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GROUP 7
A move toward working with Students as Partners: #KNOWYOUSTUDENTS

Introduction

> *Time has been shattered, exploded into bits, dispersed by the wind. Moments caught up in turbulent flows forming eddies, circling back around, returning, reconfiguring what might yet have been* (Barad, 2017, p. 59).

Teaching and learning at South Africa Higher Education Institutions has not been able to shed the legacy of an inequitable past as the struggle to transform persists. Attempts to transform through decolonial efforts continues to be obstructed by the privileging of epistemological structures prioritising Western/Eurocentric knowledges over indigenous knowledge (Zembylas, 2018, p. 1). Borrowing from Barad (2017, p. 59) who aptly describe the student's expression of alienation and the frustration with the slow pace of transformation at South African universities, as *time has been shattered, exploded*. Like *bits, dispersed by the wind*, one could mistake the scenes from the peoples' mass movement to the 70s and 80s *circling back around*. *Returning*, students called into question institutional cultures, the lack of black academic staff, and the Eurocentric focused curriculum, at the expense of other forms and types of knowledges (Naicker, 2016).

Barad (2017: 73) helps to frame and understand the issues which continue to affect and haunt higher education, as *our atomic past not only haunts the present but is alive in the thickness of the here and now.* In higher education *here and now*, there are traces of the past that remain, entangled with the higher education systems of *then.* These remnants as Langa (2017) outlines of the past include, denial of access through student financial exclusion, the lack of transformation in curriculum development and the under-representation of black academic staff as evidence of the *then*. The intention of the merged universities across South Africa has not delivered on the transformational goals envisaged, instead institutional fabric remains largely intact, characterised by differences based on the material, cultural and social positions of their separate histories as described by Jansen (2003). This *returning* of and to the past has circumvented the *reconfiguring of* universities to *what might yet have been*. The student protest movement highlighted the lack of "democratic breakthrough" and the need for more authentic ways of engaging students as partners (Langa, 2017, p.147). This report focused on an institution wide project of engaging students as partners through feedback on teaching and courses, to advance democratic values where there is an openness to diverse perspectives, navigating movements between the traditional well-known (the lecturer) and the unknown (student). Exploring and writing about the new possibilities of working with students as partners quickly uncovered the 'stuckness' in higher education and the ways in which we seek to maintain and protect patterns of the familiar. The call to free ourselves from the burden of the "one who knows" and becoming

unstuck was made by students during the #Feesmustfall protests. This demonstrated the need to question and rethink "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination" (hooks, 1994, p.4). "Epistemic racism" is how Mackinlay (2016) describes this form of knowledge eradication. With this she invites us to question " what it is we are against, what it is that we are for and what, how are we working toward. " To address this challenge, Waghid and Hibbert (2018, p. 61) argue for a paradigm shift, to include indigenous knowledge through the introduction of a   participatory pedagogy which works alongside other "perspectives, texts and ideas." This would include finding ways of working with students, to harness their own sense of agency through the process.

Students as Partners: A Conceptual Model

Student feedback framed within the new materialist pedagogies opens the possibility to engage across intersections by raising questions that disassemble hierarchies of power that dominate the way we know, think and act.   Teaching with new feminist materialisms is grounded in a relational ontology. Barad's (2007, p. 396) described the intra-active material process as:

> "Taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish. Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming"

The work of Barad (2007) in conjunction with the edited series by Hinton and Treusch (2015) provides new insights into teaching with new feminist materialism when working with students as partners. Understanding and viewing student feedback through the lens of new feminist materialism, questions the fundamental assumptions we hold about the traditional/conventional roles assigned to lecturers and students, calling into question the hierarchical structure deeply embedded in our practice (Hinton & Treusch, 2015). Hinton and Treusch (2015) describe the "materiality of the body as a political substance, a marker of difference through which power relations take effect" (p.2). These power relations can be seen in the intersectionality of race, gender, class, religion, language and sexual orientation, time, place and space (Bozalek et al., 2018) at play in higher education, which disadvantages those previously marginalised still, while privileging a few. Adopting a new feminist materialist approach to student feedback disrupted the notions of hierarchy deeply embedded in our educational system and our classroom practice, between lecturers and students, to move towards co-created knowledge and learn from each other. Bovill (2013), refers to Fraser and Bosanquet (2006, p. 272) who identify this as:

> "a dynamic, emergent and collaborative process of learning for both student and teacher... and a view of the 'teacher and student acting as co-constructors of knowledge" (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006, p. 275).

This implies that there is a measure of collaboration which takes place between the academic staff member and the student in which learning is reciprocal. Current student engagement approaches focused mainly on what students, staff and the university needs to do, in contrast SaP is inherently process-orientated rather than outcomes-driven. Working with SaP offers possibilities for thinking and acting differently, and for effecting a fundamental transformation in higher education (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014), which we so desperately need to achieve in the South African context.

Student as Partners: Reflecting on the Process

At the start of this project I intended to find ways of addressing the contradiction between institutional intent as embedded in the university vision and the student experience through the introduction of student feedback on teaching and courses. I needed to remain cognisant of the potential of traditional student feedback of not returning as a haunting of the *then.* It was important for the purpose this project to consider new ways of engaging academic staff and students. Interestingly, Belluigi (2013) noted that the approach to student feedback and the level of student engagement could often be linked to a lecturer's teaching philosophy and worldview. A workshop was hosted to reflect on student feedback on teaching and courses. Participants in attendance included academic staff (6), students(2) and academic developers(4). The purpose of the workshop was to reflect on the gains and pains of student feedback and to find collective solutions to the possible challenges which emerged. Data was collected through a focus group discussion. I relied on Matthew's (2016) interpretive framing of drawing on constructs to analyse the data of the focus group discussion as theory in relation to practice because scholarship on engaging SaP in teaching and learning is always about practice. For the purpose of this report the following constructs were included in the discussion:
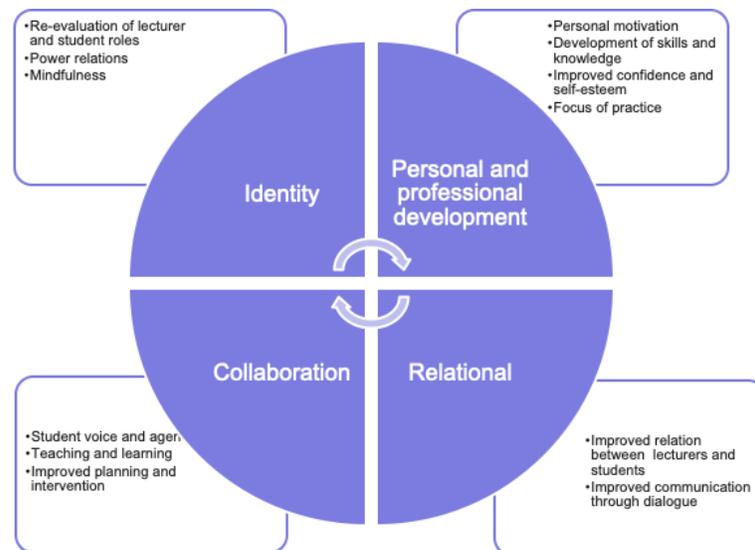

Figure 1   Student Feedback Constructs

Engaging collaboratively presented gains and pains for academic staff and students. Working in partnership assisted in the re-evaluating the **identity** of staff and students. The unique identity of students and academic staff was brought in teaching and learning with students making a significant contribution to the process. Lecturers indicated that they became more mindful of the students and their needs through student feedback. Healey et. al (2014) suggests that student feedback encounter is a starting point for lecturers and students to work together towards new ways of understanding, acting and being. **Personal and professional development** through student feedback had a significant impact on learning and teaching development and motivation of students and staff.   For both lecturers and students the opportunity of learning to learn helped in the development of personal and professional skills, learning and teaching, and employability skills and other attributes necessary to work in collaboration. Working in partnership **enhanced** student engagement through the inclusion voice. Rather than only rely on the lecturer's thinking the process created more opportunity and space for multiple voices and agents. When lecturers and students it open spaces for collective decision making in teaching and learning and possibly for the creation of intervention to support student and lecturer success. There can be no doubt that there is an improvement is the **relational** aspects of working in partnership by shaping the power relationships between students and staff.

Conclusion

As student feedback on teaching and courses gain momentum, exploring new pathways of creating partnerships with students opens opportunities to critically engage with assumptions and structures in higher education which impact practices. The possibilities of working with students as partners holds promise for creating a new culture within teaching and learning and the broader university. A culture in which a multiplicity of voices are appreciated in the becoming of lecturers and students.

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Software development

The software being developed is for student feedback on teaching and courses. The software provides lecturers with an opportunity to include the student voice in the development and improvement of the curriculum and can be used as a student engagement tool. The software has been developed to cultivate knowing, and being', where lecturers and students are interrelated through what they know, how they know and who they are always becoming through student feedback on teaching and courses. Student feedback software is usually designed where the final product is not made visible to the student, **Impendulo (studentfeedback.co.za)**which is Zulu for the **Answer** was created for this purpose. Lecturers will have access to a dashboard and instant reporting while students have access to the course overall feedback.

Support from faculty leadership, such as Heads of Departments, Schools and Programmes, academic staff and the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Teaching and Learning has been critical for the success of the project, in conjunction with the support of the student body, on which this project depends. While CPUT has a policy on student feedback on teaching and courses in place, faculties and academic staff have to undertake to implement feedback within teaching and courses.