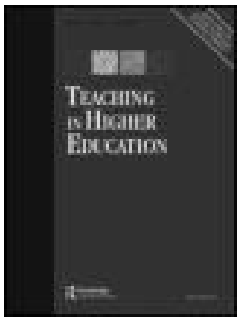

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Shattering the silence: dialogic engagement about education protest actions in South African university classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how academics create safe spaces in university classrooms to engage in dialogue about education protest actions in South Africa. Utilising the research methodology of narrative inquiry and the theoretical framework of Pedagogy of Compassion, this paper explores how academics reflect on their responses to change and protest actions and how they co-construct knowledge with students in light of this change. Data capture included a mix of focus group interviews, participant reflections, field notes and a researcher journal and was analysed by means of the content analysis method. Findings reveal that lecturers had to navigate through the institutional quagmire and were confronted by polarised thinking of students. Furthermore, it seemed that student protest actions had a negative effect on lecturers. However, despite the tide of negativity and resistance, lecturers became transformative intellectuals and created safe spaces for students to engage in dialogue and to shatter the 'normative' silence.

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Pedagogy of compassion; safe spaces; fees must fall; education protest actions; academics

Introduction and background context

South African universities are still reeling from the effect of protest movements that gained momentum in October 2015 and continued into 2016. It is apparent that these protests have forever changed the landscape of tertiary education in South Africa. Protests, which represented the largest student movement since the 1976 Soweto riots were launched under the banner of the 'Fees Must Fall' campaign (Lukhele 2015, 72). These protests aimed to contest and 'critique social inequalities, colonial epistemologies, oppressive pedagogies, bureaucratic management and financial exclusion from universities' (Postma 2016). More than two decades since the advent of democracy in South Africa and forty years after the Soweto student uprising, there is still no solution for the plethora of challenges faced by higher education in South Africa. Although there has been significant changes and transformation in South African higher education, there remain major challenges regarding the social, educational and cultural capital of students entering and exiting the system (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2016, 111). It would seem that 'the University is in a crisis over its crises' (Bridgeman and Murdoch 2008, 258). As Butler-Adams (2015) so aptly reiterated, is the decline and fall of South African universities looming?

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Student uprisings in South Africa signal wider social upheaval (Lukhele 2015, 68) as was evident in both the 1976 Soweto riots and the 2016 protest actions. The 1970s witnessed South Africa plunged into economic depression (Booyse et al. 2011, 216). Deteriorating socio-economic conditions, increasing political awareness and constant protest actions culminated in the 1976 Soweto Uprising, on the pretext that black high school pupils no longer wanted Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (Booyse et al. 2011, 250). A wave of violence, resistance and unrest which began in Soweto spread over the country. The scale of the Fees Must Fall protests resonated with the 1976 Soweto Uprising. These protests were initially sparked by the University of the Witwatersrand, announcing a 10.5% tuition fee increase for 2016. By mid-October 2015 the protest that began at the University of the Witwatersrand had spread to the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University. The Fees Must Fall protest spread rapidly across the country and on 23 October 2015, 10,000 students gathered in Pretoria to make it clear that they were outraged that tertiary education was excluding the poor. 'High tuition fees would effectively create a new kind of apartheid, forever separating the haves and have-nots' (Lukhele 2015, 69).

Although it seems as if students were protesting then and now about issues such as language and fees, the underlying causes were much deeper. Repressive action by universities against protests was unlikely to quell protest, while apartheid policies continued to apply both, to education and the wider socio-political environment (Bot 1985, 12). Jansen (2015) argued that the Fees Must Fall protests were not about fees; the core of the student protests was genuine progressive concerns about inequality and a lack of transformation and access to tertiary education. The abovementioned sentiments were also echoed by Baloyi and Isaacs (2015) who claimed that the Fees Must Fall protests were about more than tuition costs, it was also about decolonisation and transformation of higher education institutions as well as white dominance, patterns of thinking and style and content of teaching. Jansen (2015) noted that although the protests seemed to be centred on fee increases the starting point differed from each institution. At old English universities, there were deep concerns about transformation, while at historically black universities it was about basic survival and at historically Afrikaans universities it was about giving black African students access to undergraduate programmes. It may seem as if the one million university students won the battle against an immediate increase in education fees, however, the larger war against economic inequality is far from over (Lukhele 2015, 68).

Dissatisfaction with universities is not unique to South Africa. Research conducted across 15 countries, including South Africa, revealed the extent of dissatisfaction with regard to the lack of transformation at universities (Brennan, King, and Lebeau 2004, 7). Much has been written about transformation at universities (Inayatullah and Gidley 2000; Mapesela and Hay 2006; Keet 2015). Brennan, King, and Lebeau (2004) distinguishes between changes in curriculum, diversification; changes in access policies and academic responses to change. It is in this last category that we position our research. The existing body of knowledge, as cited above, deals extensively with the curriculum, diversification and managerial responses to student and societal demands for transformation. However, what is largely lacking is an educational response to the actions and voices of students (Postma 2016). This led us to reflect on how academics teach and co-construct knowledge with university students. The gap that we mentioned regarding academic

responses to protests, and that we aim to address in this research, is that of creating a safe space for students in university classrooms where they are afforded the opportunity to engage intellectually with people that are not like-minded. The challenge is how to manage our classrooms where the silence is shattered. Accordingly, this study asks, how do academics create safe spaces to engage in dialogue about education protest actions?

We begin the argument by locating this study in the relevant literature. Pedagogy of compassion as the theoretical framework is then presented. We subsequently describe the sample and context and the research methodology. It is within the context of the classroom that we choose to position this study as one of the themes contained in the module we chose to investigate in this study is history of education in South Africa, which includes student protests. Narratives of academics are then presented. We conclude with an analysis and discussion of findings and examine ways in which academics shatter the silence by creating safe spaces to engage in dialogue about education protest actions.

Exploring the terrain

The literature review of this paper is structured around our understanding and use of the term 'student protests', as well as the notion of a university, and lecturers' agency in creating transformational changes in learning. We also use the term academic and lecturer interchangeably as the role of the academic is varied but includes that of lecturing. The emphasis is on how lecturers, acting as transformative intellectuals, create safe spaces to engage in dialogue with students about education protest actions. The lens through which we will view this dialogic engagement is that of pedagogy of compassion.

Understanding the term 'student protests'

In the context of the Fees Must Fall protests the terms 'strike' and 'protest action' are intertwined as the outsourcing of workers led to contracted cleaners and gardeners stopping work while students lodged large scale protest actions at universities, the Union buildings in Pretoria and at the parliament buildings in Cape Town. We agree with Nkinyangi (1991) that for the purposes of our paper student protests refer to any incidents of student revolt or unrest, which constitute a serious challenge or threat to the established order or to sanctioned authority or norms.

Understanding the notion of a university

Universities are globally under pressure to transform and redefine their role in the world. A review of the literature reveals that universities are in a state of flux (Sarles 2001, 406) and are seen as 'serving the interests of the widest public or publics' (Subreenduth 2013, 403). Consequently, this affects student access and funding and threatens to alter the notion of a university. The question arises, whose idea of the university are we trying to preserve or reinvent (Sarles 2001, 406)? The call for decolonisation and Africanisation made by students during the protests was in response to this question. Although it is not the purpose of this paper to focus on the mentioned constructs, we will briefly allude to these as it influences the notion of an African and especially a South African university.

We acknowledge the diverse and complex causes of the current student protests at South African universities but choose to briefly refer only to the lack of decolonisation and by implication de-racialisation of universities as being an underlying cause of contention. Not enough was done about freedom and change in university classrooms in post-apartheid South Africa. Education proceeded along colonialist lines, with virtually total disregard for indigenous knowledge systems (Makgoba and Tleane 1998, 177). The student protests were a symbolic physical representation of all that is wrong with South African universities (Pather 2015, 1). The decolonisation of university buildings and specifically the university classrooms, which Mbembe (2016, 30) views as space where students are encouraged to develop their own intellectual and moral lives as independent individuals are important. Intellectual life can be dependent on the sort of buildings in which conversations take place and the capacity that students are afforded to make disciplined inquiries into those things they need to know but don't know yet (Mbembe 2017, 30). Thus, fresh ways of thinking in comparative education help us to recognise, explore and disrupt entrenched perceptions that may limit our possibilities for changing in the directions that would create more equitable societies in a globalising world culture (Hickling-Hudson 2006, 1).

Perspectives on deconstructing manifestations and implications of Euro-centrism and racism in the postcolonial world should frame the study of education. Students need to know how racism has distorted knowledge, socio-cultural relationships and economic patterns, which is clearly visible in the curricula and structuring of educational institutions worldwide; and that there is a moral imperative for teachers and students to challenge them (Hickling-Hudson 2006). It is from this premise that our paper challenges lecturers to act as transformative intellectuals in university classrooms and create safe spaces for students to engage in dialogue about controversial issues as highlighted during student protests. The situation calls for teachers to face the complexities of challenging the manifestations of continuing racism, discrimination, exclusion, cultural suppression and other forms of injustices (Hickling-Hudson 2006). Critical and transformative educators in Africa need to embrace indigenous African worldviews and root their nation's educational paradigms in indigenous African socio-cultural and epistemological frameworks (Higgs 2012, 39). 'Coexistence does not seek to remove controversy but instead to promote dialogue among different world views' (Restrepo 2014, 152).

Lecturers' agency in creating transformational changes in learning

The advent of democracy in South Africa witnessed educational policies recast teachers as transformative intellectuals tasked with promoting the constitutional values of the country (Perumal 2016, 747). In synch with these educational polices, the curriculum and teaching and learning approaches in South Africa have also been revised. The post-apartheid South African curricula through its ideological, philosophical and theoretical impulses are intended to remedy the apartheid curriculum, which was regulated and censored and to redefine the role of teachers as transformative intellectuals (Perumal 2016, 747 and 751). Perumal (2016, 762) claims that the 'crisis in democracy' in South Africa has been characterised by political corruption, crime, poverty and violence which

> renders the task of educators as transformative intellectuals daunting, given that professional training of most educators falls short of preparing them with the knowledge, dispositions,

> and capacities to both understand the depth of the crises and to respond to the challenges with democratic wisdom. (Perumal 2016, 762–763)

The first step towards acting as transformative intellectuals in South African university classrooms is for lecturers to attempt to address the gap in the professional training of teachers (Perumal 2016) and to introduce pedagogy of compassion (Vandeyar 2016) that could dismantle polarised thinking and shatter the polite silence in post-apartheid university classrooms. Lecturers are required to move out of their comfort zones and to engage in pedagogy of discomfort (Zembylas 2013). Their agency rests in questioning their own ingrained beliefs and making a shift in their mind-sets about transformation. Furthermore, transformational changes can only occur if lecturers are able to provide opportunities to open the floor to emotional and controversial issues rather than to perpetuate the silence (Zembylas, Charalambous, and Charalambous 2012, 1080). The lecturer as the agent of curriculum delivery is key in the transformational project.

Theoretical mooring: pedagogy of compassion

Instead of arriving at a single truth to inform pedagogy, we should rather work towards a 'fusion of horizons' (Elliott 2005) through a form of consensus-making in order to bring together different views and notions of worthwhile change. Pedagogy of Compassion brings together the attributes that define a progressive teacher and a transformative intellectual (Freire 1998) and the three elements of post-conflict pedagogy (Jansen 2009). Teachers need to assume the role of transformative intellectuals, rather than be alienated by the current educational dispensation if they want to cause meaningful educational change. Freire (1970, 84) proposes that for teachers 'looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future'. The new teacher thus envisaged needs not only to be able to raise the critical consciousness of learners but to adopt an 'epistemology of compassion' (Vandeyar 2016) in order to enable learners to become active critical citizens, imbued with a sense of common humanity and compassion. Taking up the role of transformative intellectuals may challenge the very premise of teachers' identities and practices, but by empowering the learner to exert influence on their world the teacher is in turn also changed and empowered. Pedagogy of Compassion builds on the work of Jansen (2009) and Freire (1998) and proposes the following tenets:

Dismantling polarised thinking and questioning one's ingrained belief system

Educational settings are almost genetically stereotyped (Keet, Zinn, and Porteurs 2009, 110) and for this reason, Jansen (2009, 153) calls for the disruption of knowledge so that all South Africans can confront each other with their respective memories of trauma, tragedies and triumph in the classroom. According to Jansen (2009), polite silences and hidden resentments should be exposed, indirect knowledge should be made explicit and its potential and real harm discussed openly. Dialogue between 'opposing parties' should be encouraged as a conflict not only promotes engagement but also harbours the inherent potential to dismantle polarised thinking. We would like to extend on this by arguing that it goes beyond just unsettling or dismantling polarised thinking, to questioning one's ingrained belief system. Discomfort is experienced when one's cherished

beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions are challenged (Zembylas, Charalambous, and Charalambous 2012, 1072).

Changing mind-sets: compassionately engaging with diversity in educational spaces

Jansen (2009, 154) claims that pedagogic dissonance happens when one's stereotypes are shattered. This does not happen overnight. 'One incident of pedagogic dissonance does not of course lead to personal change, but it can begin to erode sure knowledge' (Jansen 2009, 154). Linked to the notion of pedagogic dissonance as argued by Jansen, is the work of Zembylas (2010) which emphasises the proactive and transformative potential of discomfort. Zembylas (2010, 703) argues that teachers experience immense discomfort when having to confront diversity and multiculturalism. Drawing on Foucault (1994) who introduced an ethic of discomfort, and the work done by himself and Boler (Boler and Zembylas 2003; Boler 2013) he claims,

> An ethic of discomfort, therefore, invites teachers and students to critique their deeply held assumptions about themselves and others by positioning themselves as witnesses (as opposed to spectators) to social injustices and structurally-limiting practices such that they see and act as ambiguous rather than dualistic subjects (e.g. 'us' and 'them'). (Zembylas 2010, 707)

Freire (1992, 95) claims that teachers should have a critical democratic outlook on the prescribed content and never allow themselves to succumb to the naïve temptation to look on content as something magical. If teachers treat content as neutral, thereby ignoring what Jansen calls pedagogic dissonance, then the content has power, the teacher can only deposit it in learners and it loses its power to effect the desired change. All of the above plays out in educational spaces which according to Postma (2016, 5)

> … are political spaces of a particular kind. They are spaces of reflection, of relative safety and reduced risks, courage is not assumed, but fostered; opportunities are provided to experiment with new beginnings and imaginations and to develop judgement; forgiveness could be cultivated and hope fostered.

Fusing different horizons or views namely, 'pedagogic dissonance' (Jansen 2009); 'ethic of discomfort' (Foucault 1994); critical democratic outlook (Freire 1992) and 'educational spaces' (Postma 2016), we would like to propose 'knowledge of living experience' (Freire 1992, 57) and proactive commitment to compassionately engage with diversity in educational spaces. Educational spaces have to be opened up to the multiplicity of student voices. Zembylas (2017, 3) juxtaposes caring and discomfort and agrees with Noddings (1992, 27) that caring should be the foundation of successful education and that caring can transform education at all levels if it becomes an integral part of teaching and learning. In higher education, caring teachers exhibit traits, amongst others, such as addressing student concerns during class (Larsen 2015). Compassionately responding to student voices entails not only warmth and care but also a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

Instilling hope and sustainable peace

'A post-conflict pedagogy is founded on hope' (Jansen 2009, 154). Freire (1992, 77) claims that there is no change without a dream and there is no dream without hope. The hope

that Jansen and Freire refer to is achievable in praxis. It is insufficient to just pronounce hope, it should be acted upon. There is no room for utopia or blind optimism in post-conflict pedagogy. Freire, Freire, and Freire (1994, 8) writes in *Pedagogy of Hope*, that we need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. Pedagogies of critical hope are valuable in that it responds to feelings of despair, pessimism and fatalism about social injustices (Zembylas 2014, 11). In a post-conflict society, the former oppressor and the oppressed do not get caught up in a blaming game. Jansen (2009, 154) refers to post-conflict pedagogy as follows: 'This kind of critical pedagogy recognizes the power and the pain at play in school and society, and their effects on young people, and then asks how things could be better'. Post-conflict pedagogy needs to focus on doing what is right. Similarly, Freire argues that as an individual and as a class, the oppressor can neither liberate nor be liberated. This is why, through self-liberation, in and through the needed just struggle, the oppressed, as an individual and as a class, liberates the oppressor, by the simple act of forbidding him or her to keep on oppressing. 'The liberation of individuals acquires profound meaning only when the transformation of society is achieved' (1992, 85). We would like to argue that such a transformation not only instils hope but also holds the promise for sustainable peace.

Research strategy

Meta-theoretically we were drawn to the tenets that govern social constructivism as our worldview. Methodologically the lens we utilised identifies our view as qualitative inquirers. The research design was a qualitative case study and employed the narrative method. The case for the study was defined by the real-life situation of lecturers who lecture to first year students. The site of this research study was a university where student protests action was prevalent, for which we designate the pseudonym, 'Freedom University'. Pseudonyms were given to the research site and to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The research sample comprised five lecturers presenting an education module to first year students. Purposive sampling was used as this was the total number of academics lecturing this module, excluding one of the researchers.

Biographical information of participants

Pseudonym	Title	Rank	Participants choice of identification	Qualifications	Gender	Age	Years in the Academe
Kiara	Dr	Lecturer	Bi-racial	PhD	Female	35	7
Kobus	Prof.	Associate Professor	White	PhD	Male	65	40
Willem	Mr.	Lecturer	White	M Ed	Male	35	7
Sonja	Ms	Lecturer	White	B Ed Hons	Female	35	2
Curwin	Mr	Lecturer	Coloured	M Ed	Male	62	40

Data capture comprised a mix of focus group interviews, document analysis and lecturer reflections. The history of education in South Africa forms a section of the curriculum for first year education students at the institution where we conducted our research project. Focus group interviews were conducted with five lecturers who taught this section of the curriculum. These lecturers were provided with an opportunity to tell us their stories of how they created safe spaces in university classrooms. Interviews were conducted at a place and time on campus that suited participants. The interviews were audio-recorded.

Lecturers were invited, post-interview sessions, to write reflections on how they created safe spaces in university classrooms to enable students to engage in dialogue about education protests. This was a measure to provide lecturers with the opportunity to address issues that may otherwise not have been raised in the focus group interviews, to reflect further on some of the questions that were raised during the interview sessions and to reflect on their practice.

Document analysis comprised of the study guide of a first year education module that had the following aim:

> In this module, students are guided to develop knowledge, skills and values with regard to the political, professional, historical and cultural complexities of teaching. The module focuses on being a teacher with particular emphasis on being a teacher within the South African context. Students are introduced to the complexities of being an education student in the twenty-first century. Selected themes in the history of education are examined to demonstrate that education and schooling are not neutral entities but are rather the product of specific historical, political and cultural circumstances.

Each interview was approximately an hour in duration. Follow-up interviews were conducted for clarification or elaboration of certain issues that arose in the first interview. Participants were also observed during the interview process. Data were analysed utilising qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000; Sandelowski 2000). Codes were generated from the data and continuously modified by the researcher's treatment of the data 'to accommodate new data and new insights about the data' (Sandelowski 2000, 338). This was a reflexive and an interactive process that yielded extensive codes and themes. Multiple readings of the data were conducted, organising codes and themes into higher levels of categories within and across the interviews, observations, and other sources of data (Merriam 1998). Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education. The ethics application underwent a rigorous blind peer review process.

Findings

Navigating through the institutional quagmire

All five participants were in agreement that the institutional culture of Freedom University did not favour discussion or dialogue with students about protest actions or any controversial topics that may lead to student protests. They were of the view that this stance was contradictory to what a university should be advocating namely, freedom of thought, critical thinking, generative knowledge and so forth. They believed that students needed to be educated about education protests and not just rely on 'mass' intimidation and peer pressure. In this way, they would be able to make informed decisions and choices.

> I am not sure if this institution is safe. I find it difficult to find a safe space. This institution does not have a culture of dialogue not even for staff at departmental level. Dialogue and communication are artificial. You become silent. (Curwin)

> There is a lack of institutional support. I don't have freedom; I am protecting myself. (Kobus)

It would seem that some of these lecturers if not in their actions, at least in their thinking seemed to challenge polarised thinking, and to question the belief system of the institutional culture of Freedom University.

Lack of institutional support resulted in lecturers feeling unsafe and hence they found it difficult to create safe spaces for students to engage in dialogue about education protests. One participant claimed that the threat was just too great. 'If exposed, one could easily lose one's job … and then there's social networking that moves faster than the speed of light … it's just not worth it' (Curwin). Kiara mentioned the 'horrors of racism' at the institutional level. She said as much as she is 'driven by the passion to create critical thinkers and a new cadre of students who will be committed to civic and social responsibility, I [she] sticks to the scripted curriculum as I[she] have already been called up for disciplinary action in this regard'. It would seem that despite having a democratic and critical outlook, Kiara has been forced to succumb to the scripted curriculum due to her fear of repercussions from the institution. She has chosen to treat the content as neutral and to ignore opportunities for pedagogic dissonance. In this way the content had power and, as the lecturer, she had succumbed her power (largely due to the institution) to effect the desired change. Almost all of these lecturers found themselves trapped between polarised thinking of the institution and their innate desire to be transformative intellectuals.

Participants indicated that they viewed Freedom University and the Government as the oppressors.

> I don't talk to students about protests, I talk to the oppressor. I talk to students about life and complex situations. The government and Freedom University are the oppressors. (Curwin)

> The institutional culture does not allow for discussion. I am afraid that if I discuss sensitive topics in class, the institution could turn on me. 'Is the risk worth it'? (Willem)

> I view the university as the oppressor. (Kiara)

The institutional culture of Freedom University was stifling and did not allow for disruption of knowledge so that all South Africans could confront each other with their respective memories of trauma, tragedies and triumph in the classroom. In defending such an institutional culture, polite silences and hidden resentments could not be exposed. Hence, almost all the participants in this study identified the university as 'the oppressor'.

Confronted by polarised thinking

Demographics of the student population have radically changed at this former white Afrikaans-speaking university. Lecturers are confronted by students that are very different from students who populated lecture halls pre-1994, not only in terms of race, ethnicity and class but also in terms of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Many of the participants in this study bemoaned the fact that 'students don't have their facts straight and there are no shared values' (Curwin). Furthermore, they claimed that 'students have set ideas and are arrogant about what they think they know' (Willem). A feeling of consensus among participants was that students seemed to have their own agenda. Kobus also referred to the 'silent arrogance' of students and raised concerns that this may cause lecturers to abandon 'real education', only covering the content prescribed in the curriculum. This was coupled with a 'culture of entitlement' of some students, especially in terms of the negotiation of marks (Kiara). Like Kiara, Kobus also chose to implement the scripted

curriculum. He seemed content to just do what the institution expected of him. Kiara on the other hand strongly noted her disappointed for adhering to the scripted curriculum. Lecturers emphasised the fact that students still have very stereotypical ideas about different race groups and this played out not only in the formation of groups and seating arrangements but also in terms of debates and discussion during curriculum delivery. Curwin remarked that 'racism is alive' in university classrooms. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact of 'knowledge in the blood' (Jansen 2009). Many of these students came from home and school backgrounds that still perpetuated the racial ideology of the apartheid era, and held strong stereotypical views of different race groups. The context of the university classroom clearly presented a rich laboratory for lecturers to effect the much needed and desired change. However, the opportunity to be a transformative intellectual and to make a difference was lost due to institutional constraints and fear of the institution.

Aside from polarised thinking in terms of race groups, lecturers were also confronted with polarised thinking in terms of political affiliations during the 'Fees must Fall' protests. Kiara mentioned how she, a bi-racial female, felt extremely intimidated by the body language and political attire in class.

> You are expected to be a lecturer to these first year students and to adopt a neutral stance at the height of these protest actions. Tell me how do you do this when you walk into the lecture hall and the very first row of seats is occupied by EFF supporters adorned in their political gear, beret and all? By what means can you NOT be aware of the context? How can you NOT feel intimidated by what you are saying in class to a group of students that are set in their thinking and ideas about issues of race etc.?

The tension between Kiara's desire to be a transformative intellectual and the context of fear in which she found herself was clearly apparent. Her fear seemed to be twofold: her real and immediate fear of the students at the height of the protest actions; and her fear of going against the policy of the institution, associated with a very realistic fear of disciplinary action and possible dismissal. The 'ethic of discomfort' experienced by Kiara, a bi-racial female in a former white Afrikaans-speaking university, was evident. However, her fear to act, which was almost tangible, relinquished her desire to become a transformative intellectual.

Negative effect of student protests on lecturers

All participants in this study mentioned the negative effect that student protest actions had on them. They claimed that the protests actions had taken its toll and that they were exhausted. Their lesson preparations and assessment tasks had been designed for contact sessions and now they had to adopt a 'blended or hybrid learning' approach. This meant re-designing their lessons for online learning under an extremely tight timeframe, which many found very demanding and some, in addition, found intimidating and overwhelming,

> I just could not cope. My work had taken over my entire life as I was online almost 24/7, if not tending to students, then preparing lessons and assessing work. (Sonja)

Aside from the professional demands, lecturers also expressed concerns about their own safety, as evident from the following quotes,

> There are repercussions to what one says in class … nothing will ever be the same again. (Kobus)

> I need to take care of myself. I don't feel safe in class. (Kiara)

> Education is not a two way street anymore. Students call the shots. (Curwin)

Furthermore, lecturers indicated that they were wary of the power of social media and this influenced what they said in class. It would seem that aside from the professional demands made on lecturers in terms of lesson preparation and teaching, the academic as an authoritative figure in the classroom was also being challenged. Hence, many of the participants, because of personal safety and job security, conformed to the rules and regulations of the institution. The body language and tone of these lecturers indicated a sense of lamentation and seemed to suggest that they had been stripped of their role as 'transformative intellectuals' who are tasked with freedom of speech and freedom to critically engage, question and generate new understandings of knowledge.

Against the tide: transformative intellectuals creating safe spaces

Despite the ever looming and omnipresent threat from the institution, participants unanimously agreed that the creation of safe spaces for students in the class, by lecturers was extremely important. They held the view that lecturers need to re-evaluate safe spaces and to break down stereotypes. In this way, the process of pedagogic dissonance could 'begin to erode sure knowledge' (Jansen 2009, 154). They shared some of the ways in which they created safe spaces. Kiara strongly believed that

> lecturers need to facilitate classes so that students are empowered to question life and to challenge their own and other students' views … debate is important.

What Kiara is proposing is an engaged pedagogy that provides students with multiple perspectives so that they can understand themselves better through critical awareness and engagement. Although Kiara held this belief it did not translate into practice. It would seem that she was overcome with fear of the institution. It could be that her previous encounter with disciplinary action from the institution has made her more wary. It is also interesting to note that Kiara resigned from Freedom University subsequent to the data capture. Perhaps the incongruence between her beliefs and her practice was just too great? Perhaps as a bi-racial female she did not experience a sense of belonging at this institution?

All participants expressed that lecturers needed to be 'transformative intellectuals' with an agentive agenda that prepared students for both the harsh and pleasant realities of the everyday living context of South Africa. For example, Kobus believed that students, especially pre-service teachers 'need to be made aware of their impact on society', although this belief did not translate into his practice. What Kobus is referring to here is 'a kind of critical pedagogy that recognizes the power and the pain at play in university and society, and their effects on young people, and seeks to make things better.

Curwin raised the issue of the importance of reflection after each lecture and emphasised the importance of story-telling, for example, how he as a Coloured man experienced

apartheid. He believed this promoted authenticity and exposed students to different perspectives and opinions. He held the view that

> lecturers should be role models and education should be authentic and prepare students for life even if it means preparing them to meaningfully participate in student protest actions, They should be well educated about their rights, duties and the consequences of their actions so that they can make informed choices and decisions. This can only be done by means of open and honest discussion where nobody feels intimidated or threatened.

Curwin, a Coloured male, served as a role model and inspirer for his students and guaranteed the sense that their futures can be hopeful and doable, by providing different perspectives of events and creating opportunities for empathetic listening in his classroom. Although he was perturbed by the sense of fear as some of the other participants in this study, he believed that his pedagogy should focus on doing what is right. By allowing for a multiplicity of voices and stories, including his own, in his classroom, he seemed to foster open dialogue in a subtle manner. Perhaps his sense of maturity and teaching experience coupled with the fact that he was close to retirement played a role in his stance as a transformative intellectual.

Sonja said

> I [she] do not allow student protests to influence discourses in my class. I believe as lecturers we are duty bound to prepare our students for life and that means making them knowledgeable about the reasons for the education protests as well. Students in my classes know that their voices are heard and that their opinions matter. I encourage open and honest dialogue.

Sonja believes that she is morally bound to educate her students to challenge distorted knowledge, socio-cultural relationships and economic patterns of racism. She became a transformative intellectual by demonstrating openness towards the new and fostering open spaces for the multiplicity of student voices to be heard.

All these lecturers expressed that their professional role went way beyond the classroom to preparing pre-service teachers to embrace everyday living and 'knowledge of living experience'. Sonja, a white Afrikaans-speaking female did not seem to exhibit the kind of fear expressed by the other participants, especially by Kiara and Kobus. This really went against our (researchers) expectations. Talking about race is often highly unwelcome to people of European descent (White 2002). We thought that a white Afrikaans-speaking female would have a heightened 'ethic of discomfort' and that protest actions and activism will nestle more comfortably with a black or bi-racial person like Kiara for instance. Yet, the data proved quite the opposite. We wondered what the reasons could be for these unexpected results. Perhaps Sonja being a white Afrikaans-speaking person in a former white Afrikaans-speaking university felt much more at home and attuned to the norms and the institutional culture of Freedom University? Could it be that her racial identification, 'white and Afrikaans-speaking, provided her with the necessary armour to withstand any repercussions from the institution or was she at the very core a transformative intellectual forging ahead irrespective of the impending threat of the institution? That is, she believed that it was her moral and ethical responsibility to educate her students outside of the scripted curriculum irrespective of the consequences. 'Students in my [her] classes know that their voices are heard and that their opinions matter. I[she] encouraged open and honest dialogue'. She, like Cuwin, adopted a critical democratic outlook, knowledge of living experience and proactive commitment to compassionately

engage with diversity in educational spaces. Interestingly she was never called up for disciplinary action, nor did she mention the threat of social media which seemed to strikingly inhibit other participants from becoming transformative intellectuals in their practice. We also wondered if this could perhaps be related to her students respect for 'white authority'. But if this was the case, then should it not have applied even more so to Kobus and Willem as white, Afrikaans- speaking males? Perhaps a factor that could have played a role is the number of years in the academe. Of all the participants, Sonja only had two years' experience in the academe. She was relatively fresh into the academe and maybe the institutional culture and norms did not as yet taint or dampen her 'transformative spirit'?

Both Curwin and Sonja demonstrated that Freedom University as the oppressor could neither liberate nor be liberated. This is why, through self-liberation, in and through the needed just struggle, the oppressed, liberates the oppressor, by the simple act of forbidding him or her to keep on oppressing. 'The liberation of individuals acquires profound meaning only when the transformation of society is achieved' (Freire 1992, 85). Such transformation not only instils hope but also holds the promise for sustainable peace.

Discussion and analysis of findings

At a first glance, it would seem that Freedom University was afraid that the protest actions might flare up further and thus instituted a 'silent approach' by muting controversial voices. Given the context, this could have been seen as understandable. But, the fact that Kiara mentioned that she was called up for disciplinary action prior to the education protest actions seems to suggest that the 'silent approach' was the norm rather than the exception at Freedom University. This approach seems to go against the role of a university, which is to create and disperse knowledge. The question thus needs to be posed as to what type of knowledge is being created and dispersed and beyond that what message does this signal to students, especially pre-service teachers?

However, the threat from the institution, the volatile context of the education protest actions and the negative attitude of pre-service teachers did not deter these lecturers from their calling. All of these lecturers expressed that their professional role went way beyond the classroom to preparing pre-service teachers to embrace everyday living and 'knowledge of living experience'. They embraced their educational responsibility by bringing 'the revolutionary spirit into the public sphere so that the spirit could stay true to the pursuit and constitution of freedom' (Postma 2016, 5–6). In so doing, these lecturers became transformative intellectuals by demonstrating openness towards the new (Postma 2016) and fostering open spaces for the multiplicity of student voices to be heard. Perhaps, in a way, this was lecturers' silent form of protest against the 'normative silence'? Hooks (1994, 14) links to the idea of the transformative intellectual when she proposes an engaged pedagogy that provides students with 'multiple perspectives, enabling them to know themselves better and to live in the world more fully by reaching critical awareness and engagement'. The absence of knowing can be valuable in transforming education. Zembylas (2005, 158) claims that the goals of education can be transformed if the educator creates spaces for unknowing in educational settings and this may bring in students and teachers a sense of vigilance, humility and responsibility. These sentiments are

echoed by Maphosa and Keasley (2015, 1) who claim that 'human beings are potentially active, conscious agents capable of knowing and transforming their worlds'.

Despite the fact that 'there are repercussions to what one says in class, that lecturers 'don't feel safe in class' and that 'students call the shots', it would seem that these lecturers implemented 'pedagogy of compassion' in their classroom, although they did not seem to have been aware of such a pedagogy. However, what they were striving to do fell well within the tenets of this pedagogy. All participants expressed the need to shatter the silence, to break down stereotypes and to unsettle polarised thinking. According to Kumashiro (2000, 34) 'changing oppression requires disruptive knowledge not just more knowledge. Pedagogies of case studies and reading about race and apartheid oppressions in textbooks are not enough to engage students and educators in decolonising knowledge construction (Subreenduth 2013). By providing different perspectives of events and creating opportunities for empathetic listening in their classrooms these lecturers fuelled the desire to alleviate suffering and to help and in this way promoted a pedagogy of compassion. Sarles (2001, 413) views academics as the thinkers, the teachers who need to be models and inspirers for our students and the ones who should attempt to guarantee the sense that students' futures can remain hopeful and doable. By compassionately engaging with diversity in their classrooms these lecturers served to instil hope for a better future for all, which harbours the potential for sustainable peace in South Africa. In *Pedagogy of Hope,* Freire (1992, 69) reminds us of the important role that teachers both at schools and in the context of this paper, universities play,

> Teachers who fail to take their teaching practice seriously, who therefore … teach poorly, or who teach something they know poorly, who do not fight to have the material conditions absolutely necessary for their teaching practice, deprive themselves of the wherewithal to cooperate in the formation for the indispensable intellectual discipline of the students. Thus, they disqualify themselves as teachers.

Conclusion

In educating pre-service teachers, it is imperative to create safe spaces where every person is allowed to bring his or her authentic self to the classroom and to express thoughts and opinions that he or she holds. Challenging, honest and open discussions can create opportunities for students to learn how to deal more openly with the tension, hostility and emotionality that occur when confronting biases and prejudices (Bell et al. 1997). These 'moments of difficulty' (Gayle, Cortez, and Preiss 2013) are inevitable. Safe spaces allow students to take risks and to explore concepts as they consider unfamiliar perspectives. As teacher educators, we are morally and ethical duty bound to shatter the silence and to create a better world. Our fundamental responsibilities as teacher educators are amongst others to have the courage to speak truth to power; to be attentive to texts and to people; and to be respectful across difference. Should this not be what we as transformative intellectuals both model and encourage our education students to take up as their responsibility? (Nixon 2006, 353). We therefore argue that following Freire and others, academics need to assume the role of transformative intellectuals especially during times of student protests, instead of being alienated by circumstances and the role played by university management and the government. The fundamental role of education should be to deal with actions characterised by freedom and diversity. 'The foundation of

freedom, is the foundation of a body politic which guarantees spaces where freedom can appear' (Arendt 1990, 125).

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