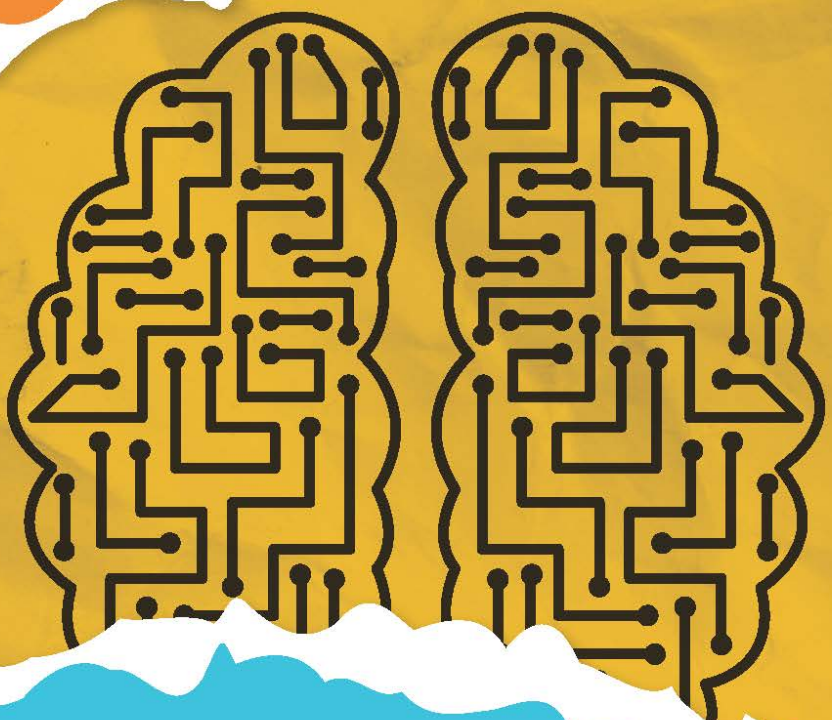
Reimagining South African Higher Education

Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future



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CHAPTER 4

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

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Abstract

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

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

1. Introduction: Inequalities and Inequities Exposed

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

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

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

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

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2. Background and Context: Wits University

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. A Humanising Pedagogical Theoretical Lens

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

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

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3.1. The humanising pedagogy discourse

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

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

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

3.2. Higher education: Student and academic success

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Twin Narratives: Humanising the Theory

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

4.1. Reflective praxis work of Schön

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

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

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

4.2. Personal narrative: Agitating towards social justice

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

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

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

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

4.3. Personal narrative: Enacting care towards transformative change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.1. Humanisation and political ethics of care

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

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

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

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

5.2. Promoting quality and care frameworks towards change

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

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

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

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6. Conclusion

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

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