power of personal narratives and described how personal narratives have the ability to help others become wiser because stories are often filled with intellectual and experiential truth.

Self-study involves using methods that require us to step back and reflect on our situated selves (Pithouse et al., 2009). Listening to our audio-recorded conversations, and writing our individual narratives, gave us an opportunity to reflect on our lived experiences in the university workplace and how our critical friendship emerged. Our personal narratives were written in response to the questions we formulated when conceptualising this paper. They are also used as guiding points in our analysis below. To analyse our data, we used narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Our narratives were given to one person to reduce and re-story into a coherent narrative account (Polkinghorne, 1995). This process was guided by our research question. Thereafter, each of us reviewed them to ensure that our reflections were captured correctly. Furthermore, we used discussions and the audio-recordings to validate some of the data. We took these measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the accounts that we produced (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). To conclude the analysis process, we continued to re-story the narratives until we were satisfied that we had produced a complete portrait of our lived experience as presented below (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Discussion

Our narratives are structured using the main research questions of the paper and sub-questions that we responded to when we were reflecting. The first section is based on the following question: "How did I identify the relationship as a critical friendship?" This is followed by the second section: "How did the critical friendship become a life jacket?" We present the narratives alongside a discussion on how we are making sense of our experiences. We believe that presenting data in this way enables the reader to get an understanding of our individual responses to the section and to engage the discussion with a comprehensive account of each narrative. The narratives show different accounts of the

moments in which each of us began to identify the relationship as a critical friendship. The question was open and enabled us to identify instances that are unique and meaningful to each person.

How Did I Identify the Relationship as a Critical Friendship?

The identities of being a new staff member, an ECA, and doctoral scholar brought us together and we began to see ourselves as a collective (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Although we see ourselves as a collective, we are driven by our individual and unique lived experiences that we each reflect on, using personal narratives. For example, Vusi highlighted the dean's meeting that brought all the ECAs together as a moment that made it possible to meet other ECAs. The common identities, as noted by Nosipho, enabled the creation of critical friendship. In this case, the dominant space, which is the university and its expectations, provided the motivation for the emergence of the liminal space. The experiences produced by the intersection of our identities provided possibilities to empower ourselves with regards to our educational endeavours. As evident from Vusi's narrative below, there were more members in the group and, as the numbers declined, we reevaluated ourselves through dialogue and interactions (Olan & Edge, 2019).

> ***Vusi:*** *The critical friendship is made up of members of the school who are based in different scholarly disciplines, made up of both men and women, and all of them are black Africans in terms of race. The group has sustained various challenges, for example, at some point, we did not meet regularly for a period of six months as others were in the field, generating data (including myself). This has not deterred interactions because we communicated through Zoom video calling and WhatsApp.*
>
> ***Nosipho:*** *I would not say our relationship could be defined as a critical friendship before. It began under the obvious common identities we had at work. These identities helped foster a relationship as we also had similar challenges and experiences bearing these identities. The common identities and experiences at our workplace resulted in us spending more time together in a small room, away from the main buildings, on the outskirt of campus. This venue (Room 32) allowed us to find comfort while at work, to share frustrations and moments of happiness with each other. It was our safe space. The safety and comfort we found in each other and the space led to my view of seeing these colleagues as critical friends as they were fundamental to my work life and advised from a place of sincerity and honesty.*

Indeed, the liminal space should not be confined to a physical space; it is also embodied in our bodies and state of minds (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). Nokukhanya and Thabile in the excerpts below present the liminal space as an embodied state, for example, travelling to a capacity development workshop and sharing experiences with a member of the critical friendship showed Thabile that it is not limited to a physical space (Room 32) but is carried all the time. In addition, Nokukhanya is perceived by other people in the academy to understand the day-to-day activities of an academic. She stated that this is based on their assumptions that she has previously worked as a contract staff member, therefore, she should know what is expected of her as an academic. However, that was not the case. As contract staff, her focus was teaching and she had little knowledge of the other KPAs. In our doctoral studies, we are in different stages: some are generating data while others are writing up. Normally in a competitive and individualistic environment, the different stages would have created a hierarchy. But within the critical friendship, we embrace and see intersectional differences as an opportunity to learn from each other. It was at this moment that Nokukhanya who was returning to the university as a full-time staff member was able to catch up with the expectations of her position and familiarise herself with the organisational systems of the institution. To reflect on our experiences is a defining feature of critical friendship (Schuck & Russell, 2005), and assists us in seeing educational

value in our relationship as we continually find illuminating discoveries that contribute to our professional development.

> ***Thabile:*** *At first, I did not see this relationship as a critical relationship. For me, it was a place where I could voice out my experiences good/bad. When I was appointed, it felt like the school could have done more to induct me to carry out my duties. In order to navigate the space, I leaned on a colleague who was new like me. We attended capacity development workshops together. For me, this was the start of our critical friendship as we would often discuss the challenges that we were experiencing in our teaching.*
>
> ***Nokukhanya:*** *I had previously been employed on a fixed-term contract and had then left. So many memories had been made in my absence. The excitement of my return was soon shadowed by feelings of anxiety, confusion, and pressure of the academy. "I think we should do an AERA presentation. We can also write papers from this?" When this suggestion was posed, I asked, "Am I part of this 'we'?" In retrospect, I now know, that was a point of validation for me. From feeling like an impostor, I started to feel like "I was within."*
>
> *The discussions that ensued and continue are ideas that shape my thinking and stretch me in various ways. Through the conversations, I have also grown to understand the organisational rules of the university. Here, I have found my voice and it is here where my professional identity is being shaped in positive ways. Here, I am allowed to not know but I am pushed to not stay in this state.*

As ECAs, we often experience feelings of inadequacy, professional isolation, and of being a "fringe dweller on the edge of the institutional research and organisational culture" (Sutherland-Smith et al., 2011, p. 330). In this narration, the critical friendship acted as a lifeline to keep Nokukhanya as where she experienced the dual isolation of the academy and of a space where she had once belonged. Turner (1969) referred to this as the in between and betwixt space. Our space is not characterised by the hegemonic forces that are at play in the dominant space (Shortt, 2015). The safety of the liminal space gave her a sense of belonging, allowed her to find herself, her voice, and to begin cultivating her professional identity (Pegg et al., 2014). Her emphasis on the transformation happening *here* placed emphasis on the empowering and transformative power of the liminal space wherein she is safe and is becoming what she wants to be (Cook-Sather, 2006; Pegg et al., 2014). Also of significance, is that the power of the space became more influential once she felt she was part of it and she felt she was valued and seen as an academic with whom her colleagues could collaborate. The earlier comment that liminality is a continual transitional space is highlighted here when she says it continues to shape her in positive ways. As before, we present the next discussion using a question.

How Did Critical Friendship Become a Life Jacket?

The narratives show that, although we had already identified the space as a critical friendship, we continued to experience other challenges within the broader university space. The pressure on universities to compete on publication outputs and Department of Higher Education subsidies (Khunou, Canham et al., 2019) has put pressure on early-career academics to publish research. Nokukhanya, in the excerpt below, shares her experiences with regards to conceptualising a paper alone. Her challenges developed an impostor syndrome in which she doubted her capabilities, her intelligence, and competence—making her feel like an "outsider-within" the academy (Cope-Watson & Betts, 2010; Mahabeer et al., 2018; Nathane, 2019). Another instance of impostor syndrome appears in Thabile's narrative, where the pressure was not about research but about teaching, which is another KPA. When Thabile was appointed to academia, she was a former high school teacher and the narrative shows that other colleagues have nourished the impostor syndrome by suggesting that she could have spent more years in schools.

The competitive and individualistic environment of academia, as already stated, has created conscious and unconscious gatekeepers. Given these comments and Thabile's experiences, we concur with Cope-Watson and Betts (2010), who stipulated that impostor syndrome is a form of subordination fuelled either by the self or others. The next excerpts illustrate how critical friendship became a life jacket. Nokukhanya was able to engage with critical friends, and meaningful conversations assisted with her challenges. For Thabile, the intervention made by a critical friend during and after an incident of conflict with students was useful mitigation. Since the 2015 and 2016 #FeesMustFall student movements, members of the student representative councils in various institutions have used militant approaches when engaging with staff members. Nosipho's experiences are similar to these in different ways: they all felt as outsiders. Having each other, they were able to share their strengths in assisting one another acclimatise to the environment. The value of critical friendships lies in the level and type of commitments we invest in each other (Schuck & Russell, 2005); thinking and learning arise from our collaboration and exchange of feedback with others (Samaras & Roberts, 2011).

> ***Nokukhanya:*** *Having not previously published on my own, I attempted to write a paper, solo. After I had written, I realised that I had really diverted from the focus of the paper. At this point, I started to question whether I had the ability to perform this task. I questioned whether I had chosen the right vocation. Sitting at the library, lost and dismayed, I turned to Nosipho for help:*
>
> *"I first do a draft where I conceptualise the paper. I then write the purpose of the paper. The potential theoretical framework. It's not linear, you know."*
>
> *After our conversation, I attempted to do what she had done. I also drew on the conversation I had previously with Vusi. He had said that sometimes he starts with writing the findings, and then these inform his purpose, and so on. He had also said that I should first identify the journal I was writing for so I could ensure that my work was within its scope. Drawing from the lessons learnt through the conversations and the teachings, I have conceptualised a paper, and I have started the write-up. I'm not there yet, but at least I have started.*
>
> ***Thabile****: The most significant moment I can recall when the critical friendship became a life jacket, was when I had prepared to administer a test to 310 students and invited my ECA colleagues to assist with invigilation. Minutes before the commencement of the test, some students boycotted the test with the assistance of the student representatives. In my attempt to negotiate and continue with the test, I was verbally assaulted and humiliated by the student representatives. This incident confirmed what a senior staff member had said about my appointment: "You joined academia a bit early. You are too young and should have stayed in high school to accumulate more experience." Reflecting on this conversation and test incident, I began to suffer from an impostor syndrome. It was the critical friends who dug me out of this hole and challenged me to think differently.*
>
> ***Nosipho:*** *In the difficulties I have encountered as an ECA, I was undermined a lot and had a continuously difficult relationship with my line manager who lacked support and did not listen even to genuine concerns I raised to her. Many times, I felt belittled because I was the youngest in my cluster. My engagement with this group of ECAs has assisted me with advice, adjusting to the terrain, as they were former undergrad students and understood certain systems better—which was their invisible capital. Their support became a life jacket as it assisted me to work through the challenges I faced and, in the safe space we created, I managed to realise my strength and build on my growth as an ECA on campus.*

Our critical friendship was founded on the principle of trust (Swaffield, 2007), which is an important feature of critical friendships (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Vusi's narrative (see below) indicates that critical friendship as a life jacket provides support even on issues outside academia. However, we took caution not to delve into personal matters unless requested by the member. A significant study on critical friendships suggests that personal friendships are not a guarantee of a critical friendship (Schuck & Russell, 2005). We argue that our narratives, although not premised on a guarantee, suggest the inverse; in our case, critical friendships preceded the personal, and we became friends through learning and thinking together.

> ***Vusi:*** *Often, life jackets are used in critical conditions and I feel having this critical friendship became that. When I realised that the critical friendship had turned into a life jacket was when I was frustrated by the feedback from the ethics office. The frustration felt like double pain as it was feedback for the student I supervised and my own doctoral study. I decided to share with the critical friends when I got to our space, Room 32; it was after lunch and, through dialogue, they advised on possible ways to address the concerns from the ethics office. Two weeks later, the two ethics certificates were issued.*
>
> *In addition, we conducted mock presentations for conferences and, prior to sending our research papers, providing feedback to each other created an opportunity to learn about ourselves and our emotions. Most significantly, we became aware of each other's studies. We provided support even outside the institution wherein members of the friendship needed non-academic support such as weddings, bereavement, and becoming a parent. It became easier to deal with the day-to-day challenges of being an early career academic.*

Given that our critical friendship has become a life jacket and a safe space for growth, we envisage that the friendship will continue beyond acquiring doctoral degrees and achieving other academic milestones such as promotions in the academy. We have designed our space not only for the challenges we experience but also for doing meaningful and pioneering work. As indicated earlier, we do mock presentations prior to conferences or to presenting to the students we supervise. Working collectively by creating an additional support layer is a significant learning that we draw from our experiences. We need alternative space for ourselves in order to counter the myriad challenges facing ECAs—amongst others, the nuances emerging from the intersections within one racial category. This is not to ignore the interracial intersections (Khunou, Phaswana et al., 2019) that continue to plague the transformation agenda of the South African academy. The challenges do not only come because we are ECAs; we are also black academics and the critical friendship is predominantly female, with one male. In academia, men are confronted with different struggles compared to women; this is the case because the nature of the South African higher education continues to celebrate historically dominant discourses (Khoza-Shangase, 2019) that are centred on race and masculinity. We thus trouble those who see us as developmental projects because we see each other as assets.

We have learned that, as a collective, we are able to deliberate on the toxicity, competitiveness, and individualistic academic environment (Bosetti et al., 2008). The challenges in academia, such as teaching and assessing large classrooms, especially in South Africa, require innovative ways of conducting teaching and learning. Through our space, we have begun to deliberate on such matters and how we can enhance our offerings amid massification, especially since teaching is relegated to ECAs if not totally outsourced to contract staff members (Phaswana, 2019). We have turned the challenges we face, that often-brought frustration, into teachable moments. Learning in our space is continuous and exciting. We learn new ways of doing things, even though sometimes the learning may create initial dissonance. However, we have opened up ourselves to learning and our thinking is stretched even during group events such as having lunch together in a restaurant. In this way, we deal

with academentia (Tomaselli, 2015). We consistently process and overcome toxic and exclusionary statements such as "publish or perish" and "swim or sink."

Conclusion

As we share our lived experiences, we hope to contribute to the ongoing conversation of ECAs and the challenges of higher education institutions in South Africa. Given that the academic space may be toxic, we also hope to begin a new dialogue about the use of liminal spaces for productivity in the academic landscape. We make the call to other ECAs to confront the challenges they face through formations of critical friendships and use of alternative spaces. We believe they are untapped spaces that possess the potential to offer non-hegemonic, self-regulated, and liberating environments that may assist them unravel and construct their own professional practice. We argue that institutions of higher learning should approach ECAs with an intersectional approach and avoid seeing them as individuals without doctorates and thus, underqualified; but rather, allow them the opportunity for growth without being stifled, suppressed, and marginalised. In this paper, we have shown how our collaborative and participatory engagements have contributed to our professional development and social change, which has led to our academic growth. Academic collaborations advance scholarship and allow for interdisciplinary partnerships, breaking the isolationist culture of the university space that promotes individualism, competitiveness, and hierarchy (Bosetti et al., 2008). Our intersectional experiences have initiated self and social empowerment through establishing an alternative space that allowed us to begin constructing our own identities as ECAs. Studying the self allows for learning to occur, for the self and others, as they understand the learning experience and the process taken for one's own learning (Russell, 1998). Therefore, we encourage other ECAs to engage in their own learning, take up liminal spaces, and engage in partnerships beneficial to their scholarship—amplifying their voices from their spaces of power and socially changing the academy into a healthier and less toxic institution.

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"Sausage Factory, in and out": Lecturers' Experiences of Assessing in an Era of Massification in a Teacher Education Institution[8]

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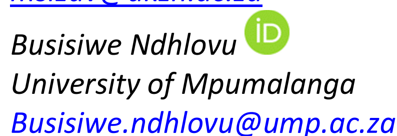
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Abstract

The massification of higher education in South Africa has been a social justice goal and a significant milestone, given the history of the country. Massification, though, has brought challenges to the higher education sector, one of them being increasing class sizes. In this paper, we explore the experiences of lecturers in conducting assessment in a teacher education institution. We used a case study methodology, and conversations as a method of generating data—with purposive selection of five lecturers from various disciplines as the sample. For the theoretical framework, we drew on the work of two scholars: Kolb (1984) on experiential learning and Pinar's (2004) method of currere. We found that the lecturers understood the purpose of mass higher education, however, the large class sizes have influenced their assessment practices. Beyond the challenges of massification, lecturers invoked their experiences to reflect, learn, and imagine possibilities. There are possibilities for teacher education institutions to enact sustainable assessment and to navigate massification. There is also a need for further research, particularly in teacher education institutions, to theorise large classes in relation to various aspects of teacher education programmes.

Keywords: Massification, assessment, large classes, teacher education

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Introduction

The South African higher education institutions (HEIs) were built to accommodate limited numbers of students with limited resources, particularly the historically, formerly black universities. Since the early 1990s, South African HEIs have experienced the massification of higher education with more people gaining access to institutions of higher learning. In the many waves of change in higher education (for example, the 2015/2016 students' protests), students have demanded access to education and free education (Murris, 2016). According to Habib (2019), the higher education system had approximately 420,000 students in 1994 and grew to 1.1 million in 2014. These latter students were predominantly from groups who had been marginalised during apartheid; mass higher education for South Africa had become a moral imperative (Allais, 2014; Luckett & Sutherland, 2000; Shoba et al., 2015).

Massification in South Africa remains a concern in myriad ways (we expand on these later in the paper). The work of Hornsby et al. (2013) broadened our theoretical understanding of the exponential growth in class sizes and, within these debates, we explore lecturers' experiences of conducting assessment in large classrooms. Our paper focuses on lecturers in a higher education teacher education institution (often referred to as teacher educators). Teacher educators are responsible for training student teachers to become qualified teachers working in basic education. We focus on how student teachers in large classes are assessed because they (unlike other students) will be assessing learners in their careers and will need to learn effective ways of doing that. We seek to demonstrate the implications of teacher educators' experiences of the quality of sustainable assessment in such contexts. Boud and Soler (2016) noted that sustainable assessment aims to ensure that students meet their present needs while being prepared for their future roles. Missing from the debates is the foregrounding of teacher education lecturers' experiences in navigating assessment during a time of massification. In essence, our study asks how lecturers ensure sustainable assessment while coping with the anxiety that results from teaching and assessing large class sizes. Our paper has the following two research questions: 1) "What are the lecturers' experiences of conducting assessment in a teacher education institution at a time of mass higher education?" and 2) "What are the implications of their experiences for the quality of sustainable assessment at a teacher education institution?"

Mapping Massification and Assessment

Internationally, particularly in the United States of America (US) and Europe after the Second World War, higher education massified to expand and provide access to knowledge (Trow, 2000). At the centre of massification is a social justice agenda that seeks to deconstruct the notion of higher education as a reserve for the elite (Mohamedbhai, 2014). As higher education classrooms have expanded in size, they have become complex and large organisations (Scott, 1995). In South Africa, the increase is more complex, given a system historically fragmented by race and class categories. The post-1994 government inherited from the apartheid era, a higher education system (Jansen, 2003) divided into the following: historically black universities (for those who were disadvantaged), historically white universities (for those who were privileged), technikons (now universities of technology), and colleges (see Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; Council on Higher Education, 2016).

Laudable as the pursuit of social justice and access to knowledge for all is, the nationally rapid increase in size has affected the day-to-day running of the institutions (Mohamedbhai, 2014). Mass higher education manifests differently in the 26 South African universities. Social contexts and the financial standing of the universities are some of the determinants that shape the nature of institutional massification (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Mohamedbhai, 2014). Institutions such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, according to their strategic plan, are deliberately diversifying their student body by, for example, targeting students from Quintiles 1–3 schools (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017).

Along with the growth of universities and the agenda of massification to create access, institutions are expected to accommodate all these students with limited resources of, for example, teaching staff, libraries, and student housing (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Put succinctly, Snowball (2014, p. 823) stated that "in many universities class sizes have increased more quickly than teaching and learning resources." We have created a paradox in which the social justice agenda is undermined by insufficient efforts to respond to the numbers. This is particularly important for teacher educators. Creating physical access for students to enter institutions without providing sufficient support hinders epistemological access and the development of specific skills that a student teacher is expected to have, according to Jansen (2008). We risk producing teachers and other graduates who are not lifelong learners and who do not have the potential to contribute to the economic and social development of the society (Hornsby et al., 2013). There is insufficient exposure to knowledge and to the discipline-specific skills for student teachers because of large classes and shrinking funding and subsidies (Habib, 2019; Wangenge-Ouma & Cloete, 2008). In the early 21st century, there were challenges with funding in almost all African higher education systems (Teferra & Altbachl, 2004). And academics remain faced with "how to maintain the quality of assessment and feedback in large groups" (Ballantyne et al., 2002, p. 428).

Inherent in the debates around massification, is a focus on the implications of large classrooms that are determined by different factors; for example, class sizes vary according to schools or faculties (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). In this study, the focus is on education. As Maringe and Sing (2014) argued, there is no universally accepted definition of what a large class is although, typically, 100 students is commonly rated a large class. However, Arvanitakis (2014) and Shoba et al. (2015) revealed that, in certain contexts, a large classroom for higher education institutions could be as many as 1,500 students. For teacher educations institutions, the issue is not so much the number of students as other aspects. As Maringe and Sing (2014) stated, it is the complexities taking place in a large classroom that are a concern for academics. These complexities relate to ensuring equality amongst the diversity of students and, of course, ensuring quality in our offerings as teacher education institutions (Maringe & Sing, 2014). One way to intervene in a rapid growth of student enrolments is to redesign how we deliver or conduct our large classes (Cuseo, 2007).

Hornsby et al. (2013) suggested that it is possible to maintain quality in large classes. They argued that appropriate objectives and rich educational experiences should take priority over the concern of class sizes (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). In the midst of this wave of change, there is contestation over large class teaching and assessment. In teacher education institutions, the rich educational experiences that student teachers need to improve their skills and assessment knowledge should include the effective use of assessment-*for*-learning and its subset, assessment-*as*-learning or peer assessment (Earl, 2013). In peer assessment, teacher educators create an opportunity for student teachers to conduct assessments while learning both content and skills (Falchikov, 2005).

Assessment and feedback should be frequent in order to achieve consistent learning (Boud, 2000; Cuseo, 2007). In addition to Hornsby et al.'s (2013) suggestion that academics should not exaggerate the negative implications for quality in large classes, is Cuseo's (2007) revelation that frequently, assessment in large classes comes with challenges such as delayed feedback and reduced student learning opportunities. The practices of assessment in education are predominantly summative and the use of formative assessments is declining (Boud, 2000). Institutions have resorted to information communication technology (ICT) and resources such as automated multiple choice questions (MCQs) to administer assessments (Snowball, 2014). A challenge that comes with ICT tools as a solution to large classes is the diversity of students in each institution. Massification brings student diversity in terms of language, socioeconomic background, learning styles, gender, and context (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Snowball & Boughey, 2012). Some students from economically challenged contexts are not familiar with technological devices. For example, when we were advising students during registration,

we realised that many were using a computer for the first time. Therefore, conducting assessments using ICT resources might require more staff to assist students, and a dedicated computer literacy course for the students. However, this is not possible without funding in a context in which, as Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete (2008) demonstrated, funding is declining. Dumping technology on students in the name of creating access to education is not the answer (Allais, 2014).

Theoretical Perspectives

We draw on Kolb and Kolb (2005) and on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to demonstrate how lecturers are learning from their experience to understand massification and to enact sustainable assessment essential for teacher education. Kolb (1984) stated that for learning to occur, individuals need to recall and reflect on their past experiences. In this study, we explore the experiences of lecturers regarding assessment at a time of massification. Learning from their past experiences can enable lecturers to design assessment practices to promote lifelong learning (Lindén et al., 2013). We also draw from the work of curriculum theorist, William Pinar. We argue that to ensure sustainable assessment and to produce teachers who are lifelong learners, we ought to privilege individual experiences regarding the impact of mass higher education. In addition to Kolb, Pinar's (2004) work helped us to understand individual lecturers' reflections on their past, present, and future experiences as well as the possibilities they identify when attempting to respond to the cohorts in mass higher education. These cohorts are diverse in terms of socioeconomic background, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Lecturers need to engage in conversations to reflect on themselves and on assessment practices for teacher education institutions (Pinar, 2004). We have noted that some faculties are resorting to standardised, electronic type of assessment such as MCQs, and Pinar (2004) has critiqued this approach as an anti-intellectual project that reduces academics to mere technicians. Consequently, teacher education institutions suffer more scars as we produce teachers who are unable to enact the intellectual, scholarly conversations that underpin lifelong learning.

Methodology

The paper used a qualitative case study methodology in which the case was an institution of teacher education (Yin, 2016). We adopted a qualitative approach because we are researching lecturers' lived experiences that are distinct to their context and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). While the overall methodology for the paper is a case study, we deliberately chose a method commonly used in both narrative inquiry and life history methodologies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Instead of using the usual structured, unstructured, or semi-structured interviews (see Cohen et al., 2011), we used conversations as a method to generate data. Conversations follow a similar approach to semi-structured interviews; we designed prompts to start the conversations with the participants. Through the conversations, we were able to speak to participants in a relaxed, nonintimidating manner, ensuring that participants did not feel they were being interrogated. We wanted to ensure equality between the interviewer and the participants; conversations entail listening and probing established on the basis of mutual trust (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Conversations were an appropriate method to use for a topic of this nature because there are frustrations with regard to mass higher education. Therefore, the participants were free to speak and share their experiences in relation to massification and assessment. Conversations allowed them to share their experiences in a storied way, enabling them to be free while also providing in-depth data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Eisner (1997) put it, as researchers we select a method of generating data that can elicit rich data; this method was appropriate for our purpose. Through conversations, participants were able to revisit their past experiences and to imagine their future in the academy. We purposefully recruited and selected five participants from various disciplines who are lecturers; one of the authors conducted the interviews. The lecturers were all black Africans: three men and two women. Their experience in higher education is between 11 and 25 years.

In conducting the study, we followed all ethical procedures. The paper is drawn from a wider study that focused on lecturers' experiences of assessment in higher education and we therefore followed all ethical procedures by obtaining gatekeeper permission from the registrar's office and ethical clearance from the ethics committee. We practised voluntary participation and explained that those who wished to withdraw might do so (Flick, 2007). Given our responsibility to conduct ethical research (Cohen et al., 2011), we sought permission via an informed consent letter to audio record the conversation. The audio-recorded clips were transcribed and shared with the participants for member checking purposes. We, the three authors, read the paper to ensure rigour. All these were efforts to enhance the trustworthiness. Where there was a need to refer to the participants, we used pseudonyms to protect their identities. The data was analysed using the guidance provided by Braun et al. (2015) and Clarke and Braun's (2013) method of thematic analysis. We first read the transcripts and created codes; from the codes, we moved to formulate themes. The second level of analysis that we used was to request each author to go through the process and raise concerns where applicable. All the concerns were addressed. In the next section, the data is presented thematically.

Findings

From the data that was analysed, we generated three themes related to the focus of the paper. Theme 1 was understanding massification, Theme 2, the challenges of massification for teaching and assessment and, Theme 3, the possibilities beyond massification. In the conversations with the participants we wanted, first, to capture their understanding of massification; then, to understand the challenges the participants have experienced or observed as a result of massification, in particular, those related to teaching and assessment. Maringe and Sing (2014) stated that mass higher education is here to stay and, according to our observations, there are merits to this statement given that student enrolments continue to grow. Therefore, we also wanted to understand the possibilities beyond massification and its challenges.

Understanding Massification

The responses of the participants, as set out in the excerpts below, indicate that they all relate massification to increasing student enrolments or class sizes. For both Richard and Lebo, massification was a new experience. For instance, Richard, who teaches in the area of science, showed uncertainty regarding the concept.

> ***Richard:*** *The word is not that familiar with me because I'm in science. But when I look at it, I think it is teaching a lot of people at a time without looking at the quality of teaching.*

This suggests that he sees large numbers as a foreign phenomenon in the science discipline; historically, science classrooms were relatively small in both high schools and higher education institutions. Government continues to encourage young people to take up science by providing the Funza Lushaka bursaries that prioritise the sciences in education. Richard appeared to be resistant to large classes. This suggests that he is resisting the wave of change taking place in higher education, and delays acquiring new experiences. Maringe and Sing (2014) argued that the issue of quality is debatable—like beauty, quality lies in the eyes of the beholder. Richard was particularly concerned about quality, specifically the quality of teaching in large classes. The topic of quality is important in the business of producing student teachers who will, one day, become professional teachers and teach thousands of learners in South Africa. This brings us to Lebo's sentiments—that massification feels like being pressured to produce a high number of teachers in a short period of time.

> ***Lebo:*** *It sounds like producing a large number of teachers in a short space of time, like a sausage factory. In, out, in, out. You just need a large number.*

Lebo equated massification to the mass production of sausages in a factory. Essentially, assessment is used for certification purposes for students who go through mass production. Like sausages, students are turned into consumers and cash cows—sources of income at a time of budget cut (Maringe & Sing, 2014). Although the point is implied, Lebo, too, was concerned about quality.

> ***Victor:*** *When we speak of massification of education, we are going into the economics of education. With South Africa as an example, during the apartheid era, not everyone had access to higher education. Looking at the present day society where technology is the order of the day, there is a higher number of people accessing higher education, including distance learning. One of the things that enables the ideology of massification of education is access to education.*

Victor's understanding of massification sets out the core purpose of mass higher education: creating or providing access to education and knowledge to those who were previously disadvantaged, such as black South Africans during apartheid. This is in line with Scott (1995, p. 9), who stated that the "transition from the elite to mass higher education cannot be understood simply in terms of . . . the expansion of student numbers only." At the centre of this, as indicated earlier, is the provision of access to knowledge. Victor stretched our perspective of mass higher education by highlighting massification in institutions that offer basic long-distance learning and how innovation and technology have made it possible. Snowball (2014) saw online learning management systems such as Moodle (modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment) as interactive and increasing students' engagement. As argued earlier in the paper, the successful use of online tools is dependent on the ability to address the diversity of students and on sufficient resources. We do see the possibilities of this platform for distance learning or a blended learning approach. Victor's observation of the current state of higher education, specifically in the institution where he is located, suggested the possibilities of using ICT to provide more access to knowledge. The lived experiences of these lecturers in a teacher education institution addressed the past, present, and anticipations for future possibilities in teacher education institutions (Pinar, 2004).

Challenges of Massification for Teaching and Assessment

The central concerns of the participants were intricately linked to their understanding of massification, in particular, the rapid growth of class sizes. This part of the analysis presents the challenges of massification in relation to both teaching and assessment. We reiterate that the focus of the paper is on massification and assessment, therefore, teaching cannot be left out given that it goes together with assessment. All participants linked large classes to issues of assessment.

> ***Vicky:*** *We do fewer assessments now, because you can't do all the assessments you used to do before massification. In my module, I used to do the history of the microscope and practicals, and it was wonderful, but we no longer do this. Now we have to leave out the skills that are needed by the students because there is not sufficient time; we have more groups to teach. I have tried to get a tutor but one of the things we have to be conscious of is that people won't do things and ensure the quality I want; this has created regular checking and moderation.*

Vicky has reduced the number of assessment activities from those she used before large classes. If we consider that mass higher education in South Africa started in the 1990s, thus, within the past 30 years (Jansen, 2003), we can only imagine the state of mass higher education in South Africa in 2030 when the National Development Plan envisages that one in six people in South Africa will have a university degree (National planning commission, 2012). Frequent assessment and feedback are significant for consistent, deep learning (Cuseo, 2007) and reducing the number of assessment activities has an

impact on student teachers who are not sufficiently engaging with the SKAV (skills, knowledges, attitudes, and values) required of a professional teacher.

Lebo provided a robust account of her observations and thoughts.

> *It has affected me greatly because there's no time to focus on individuals. I'm teaching so many other modules, I see the challenges. I can see that they are struggling with the content but I can only do so much. Uhm, I can't be there in every tutorial. I have to let the tutors assist them. But I still feel like the tutors are not at the level I want them to be. Besides, they are employed on temporary basis. The tutors are not the same in the following year, usually I get new ones that I need to train. . . . I mean students come with a lot of gaps from high school and it's difficult to identify and address them to my satisfaction because they are so many and they are going to be teachers. So we are half cooking and that's why to me massification means just making sausages. Honestly, and I'm not happy. I think I love my subject and I love teaching my subject, but it depresses me at times. I don't feel good even when I go to teaching practice and I watch them and I think, this is my product. I think assessment becomes watered down.*

Lebo felt massification has caused the academy to produce half-baked professional teachers. A study by Petersen (2017) found that novice teachers in South Africa who had recently graduated felt underprepared in their teacher education programmes. The "mass production of teachers" without equipping them with sufficient pedagogical and assessment skills, makes the transition a nightmare. The idea of a factory resonates with Pinar (2004) when he argued that institutions are turned into factories of skills and knowledge. Nonetheless, there is hope for South Africa where massification is still in its infancy, provided care is exercised to avoid corporatisation (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Lebo referred to other lived experiences, such as assessing teaching practicum. According to her, mass higher education, in particular large classes, has watered down assessment practices. An opinion piece in the *City Press* newspaper by Dikotla (2019) critiqued the transfer of teacher education to universities. He called for teacher colleges to be reinstated in order to maintain the quality of didactics. We may not agree with Dikotla on reinstating the colleges (and this requires a different platform) but Dikotla's argument, and that of Lebo, suggests a widespread concern regarding teacher education institutions and the student teachers we produce. A similar concern was raised by Bertram (2003) in a study that focused on the expansion of the Bachelor of Education honours degree at the former University of Natal. Bertram found that with mass higher education, especially in teacher education, there are challenges with balancing theory and practice when teaching students.

All our participants indicated that they struggled to attend to the individual student in their respective classrooms. In large classes, lecturers do not have sufficient opportunity to focus on all the students (Arvanitakis, 2014). Lebo, above, stated that students come with knowledge (theoretical or methodological) gaps from high school. As a lecturer in a university, she felt there is insufficient attention for every student with challenges. But Richard was adamant that teaching, as opposed to a lecture method, is needed to accommodate the diversity of students.

> *Maybe in future, two lecturers should take the module or split the class. The lecturer–student ratio is large, and I think we are teaching at the university and no longer lecturing because the students are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. If you lecture them, you find that they might not perform well. Good teaching is hampered by the large number of students in the classroom. Sometimes you want to ask questions but no one will answer because some of them are shy as they are in a large classroom. So, if the university can*

reduce the numbers in the classroom and get more lecturers, it might reduce the work load and improve classroom experience.

This view requires lecturers to rethink their pedagogical and assessment practices to respond to large classes and the student of the 21st century. In this conversation, lecturers reflected on the current conditions brought by mass higher education, how higher education was before massification, and the future possibilities (Pinar, 2004).

> ***Victor:*** *The issue of large numbers has always been the case. Like I stated, if we look at it from the economic point of view, such as capitalism, those who have power admit more students without having to look at the available resources to meet the students' needs. Classrooms are built to accommodate a maximum of 40–50 students but looking at the large number of students coming to class, the reality of maintaining 40 in a classroom has already been defeated. How many learners are paying attention in classroom activity? The possibility of collaborative learning with a large number of students is not ideal. The lecturers' teaching and assessment strategies are affected.*

Victor's frustration stemmed from not being able to use a variety of teaching and assessment methods, such as collaborative learning, due to class size. This defeats the excitement and the enthusiasm that comes with teaching in higher education. In addition, it defeats the intention of privileging formative assessment as a vehicle for lifelong learning and producing teachers who can assess sustainably (Boud, 2000). Currently, the system warrants the use of summative forms of assessment such as MCQs that are predominantly concerned with numbers and throughput. Quantifying assessment and paying attention to numbers gives little indication of the quality of learning and of teachers that teacher education institutions are producing (Biggs, 2012).

Victor reminds us of the historical context, the original capacity of the physical class sizes. He stated that physical structures were built to accommodate a number that has since doubled during massification. He felt that those who are in position of power ought to address the shortage of resources, including human resources. Allais (2014, p. 33) cautioned that "massification without a concomitant increase in lecturer numbers may well undermine what makes our enterprise valuable in the first place. If we cannot afford this as a society, then we cannot afford to massify higher education." We found that managing large classes required Vicky and Lebo to seek assistance from tutors to facilitate learning in tutorial groups—a view that is shared by Richard. Two challenges similar to Bertram's (2003) findings emerged. Vicky carries the burden of consistently moderating the work of the tutors in order to maintain quality. Lebo has to train new tutors every year because they are employed on contractual basis. Moreover, she shared the same sentiments that, even after training, the tutors are not at the intellectual level she expects. As a result, tenured academics end up performing managerial and administrative tasks instead of doing their research and developing staff (Bertram, 2003). Yet, providing tutors to assist lecturers in teaching and assessing large classes is a cost-effective measure.

South African universities are largely dependent on subsidies and state funding, therefore, the decline of this source of income has pushed institutions to adopt cost-effective measures (Wangenge-Ouma & Cloete, 2008). One of these is to outsource using the least experienced tutors, often postgraduate students, who require training every year. A report by the Council on Higher Education (2016) indicated that current academic staff are over extended as a result of the high number of students and the need to replace ageing with young academics. Recruiting young academics is an investment in the future of higher education, nevertheless, for under-staffed academics, mentoring these colleagues is an extra burden (Mohamedbhai, 2014). Yet, "almost everywhere there is an increasing use of part-time, casual academic labour without job security as a way of dealing with declining resources and rapid

unpredictable change" (Trow, 2000, p. 33). Linked to the point we made earlier of imagining South African mass higher education 30 years from now, it appears that we ought to learn from other countries' experiences of massification. Indeed, according to Kolb (1984, p. 42), once individuals learn about other people's experiences "something must be done with it." Therefore, Pinar's (2004) framing assists us in the academy to look into our current experiences and envision future possibilities.

Possibilities Beyond Massification

Seeing the indications that massification will continue to exist along with the continued growth of student enrolments, we also explored possibilities beyond massification—possibilities that participants create for themselves, through experiential learning in particular, how they envision assessment in a teacher education institution. Vukile, in the excerpt below, saw the use of ICT as important to address mass higher education, but, as discussed earlier in the paper, online assessment cannot be used as a blanket approach for all lecturers.

> ***Vukile:*** *We created an online assessment that can cover up to one million students. We have online assessment tools, open book assessments which are related to the articles we provide and discuss online. This gives students a chance to read and be ready for assessment tasks.*

Disciplinary requirements may well conflict with Vukile's view. A lecturer in early childhood education or in the philosophy of education may assert that online assessments (predominantly MCQs) are not the best way to assess knowledge in those specific disciplines. Massification has brought a diversity of students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds—some with computer illiteracy—and, based on our evidence, institutions of higher education have not responded comprehensively to matters of inclusivity. The provision of resources to compensate for or accommodate the rapid growth of mass higher education is moving at a snail's pace, deepening the access/success debate (Jansen, 2008). The issue of resources vis-à-vis the increasing number of enrolments is also concerning at the University of Zambia; for example, Kanyengo (2009) found that enrolments have increased but the library resources remained the same as when it was established in 1966. In South Africa, progress could be moving too slowly, as argued by Jansen, but in other contexts such as Zambia, there hasn't been any significant response to massification. When asked to consider what would help them in dealing with the challenges, Lebo replied,

> *I can't think of anything, because I don't believe that a machine is good enough for teacher trainees. So I think that you need more manpower than more machines or changing strategies to suit marking with a machine. Maybe if I have a large class, it should be the only class that I teach. I shouldn't have another large class. In this way, I can focus and have more strategies to see them individually over this time, maybe assess them in groups. Then I would have time to focus on doing good job with one module.*

In the excerpt above, Lebo rejected the use of technology for marking—such as the automated MCQs that mark and provide feedback instantly. Reflecting on the current challenges, she believed that human resources in the form of lecturers are more important for conducting assessments because they are able to observe social aspects and constantly change the assessment strategy. Technology cannot replace the nuances of human beings who make our teacher education classes exciting and inspiring for the student teachers (Arvanitakis, 2014). A study conducted by Rhodes University's economics department found that the students appreciated blended learning and thought it enhanced teaching and learning in large class sizes (Snowball, 2014). Teacher education institutions consist of content modules such as mathematics, geography, and English followed by methodology modules

focusing on different ways to teach the content. They should therefore consider which of the two, content or methodology, can be offered through blended approaches.

According to Pinar (2004), lecturers should constantly ask themselves the meaning of the present moment—in this case mass higher education. Lebo, having analysed the present moment, believed that to overcome massification and the assessment deficits that are brought by large classes, it is better to focus only on one module and one class. The challenge with that proposal would be in the assessment; one lecturer cannot process all the assessments, while outsourcing the task without proper training might cause dissatisfaction for students or the lecturer. It is, though, impressive that lecturers are creating ways to alleviate the situation they face. Kolb and Kolb (2005) maintained that such a process is important, particularly to engage with our experiences and relearn from them. In a study by Arvanitakis (2014), the author reflected on a conversation with a student in which the student said he was an "academic pirate" and "pirates are resourceful they learnt to use their environment." (p. 744). This is another focus for academics in teacher education, especially noting limited research on teacher education and massification—to dance in the wave of change in order to respond to challenges of large classes while also producing teachers who are lifelong learners and able to function globally.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the experiences of lecturers conducting assessments in a time of massification. We specifically focused on lecturers in a teacher education institution. The findings showed different conceptions of massification. The participating lecturers conceptualised it both as a social justice project and as a project that has brought significant challenges for assessment. Conducting assessment in a sustainable way, as argued by Boud (2000), carries more significance for the work that is done in a teacher education institution (this does not suggest we undermine other sectors). Producing professional teachers who are lifelong learners, whose assessment practices are based on knowledge, skills, and different ways of thinking, requires the transformation of teaching and learning in South Africa. Teacher education institutions should avoid falling into the trap of using assessment for certification and accountability purposes. Instead, we ought to reposition assessment as a meaningful contributor to teaching and learning (Boud & Soler, 2016; Earl, 2006; Pinar, 2004). Our findings demonstrated that, beyond the challenges brought by massification, which include the diversity of students and large classes, lecturers are hopeful and determined to participate in the wave of change by reflecting on their experiences, interrogating themselves, and relearning (Kolb et al., 2001; Pinar, 2004). It is unfortunate that the existing wave of change caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all higher education institutions, globally, and more deeply in the Global South. Our institutions, with large numbers and few resources, are left to ponder how to navigate teaching large classes remotely with a population of students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The danger here is that mass assessment strategies may offer an easy way out.

One participant argued for teaching as opposed to using a lecture method in our classes. We think the point is important because it calls on lecturers to engage in what Pinar (2004) called complicated conversations in order to reflect on the relevance of the methods that are used. These include, for example, the use of a lecture method and traditional forms of assessment such as academic essays. Biggs (2014) emphasised that, when conducting assessment, there should be a constructive alignment between the objectives and the type of assessments that are given to students. Also, in large classes, there is a need for lecturers to create opportunities for student teachers to practice assessment skills, for example, peer or self-assessment that will be needed when they become teachers (Boud, 2000; Falchikov, 2005). Therefore, the participants' experiences of massification should be geared towards strengthening the quality of assessment and of teaching.

ICT methods of teaching and assessment are already advocated for use in higher education but, in doing so, we need to be cautious not to adopt simplistic methods. For example, when using an e-assessment method for approximately 1,500 students, anecdotally, we have observed cyber cheating; students snapshot their screens and share amongst themselves. This is possible because there is a lack of resources to accommodate all the students to write at the same time. Instead of a total rejection of manual ways of doing assessments over ICT, other scholars have argued for a blended approach (see Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Another important aspect in higher education is to work and engage the students in order to embed ourselves as teacher educators into their lives and encourage them to see the world differently (Arvanitakis, 2014).

Earlier in the paper, we used 30 years from now as a target to imagine the scope and nature of higher education in South Africa. Using this as a target will enable lecturers in a teacher education institution to imagine their future and the type of a student teacher they want to produce. Responding to current university challenges to address inequalities in South Africa, which, inter alia, are caused by mass higher education and insufficient student funding, Habib (2019, p. 182) stated that "universities are constrained by the Department of Basic Education's failure to provide quality education to all South Africa's children." We would rather argue that it is the quality of teachers we produce as teacher education institutions that contributes to either the success or the failure of basic education. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the academy to rethink teaching and assessment. And, to redefine what assessment is for a mass higher education with significant diversity of student population. Apart from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, more research is required on large classes especially in the humanities and social sciences in teacher education programmes including the Post Graduate Certificate (PGCE) that covers large numbers in selected institutions. We emphasise that to alleviate current challenges, we need to reflect on our past, on our skills, and on our knowledge, while envisaging the future.

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Connecting the Classroom to the Business World: Evolvement of a PALAR Journey in a Disciplinary Environment[9]

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Abstract

There is an increasing demand for skilled graduates who can integrate and apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world context. As a means of enhancing students' employability skills in an exit-level strategic marketing module, two lecturers embarked on a PALAR (participatory action learning action research) journey over a period of three years to design a skills-centred curriculum with corresponding assessments centred upon partnerships between educators, students, and businesses. In order to attain the desired level of practical learning, the partners formed part of the entire assessment process. This included the businesses' (local, national, and international) involvement in the process of identifying real-life problems that served as the foundation of the assessments. Furthermore, the business partners also formed part of the feedback system, empowering the students with practical, industry-specific feedback while, in turn, enhancing the businesses' idea generation process with insight obtained from the students' thinking. During this process, the lecturers redesigned assessments until strategic alignment was attained between the partners' needs and the module's exit-level outcomes. The results reveal that the partnerships between educators, students, and businesses added value to the students' learning experience and enhanced their perceived employability skills. This article thereby contributes to extant literature by explaining how the PALAR approach can be practically applied in the field of business management and marketing. The practical details provided can easily be utilised by educators in the same and other similar fields. Furthermore, an established set of reflective questions and a summary framework have been included, which can aid a lecturer in evolving a PALAR journey. This personal PALAR journey, and the reflection thereon, proved not to be rigid in nature but, instead, fluid and highly adaptable. Each recursive PALAR cycle (plan-act-evaluate/observe-reflect) is needed and cannot be completed without the others. In conclusion, the way one addresses each cycle will be unique to one's teaching style and discipline-specific needs. This article provides educators in similar positions with insight into how they can use a PALAR process when designing their modules and assessments to foster employable graduates.

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Keywords: higher education, teaching and learning, collaboration, business partnerships, PALAR, action research, employability

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Introduction

Employers expect graduates with business degrees to possess employability skills and competencies to apply their disciplinary knowledge in the workplace. As a result, university lecturers have a new responsibility to produce employable graduates who can contribute significantly to the world of work (Bernstein & Osman, 2012). This led to the research question at hand: "What can be done, in terms of teaching and learning, to enhance students' employability skills and assist them to integrate theoretical knowledge in a realistic business-world setting?" Two lecturers of an exit-level B. Com Strategic Marketing module with more than 200 students aimed to create opportunities for applying marketing knowledge in a real-life setting through collaborative partnerships by following a PALAR (participatory action learning action research) process.

In this article, the two lecturers reflect on the way the module was designed (and redesigned) to forge a bridge between the classroom and the business world by utilising strategic business partnerships. The article reports on a journey of two lecturers who became researchers by indulging in an action learning (AL) process and then gradually incorporating action research (AR) as part of the evolvement of their particular (disciplinary) PALAR expedition. The article does not take the typical article format of research problem, methodology, and findings but is, rather, a reflection on a journey of change. The article commences with the theoretical underpinnings of the PALAR journey. It details the practical application of PALAR over a 3-year period. During this PALAR journey, various initiatives were undertaken to ensure that the needs of the three main stakeholders (educators, businesses, and students) were met through students' learning experiences. As the article progresses, the consequences of these teaching and learning initiatives are explained in terms of the impact they had on the three stakeholder groups. To conclude, the value of the PALAR approach for designing and teaching a module in the field of business management that aims to develop students' employability skills, is emphasised.

A Theoretical Mapping of This PALAR Journey

Partnerships can be defined as cooperative relationships with a shared goal, and where learning takes place within all stakeholders (Fletcher, 2015). Partnerships for teaching and learning are reported to yield benefits that result from engagement because the role-players tend to experience heightened motivation and learning (Felten et al., 2014). According to Green (2014), a student's learning and development is enhanced when business partners participate in the teaching and learning experience. Furthermore, the involvement of external role-players (such as business partners) enhances the learning environment, and reaps mutual benefits for all role-players involved (Green, 2014). In addition, business partnerships contribute to the collaborative nature of a PALAR process.

AL, a key element of PALAR, entails "learning from action or concrete experience" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 2). AR, the second part of PALAR, "aims to change practices, people's understandings of their

practices and the conditions under which they practice" (Kemmis, 2009, p. 2). In this case, AL entailed a process by which groups of people (business partners, lecturers, and students) addressed actual workplace problems, taking into consideration complex real-life conditions (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). Dick (2009) declared that AL is a powerful tool for improving the transfer of skills. As advised by Dick (2009), to improve employability skills, assignments should be real and relevant to the workplace. The need for businesses to participate in the development of authentic assessments (Griesel & Parker, 2009) through AL served as impetus for this evolving PALAR journey, which was a collaborative-participatory paradigm grounded in AR. Kemmis et al. (2013) argued that the main aim of PALAR is to undertake critical research to change one's own educational practice (habitual or customary action) into praxis (informed and committed actions) that could lead to waves of change for all those involved.

The theory and praxis (the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realised) of PALAR stem from aspects of existing theories, namely, grounded theory, action theory, critical education theory, systems theory, personal construct theory, and experiential learning theory (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). In order to contextualise this study within the existing body of knowledge, a short definition of each of these theories, together with an explanation of how each underlying theory influenced, guided, and supported this particular PALAR journey are presented in Table 1.

As is evident in Table 1, PALAR entails a collaborative critical reflection on one's work by several partners. Critical participatory action researchers engage in cycles of research within their own practice traditions by integrating theory, practice, research, and development (Zuber-Skerritt, 2016). This process is cumulative in nature and builds on previous cycles of planning by critically reflecting on partners' actions and experiences (Fletcher, 2015). The four recurring stages of PALAR (plan-act-observe/evaluate-reflect) result in a deeper understanding of one's changed practice and critical reflections. These cyclical stages assist researchers to collaboratively identify the needs of all participants. Based on the acknowledged needs, the best course of action is identified and implemented. Thereafter, the actions that were implemented are evaluated through a critical reflection by participants to decide which further actions should be taken, hence, showcasing the recursive nature of PALAR (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013).

Kearney et al. identified the three R's of PALAR research that can be used as a guide when using this approach—relationship, reflection, and recognition—and these three components "promote a truly participatory approach to knowledge creation and practical social and educational improvements" (2013, p. 113). The three components were embedded in the foundation of this PALAR journey to trigger change in all participants' learning and knowledge.

In her description of PALAR, Zuber-Skerritt (2011) emphasised the importance of conceptualising the innovative processes that were followed, and of sharing the results of AR in scholarly journals so that others can learn from it. This reporting should not only document the authors' professional development, but should, "legitimize PALAR in higher education, integrating theory with practice and research with teaching" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 19). Consequently, the aim of this article is to reflect on a PALAR journey and the design (and redesign) of the activities and assessments to achieve the module's learning outcomes (including the development of employability skills) over a period of three years. With this objective in mind, the article presents a conceptualisation of the PALAR process that was followed to enhance students' employability skills by deliberately connecting the classroom with the business world. Through fostering partnerships between educators, students, and businesses, value was added to the students' learning experience and enhanced their perceived employability skills. During the PALAR journey, various initiatives were taken to ensure that the needs of the three main stakeholders (educators, businesses, and students) were met. In the section that follows, the practical application of the PALAR journey is discussed, including how each of the recurring stages was

applied over a 3-year period in a strategic marketing module. And the results and findings provided by the participating stakeholders are addressed.

Table 1: How Theories Underpinning the Palar Praxis Guided the Study

Theory	Defined and explained by Zuber-Skerrit (2011, p. 101)	Guiding and supporting role of the theory on the PALAR journey
Grounded theory	Solutions to problems, issues, and challenging new questions are identified from collected data, analysis of this data, and interpretation based on participants' practical life experience.	Problems in the business world prompted the lecturers to start the PALAR cycles of plan-act-evaluate/observe-reflect.
Action theory	Participants themselves are the agents of development and change who, through trial and error as well as individual and group reflection on and in action, come to understand their social situation/dilemmas.	Through trial and error over the 3-year period, the researchers embarked on a journey of critical individual and team (the two lecturers') reflections, including critical reflections by students and business partners.
Critical education theory	Participants as equal partners in "symmetrical communication" are free to explore any way in which their situation under consideration can be improved, even if constraining conditions must be removed or changed.	Critical dialogues between all participants led to improved assessments that are authentic in nature and focused on empowering students with skills.
Systems theory	Participants take a systemic, holistic approach to inquiry and subsequent improvement of praxis.	The assessments were not analysed in isolation, but with the holistic development of students and the student voice as drivers.
Personal construct theory	The researcher is not an unattached outside observer, but a facilitator of participants' construction of knowledge and their interpretation of this knowledge for their consequent behaviour, attitudes, values, and responsibilities in real-life situations.	The PALAR journey began with the role of lecturers, focused on improving our students' employability skills. In addressing the needs and problems, the role of researchers was applied.
Experiential learning theory	Participants create knowledge and insights based on concrete experience, reflecting on this experience, and identifying their learning from reflection.	The reflection of each year aided in the planning for the next year—showcasing the cyclical nature of PALAR and reflection.

The PALAR Journey

The PALAR journey for the two lecturers began with a critical reflection session in which a research problem was identified, namely, students' lack of employability skills. The action steps taken to resolve the problem entailed collaborating with the business partners—engaging in critical reflection on their business practices and identifying problem areas. Assessments were then created, requiring students to develop strategies to address these problems through the practical application of their newly acquired marketing theory (see Table 2). The assessments aimed to assist businesses in addressing their respective problems and, in the process, develop students' employability skills. Through these initiatives, AL was stimulated.

The cycles of plan-act-observe/evaluate-reflect pertaining to the 3-year PALAR journey will be discussed, showcasing how the researchers developed a deeper understanding of their own practice by critically reflecting on feedback from the stakeholders, namely, students and business representatives.

Table 2: Participating Companies and Assessment Formats Used in the Various Cycles

Pseudonym	Explanation	Type of assessment/assignment	Used during following cycle
INT001	International company with several business units in various industries.	Summative assessment in the form of a group-based oral presentation.	Y1, Y2, Y3
COURIER1	An international courier company, of which the local branch participated.	Formative group assessment in the form of a poster where news happenings were identified that could affect the business. Action plans were to be developed to assist the business in dealing with the external business environment.	Only Y2
COFFY01	A local takeaway coffee and frozen yogurt company on campus.	Formative group assessment orally presented with a written document designed around a market research-related problem the business partner experienced at that time.	Only Y2
LOCSL01	Local sport and leisure business that trains children and adults in a specific sport.	Formative assessments based on LOCSL01, LOCCPO2, LOCNP03, LOCMC04:	Only Y3
LOCCP02	Local courier and printing company that is part of a franchise group.	Marketing research group-based oral presentation related to a current, real-life problem the business owner experienced.	
LOCNP03	Nonprofit organisation that bridges the gap between business and community.	Identification of a market segment, targeting strategy and positioning approach that could be used by the company.	
LOCMC04	A local brick-and-click (online business and physical store) men's clothing company.	Marketing mix written assignment as individuals. Electronic media analysis as a group-based written assignment.	

The methodology adopted in the AR varied per cycle, however, the student voice remained at the heart of all three cycles. Each cycle made use of a different set of students because once they completed the course, they progressed to the world of work. This strengthened the student voice and provided the lecturing team with a holistic view into ever-changing student needs (Seale, 2009). During the first and second cycles (Y1 and Y2), student feedback forms were used, which contained questions regarding the student experiences (Seale, 2009). Students critically reflected on their learning journey, assessments, and activities in the module. Insights derived from this feedback aided the lecturers to make necessary adjustments to the module and assessments going forward. During Year 3, a survey containing both quantitative and qualitative elements was used to assess students' employability skills

pre and post module completion. The population in each year was the registered students for the exit-level strategic marketing module.

Across all cycles, the ethical values of action research were applied. This entailed obtaining ethical clearance (which was granted for the umbrella project: UFS-HSD2016/1114/0305). Furthermore, at the start of the semester, all module participants signed consent forms for their data to be used for publication purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured for the business partners as well as the students by incorporating pseudonyms. In terms of data analysis, the student feedback was thematically analysed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) independently by the two lecturers who then came to a consensus. The pre- and post-test questionnaire data was analysed by means of inferential statistics using ANOVA and t-tests.

Cycle 1 (Y1): The Year of Realisation

Plan Y1

The collaboration started in Year 1 (Y1), when the two lecturers were assigned to the Strategic Marketing module. During the planning phase, the researchers critically reflected on past teaching experiences and prior student feedback. To kick-start the planning cycle, a unified vision was developed, based on bringing the business world into the classroom. This was done to improve students' employability skills. The researchers reflected on how to teach the discipline-specific content and, in the process, assist students to solve learning tasks associated with understanding concepts in the discipline. According to Ashwin et al. (2020, p. 46), "reflective teaching is sparked by dissatisfaction." In order to identify the factors of dissatisfaction, regular needs analyses were conducted via consultations with students as well as conversations with business partners.

The needs analysis showed that, firstly, the students themselves, who were responsible for their own learning, had a set of general needs and concerns including finding jobs, being skilled and ready for the workplace, and acquiring relevant work experience. In addition, students wanted to recognise the real-life value of the module. Secondly, the lecturers, who have the authority to design curricula and course content that can either improve or hinder students' employability skills development, also had needs. Lecturers' needs and wants were based on efficient and effective handling of large classes, simplifying the grading of assessments, finding a balance between explanation of course content and practical activities, and ensuring that students developed employability skills through their participation in the module. Additionally, lecturers were time constrained and had to balance their teaching roles, research responsibilities, community service initiatives, and life itself. Lastly, the needs of the business partners, as stakeholders who have the authority to hire or reject the students as potential workplace candidates, were focused on finding suitable workplace candidates who possessed practical skills, are task directed, and have the ability to apply their acquired knowledge. These needs are confirmed by the research conducted by Griesel and Parker (2009), who identified task-directed engagement and the application of knowledge as two salient concerns that South African employers have highlighted upon the recruitment of graduates.

Act Y1

Assessments were developed with the overarching goal to empower students to be theory-based practitioners who solve real-life problems, thereby becoming more employable in their discipline. A summative assessment in the form of a group oral presentation was created in Year 1 in collaboration with an international company (INT001) that comprises of multiple sub-companies in a wide range of business industries. The students were assigned to develop practical marketing strategies for any one of the INT001 companies operating in Africa. Students presented these ideas to a local panel of judges. The top 20 students were selected to present their ideas individually to representatives of the

company and other external judges (from the private sector). The judges provided critical feedback to the students, as done in real-life business pitches. A formal function was organised to take place after the student presentations to showcase the students' accomplishments, addressing the third R of PALAR—recognition. Attendees included students and their family and friends, business partners, lecturers, head of the Business Management department and the dean of the faculty. This function provided the perfect avenue for engagement because all role-players were brought together.

Observe/Evaluate Y1

During this stage of evaluation, in-class observations and after-class assessment reflections were conducted. Students' module evaluations and business representatives' feedback were also consulted, as reported below.

Student Perspective

Students appreciated the opportunity to work on the INT001 project (explained above) because they believed this assessment equipped them with necessary employability skills. The students' comments about the experience summarised how the business partnership heightened student learning and enjoyment thereof:

> ***Participant 3 (Y1):*** *By participating in the INT001 project, I felt like I was really learning how things will be in a work setting.*
>
> ***Participant 7 (Y1):*** *I enjoyed the challenge of the INT001 assignment, as it helped us further put our skills in practice.*

Students started to utilise theory to create practical solutions, thereby developing a deeper understanding of what can work in a practical sense and what cannot:

> ***Participant 12 (Y1):*** *It was nice to do an assignment on a real company that is growing. Learned how to use theory with practical.*

Although positive feedback had been obtained, the students mentioned that they had, at times, felt challenged and overwhelmed due to the assessment requirements and the time constraints. Participants articulated these problem areas explicitly:

> ***Participant 18 (Y1):*** *Was tricky because had to come up with strategies. Out of comfort zone but good to be in an unknown situation.*
>
> ***Participant 15 (Y1):*** *Too much to do, too little time.*

Business Perspective

From a business perspective, the partnership was viewed as a tool of empowerment. INT001 saw their contribution as a driver of student growth, not only to achieve course success, but to inspire future possibilities, as articulated by the executive director of INT001:

> ***INT001 Managing Director:*** *We are very honoured to inspire young minds to come up with innovative marketing solutions to the INT001 business. We hope that their creativity will also inspire innovations in business, government, and civil society that will ultimately sell better, South Africa and Africa as investment destinations.*

Reflect Y1

Critical team reflection sessions were conducted weekly. Notes were made for the coming year on how to change practices. Resultantly, current practices and habitual actions were adapted. The biggest concerns were based on the time-consuming nature of arranging the INT001 presentations. These arrangements included setting up a presentation schedule, booking venues, communicating with business partners, and providing feedback to the students. The INT001 summative assessment was improved and adapted in accordance with stakeholders' suggestions and students' concerns. Consequently, the two lecturers' reflections helped them improve the INT001 presentation rubric to better guide the students. As a result, the initial assignment instructions, which were broad in the absence of a rubric, were improved to include specific guidelines and a suitable rubric that addressed all partners' needs. In addition, formative assessments were refined for Year 2 to help students integrate knowledge instead of confusing and frustrating students and, in the process, to develop better-prepared students.

Cycle 2 (Y2): The Year of Adaptation

Plan Y2

At the end of Year 1, the lecturers decided to adapt their vision in accordance with the experience they had gained. Inspired by Anderson et al.'s (2001) revision of Bloom's taxonomy (understand, apply, and analyse), an adapted vision was created with a 3-tiered teaching and learning philosophy: understand, think, and create. The lecturers aimed to create an understanding of difficult theoretical concepts by presenting examples in class. Secondly, the lecturers wanted to ensure that students think critically about the theoretical concepts—as noted by Griesel and Parker (2009) who emphasised the importance of application of knowledge in the workplace. Lastly, students were provided with an opportunity to create something new, such as feasible marketing strategies for existing businesses.

During the Year 1 reflection, newly developed needs on the students' side were identified, based on their lack of exposure to practical assignments. Consequently, two formative assessments in cooperation with two local businesses, COURIER1 and COFFY01 (refer to Table 2) were developed. The respective owners visited the class to present real-life business problems. The aim of these assignments was to enhance student understanding and provide students with the opportunity to put their newly acquired disciplinary knowledge into practice before completing their summative assignment on INT001.

During Year 2, a detailed resources inventory was conducted, which helped the lecturers identify the resources needed to attain project success. These resources included (a) people: open-minded people involved in local businesses, who are willing to share real-life problems and utilise student ideas to solve these problems. Additionally, a network of expert judges who could assist in assessing the summative assessment (INT001) was identified. These judges comprised of businessmen and women as well as academic colleagues. Financial resources (b) were also needed in order to cover the costs of the refreshments for the judges and the costs of hosting a prize-giving event for our summative assessment. Another resource (c) was the availability of venues and technological infrastructure such as projectors, internet connection, and microphones. Lastly, on a personal level, the lecturers realised that this process required a great deal of (d) time. The obstacles caused by resource limitations will be reflected on in a later section.

Act Y2

During Year 2, formative practical assignments with detailed rubrics were developed to guide both students and judges. During two of these formative assessments, local businesses were involved and

the following disciplinary topics were addressed: environmental scanning, segmentation, targeting and positioning process, market research, and the development of a four P (product, place, price, and promotional) strategy.

An example of the inner workings of one of the formative assessments was a marketing research project requiring students to identify a research problem from a presentation made by the business owner of COFFY01. In groups, students had to develop a research instrument, collect data, and present their findings to the business owners three weeks later. The lecturers and business owners scored the students' presentations according to a rubric. Business owners also provided valuable feedback on the practicality of the students' proposed strategies. Based on the feedback obtained from students and the business owners, this project was a success. The business owner immediately implemented some of the strategies proposed by the students.

Observe/Evaluate Y2

During Year 2, student feedback was obtained from formal end-of-semester student evaluations, continuous feedback forms, and in-class lecturer observations. Hoon et al. (2015) suggested that, if the purpose of student-generated feedback is to improve a module, the evaluation must include questions that explicitly ask what improvements can be made. Students had to answer the following three questions in relation to each of the assessments and activities completed during this module: (1) "What should we stop doing?" (2) "What can we improve?" and (3) "What should we keep on doing?" These evaluations were conducted twice during the semester: after the semester test (first summative assessment) and several formative assessments had been completed, and after the completion of INT001 (second summative assessment) and the remaining formative assessments. Feedback obtained is reported below.

Student Perspective

Regarding the INT001 assignment, the feedback that emerged was similar to that of Year 1, however, new insight was provided about the formative assessments involving the two local businesses. Students viewed the formative assessments as a tool to improve their understanding of theoretical content and to develop their practical application skills—maintaining their engagement throughout the learning process:

> ***Participant 13 (Y2):*** *The practical assignments and real business situations helped my learning—kept me engaged.*

Students identified the following two potential problem areas: the number of assignments, and the time-consuming nature of the practical activities, as one student noted:

> ***Participant 34 (Y2):*** *The workload is too much, students have other modules too.*

Business Perspective

The solutions developed by the students had considerable practical implementation value given that the COFFY01 business owner managed to implement the solutions and achieve success, as indicated in the comment:

> ***COFFY01 Owner:*** *We were able to gain valuable feedback in better understanding what our customers truly cared about. Some ideas that we have implemented since the presentations include some tweaks in pricing, displaying images of our products in-store,*

and hand writing personalised messages on our coffee cups, which have become popular on social media.

Although the overall feedback was positive, there were a few concerns regarding practicality brought up by the manager of the local COURIER1 branch:

> ***COURIER1 Manager:*** *It was a great opportunity for our brand to increase brand awareness. The students came up with some good ideas, but some of the ideas were a bit impractical and strategies far-fetched.*

Reflect Y2

The reflection on the Year 2 action plan and newly implemented practical assignments led us to the realisation of the potential of participatory business-based assessments. Energised by the feedback from students and businesses, another set of practical assignments, in conjunction with local business partners, were designed and implemented in Cycle 3. However, with a class of approximately 200 students, three group presentations were too time-consuming for all the involved role-players. This led to new plans in Year 3.

Cycle 3 (Y3): The Year of Focus

Plan Y3

In a study that set out to determine the needed employability skills for graduates in the South African context, Coetzee (2014) developed an employability framework (refer to Figure 1). This framework outlines eight skill sets a South African graduate should possess in order to successfully transition to the world of work. The framework served as the basis of Year 3's planning phase because the lecturers aimed to develop these sets of skills in their student cohort.

Act Y3

To develop the employability skills mentioned in Figure 1, a new set of assessments were planned, taking into consideration the time-consuming nature of student presentations and the fact that students failed to grasp the holistic nature of the module and the assessments. Based on these two constraints, partnerships with four local companies (LOCSL01, LOCCP02, LOCNP03, and LOCMC04) were formed. Short videos were created in collaboration with the business partners, showcasing a summary of their real-life business challenges. These videos were then distributed to the students through the learning management system. In self-allocated groups, students had the option to choose between the four different local companies. A set of practical formative group assessments were developed, based on the video content. Each assessment that formed part of this set covered an element of a marketing plan. This was a strategy used by the lecturers to assist students to understand what each element entails and, also, to foster holistic thinking because each element needs to strategically integrate with the others in order for a feasible marketing plan to be developed. To ensure that the students still received critical feedback, one student presentation to the business owners formed part of the assessment strategy.

Figure 1. Definitions of Employability Skills (Coetzee, 2014, pp. 893–896)

Interaction skills	Using the English language and technology when communicating with others. Personal efficacy in communicating and interacting with people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and authority levels.
Enterprising	Venturesome application of critical reasoning, initiative, and proactivity in engagement of economic activities or undertakings.
Problem solving and decision making	Creativity and proactivity in the process of producing a solution to a recognised problem or problematic situation.
Presenting and applying information skills	Communicating knowledge, facts, ideas, and opinions clearly and convincingly with a view to offering solutions for one's personal benefit, or for the benefit of one's community or workplace.
Continuous learning orientation	Cognitive openness towards and awareness of, and proactive engagement in, the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and abilities throughout one's life and career in reaction to, and in anticipation of, changing technology and performance criteria.
Goal-directed	Proactivity and initiative in achieving one's goals, accomplishing tasks, or meeting deadlines.
Ethical and responsible behaviour	Responsible leadership in upholding the code of moral beliefs and values of one's profession, community, and/or workplace in all one does.
Analytical thinking skills	Skilful, logical, and critical reasoning and analysis in explaining information and data and drawing insightful conclusions from the data analysis.

Observe Y3

The two lecturers' observations in Year 3 incorporated quantitative research in the form of a pre- and post-test questionnaire based on Coetzee's (2014) work, which measured students' perceptions of their employability skills before and after they had completed the course. This AL journey was gradually changing into a strong AR and scholarly journey.

To establish the students' perceived employability skills, a pre-test with statements drawn from Coetzee's (2014) work was developed. These statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Additionally, two open-ended questions were added: (1) "What, during the past six months, contributed to the development of the abovementioned skill?" and (2) "If the strategic marketing module was a positive contributor, which aspects of the module led to the improvement of this skill?" The key qualitative findings from the second open-ended question provided a synopsis of the views of the student cohort.

Of the initial sample of 214 registered students in Year 3, 152 completed the pre-test. Just over half the sample (51%) were aged between 21 and 23 years, while 19.9% were younger than 21. Only 1% was older. One third of the students were males, whilst 67.8% were females. In response to the question, "Do you set personal goals?" 97% indicated that they did indeed. Job advertisements were

reviewed by 40% of the students, an activity that is encouraged to prepare a student for the world of work.

Three months after completing the module, 136 of 214 registered students completed the post-test questionnaire, designed on the same basis as the pre-test. As part of the ethical considerations and to ensure anonymity, but to be able to link the pre and post tests, pseudonyms were used. The data was analysed using SPSS and the results pertaining to the research question at hand are discussed below.

Quantitative Results

To test the reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha measurement was used. Pallant (2013) considered a value greater than 0.7 to be reliable. Five of the eight skills will therefore be included in the analyses (Table 3): interactive skills, continuous learning orientation, goal-directed behaviours, ethical and responsible behaviour, and analytical thinking skills.

Regarding the mean scores, it is evident that a positive difference (ranging from +0.08 to +0.18) occurred in the students' perceived interactive skills (IS), continuous learning orientation (CL), goal-directed behaviour (GS), ethical and responsible behaviour (E), and analytical thinking skills (AS). In order to deter whether this positive difference could be attributed to the module's teaching and learning pedagogy, further qualitative results were analysed.

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha and Mean Scores of Pre- and Post-tests

Cronbach Alpha of Pre- and Post-tests	**Cronbach Alpha**		**Mean**		
Employability skills as identified by Coetzee (2014)	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**Difference**
Interactive Skills (IS)	0.818	0.839	3.94	4.13	0.18
Enterprising (ES)	0.678	0.661	3.76	3.87	0.10
Problem-solving and decision-making skills (PS)	0.690	0.761	3.81	3.92	0.11
Presenting and applying information skills (PA)	0.595	0.628	3.83	4.00	0.16
Continuous learning orientation (CL)	0.745	0.790	3.83	4.00	0.16
Goal-directed behaviour (GS)	0.756	0.795	3.86	3.98	0.12
Ethical and responsible behaviour (E)	0.733	0.770	4.18	4.26	0.08
Analytical thinking skills (AS)	0.863	0.888	3.68	3.79	0.11

Qualitative Results

The students classified the INT001 group project and the presentations to the business owners as the two major contributors to the development of their interaction skills as specifically mentioned by 112 of the 214 participants:

> ***Participant 13 (Y3):*** *The INT001 assignments helped me acquire skills and knowledge in communicating and interacting with large organisations.*

> ***Participant 51 (Y3):*** *All the assignments, because we worked with real companies and clients.*

The enterprising skill (defined in Figure 1) was enhanced through the lecturers' teaching styles, which challenged students to use their acquired knowledge and apply it to their everyday lives. Half the student cohort mentioned INT001 and the other practical assignments as positive influencers in this regard:

> ***Participant 18 (Y3):*** *Lecturers in class and real-life examples and assessments.*

> ***Participant 85 (Y3):*** *We were challenged to always think further—out-of-the-box ideas, especially with the INT001 assignment.*

Most students mentioned that the authentic, practical assignments developed their problem-solving skills:

> ***Participant 91 (Y3):*** *The INT001 assignment helped us realise the urgency of future planning.*

> ***Participant 65 (Y3):*** *By solving problems for clients and thinking of ideas in assignments.*

The presentations, based on the research project and the INT001 project, were the main contributors to students' presentation and application of information skills:

> ***Participant 125 (Y3):*** *The practicality of the presentations in the modules and my lecturer were very helpful.*

Students perceived an improvement in their continuous learning orientation due to the authentic nature of the assignments and teaching style:

> ***Participant 206 (Y3):*** *Attending classes and the way lecturers prepare and interact with us.*

> ***Participants 64 and 77 (Y3):*** *Doing assignments of different kinds on the same company.*

The strongest determinants of the students' goal-directed skills were the module's workload as well as the assessments developed in collaboration with the business partners:

> ***Participant 8 (Y3):*** *The presentations had deadlines that we had to meet.*

> ***Participant 85 (Y3):*** *All the assignments that we had to hand in.*

The group projects were recorded as an important factor that contributed to the advancement of ethical and responsible behaviours:

> ***Participant 12 (Y3):*** *Having to deal with people when doing assignments.*

> ***Participant 124 (Y3):*** *Working in groups taught me how to take others in account.*

Analytical thinking skills were developed through the formative-based research project as well as the INT001 assessment:

> ***Participant 158 (Y3):*** *While it was difficult, to do research and analyses the data to make decisions for a business.*
>
> ***Participant 66 (Y3):*** *Developing questionnaires as a source that was used in statistical analyses, and INT001.*

Based on the reported feedback, it became evident that the assessments (INT001 and set of practical assignments relating to local businesses) improved the students' perceived employability skills. From the businesses' point of view, the collaborations provided the business representatives with novel perspectives that led to new strategies, which were applied in their businesses, as emphasised by the business owner of LOCSL01:

> ***LOCSL01 Owner:*** *The research your students performed and the feedback I obtained helped me so much in achieving my goal in creating a better and simpler website for my business. The data that I got made my decision-making process a lot simpler and guided me in the direction I need to go.*

Despite general positive dispositions, the issue of student under preparedness was brought forward, specifically in terms of their ability to practically handle real-life business problems:

> ***LOCCP02 Owner:*** *The strategies proposed by students were not always viable due to red tape within the company.*

Reflect Y3

Due to the diverse nature of the four companies, it was easier to apply the disciplinary principles to some more than to others. Based on the discrepancies, it was decided that, in future, the companies should have similar products or services. This becomes increasingly important with the formative assignments where the focus should be on learning how to apply theoretical concepts.

Based on the evidence, the stakeholders' practices and perspectives evolved for the better. Lecturers practised better teaching principles with the student voice as their foundation, students' employability skills were improved, and business partners acquired fresh business ideas. Table 4 indicates how the students' success rate drastically increased, from 64% (in the two years prior to the establishment of this team of lecturers) to 92% in Year 3. From Year 2 (79%) to Year 3 (92%) a significant increase in success rate was reported.

Table 4: Student Results Over a 5-Year Period

	YA: Before team had been established	**YB: Before team had been established**	**Y1: After team had been established**	**Y2: After incorporation of two business partners**	**Y3: After incorporation of business partners in all formative assignments**
Average semester mark	52%	55%	54%	55%	58%
Average exam mark	49.5%	50.5%	54.5%	50.5%	58%
Average final mark	54%	56%	58%	56%	60%
Success rate	64%	78%	77%	79%	92%

The findings in Table 3 and 4, in conjunction with the qualitative results, provide evidence of the realisation of the lecturers' vision and accompanying goal—to develop more employable graduates.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge by showcasing how the PALAR approach can be applied practically in the fields of business management and marketing.

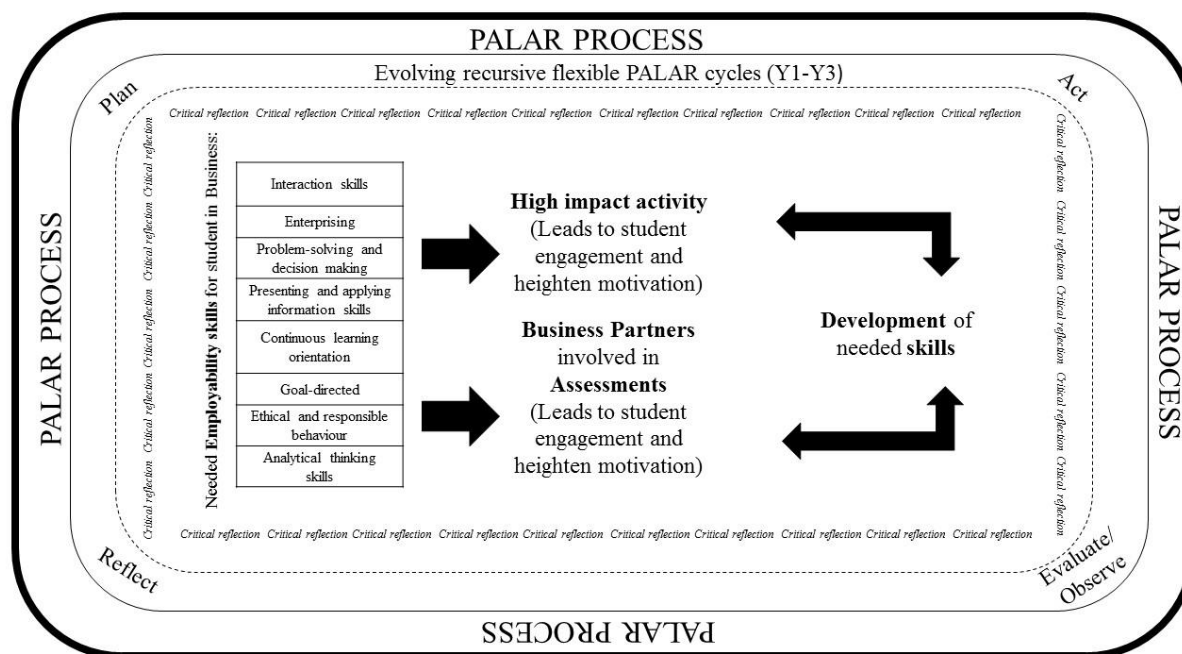
The details provided of the approach can easily be utilised by educators in the same and other similar fields. As a practical contribution, a set of reflective questions that could help lecturers to evolve on a PALAR journey was established. Table 5 lists the questions and examples of answers to these questions, which can serve as a guideline.

Table 5: Reflective Questions To Address When Developing a PALAR Project (Authors' Own)

Questions	Examples of the two lecturers' answers to these questions
What is your teaching and learning philosophy? (Self-reflective statement summarising beliefs about teaching and learning.)	Produce a more employable student for the workplace.
Who are the important stakeholders in your module?	Students Lecturers Business partners
What are the current problems/needs they experience?	Students: Employability skills Lecturers: Teaching and reflection skills as well as research skills Businesses: Employable students and solutions for their current problems.
What do I need to do to help stakeholders overcome these problems/needs?	Practical assignments with business involvement.
At the end of the semester, what type of student would I like to send out of my class?	Students who can understand, think, create.
How can I involve real-life problems in my course by collaborating with businesses or discipline-specific outside partners?	Identify areas in the disciplinary field that students and businesses struggle with.
How can I collect evidence of my teaching and learning practices to ensure that, in a year or two, I can share this knowledge with my peers?	Student feedback—mid-term, end of year Lecturer critical reflections—informal notes Business feedback—emails, letters, and interviews
What can I do to improve my teaching and learning practices, to develop all stakeholder skills or satisfy their problems/needs?	Focus on more specific, real-life business problems.

The PALAR process is not rigid in nature but, instead, fluid and highly adaptable. Figure 2 provides a summary of the evolving PALAR process. Each PALAR cycle (plan-act-evaluate/observe-reflect) is needed and cannot be completed without the other. These recursive cycles are flexible in nature. The way each cycle is addressed will be unique to the respective teaching style and discipline-specific needs, but the key element during these cycles is critical reflection throughout. Reflecting on one's teaching does not involve a set of strict rules but is a journey to utilise new understanding to enhance one's own practices.

Figure 2: Evolvement of the PALAR Journey in a Disciplinary Environment



Results obtained from student feedback from Year 1 to Year 3 made it evident that assessment activities that incorporate business partners enhanced the students' perceived employability skills and assisted students to integrate theoretical knowledge in a realistic business world setting. AL took place in three ways: (1) The students gained disciplinary content knowledge from interaction with the lecturers and practical insight through the involvement of the business representatives, (2) the lecturers gained disciplinary knowledge and experience from the students and business feedback, and (3) the business representatives gained disciplinary insight from the students' ideas.

Remaining Challenges

Despite innovative solutions and a focus on collaboration, there were several unresolved challenges. In the future, Huang's (2010) and Moore's (2004) ideas, namely, that AR should move to a place where the students see themselves as participants in their own AL, should be incorporated. Gibbs et al. (2017) referred to a limitation of PALAR studies and publications—they are done predominantly by university academics (lecturers) and rarely involve the other stakeholders such as students or business partners. Our aim is to conduct a follow-up study with the business partners to review their PALAR journeys during involvement in this project. The business partners and students were part of the AL, although they did not participate in the analysis of the data. Future research projects will be incorporated to enhance the involvement of these partners in all four cycles of PALAR. This may address the criticism by Kemmis (2006) and Levin (2012) that a PALAR process prevents researchers from maintaining a critical distance from their own research, limiting transparent reasoning and the development of new insights.

Conclusion

Student employability skills can be enhanced through collaborative business-based assessments. The reflection process of a PALAR philosophy, methodology, theory of learning, and facilitation process encouraged engagement with all stakeholders and potentially transformed the lecturers' practices.

In conclusion, this evolving PALAR journey has empowered the lecturers to break down the classroom walls that traditionally hindered holistic thinking. Instead, through partnerships and collaboration, bridges were built between the classroom and the real world. This approach has created a dynamic synergy that encourages students to learn from business mentors. In turn, businesses can access new ideas, recruit potential candidates, and create change far greater than they had imagined. By using PALAR, a process that enforces a positive social change for a just and better world for all the stakeholders involved, the researchers are committed to building bridges that nurture collaboration and develop students into employable graduates.

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The Rise of the Executive Dean and the Slide into Managerialism[10]

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Abstract

Universities have long been characterised by hierarchical and paternalistic management structures and institutional cultures. Change is therefore to be welcomed but, in contexts where social change is urgently needed, it is possible to mistake a change in any direction as being worthwhile. Around the world, recent shifts in university leadership and management have been towards managerialist approaches that work against a shared responsibility for the academic project. Accusations of managerialism often refer to a general sense that institutions are becoming bureaucratic, or that it is the logic of the market that drives decision-making. But beyond vague complaints, these accusations fail to identify the exact processes whereby managerialism takes hold of the institution. This article hones in on one specific example of institutional change in order to argue that it is implicated in the move towards managerialism: most universities in South Africa have changed from having elected deans, selected by faculty, to executive deans, appointed by selection committee. Crudely distinguished, it can be said that elected deans represent the interests of their faculty up into various institutional structures whereas executive deans are tasked with implementing the decisions of top management down into faculty. This paper tracks the differences between the two forms of deanship through reflections on discussions about such a change at one South African institution, Rhodes University. It analyses the literature to argue that we do not have to choose between patriarchal management and compliance-based managerialism. Instead, we can choose shared responsibility for the academic project.

Keywords: managerialism, executive deans, leadership, university management, collegiality

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[10] This article was not based on any empirical data and so no ethical clearance was required by Rhodes University. The draft article was commented on by the vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellors and members of the ad hoc committee considering changes to the nature of appointment of deans.

Introduction

Donella Meadows (2008), whose work underpins the focus of this special edition, "Dancing on the Waves of Change," argued that much of the reflective research work we need to undertake is qualitative in nature. If we do not undertake reflective qualitative research on our institutional systems and interrogate which interests they privilege, we can easily find ourselves making changes in problematic directions. She argued that changes often rest on the idea that "if you can't define it and measure it, you don't have to pay attention to it" (Meadows et al., 1972, p. 55). This journal, *Educational Research for Social Change*, takes as its premise however that not everything that counts can be counted.

Meadows (2008, p. 170) also asserted that "before you disturb the system in any way, watch how it behaves. . . . Before you charge in to make things better, pay attention to the value of what's already there." In a context such as the South African higher education system with its inherent injustices and racialised structures, it is easy to think that charging in and making change is necessary—regardless of the nature of such change. While many of the changes experienced in the sector have been good, such as the changes over the last three decades in the direction of widening access, and we should celebrate such changes, we also need to be cautious of the direction in which certain institutional shifts are taking us. Around the world, changes in university systems have often been conceptualised as *managerialist*. This ideology is identified as underpinning universities' structures and practices (Deem, 1998; Kinman, 2014; Thys-Clent et al., 2002). In a nutshell, managerialism entails managing every aspect of the academic endeavour in order to ensure better efficiencies. It assumes that business concepts can be imported into universities to ensure financial stability.

This article reflects on changes towards managerialism in our institutions by considering one specific example: the move from elected deans to executive deans—a move that has already taken place across most South African universities. In this reflective piece, I consider the relevant literature to show how the role of executive dean needs to be understood as one small step in a much broader shift towards managerialism in the university sector, a shift that we need to navigate with caution.

The Managerialist University in an Era of Efficiency

Drawing largely on international literature, we can see that managerialism is driven by cost-benefit thinking (Bok, 2009; Giroux, 2014; Newfield, 2016). Clearly, the cost-effectiveness of the university's internal processes is significant but, in a managerialist institution, this logic pervades even the purpose of the university, which then entails pandering to the demands of external markets in the name of sustainability. The university becomes conceptualised as an institution focused on producing skills and goods for the market, rather than as a public good focused on knowledge creation and the nurturing of critical citizens who are well placed to address environmental degradation and social injustice. The focus on the production of skills and goods for the market has consequences for teaching, research, community engagement, and every other university activity.

The market logic of managerialism suggests that efficiencies are enhanced through competition (Deem, 2001; Nixon, 2010). This leads to employees being encouraged to be competitive and being rewarded on the basis of their outputs rather than their contribution. Giroux (2014) argued that we can see what he called the *neoliberal move* through internal markets being introduced within the institution, for example, when departments are run as individual cost centres that have to pay for the hiring of institutional venues, or when financial incentives are paid to star performers for their research outputs, and when less financially significant tasks, such as pastoral care of students, are rendered invisible. Management's role of developing a commitment to a shared endeavour and then trusting people to work towards it is replaced with the surveillance and performance measurement of labour

(Giroux, 2014). Working in a university that is premised on adherence to rules, rather than on the stewardship of academic values, can lead to a lack of commitment to anything that is not explicitly required in the job description (Maistry, 2012).

In a managerialist university, labour is measured by exchange value, rather than use value (Harley, 2017). Use value entails valuing labour that "produces useful things, things that are necessary for our existence and well-being" (Harley, 2017, p. 1). Exchange value, on the other hand, cares not whether the work has been for the public good, has been undertaken with care and compassion, or whether the work has meaning in the world; instead, exchange value is concerned with whether the product of the work can be sold for more than the cost of the time and materials taken to produce it (Holloway, 2010). Around the world, the validating of academic labour on the basis of exchange value has had the effect of alienating those working and studying in the academy (Bok, 2009; Giroux, 2014).

There is alienation from the academic project when teaching comes to be discussed as the number of FTEs[11] accrued for enrolment and graduation, rather than as the transformation and empowerment of people, and when research comes to be viewed through the metrics of subsidised outputs, rather than as contributions to knowledge. This thinking has resulted in the development of a "short-term approach to research, an emphasis on articles and deliverables" (Shore, 2010, p. 25), where the "thrill of discovery is . . . held in check by the need to package yourself as a saleable commodity" (Nash, 2013, p. 43). As Deem (1998, p. 48) explained of universities in the United Kingdom:

> *Universities are . . . being exhorted to raise both the standards of educational provision, and the quality of their teaching, learning and research outcomes, whilst prevailing government policies also require annual so-called "efficiency gains" to be made, resulting in a declining unit of resource per student taught, less money for equipment and a decrease in research resourcing. At the same time, the emphasis on competition between universities for students, research income and academic research "stars," has also served to stress the extent to which higher education can be described as operating under quasi-market conditions.*

There is an argument that those who resist the processes of the managerialist university, such as the performance management of academics, are simply doing so because their lack of productivity would be exposed through such systems. But this argument underestimates the extent to which such shifts impact on every relationship in the university and, indeed, the whole ethos of academic life (Nash, 2013). The professor who publishes regularly and supervises numerous postgraduate scholars is doing the kind of work that performance management systems reward with status and financial payment (Waitere et al., 2011), but she is still harmed by such systems. Any benefits that such an academic might accrue would not be shared with colleagues who do the bulk of undergraduate teaching or with those who are novice researchers. Performance management systems encourage activities that are "calculable rather than memorable" (Ball, 2012, p. 17), and can have numerous unintended consequences such as the adaptation of teaching and assessment practices to allow more time for research (Ball, 2016), and the rise of predatory publications in a bid to receive funding incentives rather than publishing in order to disseminate knowledge (Mouton & Valentine, 2017).

The managerialist turn positions the university as being in the business of the production of goods—both graduates and knowledge. This process gets into "our minds and souls" (Ball, 2012, p. 4); it affects our values, our approach to teaching, our relationship with our students and with our colleagues. In all these areas, we're encouraged to "replace commitment with contract" (Ball, 2012, p. 20). In line with a consumerist ideology, the managerialist university embodies the ethic of competitive, individual self-

[11] FTEs, or full-time equivalent students, are the weighted measurement by which the State funds universities in South Africa.

advancement. In order to excel in the managerialist university, academics should focus on developing a very niche area of expertise, they should publish on their own, and they should eschew teaching (Newfield, 2016).

South African universities were latecomers to managerialist processes that have been widely critiqued elsewhere (Hedley, 2010; Sandgren, 2012; Smeenk et al., 2009; Teelken & Deem, 2013). In part, we were protected by the public good roles articulated for the university in the larger national reconciliation project (Department of Education, 1997), but the power of the "knowledge economy" discourse means that our institutions are increasingly seen to be sophisticated training grounds providing the skilled labour needed for economic growth. The extremely challenging financial context of South African institutions has also been a key driver of managerialism because such processes promise efficiency and financial stability—though there is little evidence that they provide it (Ginsberg, 2011).

Some argue that changes in how our universities are run are not managerialist per se but, rather, are a much-needed strengthening of management. It is inarguable that many institutions in the South African sector battle with problems of weak leadership and shoddy management. This is evidenced, not least, in the all too regular placement of institutions under administration over the last decades (National Planning Commission, 2011), the ongoing stories of corruption, and the general lack of capacity in core areas—such as the inability of most institutions to spend grants allocated for the improvement of teaching and research, resulting in millions of rand being reclaimed by the Department of Higher Education and Training every year (Moyo, 2018). But pointing out the problems of poor management is not an argument for managerialism. While strong management can take many different forms, from inspirational leadership to administrative competence, managerialism entails one very particular ideological position: that the academic project needs to be tightly controlled by those who are external to the actual academic work.

The potential for a humanising dialogue (Roux & Becker, 2016) in our universities is severely constrained by the more hierarchical notion of the university where management is understood to be entirely separate from the academic body, such that there is "a serious gap between leaders and managers on the one hand and academics on the other" (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009, p. 356). This rift between management and those engaged in the academic endeavour is enacted through small structural changes in our institutions such as the introduction of numeric measurements of performance, the decreasing authority of Senate, and the increase in powerful institutional positions outside of academic faculties (Bok, 2009; Ginsberg, 2011; Newfield, 2016).

Concerns about the incursion of managerialism are often expressed in vague terms and there is little understanding of the specific institutional changes that lead to its emergence. There is no checklist for a managerialist institutional culture but being able to identify specific examples of moves towards managerialism is key to our being able to resist it. The introduction of executive deans is not, in itself, an indicator of the "managerialist university." Nonetheless, I think consideration of the appointment of executive deans offers a useful case study through which to consider the emergence of managerialism. It is an issue with which the university where I work is currently engaged.

A Small University in a Small Town

Until recently, Rhodes University was the smallest university in South Africa. This identity has been usurped by a number of newly formed institutions that are still enrolling to their full capacity. Rhodes University has not resisted its small nature—indeed, it has often protected it. In large part, this is because the municipality cannot cope with serving a larger population in the rural town in which the

university exists. The infrastructure to provide consistent water supply, electricity, housing, and functional roads is already stretched. But besides such external constraints, there are numerous advantages to being small. There are, for example, pedagogical benefits to being a small university in a small town where academics and students cross paths in various spaces on campus and off, and where the deans know many of their students by name (Case et al., 2018). The small size of the university may well be part of the reason why the university consistently enjoys among the best undergraduate throughput rates and per capita research outputs in the country.

Along with the rest of the sector, the university is grappling with massification in an era when government subsidy has failed to keep up with inflation. Massification, according to the seminal article by Trow (1994), occurs when a national higher education system is accessed by at least 15% of youth between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. South Africa has now reached a participation rate of over 20% (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2019). Massification is about far more than large student numbers. A massified student body no longer comprises only wealthy and middle-class students. Many students will be seeking higher education with the hopes of social mobility, they will not necessarily have strong schooling backgrounds, they will not necessarily have access to literacy practices that align fairly closely to those of the university, and they will bring prior knowledge that may be overlooked or dismissed by the university curriculum in alienating ways. These are just some of the implications of massification for both teaching and learning; the implications for the academic leadership and management of our institutions are just as profound. Many leaders battle to meet the needs of the changed student body and our institutions might be poorly placed to ensure that equity of access is met with equity of outcomes. Increasing the numbers of students who enter higher education, that is, achieving equity of access is, in many ways, the easier goal to attain. Equity of outcomes, that is, supporting students to succeed, is far trickier—as the persistence of racially differentiated success rates across all our institutions indicates (CHE, 2019).

A particular challenge is that these demands take place in a context of institutional fiscal constraint. Financial issues have taken a sharp form in this particular university for a few reasons. Firstly, the institution fails to benefit from economies of scale. Secondly, it made the very expensive but principled decision over the last decades not to outsource a great many of its departments such as maintenance, gardening, catering, residences, and others, while every other university in the country cut costs by doing so. Thirdly, it made another financially costly but principled decision to, since the early 2000s, use its own resources to top up National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) fees (NSFAS, n.d.) and increase the threshold to better meet the demand for higher education from academically deserving but financially needy students. For these and other reasons, this university now faces cost-cutting measures despite offering amongst the lowest academic salaries in the country.

Understanding the context of an institution is important for any analysis of its structure and culture. Rhodes University, with its history of whiteness and privilege (Maylam 2017), is well positioned in its rural setting to make changes in its scope and focus while attending to its responsibilities as a research-intensive institution. The need to move from a patriarchal institutional culture to a socially just culture focused on shared academic endeavour is intensely felt in this little university, and a number of initiatives have been put in place to attend to its multiple responsibilities as a research-intensive university in a rural setting in which many people experience poverty (Rhodes University, 2018, 2019).

It is in this context of ongoing institutional change that faculty boards have been discussing the possibility of following other universities in South Africa and moving from a system of elected deans to the appointment of executive deans. A key driver of this debate is that fewer and fewer people want to take on the role of leader of the faculty in the context of the increased administrative demands attached to the post. Taking on the role of dean is no longer seen as an honour so much as a burden.

The need for more demographically representative leadership is strongly felt. At present, the deans of the six faculties comprise three white men, two white women, and one black man. Only a limited number of internal academics can take on the role and some are understandably concerned about the constraining implications being dean has for their own research endeavours.

While I have been consistently opposed to implementing this change at Rhodes University (see, for example, McKenna, 2015, 2018), there are undeniably some benefits to introducing executive deans. In order to make sense of them, we need to have clarity as to the distinction between the two forms of deanship.

The Difference Between an Elected and an Executive Dean

Simply put, an elected dean is appointed through a vote by faculty whereas an executive dean is appointed through the usual institutional appointment processes. There are, however, a number of additional differences that distinguish these two forms of deanship, to which I now turn.

The elected dean is considered to be primus inter pares (the first among equals; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009) and is nominated by faculty members who then vote once the academic has agreed to such nomination. The elected dean can stand for a second term of office (and, in some cases, a third or more). The faculty has the right to reappoint the incumbent dean or to appoint someone else, or to vote between the existing dean and another candidate. The faculty also has the right to insist that a dean step down if there is a vote of no confidence in her performance.

In contrast to this, the executive dean is appointed by a committee that would include some faculty representation but would also include whatever representation is the institutional norm for management appointments such as vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellors, human resources director, other executive deans, trade unions, and so forth. Most of these people would have little or no role to play in the appointment of an elected dean. Like the elected dean, the executive dean takes on the role for a fixed time period. Renewal of the contract for an additional period, however, is not up to the faculty but is dependent on the executive dean meeting the performance management criteria attached to the position.

The job description of the elected dean is often relatively informal and relates to her offering guidance and leadership to the faculty and her representing the voice of the faculty on various institutional structures (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). Typically, the elected dean is paid an allowance on top of her salary for the duration of her term of office. She loses this allowance when she returns to her full-time academic post after her tenure as dean.

Executive deans, on the other hand, are paid large salaries in South Africa, and these are typically pegged at the top administration salary scales with a significant pay grade difference between the executive dean's salary and those of academics. The executive dean salary is closely aligned to the corporate nature of the job description, which would require high-level management expertise including the ability to manage those in the faculty in line with institutional demands.

The elected dean is expected to be a senior academic with recognition from the faculty emerging, in part, from her active engagement in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. The elected dean often continues to produce academic research and undertake postgraduate supervision and, sometimes, also teaches during her tenure as dean. She thus has the mammoth task of juggling her academic demands alongside the management ones.

The academic background of the executive dean, on the other hand, is not the core basis on which she is employed. She is not generally expected to do any teaching and, in many cases, undertaking research is not a requirement either. However, the ability to raise funds for research projects, infrastructure, and so on is often explicitly stated in the performance management contract (Seale & Cross, 2016).

While both kinds of dean are expected to oversee teaching and learning, and the faculty's relationship to its students, the executive dean is also expected to take on a number of other roles. These include the responsibility for aligning faculty strategy to institutional processes, performance management of staff, external stakeholder relationship management, marketing of programmes, and the development of third-stream income sources (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). The elected dean might also engage with such activities but these would generally be collaboratively undertaken with broader faculty representation. Having an elected dean thus requires more involvement in various projects by all staff in the faculty, projects that may simply be presented to faculty as faits accomplis in the case of executive deans.

While both kinds of dean are expected to identify closely with the needs of the students and academics, balanced by responsibilities to the institutional management team, and, in some cases, the relevant professional body, the executive dean holds such responsibilities with a significantly different weighting and she responds to a much more multifaceted constituency. For example, "executives are actively engaged in setting institutional objectives and measuring outputs. New instruments, frequently copied from the private sector, such as benchmarking, internal performance agreements, and reporting and monitoring systems are no longer the exception but the rule" (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009, p. 351). And while executive deans might have a say in developing an institution's policies and approaches, once these are agreed upon by management structures, the executives have a responsibility for implementing them regardless of their perspectives on the issue. They may thus have to navigate a disjuncture between their own views and those they are expected to officially espouse (Waghid, 2000). Those "schooled in social justice theory are likely to experience several tensions when they assume leadership roles in higher education" (Maistry, 2012, p. 515).

The discussion, thus far, of the differences between the two forms of dean has attempted to make the distinctions explicit but there is, of course, much variability depending on factors such as the type, status, and size of the institution and the country's higher education policies and processes (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). South African universities are highly differentiated by history and also by type: traditional universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology. Both differentiation of history and differentiation of type lead to very different institutional cultures, which impact on how deanship is conceptualised and enacted. How hierarchical the university is, the institutional expectations about leadership and management, and the extent to which academics have the autonomy to determine the structures and practices of the university (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; McKenna & Boughey, 2014) all impact on the nature of deanship in that university. White et al. (2011, p. 181) argued, for example, that "universities of technology are much more managerial with centralised power located with the VC, and comprehensive universities (that offer both research-based degrees and practically oriented diplomas) are also more managerial and centralised." They pointed out that, in contrast, fairly significant power is devolved to the dean and faculty in some universities in the sector. Seale and Cross (2018, p. 276) argued that, regardless of institutional history or type, the introduction of the executive dean in Gauteng

> *added another layer of complexity to deanship . . . and points to a potential crisis in the advancement of the academic project, since the position of dean is now more management orientated, and allows little or no room for strategic academic leadership.*

Elected Deans for the Status Quo and Executive Deans for Change?

The main argument against elected deans is that they are steeped in the culture of the faculty they lead, including aspects thereof that are resistant to transformation. Research suggests that where management is undertaken with a light touch because academics are expected to be committed to a shared endeavour and are therefore "trustworthy," academics can abuse this freedom to avoid transformation (McKenna & Boughey, 2014). The patriarchal university is reliant on systems of patronage disguised as collegiality and the elected dean may potentially form the linchpin for such power networks, or old boys' clubs that privilege particular sets of voices and values while silencing others. The patriarchal university suffers from class elitism, racism, and sexism, a lack of accountability, and very little transparency (Nash, 2013). Given the enormous demands for change across areas such as curriculum, institutional culture, and staff demographics (CHE, 2016), this is a significant concern.

But, it is important to note that the literature suggests that the move from patriarchal universities to managerialist ones has not done away with systems of patronage (Maistry, 2012). Arbitrary decisions and preferential treatment, which used to be quietly implemented via the network of power in the patriarchal university, are, in the managerialist university, justified in circumlocutory ways in which managers "rely on legal technicalities or on legal procedures that will bankrupt colleagues who stand up to them" (Nash, 2013, p. 45).

The argument that elected deans are resistant to change, whereas executive deans will drive the transformation agenda, is based on two problematic assumptions. It assumes that elected deans are always invested in the status quo rather than committed to a more socially just institutional culture, and it assumes that the changes brought about by executive deans would be in the interests of the academic project and transformation. Executive management structures, however, generally focus on internal reporting, performance monitoring, and quality assurance processes (Shore, 2010; Shore & Wright, 2015; Strathern, 2000), rather than bolstering a more socially just academic project. There is ample evidence that one of the core roles of executive management in times of fiscal constraint is to implement rationalisation processes (Joseph, 2015; Wolverton et al., 1999) and to build income diversification rather than to attend to the racialised structures of power in the university (Taylor & Taylor, 2010). Executive deans are more likely than elected deans to embrace managerial values, because "the balance between academic and managerial values seems to tip towards the latter" (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009, p. 354) and the position of executive deans in South Africa is "skewed towards the executive, administrative, management dimensions, with little if any support for strategic advancement of the academic project" (Seale & Cross, 2018, p. 288).

Maistry (2012) argued that because executive staff members are typically only part of the university community for the duration of their contracts, and they are driven by the need to deliver on performance management outputs, they may be more likely to coerce faculty and suppress dissent. He emotively argued that the "ingenuity of temporality is that the perpetrators do not remain on long enough to witness the long-term damage that is the product of their acts" (Maistry, 2012, p. 521).

The argument that the appointment of executive deans is necessary for transformation was also challenged by research undertaken by Michael Cross and others. Johnson and Cross (2004) argued more than a decade ago that the introduction of the executive dean in South Africa would work against the institutional rejuvenation agenda and then, in 2018, Seale and Cross asserted that, at least for the universities in their study, this was indeed the case. There is no research to show that the appointment of executive deans has brought about system efficiencies and increased funding in the form of project grants even though very large salaries have been paid to this end. Indeed, Seale and Cross argued that the introduction of executive deans has "contributed very little to the envisaged long-term and far-reaching operational efficiency and effectiveness" (2018, p. 276).

Attracting External People to Managerialist Positions

The South Africa higher education sector is a small one and we know from the lengthy time period taken to fill posts that there is not a glut of qualified candidates waiting to be lured into these jobs. Top-level managers with the cut-and-thrust business acumen to drive profitable changes are more likely to be drawn to the salaries of industry than those offered by our universities. And for those who are attracted not so much by salary as the desire to provide meaningful leadership of the academic project, the incursion of managerialism makes academia a far less desirable career option (Waitere et al., 2011).

In an era where we are trying to attract young academics, particularly black South Africans, to academia, it seems problematic to be embracing systems that undermine the very essence of what is worthwhile in working in a university, that is, engaging in the academic project, participating in an endeavour that has extensive use value, being part of knowledge creation and dissemination, and contributing to a public good. Maistry went so far as to argue that the "reckless appropriation of neo-liberal, western performance-driven models grounded in economic rationalism translates into a form of subtle and sometimes overt 'violence' against, and humiliation of, marginalized individuals and groups within the university community" (2012, p. 515).

The term "executive" in the designator has significance.[12] Executives belong to top management structures, which are positioned by this terminology as being separate from those on the ground engaged in the academic project. The executive dean has executive powers and can give executive orders. Importantly, such positions are often accompanied by the introduction of a number of other high-level administrative positions (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009) such as executive director of human resources, executive director of intellectual property and technology transfer, executive director of risk management, executive director of institutional planning, executive director of quality assurance, and so the list goes on. Individually, such positions can be argued to be necessary for enhanced efficiencies in the institution but, collectively, they shift the culture of the organisation away from the academic project (Ginsberg, 2011). Taylor and Taylor (2010, p. 897), writing about South Africa, indicated that "over the last two decades or so, a new managerialism has indeed witnessed academics surrendering power and authority to a new breed of professional, highly-paid, and bureaucratically-inclined university administrators."

Habib (2013) called for proactive engagement with the increasingly market-orientated positioning of university activities with a view to subverting from within. He suggested that this would entail using market strategies to ensure that institutional power and status remain with academics through initiatives such as awards and non-pensionable allowances paid to high performing academics so that senior executives are not the only power brokers. Habib's response to those critics, such as myself, who argued that these approaches are succumbing to the logic of the market, is that we are out of touch with the realities of the moment and we should not confuse means and ends. Coughlan (2008, p. 582) similarly suggested that "a balance is needed between collegial and more corporate style management if a university is to protect its academic work while surviving in an external environment that could be perceived to be increasingly hostile to the traditional collegial model."

Taking on any management role in these politically charged times, when the very nature of the university is under debate, is an onerous task. Increasingly faculty members are not willing to raise their hands to be considered for election as dean. Thus, the ponderings presented here about the

[12] In a few cases in South Africa, the word "executive" is not used in the title, possibly because of the negative connotations of the word or in order to avoid paying the large salaries typically associated with the term. However, the position remains "executive dean" in the sense of fulfilling the key characteristics outlined in this article.

managerialist implications of executive deanships may well be moot. If nobody is willing to stand for election, there is no option but for Rhodes University to follow the rest. Unless there is an explicit understanding within the institution of why a culture of collaborative leadership is worth nurturing, it is unlikely to flourish.

A Different Way

There is no doubt that the patriarchal university characterised by systems of patronage must be dismantled, and that multiple small shifts have taken place to bring about the changes we can celebrate today. However, we do not need to choose between an unjust historical system and a future managerialist one. The possibilities for an ethical university based on an ongoing commitment to the academic project are evident all around us. But this requires a willingness by everyone to share responsibility for the institution’s actions.

Working in the managerialist institution may be far less intellectually, socially, and morally rewarding—but it can also be far simpler. It absolves university employees from doing anything beyond the tight confines of their output-measured and quality-assured job descriptions. It allows disgruntled employees to blame “management” for any unpopular institutional decisions. Managerialist institutions empower the top echelons of the hierarchy at the expense of the projects of the rest, and thereby withdraw agency from “the rest” for driving change. The job of the rest then becomes compliance to the outcomes set in the performance management systems, rather than personal commitment to the academic endeavour.

Centralisation of power and decision-making within universities, and reluctance or fear to challenge management decisions leads to an insidious culture of compliance (Shore, 2010) whereby academic freedom is quietly curtailed. Academics’ voices are “managed” to ensure they do not make statements that could besmirch the branding of the institution. Management teams then speak on behalf of the university relegating “staff, alumni and students to the role of ‘stakeholders’—along with students, parents, industry, and government. This discursive turn represents a major shift in power relations” (Shore, 2010, p. 26).

Collaborative decision-making, where the university’s decisions are determined in favour of the academic project, requires an explicit joint accountability ethos (Maistry, 2012) where everybody working in the university is responsible for its endeavours. It’s a significant challenge and one that requires an institutional culture at odds with the direction being taken by many universities. The small size of the university upon which this reflection is focused makes it perfectly placed to exemplify the ethical university, and many of its current activities provide a rich resource base from which to work, but it will need to be much more explicit in its endeavours in this regard.

Conclusion

If this argument against executive deans is convincing, then the key challenge may be to facilitate a system whereby external people can be elected by faculty into dean posts, given the need for transformation and for more flexibility beyond the small number of potential internal candidates. As noted above, the elected dean is typically an internal appointment from existing staff members whereas the executive dean is typically an external appointment. This seemingly simple issue may well be a sticking point between the two systems. In principle, internal staff can apply for an executive dean position and, conversely, faculty can approach external candidates to stand for election as elected deans, though this is complicated by the need for a vacant academic position that an external elected dean could fill. If we could navigate the need for any elected dean from outside the university to be assured a permanent academic position after their term of office, this problem could be ameliorated.

But, beyond such practicalities, the deliberations about a shift from elected to executive deans at one university require us to reflect on the relationship between structures and cultures in our universities, more generally. I have argued that the structural move from elected dean to executive dean entails far more than a shift in appointment procedures. It is part of a broader incursion of managerialist culture into our universities.

Because institutional cultures are, by nature, implicit, it is difficult to engage in deliberation about them. "Ambivalence is an effect of all of this, the sense of not being clear enough about what is worthwhile, what is defensible and what is objectionable" (Ball, 2012, p. 24). We need conversations about the nature of the academic project in each of our universities and the responsibility of everyone who works in the university to this project. We are guided to some degree by national policy but we need to have a clearer sense of the academic project at each university and an explicit understanding of how it is that every person who works in the institution serves that project, whether they are academic, administrative, support, or management. This process of explicit conversations about institutional culture and the academic project will also have implications for how students participate in the university.

Alongside the challenges of making institutional cultures explicit, comes the issue that no university works in isolation of the bigger context. It is almost impossible for a particular institutional culture to exist in contradiction to broader national and international cultural and structural conditions (Archer, 2007). Habib (2013, p. 66) argued that it is "going to be impossible to create islands of collegiality in a market-oriented higher education system. This is especially so since universities are funded by the state by means of a formula that is itself market-oriented."

Is resistance futile? Is it dangerously naïve? Or is it up to those of us committed to the academic project as a public good to defend the university from becoming yet another tool of the market? If we want our universities to instil "values of empathy and mutual recognition, compassion, respect, dignity and meaningful relationships with peers" (Walker, 2005), then we need to ensure that the very fabric of our institutions is made of these (Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2016). Perhaps there is some truth in the accusations that resisting the managerialist university comes from self-interest or a romanticising of something that has never existed. But there is also the truth that many of us have a deep-seated commitment to the role of the university in knowledge creation and dissemination, and a determination that this should underpinned by a principle of public good for people and the planet—not profit.

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Book report

Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge by Jonathan D. Jansen (Ed.)

Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2019. 286 pp.
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Jonathan Jansen's signature is entwined with that of the postapartheid South African university or, more precisely, the enduring legacy of apartheid within the South African university. His signature inscribed on this collection, as editor, therefore inscribes it with complexity. However, his signature cannot be read in isolation because, amongst others, those of Achille Mbembe, Crain Soudien, and Mahmood Mamdani are equally saturated with the tensions surrounding (South) African intellectual traditions, colonial and apartheid legacies, and the university. With these names printed in alternating colours of orange, red, white, and yellow on the cover page, the collection cannot but raise high expectations as to the ideas contained within.

Central to the collection is the question of decolonisation. And this is a question, as Jansen outlines in the introduction, because there was a relatively sudden entrance of the concept in the idiom of university-speak during and after #RhodesMustFall; the book can, therefore, like Booysen (2016), Msila (2017), and Praeg (2019) be read as a form of #RMF scholarship. Decolonisation has not been made famous in our country by established academics but, rather, by activist students. And although it is no foreign idea, Jansen argues that its roots as a critical concept can be found mostly elsewhere, and decidedly more north, in our continent. He continues to frame the book broadly as concerned with knowledge and the relation between knowledge, decolonisation, and the university sphere. Overarching, it can be regarded as belonging to the field of curriculum studies, particularly the question of problematising and decolonising this field. The collection therefore situates decolonisation within the realm of knowledge and its double, curriculum, rather than regarding it as a broad and ill-defined abstraction.

Four sections structure the book: 1) arguments and motivations for decolonisation, 2) the politics and challenges facing decolonisation, 3) examples of decolonisation in practice, and 4) rethinking and reimagining colonial legacies and inheritances. There is a movement here from articulating the need to posing the challenges, from probing the realised to imagining the possible. It is satisfying to read a text that provides a critical overview of decolonisation, rather than an argument for or against it, grounded in ideology.

All contributors provide readings in support of decolonisation as an intellectual project. What is clear—particularly when comparing Sections 2 and 4—is that there are varied levels of conviction in the

eventual success of such a project. Mbembe's contribution, coincidentally the final chapter, offers the most optimistic account. Drawing on theories of cognition, computation, and planetary thinking, Mbembe argues that we are entering an age where Afrocomputation could be the change heralding a radical rethinking of the formation and distribution of knowledge. Jansen is, however, arguably the most sceptical. Arguing that the emergence of new "knowledge regimes" the world over always appears to be revolutionary, he warns that these regimes ultimately echo some, if not most, of the characteristics of those that preceded them. He questions whether decolonisation will, eventually, become another regime in this cycle—becoming a mere moment in time, rather than the ushering in of a new era.

These two chapters (almost) bookend the collection, and between them lie many different expressions and explorations. Amongst others, Mahmood Mamdani presents a critical reading of two "models" of universities in Africa, Brenda Schmahmann argues for reading the very landscape, specifically monuments, of university campuses as curricula, and Piet Naudé questions whether the discipline of business ethics could be saved from itself through a shift towards ubuntu as conceptual frame.

Whilst these, together with the other chapters, all amount to stimulating pieces, I cannot help but wonder what the book could have looked like had three things been taken into account: firstly, the contributors themselves. As I mention above, the book lies heavily under the signatures of its contributors. This points to both a presence and an absence. The presence is of influential and respected academics at the pinnacle of their field whose writings, such as these, promise and deliver highly saturated inscriptions in their fields of inquiry. In terms of absence, as mentioned, the very question of decolonisation in the realm of the university is not one that was uttered by the current body of senior academics nor, as Jansen mentions, has truly been engaged with by those academics until recently. This begs the questions: "Why the absence of younger voices?" "Where are the activist students to whom the very possibility of this collection owes its existence?" With the exception of two contributors (currently pursuing doctorates), the book comprises overwhelmingly of writings from deputy vice-chancellors, research chairs and senior directors.

This is perhaps not such a moot point, yet I would like to read it together with my second concern: the conversation within the book. All the chapters provide stimulating reading and a refreshing look at the realities and possibilities of decolonisation. When reading the individual chapters, however, I wondered what the response would be of the various contributors to the chapters next door. What would the conversation between Achille Mbembe's Afrocomputation and André Keet's plastic university lead to? How does Ursula Hoadley and Jaamia Galant's overview of the classification and codification of disciplines relate to Yusuf Sayed, Tarryn de Kock, and Shireen Motala's call for an ecosystems approach to change in teacher education? I would argue for such a comparative, conversational approach given that most chapters articulate the lack of theory in the existing curriculum or knowledge base. And whilst articulating this is an important step, the question as to the theorising of new knowledge is its only true answer. The book falls short of providing a truly meaningful overarching theory or framework as it pertains to the decoloniality of knowledge, and knowledge that is decolonial.

I am a child of #RhodesMustFall. It was during my second year at Nelson Mandela (then still Metropolitan) University that the call was first made, and in my third and final year that fee structures were radically changed. I remember one of the key articulations of decolonisation amongst us students was not merely for a change *in* and *of* knowledge, but a shift in the *approach to* knowledge. These two concerns therefore lead me to question whether a wholly different approach to producing and presenting knowledge is required—whether the presence of younger voices, those who have been at the forefront of the movement, those whose collective signature is decolonisation in the university,

could not offer a different reality, not merely a different vision for the future when combined with the voices in this book?

My own position towards #RhodesMustFall and activist studentship is not uncritical. I document elsewhere (Staphorst, 2019) some of my disillusionments with the movement, with these disillusionments mostly related to some of the conceptual schemes and languages that we expressed through movement. My third concern is that a number of these problematic conceptual schemes and languages appear, uncritically, throughout the collection. These include essentialised binaries such as "Western" and "African," "core" and "periphery." Whilst a few contributors do critique these notions, they nevertheless creep into the writing of others.

As I write this, five years after the first spark of revolution at the University of Cape Town, the world seems to be becoming a more precarious place each and every day. Not only are we facing the deadliest biological threat in a century, but we have to find our way to a new electronic normal; not only are there mass protests against systemic racism and police brutality in the United States of America, but the city council leader of Oxfordshire in the United Kingdom has moved to remove the towering statue of Cecil John Rhodes at Oxford University's Oriel College. Herein lies the true challenge for both extremes of the decolonisation conviction question in the collection. Will Afrocomputation truly be our salvation, considering electronic and internet connectivity is the largest challenge to student access and success across South African university campuses, as currently evidenced in an international time of crisis (Mzileni, 2020)? And is the imminent removal of Rhodes' statue at Oxford the proof of a deep decolonial turn, or simply window dressing? A moment versus a structurally effacing movement? These questions remain to be answered.

These concerns do not, however, detract from the clearly important and, which it will surely prove to be, influential work that Jansen's hand has brought together. He and his fellow contributors inscribe endless new possibilities. The book is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to questions pertaining to decolonisation, curriculum transformation, and the state of university institutions—both for, and beyond, South Africa. The chapters offer insights, ideas, and criticism that raise questions that must be addressed in the future, whilst they serve as a barometer of the decolonisation debate as it stood in 2019. I believe the collection will not only confirm its place as a cornerstone of scholarship in curriculum studies, critical university studies, and philosophy of education, but that it is of value to a wider audience including scholars and activists alike. Now, let's get to more theorising, let's get on with decolonisation. *A luta continua! Fluit, fluit, ons storie is nog lank nie uit!*

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Conference Report

Dancing on the Learning and Teaching Waves of Change in Africa

HELTASA 2018 Conference, 20–23 November 2018, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

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Background

Nelson Mandela University hosted the 2018 Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) conference from 20 to 23 November 2018. The picturesque South Campus in Summerstrand welcomed 354 delegates to Port Elizabeth and enabled the presentation of 109 papers, 38 posters, and four workshops from across the South African higher education sector.

As hosts of the HELTASA 2018 conference, Nelson Mandela University endeavoured to create an enabling space for delegates across the higher education landscape to engage, converse, build relationships, and contribute towards building a community that will continue to add value to the higher education context, regionally, nationally, and globally.

Conference theme

Higher education institutions in South Africa and the world over are confronted with, and continuously navigate, various waves of change. These include but are not limited to fee-free higher education; financial sustainability in the face of shrinking government funding; producing graduates who function effectively in a globalised, connected world but who are also locally relevant; including the student voice; and decolonisation and transformation of curricula, academia, and academic spaces. Considering these developments and changes, *Dancing on the Learning and Teaching Waves of Change in Africa* was deemed a befitting theme for the HELTASA 2018 conference. In bringing the theme to realisation, it was decided to move away from prescriptive sub-themes and, rather, request presenters to *focus on change and transformation in higher education that relates to one, or a combination, of the rhythms below:*

- Responsive curricula, and curriculum and career pathways
- Higher education pedagogies for sustainable development (including new and/or responsive pedagogies and sustainable assessment)
- Student access and success

- Learning analytics to inform transformative teaching, learning, and support
- Leadership to respond to complexity and uncertainty in novel ways
- Transformative teaching development across the academic career trajectory

In moving away from conventional sub-themes and focussing, rather, on rhythms, we hoped to stimulate and disrupt traditional thinking and paradigms to encourage a measure of freedom, collaboration, liveliness, and innovation within the academic project.

Complexity science literature suggests that it is no longer fruitful to manage and drive change in conventional, linear, mechanistic ways—by generating a strategic priority, determining a course of action, and implementing it to achieve predetermined outcomes. Instead, new paradigms and novel approaches are needed to effect transformative change in a living system such as a university. In complex, uncertain times that demand new ways of being and doing, a nonlinear theory of change and paradigms related to complexity, and a living systems approach provide new perspectives for organisational transformation. Working in these new paradigms and approaches unlocks shared envisioning and then requires acting collectively and creatively in fluid and sometimes "messy" ways by "dancing with systems" (Meadows, n.d., line. 1) to bring about transformation. So, by focusing on change and transformation with new lenses/paradigms, conference presentations, and conversations provided insight into how academics, academic development professionals, and academic leaders are dancing on the waves of change in innovative and creative ways to systemically and organically transform learning and teaching.

Through scholarly presentations and workshops around how learning and teaching are being transformed at universities via engagement with the conference rhythms, robust discussions that challenged and disrupted thinking and paradigms ensued. This critical engagement aligns to the *ERSC* journal's purpose of promoting educational research for social change and the notion that educational research has the potential of being transformative—particularly through its work with communities and through various participatory research approaches. By engaging with colleagues across the higher education context, the HELTASA 2018 conference foregrounded the critical role of educational research as social change, contributing to the theorising thereof and the dissemination of current research to a broad, cross-disciplinary audience of scholars and practitioners in the field of education, bringing to the fore promising innovations in response to some of the higher education waves of change.

Overview

Given that the higher education sector, internationally and nationally, faces many challenges and pressures that require radical responses and a high level of responsiveness, the HELTASA 2018 conference endeavoured to positively and innovatively rise to the challenges to, in effect, "dance on the learning and teaching waves of change." In this quest, particularly during this centenary year of Madiba's birth, delegates and presenters were encouraged to draw on Nelson Mandela's lifelong commitment to social justice and his unwavering belief in the value of education to change the trajectory of those who are marginalised and vulnerable.

By engaging with the conference theme, rhythms, keynote speakers, pre-conference workshops, papers, and poster presentations the HELTASA 2018 delegates were encouraged to rethink and transform the content of, and the approach to, learning and teaching, their research agendas, and engagement initiatives, to "change the world" through scholarly and societal contributions.

It is fitting, therefore, that the keynote speakers, both home-grown academic stalwarts, André Keet and Chrissie Boughey, have each made a significant contribution to the higher education sector. Both keynote addresses included profound provocations that enabled delegates to gain perspectives on how far we have come and where we still need to go, considering the contextual challenges that we face in higher education such as transformation and decolonisation.

In his address "Differentiating Pedagogy: Rhythms, Dances and Waves," Keet focussed on the idea that movement holds transformability, and rhythms, dances, and waves are expressions, imageries, and imaginaries of flow, motion. Always pushing at the margins of the standard interpretive regimes of the pedagogical encounter, these movements suggest a perpetual yearning for renewal, regeneration to free surplus energy for greater adeptness and creativity to engage the decolonial project. Keet brought his work on higher education transformation, plasticity, and "plastic" education into conversation with each other and put forward the idea that to dance on the learning and teaching waves of change in Africa implies the sublimation and (de/trans)differentiation of our pedagogical endeavours.

Boughey engaged with the trajectory of the academic development movement in her address, "Academic Development: Where to Now?" She highlighted the shifts in the South African higher education system as well as developments at national and global levels, more broadly. In her address, she highlighted that, to a large extent, the movement has not been able to set a direction for itself despite enormous efforts on the part of those working within it. Her presentation questioned why this has been so, and where the movement needs to go in order to contribute to the development of a higher education system that will serve South Africa well.

The pre-conference workshops included presenters from the national and international higher education sector and focussed on the conference rhythms of "Transformative Teaching Development" and "Student Access and Success."

"Dancing With, and Sometimes Against, the Beat: Reflective Tools for Developing Yourself and Others in Changing Times," facilitated by Alison Canham from the United Kingdom, adopted a highly person-centred approach. The workshop was grounded in cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and a transformational learning cycle (Bligh & Flood, 2017; Engeström, 2007; Holland, 1998) that enabled participants to explore how they are shaped by, and shape, the contexts in which they live and work. By honouring and reflecting on their different stories and histories, participants were encouraged to conceptualise how they could be adaptive, agile, and sensitive in navigating the tides of change without compromising their own authenticity.

Other pre-conference workshops included, "Who Should Be on an Extended Curriculum Programme? Towards a Framework for Institutional Placement Policy" by Ian Scott, "Supporting Development of Students' Academic Literacy Skills in Everyday Teaching Practice" by Sonya Stephenson, and Pieter du Toit's, "Scholarship of Teaching And Learning: A Whole Brain Approach to Self-Enquiry."

All the conference rhythms were represented by the various paper and poster presentations and enabled delegates to conceptualise new "dances," as they listened to the conference presentations and engaged in discussions and social activities. It was also a conference goal to proactively include the student voice in the HELTASA 2018 proceedings and deliberations, which was achieved through a reduced registration fee and inviting student presentations and attendance.

Reflection

In addition to inspiring delegates to "change the world," the plenary reflection on the final day of the conference endeavoured to enable the emergence of a shared vision and commitment across the higher education sector in Southern Africa. The final reflection was aptly titled, "Collaboratively Charting the Course for Learning and Teaching and Southern Africa."

During this plenary session, delegates identified and deliberated on factors that serve as enablers, hindrances, or both in navigating the changing tides of learning and teaching. Taking a multifaceted approach, or using multiple lenses, was described as one of the most useful tools for innovation. Working in teams with people from different environments or contexts with diverse ideas on various platforms does not only enrich the experiences of participants but also increases creativity levels and adds to the repertoire of useful strategies. Student participation was highlighted as another important layer or lens that should continue to be nurtured. When engaging students in learning and teaching, the intention should not be about making deposits, dispensing knowledge, or using them as mere sources of data so that we can make minor adjustments to our practices and curricula development. The level of engagement should go deeper and deliberately tap into their lived experiences prior to, and during, their university studies. This would serve as one of the platforms of forming partnerships for enriching the learning of both students and academics.

> *As the music changes the dance changes. Each year our students change, we, the lecturers should evolve and be flexible with the sands of time. — University of Venda group*

Commitment to the course of working together is essential for development and transformation. It is through collaboration that multidisciplinary approaches and flexibility will be nurtured and, ultimately, turn the tides for the better.

New and transformative methodologies tend to emerge from the process of critical self-reflection. Self-reflection assists in bringing to the fore one's blind spots, and contributes to the acknowledgement of one's contribution to old and new challenges. Critical self-reflection also involves being able to interrogate one's biases, the ability to live with all kinds of discomfort, thinking about the effects of one's actions on others and, ultimately, make informed choices about what needs to change. Reflective practice in general is a plausible approach for academics to use to enhance their learning and teaching experiences.

Conclusion

By providing transformative educational experiences, and researching and disseminating the impact of these, the HELTASA 2018 conference enabled delegates to conceptualise the development and implementation of learning and teaching approaches and praxes that are truly African and student-centred. Moreover, the spectrum of presentations across the various rhythms in plenary, parallel sessions, workshops, and poster presentations drew from various disciplines, including the field of academic development, and highlighted how these contribute to the transformation of educational research.

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