Pre-service teacher education students' engagement with care and social justice in a service learning module

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Abstract

This study investigates pre-service teacher education students' engagement with service learning at a South African university. The service learning module was premised on a framework of caring and social justice. A critical discourse analysis technique (Fairclough, 2003) along with content analysis and a hybrid form of ethnomethodological analysis (EA) was used to explore students' meaning making. The findings show that students performed mainly as 'technicians' of service who largely misunderstood the purpose and intention of service learning. Students also positioned themselves as observers of the 'other' in a troubled world and took up positions as subjects in the service learning, pathologising the 'diseased other'. In addition, the investigation reveals that students were challenged by service learning as an experienced/experiential curriculum and that for the majority of students there was only a transient development of their personal and professional knowledge.

Introduction

This paper describes a study designed to investigate pre-service teacher education students' engagement with service learning (CSL) at a South African higher education institution. In particular, as primary researcher, I was interested in gaining insight into whether there were any signs of students' sense of social justice and of care in their SL engagement as it had been designed in their curriculum. I argue that such a foundation for SL promotes the idea that learning to become a teacher is learning to serve with a conscience, to serve by way of caring pedagogy. The investigation into student meaning making in a service learning-based module in a teacher education curriculum, was thus focused on investigating how student teachers respond to being asked to learn how to *become* morally interdependent with a selection of communities where they learn to practise community service as *learning* and as *learning to give*.

Implementing service learning founded in care and social justice

The service learning literature abounds with the benefits of SL for higher education students (and to an extent more specifically for teacher education) (see for example Anderson, 1996; Astin & Sax, 1998; Markus, Howard & King, 1993; Rhoads, 1997) There are, however, few examples of service learning invoking a social justice framework. I argue that service learning can be distinguished from other forms of applied learning in community settings, such as community-based work, integrated learning and teaching practice experience by a principle of social justice. Social justice is thus the distinctive characteristic of service learning. Arguing in this vein I, in consultation with my fellow teachers in teacher education, designed a SL curriculum, founded in care and social justice, with an experiential learning foundation. This curriculum was a component of the pre-service teacher education programme and the students were in their final (fourth) year of study.

In consultation with co-teachers in the programme (as the curriculum design team), I argued for a poststructuralist framework of care and social justice for service learning, and drew on Shor's (1992) values for critical education and Noddings' (1984:188) notion of "caring apprenticeships". I worked from the premise that in crafting such a curriculum, the design of classroom pedagogy in the university itself should reflect related principles as it would allow for student-teacher interactions in which students can learn about caring prior to their service learning experiences. Thus it is the responsibility of the higher education teacher to model "caring apprenticeships" in his/her interactions with students so that students can learn by example how "to be present" in their interactions with the "cared-for" (the service recipients) (Noddings, 1984: 25, 26). This was intended to teach students experientially about social justice and the influence of power, ideology, race, and class on education and for extending debates in education for civics and democracy in service learning.

In implementing such a curriculum and pedagogy, I was aware that it might pose problems for students because for many, experience as learning opportunity has been a scarce item. I was concerned that students would not easily transcend their belief in, firstly, the power of the university curriculum 'package' and, secondly, their reliance on highly individualised sociocultural and historical backgrounds that make shared understanding more difficult. I was also uneasy about the pervading influence of a structuralist view of programme design in higher education and especially in teacher education – one that has been teaching students about pedagogical care in an objectified manner in which care has been the object of study and not the object of action. Some of my fellow teachers shared this uneasiness. I surmised that many students would not be able to recognise and identify with relational and reflective forms of knowing that are associated with a curriculum of care. I expected that students would thus be unlikely to conceptualise and understand 'pedagogic care' as a valid form of knowledge and would struggle to practise it in their service learning experiences. I would argue that this is largely as a result of students' learned ideas about educational caring which in my experience has been grounded chiefly in duty and obligation, and not in pursuit of relational caring according to Noddings (1984).

The design of the study into student engagement in service learning

As I wanted to capture, holistically and in sufficient depth, the engagement of teacher education students in service learning, I needed to find a way of discerning students' meaning-making in a way that relied on more than just what they reported and what was observable in their activities. I already had a corpus of data that was readily available in the students' portfolios of evidence (as a composite learning artifact), produced in the course of the module. I reasoned that a critical discourse analysis (CDA) study (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Keller, 2005; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002) would enable a discernment of students' engagement with the service learning experience and reveal the discourses they drew on in making sense of these experiences. My sense was that their discourse would reveal how they went about coming to terms with this major curricular change, and from which discursive means, or systems of meaning, they would draw to construct their experience and make meaning (semiosis). I chose to use Fairclough's (2003) CDA tool, with its three levels of analysis, namely analysing actional, representational and identificational meaning-making, to discern specific aspects of students engagement and meaning making. The tool also allowed me to discern the existing realities or lifeworlds students' invoked - especially in the linguistic expression of their meaning-making – by allowing me to identify the

discourses they drew on in making sense of these experiences and to detect how they positioned themselves in this process – all of which could be sourced from their everyday occurring "talk and text". *Actional* meaning-making served as the basis for distinguishing the subsequent levels of meaning-making and their associated discourse markers. Hence students' *representational* discourse markers, in which they reveal the signs and symbols they use in their meaning-making, and their *identificational* discourse markers, in which they disclose their direction and identification as individuals, flow from their *actional* meaning-making.

I was guided in my choice of data for analysis (from the student portfolios) by Phillips and Hardy (2002) who advocate isolating texts for analysis that would form part of the discourses that make up the phenomenon being investigated. My choice of 'texts' for analysis thus included students' learning journals, photographs they took and collages and educational artefacts they created for curriculum purposes. I ague that although part of curriculum requirements, these "naturally-occurring" texts – as they appeared in the common everyday activities of the students - would be considered good sources of data for discourse analysis as they are examples of language in use. In using these texts I acknowledge that the collages and artefacts could also be considered 'constructed texts'.

In addition to the CDA I also conducted content analysis in *grounded theory* mode (Charmaz, 2002) and an ethnomenthodological analysis of selections of text (Bamberg, 2003, 2004, 2005; Goffman, 1981; Sacks, 1984). The content analysis firstly facilitated a systematic 'summarising' of data through a process of coding and categorising, thus laying the ground for further analysis. The ethnomethodological analysis made possible the detection of students' search for footing and eventual positioning in the process of engaging with service learning. Thus, while analysing the corpus of data for discoursal purposes, I kept in mind that the participants were also creating everyday methods and systems of ordering for practice, and of positioning themselves in this practice – the focus of ethnomethodology. Using the same basis for including data in the CDA, I argued that "talk and texts" for ethnomethodological analysis also occur in everyday practice (Lawrence-lightfoot, 1997; ten Have, 2004). I wanted to uncover the way in which students had engaged within their service learning and how they positioned themselves in their texts (and talk). I reasoned that in the opening paragraphs of their reflective journals, in which they positioned themselves in relation to the service learning, they would use language that revealed this "positioning" (Ribiero, 2006; De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006: 8). They would also show how they calibrated this positioning in their planned actions. In addition, the narrative nature of this section of the student journals aptly captured their individually unique and distinctive use of subjective and personal language in the descriptions and expressions they contained. It was thus a reliable source of information of each student's stance (situation/ position) in the lifeworld of service learning at the institution. It also exemplified the students' engagement with the curriculum of the service learning module specifically. The inferences made in this analysis were supported by the photographs taken by some students, which provided insight into the students' larger cultural realities and unexamined theorising about the world. The photographs were the conceptual and the material 'lenses' by which students made these images, indexing what was of primary importance to them.

The investigation was thus guided by the following primary and secondary research questions:
How do teacher education students engage with service learning?
The following complementary research questions helped in structuring the investigation of the main research question:
What is the discourse of students' first engagement with a service learning module?
How does this discourse reflect their experience of and positioning in the service learning module?

These questions directly address the students' experience – in the way they used language and other mediating codes to show their experience in their everyday "talk and text".

Results of the data analysis process

Once the results of the three forms of analysis were integrated I was able to discern the students' processes of "being" (according to the CDA frame of Fairclough, 2003) and how they situated or "positioned" (Ribiero, 2006, p. 49) themselves in this process (according to the ethnomethodological frame). These ranged from misunderstanding the nature of CSL, to focusing on their fear and shock and responding by 'othering' and pathologising those they came into contact with in their SL experiences. Other students were challenged by the experiential nature of the SL curriculum and separated themselves both physically and emotionally from the world of CSL. Few students were able to identify with a discourse of care, and with the challenges posed by a curriculum in which they have to experience in order to learn. The integrated findings are displayed in Table 1. The discussion that follows concentrates on the five main themes from the integrated data analysis process.

Discussion

1. Students as 'technicians' of service who misunderstand the purpose and intention of service learning

Firstly, it appears as though the majority[1] of students had a flawed understanding of the nature and intention of service learning. As a result they drew primarily on default personal discourses in their meaning-making. Secondly, they tapped into a discourse of service as one-way philanthropy – 'helping the other', and positioned themselves accordingly in their texts. Drawing on this discourse and adopting this stance, the students entered service learning from the privileged, controlled position of volunteer in which they were likely to ignore unequal power relationships (Butin, 2003: 8). This discourse of service in all probability emanates from a background located in a strong religious or family ethos or in outreach organisations such as Lions International, which emphasise 'good works' for the less fortunate. It could also be traced to their strong religious backgrounds or their involvement in outreach clubs/or organisations on campus, which promote ideas of charitable service to the needy, without for example interrogating underlying power issues. This idea of service was thus part of the students' everyday socio-cultural and historical lifeworlds and was a discourse in which they had a voice.

In the results of the EA, I found evidence that the majority of students bring into play this kind

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[1] The data-in-process where this is most apparent is with the content analysis and thirty eight (38) of the forty four (44) students in the sample represent this in their portfolios.

of socio-cultural and historical reality as interpretive framework within which they could make meaning of the service learning. This lifeworld was also the means by which they could find footing that blended with their known (and powerful) discourses as sets of meaning about what philanthropy is and who they are as givers of service. Most students could not transcend this lifeworld, despite interacting with a social justice framework and discourse in the pedagogy of the SL module. Most thus struggled to find their footing and position themselves within a social justice frame as it was unfamiliar to them. They had developed (and were continuing to do so) an identity as Education students who aimed at becoming competent teachers. The incorporation of service and a social justice lens for service did not fit the "web of significance" (Geertz, 1973: 8) that they had created with the semiotic tool available to them. They could not identify with the social justice frame or make meaning of their experiences within it. They found it easier to invoke a charitable, philanthropic frame, with associated discourse/s. The students' inability to utilise a social justice discourse (in which they would for instance interrogate or highlight underlying power issues) highlights the assertion made by Lincoln and Guba (2003:270) that "knowledge of the social world resides in [the] meaning–making mechanisms of the social, mental and linguistic worlds that individuals inhabit". These students' knowledge of a teacher and of education was thus located in the world of education that they occupied and with which they were familiar, their "web of significance". In keeping with their identification with a charitable, philanthropic frame and its associated discourse(s), students then focus on 'giving' service, by for instance detailing the routines and administrative aspects of their service activities. They position themselves as 'technicians', who provide a service, using techniques of interaction with which they were familiar.

An example of this is evident in the case of a White male student, who, when he encounters the Black workers in a shoe-making business at which he offers service, draws on a particular bias or stereotype of Black people as uneducated and unable to think for themselves. This prejudice arises in part from his sociocultural and historical background. He responds by focusing on himself as the giver of service and he positions himself as the saviour-philanthropist, who comes to the rescue of the failing business by putting a system in place to bring order to the business and save it from ruin. In the CDA it is evident that this discourse is represented. The student's resulting actions in taking charge of the process of production and the ordering system used in the business is reflected in his representational meaning-making. The discourse markers in his descriptions of what he did, substantiated by the photograph he includes, reveal his identificational meaning-making with the teacher as development agent. This student, like many others in this study, appear to conform to what Kahne, Westheimer and Rogers (2000) classify as a participatory citizen in the service learning literature, who are eager to make a contribution, but only concentrate on a selective aspect in service and tend to adopt the attitude of one who is more knowledgeable than those being served. As is highlighted in the literature, a paternalistic attitude like this prevents most students from understanding the reciprocity inherent in service learning and they do not recognise or interrogate hegemonic practices in their service and do not invest in a relational ethic with members of the community.

2. Students as observers of the 'other' in a troubled world

Overwhelmingly though, the majority of students appear to revert to a discourse of the 'other' as different, and therefore strange and fearful – especially the 'diseased other', the 'racial other' and also the 'economically disadvantaged other'. Once again, students' use of this kind of discourse

can be traced to their sociocultural and historical backgrounds. In cases where students have been socialised by parents from a racially divided past and educated within a separated education systems, the remnants of this past influence remain and shape their current realities. For example, the foundation of apartheid, and its accompanying racially segregated education system, taught White children in many schools, as witnessed in especially social studies textbooks of schools, that African people were intellectually and morally inferior, that they were offensive and violent and were to be feared [2]. As most of the students are heirs of this system their utterances reveal that they take refuge in this discourse in their meaning-making. In making sense hereof I drew on the work of De Fina et al. (2006:8) who describe authors who work in identity research and who use discursive tools: "Authors investigate the linguistic mechanisms and discourse strategies that allow individual speakers to place themselves in positions of acceptance or rejection, for example, of ideologies of race (and) gender…". In this study I investigated how the students either struggle to find their position vis-à-vis 'the other', or do not even address it reflectively – they merely 'other' as a way of being, with their own as the centre of an 'only' life world. In their discourse a sense of superiority is pervasive.

A prime example hereof is Elzette[3], whose use of a mask[4] as metaphorical device to position herself, is a prime example of how human development and learning is mediated by tool-use (language and artefacts) and that tools are semiotic. They create meaning in social structures (Lemke, 1995, 1998). The mask in Elzette's portfolio can be interpreted as having a double meaning: it is firstly a physical barrier to protect her from TB[5] and it is also a representation of her greatest fear in service learning, the fear of contracting TB and also to integrate with the world of the diseased; the significance hereof plays itself out throughout her work. She cannot wear the mask as she fears it will cause a separation between herself and the children, and so she does not wear it. Ironically as the mask represents her greatest fear it also causes the separation she so much wishes to avoid. It causes a separation in herself: she is torn between her strongest need (to wear the mask) and her professional obligation (not wear it to be a 'caring' teacher). So she chooses to wear an invisible mask, by aligning herself and identifying with an objectified, duty-bound form of caring in her service activities. Her learning in service learning is thus mediated by her use of tools in her environment (language use and artefacts), and these signify meaning for her. Precisely because the tools are semiotic (they create meaning as part of the social structure), her language and artefacts also create meaning for her in the interaction with the children. The mask (and her language) thus only allows her to make meaning positioned as observer of the 'other' in a troubled world.

The situation of this student is similar to many others in this study who cannot cross their own sociocultural and historical boundaries and who then adopt the position objectifying the 'other' and draw on this discourse, in describing their experiences. Most of the students focus on aspects

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[2] I acknowledge that this is not a phenomenon particular to South Africa only and can be found in many other societies across the world.

[3] Pseudonyms have been allocated.

[4] This student offered service at a hospital in which the children were being treated for drug resistant and multi drug resistant tuberculosis and her portfolio of evidence is dominated by a green surgical mask. The mask remains a powerful and pervading symbol throughout this student's portfolio.

[5] I acknowledge that this action is wholly understandable as TB is highly contagious but must point out that students themselves chose this site at which to work.

such as their fear, their shock at what they encounter, especially with respect to the diseases they are faced with in the course of their service (such as TB and AIDS), and the conditions (poverty, inadequate facilities) within the contexts in which they offer service. This focus indicates their struggle to find their footing in situations that they have not encountered previously or have been conditioned to avoid. In identifying with their personal discourses, students positioned themselves in their own life worlds and practice an objectified form of caring for those who need help in the world of service learning. In the process they also classify the two worlds, by according normative status to each and then locate themselves in the morally and materially superior of the two. I argue that this is as a result of students learned ideas about educational caring which has been grounded in duty and obligation, instead of being grounded in relationships, as proposed by Noddings (1984). Students then focus on the problem/s in the service learning community and neglect "to be present" in their interactions with the "cared-for" (the service recipients) (Noddings, 1984: 25, 26). They thus position themselves as observers of a troubled world more than as caregivers in a troubled world, through their practice of service learning. The significance hereof for the practice of SL is that because students find it to be a frightening, unfamiliar experience, they need both time and support to help them adjust.

3. Students as subjects in service learning, pathologising the 'diseased other'

Significantly, the discourse of pathologising, coupled with 'othering', dominates in the meaning-making processes and positioning of students. From the CDA and EA it is evident that the greater majority of students appear to seek safety and distance in a discourse of pathology of the marginalized and disempowered in society, which can be a descriptor for the people with whom they interact in their service activities. These students focus on themselves as subjects in the service learning, and are unable to see the SL from the perspective of the served, despite this aspect being emphasised from the beginning of the module. In many cases students are unable to understand the dynamics of the situation of those they offer service to or recognise their wealth of knowledge and skills. These aspects were also interrogated during in-class reflections. Students then tend to view the lives of the service recipients as the effects of a social disease and in turn attribute their disempowerment, marginalization and poverty to personal deficiencies, such as laziness and a lack of ambition. This is in line with a common trend found by researchers in the U.S.A. that White students in service learning often attribute a lack of progress by people of colour to apathy and laziness (see for example Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Sleeter, 1995). In cases where students worked with people affected by HIV and AIDS, they concentrate primarily on the actual disease they are able to observe and attribute the disempowerment and marginalisation of the served to personal deficiencies, such as a lack of exercising control over their lives and sexual promiscuity.

For example, in the study students revealed their backgrounds in their actions towards the economically-disadvantaged, racial 'other' or of the 'diseased other' when they worked with those affected by HIV and AIDS. In many of such cases the discourse markers in students' representational and identificational meaning-making, point to the students' identifying with the image of paternalistic, superior 'giver of service'. Their discourse also highlights their inability to see things from the perspective of the service recipients that they 'other' and pathologise. In conjunction with the EA of these students work, the CDA reveals that the students tend to focus on themselves, in relation to what they find at the service sites (such as the inadequacies of facilities); they position themselves as the 'other', and use comparison as a boundering device. Their privileged, sheltered backgrounds

dominate their service learning experiences as well, and block their ability to look beyond their own lived realities and see the effects of social (in)justice on Black youth or those affected by HIV and AIDS in South African society. They have created borders around themselves and those they offer service to, and in the process trap themselves and those they serve in two distinct worlds. Despite creating the borders themselves, they are do not seem to clearly 'see' the lines separating themselves from those they serve and thus cannot take steps to breach these borders.

4. Students' engagement challenged by service learning as an experienced/experiential curriculum

The students' histories, and in particular their educational histories, also inform the view of the teacher/ teaching and education that they most identify with and thus appropriate and use in the course of their service learning engagement. Almost all the students engage with a discourse of curriculum that has to be learned in a formal, 'academic' way in order to achieve results. They find great difficulty in engaging in a curriculum through experiential learning, and revert to a discourse of education with which they are familiar: curriculum/learning/education as a highly regulated, ordered process overseen by a competent teacher. Such a teacher is uninvolved, objective, non-partisan and a rational provider of a particular service. This image of a competent teacher is comparable with a "domesticated" teacher (Hinchley, in Whang & Waters, 2001), who is described as being compliant, commanding, uninspired, apolitical and voiceless. Such competent (or domesticated) teachers and students are most at home in traditional education, where there are set routines, a conventional, predictable curriculum and specifically assigned roles for each party.

I argue that this view of the teacher and teaching can be traced to a number of factors in the students' lived realities. I assert that the first of these is the legacy of an authoritarian, traditionally Afrikaans higher education institution, of which these students have been a part for three or more years[6], and in which most at the time of this inquiry, had had little exposure to investigative, inquiry-based and critical thinking to address the status quo in their Education coursework[7]. The second factor is the structuralist frame for teacher education in which this study was located, with its roots in the competency-based models of the 1970s and 1980s. This combined with the newly introduced outcomes-based education (OBE) model of the country, in which teacher and pupil performance is emphasised as observable outcomes. When teacher educators in this institution were compelled to adopt an OBE model, many struggled to find their footing in this new discourse and reverted to the discourses associated with the past competency-based models, resulting in a hybrid system in which teacher competence was objectified and even reified and in which demonstrable performance assumed centre stage.

I argue that these have been powerful factors in shaping the service learning students' views of education; views which pervade their discourses in their communication about the service learning. The first three years of the students' socialisation in education especially as teachers, was within this overarching frame, with academic modules comprising the majority of the curriculum, in which critical, experiential learning was limited. It was thus extremely disconcerting for the students, accustomed to a discourse of competence and observable performance in higher education,

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[6] Some students were enrolled in the BEd degree, a 4 year undergraduate teacher education degree, while others, who had already completed an undergraduate professional degree in another faculty (e.g. B Sc or B Com), were enrolled in the PGCE, as a one year capping teaching qualification.

[7] In making this assertion I acknowledge that these are my views and that there may be other views.

which largely mirrored their schooling experiences, to be confronted in the final year of their
teacher education with both pedagogy and discourse they did not recognise, welcome or understand.
Consequently, when students were faced with a learning environment and curriculum in which
they were expected to learn by experience through engagement in service learning, they could not
do so and thus had no voice to express their learning in these terms. Instead they once more took
refuge in a discourse of education familiar to them.

This was most evident in the examples of the students who offered their services at organisations
with an environmental education focus. These students mainly employed their disciplinary content
knowledge in enacting the service learning, and also extract from the SL only those aspects that
are valuable for the study of their disciplinary content knowledge. They thus isolate their knowledge
(and consequently their further learning) from wider social, cultural, political and ideological
issues in society. The process of CDA enabled me to capture more accurately the students' meaning-
making during tool-use in a social setting and also highlighted the dialectical relationship that
discourses have with macro social structures (Fairclough, 2003; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter,
2004; Van Dijk, 1997b). It also alluded to the relationship between the tool-use, such as the use
of a particular type of curriculum, with macro social structures, such as a past competency-based
educational system in combination with a present OBE education system.

In addition, the EA of these students' opening paragraphs indicates a focus on themselves and the
administrative details of their tasks. They struggle to find their footing in the text in the introduction
to the framework of the service learning module within which the critical teacher who works for
social justice is promoted. They instead calibrate their positions solely with the aid of their
disciplinary knowledge. In this search for a footing, the students identify more with the knowledgeable
and skilled (such as geography/ English language) teacher and position themselves as disassociated
observers of SL. I argue that his positioning is evidence of the students' inability to move beyond
the boundaries of their disciplines, and this then becomes their lens for viewing service learning.
This does not change over the service learning experience. Their identity is thus most closely
aligned with their individual academic disciplines and they practice a kind of civic engagement
associated with "exclusionary citizenship", as described in the service learning literature (McTighe
Musil, 2003). For some students there were changes but these changes largely tended to be
temporary/ transient. In addition, the pervasive influence of a performance-based higher education
system and OBE, and their associated discourses on students, are evident at all levels of their
meaning-making, alignment (search for footing) and positioning. These students attempt to display
their competence by performing and demonstrating their knowledge in a measurable way for the
course teacher in the service learning and for the supervisor at the organisation. They thus create
deliverables in the language-speak of OBE that they could display in their portfolio as evidence
that they had learned and engaged with service learning.

5 The temporary/transient development of students' personal and professional knowledge through service learning

Despite all the difficulties associated with service learning as a challenging environment for student
learning, the results of each stage of the CDA and EA analysis indicate the potential for students
to benefit from it in two key areas. Firstly, it is evident from the CDA that service learning creates
an enabling environment for students in which they can draw on existing knowledge frameworks
to make new personal and professional knowledge. Secondly, the results also point to the value

of service learning for the promotion of positive outcomes, such as subjective, relational caring for teacher education students. For example, the discourse of objectified caring from a sense of duty, changes for a few students over the duration of their service learning experience, and they seem to be more open to a discourse of care as personal development. In part, their references to the influence of the coursework and the prescribed readings in the module, as well as the process of reflection on experience encouraged in the service learning module seem to have stimulated this. Although there were indications of some changes in the discourses on which students drew, as is evident from their actional, representational and identificational meaning-making, it is not clear if these have been appropriated sufficiently to effect long-term changes.

It is here that the combination of the EA with the CDA is invaluable as complementary analytic devices. Although the students' discursive meaning-making may point to a heightened awareness of societal and justice issues and a consciousness-raising in this respect, it is in their foci and positioning that they provide real evidence of their (in)ability to "gain a voice" (Ribiero, 2006, p. 52) within this new discourse. The EA indicates that most students still focus on themselves and their own life worlds, and position themselves in opposition to the troubled world of service learning. In the micro-analysis of the introductions to their journals, the majority struggle to align themselves freely with the world of service learning as practice in the field, although they may do so with SL in the lecture room of the university. I argue that it is most likely that this temporary conversion will not last for much longer than the duration of the module. When students leave the milieu where social justice is emphasised, they are likely to revert to their accepted and entrenched ways of thinking. The data I have gathered in this study support this. The appropriation of a new discourse, and the strength of student voice within it, requires careful and sustained nurturing by higher education teachers if it is to become part of the established knowledge framework of students. The social context (which includes the classroom relationships and context) is the primary landscape in which users of a particular discourse do or do not become users of other discourses in the process of change. The danger is that if the conditions of the students' social context do not promote sustained and encompassing change then it is likely that the discourse of social justice, which accompanies such change, will also diminish. Without a firm foundation in the students' interpretive frameworks and discoursal patterns, social justice and working towards creating a more just and caring society may eventually disappear altogether.

Many of the students 'texts' reveal utterances of 'othering' and pathologising before they even get to the service sites. Some, on encountering the service sites do address their misconceptions and many begin to interact engagingly with the community members at the sites. Likewise the discourse markers in their texts also provide evidence of how they draw on existing knowledge frameworks in making new personal and professional knowledge about themselves as teachers and how they attempt to identify with the discourses promoted in the module (such as that of the caring, critical teacher in service of society).

However, the EA of these student's opening paragraphs indicate a strong focus on themselves and their own emotions and taking a position as 'other' in relation to the world of service learning. This is evidence of how discourse thus plays a role in possibly changing social structures but also mirrors and reproduces them. Despite this positioning, the significance of this, particularly for teacher education, is that it is possible even in a short period to stimulate student thinking about issues outside the student's frame of reference, through the experiential learning provided by

service learning, and the concepts introduced in these modules. The challenge lies in ensuring that the discourse of social justice and teacher as change agent, and the practice of critical thinking, become more entrenched in the students' frames of reference, so that they do not revert to petrified ways of thinking when the vicissitudes of life as a teacher in a harsh world overwhelm *them*. This is unlikely unless the rest of the curriculum reinforces it.

Exceptions in the study

In the course of this study there were however two notable exceptions. One of these students had grown up in a multicultural environment, grounded in an ethos of tolerance and care, and the second, a mature, older student, had worked in a variety of multicultural community and school contexts. These students did not seem to struggle to find their footing in the service learning and aligned themselves easily with the discourse of the module, namely social justice and culturally relevant teaching. Their work also shows evidence of the actions of a caring professional. Both students thus have a voice and agency in this discourse and experience and are able to find their footing and position themselves with greater security.

Conclusion

In this study I have shown how students, instead of appropriating the discourses promoted in this module, drew primarily upon their existing personal realities and their accompanying discourses in making meaning and in positioning themselves. A large portion of research in teacher education attests to the difficulties in transforming pre-service teacher education students' deeply held beliefs and knowledge frameworks (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). This study has highlighted that teacher educators should pay far more attention to students' processes of identity-construction, deconstruction and (re)construction in the course of students learning.

Secondly, I assert that even when transformative, liberatory discourse and practice is introduced in a component of the teacher education programme, it is improbable that it will bring about changes in students' deeply held beliefs in the course of one module. In my view more coherence and alignment with a transformative agenda and discourse *in whole programmes* are required so that these discourses are infused throughout the students' period of education and training.

Thirdly, I would argue for more investigations into how higher education teachers address issues of identity and positioning in SL to add to the body of rigorous, in-depth, innovative and critical research. This I argue would go a long way towards building a theory of service learning for South Africa. I have seen little published research in the South African context that engages with service learning within a social justice framework and that deeply interrogates what happens during the process of student engagement in SL (there are some exceptions). I believe that the SA service learning research agenda should be broadened to include investigations into how students who have been exposed to SL in their higher education have been influenced over a period of time. The questions posed could be, "Have long-term changes been effected in students three or five years after their exposure to community service learning? If so, what is the nature of these changes and what would be the most insightful ways of investigating these?".

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