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Foregrounding relational dimensions of curriculum and learning design in online and hybrid learning environments

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Abstract

This paper reflects on a collaborative intervention implemented by an Education lecturer and Writing Centre staff at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) before and during the COVID-19 lockdown. The migration to emergency remote teaching was destabilising and exposed and exacerbated existing student inequalities. This collaborative intervention involved formative feedback being provided by writing tutors to students in Honours modules as part of a strategy of embedding academic literacies development within the modules. We used a Design Based Research (DBR) approach combined with collaborative action research. Key elements of a response-able pedagogy (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) and Tronto's political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013) were drawn on to explore our curriculum design principles. We argue that online and hybrid curriculum design needs to consider affective dimensions of learning such as trust and care. Building webs of support into curriculum and assessment design constitutes a necessary element of a just pedagogy.

Keywords: academic literacies, curriculum design, relational design, response-able pedagogies, tutors, writing centres

Introduction

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) is located in Cape Town, South Africa, a country with one of the highest rates of inequality in the world. UWC is a previously disadvantaged university that has increasingly become recognised for research engagement and teaching excellence (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2019; O'Connell, 2010; Pokpas, et al., 2021). The student body is culturally and linguistically diverse, with many international students, particularly from various African countries. A high proportion of South African students come from a low socio-economic background and have had a poor educational foundation. Many of them are first generation students on bursaries or scholarships (Cooper, 2015).

When higher education institutions were forced to shut down all physical contact due to COVID-19 in March 2020, they underwent a rapid migration to emergency remote teaching and assessment. The rapid, unanticipated, and disruptive impact which the pandemic had on families

and communities exposed and exacerbated the inequalities in our country and in the UWC community (Badat, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2021). Restrictive lockdown conditions deepened unemployment and poverty for most South Africans.

During lockdown, students were denied access to campuses and had to work at their homes. Those in residences had to relocate to their homes in a variety of areas. Once students were relocated to their home environments, pre-existing student inequalities were exposed and exacerbated. One of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown conditions was that students who were most marginalised already were pushed out further on the margins through their lack of access to campus, reliance on online teaching and learning, and potential isolation both socially and physically. Although the capacity of online connectivity enabled a wide range of learning activities, the COVID-19 context exacerbated the pre-existing digital inequalities in teaching and learning (Badat, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2022; Mphungose, 2020).

Many students who traditionally accessed technology from campus during the lockdown struggled to connect to online teaching programmes from their homes. Most students and academic staff experienced the added frustration of electricity loadshedding due to inadequate power in the country, which disrupted connectivity. Although the provision of devices and data to UWC students did enable a level of access, this access also depended on other socio-economic and geographical factors that influenced connectivity and access to the internet. Zheng and Walsham (2021: 5) assert that bridging digital inequality requires not only technologies and skill training, but 'associative interventions and supportive networks that address some of the underlying vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups'.

Furthermore, the remote learning conditions resulted in social isolation and fragmentation of the learning programme and people's lives. For many students, working from home blurred the boundaries between academic and domestic life. The social isolation that students experienced when removed from an academic and student community as well as the harsh inequalities in students' experiences call for humanised and relational forms of learning design which are responsive to students' diverse contexts and needs (EDUCAUSE, 2021).

This paper reflects on a collaborative intervention that was implemented over a five-year period, which involved Writing Centre tutors giving formative feedback to students in three Bachelor of Education Honours modules, and the embedding of student academic literacies development within the modules. The intervention started in 2017 and continued into the COVID-19 lockdown period in 2020 and 2021. Students in the Honours module were school educators who were studying part-time. As returning postgraduates, most students were out of touch with academic reading and writing practices even before the COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, they had limited access to the university's academic support services, such as the Writing Centre, which had to be accessed during formal working hours. These students were on the margins of the mainstream teaching and learning programme of the university which is focused mainly on full-time undergraduate students.

Writing centres, according to Archer and Richards (2011), tend to be placed on the margins of institutions. The UWC Writing Centre has its roots in a dominant model of Writing Centre

practice in South Africa which is a de-contextualised writing support service where students come for assistance outside of their disciplinary teaching and learning context (Collett & Dison, 2019). This assistance is based largely on individual consultations with students, where writing tutors hold face-to-face consultations with individuals or groups of students about a draft of an essay or assignment. Historically at UWC, tutors' engagement with the writing task is not contextualised in relation to the curriculum. In most cases, because students come individually, the Centre is not briefed on the task by the lecturer. When this does happen, it tends to be a one-way interaction without dialogical engagement about the task. Before the pandemic, the work of the Centre was largely housed in the physical writing-centre building. Increasingly the need for supporting lecturers with the embedding of students' academic literacies within course curriculum and assessment design has been acknowledged as part of the role of the Centre (Collett & Dison, 2019).

The project of integrating formative feedback in the curriculum

This paper shares insights from a collaborative project, involving an Education lecturer and Writing Centre staff (Coordinator and tutors) at the University of the Western Cape. The project was aimed at facilitating development of students' academic literacies within the curriculum of B.Ed Honours modules. Collaboration between the Education lecturer and Writing Centre staff began in 2017, when the lecturer engaged the support of the Writing Centre coordinator and a number of tutors, in providing a greater level of integrated support to her B. Ed Honours classes. The classes have been small, ranging from 10 to 25 students. Through the collaboration between the lecturer and the Writing Centre, the Centre was drawn into the heart of the teaching and learning process in the module rather than operating on the margins. This took place through tutors' involvement in formative feedback processes embedded in the curriculum design and through the ongoing broader collaborative process of engagement between the lecturer, coordinator and tutors. This small pilot has aimed to build up a sound practice of embedding academic literacies in course design, which can contribute to practice and research in this area (see Collett & Dison, 2019).

A central feature driving the design of this course was the deepening of formative assessment through peer, tutor, and lecturer feedback and the embedding of the development of student academic literacies. Formative feedback was provided on a number of scaffolded tasks leading up to a final summative take-home assessment task. Prior to the pandemic, feedback in these courses was given online via Turnitin. However, during the pandemic and as a result of our collaborative reflection on practice, greater opportunities were created for online interaction through the use of synchronous platforms such as Google Drive and Google Meet for students, tutors, and the lecturer. Writing Centre tutors were not postgraduates students from the Education faculty, but came from various disciplinary backgrounds. Their feedback focused on academic literacy elements of the task, while peers and the lecturer focused on both content and structure of the assessment task. For example, tutors did not give feedback on the educational theories in the module. Rather they gave feedback on *how* the students related theory to the

practices in the students' schools. Furthermore, their feedback was contextualised within the specific disciplinary field of the course as mediated by the lecturer.

The module already had an infrastructure set up for the provision of online, formative feedback before the COVID-19 online turn. While technology did enable a level of feedback and support to students, this support was not uniform. In our intervention, we were aware that there was unequal access and use of ICTs among students from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. We were thus mindful of using a range of ICT platforms to allow for varying data and bandwidth resources. Moll (2004) argues for curriculum responsiveness which 'entails accommodating the diversity of socio-cultural realities of students, by developing a wider variety of instructional strategies and learning pathways' (Moll, 2004: 4). We were conscious that the curriculum and assessment design needed to build a web of interpersonal and online connectivity as a learning community and that we ensured continuity and progression in learning, to support knowledge acquisition (Morrow, 1994, 2007).

During COVID-19 emergency remote teaching, the process of embedded opportunities for feedback in the curriculum was continued in a similar form as before. Before the lockdown, tutors had met face-to-face with the group of students allocated to them after each assignment to give general feedback and engage with students. Under remote conditions, these meetings took place through online meeting platforms.

Furthermore, during COVID-19 the interaction between the tutors and students took on additional dimensions of care. The nature of the students' need for care shifted and the tutors were required to be more attentive to the psycho-social elements of their interaction with students. Through ongoing reflection on our practice of implementing this innovation as a small professional learning community of tutors, the Writing Centre Coordinator, and the lecturer, we were able to refine the curriculum and learning design principles and practices over a number of years. The research methodology and theoretical streams that informed the course curriculum and learning design are elaborated on below.

Methodology

We used a Design Based Research (DBR) approach combined with a collaborative action research design to gather data and refine design principles in an ongoing way (Herrington & Reeves, 2011). Design-based research 'integrates the development of solutions to practical problems in learning environments with the identification of reusable design principle' (Herrington, et al., 2007: 1). Both DBR and collaborative action research involved us in an ongoing iterative cycle of action, data gathering, reflection, refinement of design principles and planning for improved action.

Our qualitative research approach was informed by both an interpretivist and critical, emancipatory paradigm. The epistemological approach of an interpretivist paradigm fitted with the nature of our study, which was concerned with the meanings participants gave to their actions within the social context (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Our goal coming from a critical, emancipatory paradigm was not just to explain or understand society but to change it (Patton, 2002).

Our collaborative action research approach included an emphasis on action learning and action research with a focus on enhancing social justice pedagogy and promoting change (Zuber-Skeritt, 2002, 2011). Participants and researchers were integrally involved in the process of conceptualising and initiating the research together with other actors such as tutors and students. Collaborative action research included ongoing and iterative cycles of action learning and research between the tutors, the lecturer and the director of the Writing Centre via Google meet during lockdown conditions. These professional learning community (PLC) meetings provided opportunities for collaborative reflection on practice, data generation and the extracting of key design principles to inform future action and curriculum design.

Our research site included three B. Ed Honours classes over a two-year period between 2020 and 2023. Participants in the research process were the lecturer, selected students from each of the classes that consented to participate in the research, and three cohorts of between two to three tutors per year, as well as the Coordinator of the Writing Centre.

Qualitative and participatory methods of data collection and analysis were used to collect and reflect on data in an ongoing way. They included the following: Pre-and post-course online Google surveys, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methods of data generation, semi-structured focus group and individual interviews, data gathered from professional learning community (PLC) reflections, individual reflective journals, tutor narratives, and documentary analysis. The data collection strategy was guided by and related to the cycles inherent to the collaborative action research and DBR models used. Data collection and analysis occurred reiteratively throughout the study and were flexibly related to the need of the research process.

Data analysis proceeded through several iterative cycles and processes. Data analysis, according to Fossey, et al. (2002), is the process that focuses on constant reassessing, integrating, and understanding data to make meaning. In various iterations of action and research, we participated in processes of data reduction and analysis. In both the data collection and data analysis process we were mindful of building in several steps and measures to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of our research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards and requirements of the university.

Humanising and relational dimensions informing the curriculum and learning design

The intervention originated as a strategy to embed the development of academic literacies in the curriculum (see Collett & Dison, 2019). Through ongoing reflection on our practice, we began to focus on the relational aspects of the practices that were being embedded in the curriculum. During remote teaching and learning due to COVID-19, the need to build in support, scaffolding of learning and connection with the students became even more pressing. Moreover, these practices needed to be built into the curriculum in order to be sustainable and have maximum impact.

Four conceptual streams informed our approach to curriculum design and embedded formative feedback practices. These are the political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013); the

concept of 'response-able' pedagogy (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017); approaches related to enhancing pedagogical and occupational well-being (Collett, 2013; Collett, et al., 2021; O'Brien, 2021); and the value of working in professional learning communities (Carpenter, 2017; Hord, 1997, 2004). These pedagogical approaches are based on a relational worldview with an emphasis on care.

Care ethics refers to the compelling moral obligation to attend to and meet the 'needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility' (Held, 2006: 10). It is based on a relational ontology and is premised on both the moral and practical dimensions of care (Tronto, 2013). Under the extremely difficult conditions of remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, a pedagogical approach that is infused with an ethic of care becomes even more pertinent.

Ensuring social justice practices towards a response-able pedagogy would require what Bozalek and Zembylas (2017: 3) refer to as an orientation towards justice at the societal level that 'nurtures relational values such as care, compassion, respect, and solidarity'. Social justice pedagogies therefore need to create spaces in higher education that nurture these relational values (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). Bozalek and Zembylas' (2017) response-able pedagogy draws on Tronto's (1993; 2013) political ethics of care infusing it into feminist, new materialist studies (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1992, 2016). A new materialist approach recognises the agency of non-human beings, such as other species, objects, and technology together with humans which have an impact on each other and the world through their intra-actions. Response-able pedagogies constitute relational processes through which social, political, and material dimensions are entangled together in processes and practices in higher education. For example, students, lecturers, tutors, texts, face-to-face and online comings-together are "rendered capable" through each other to bring about social transformation. In this paper the intra-actions with material dimensions, mainly relate to what was rendered capable through technology as this was primarily the means of engagement between 2020 and 2022. The elements of attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility and being rendered capable inform a response-able pedagogy. We will explore these concepts in relation to our project below.

Prilleltensky (2005: 57) argues that 'relational well-being is reflected in the presence of supportive relationships, which derive from successful experiences of nurturance and attachment, and is promoted by empathy and opportunities to give and receive caring and compassion'. O'Brien (2021), drawing on two different frames of human flourishing, namely care relations and social justice approaches, argues that both these approaches can work powerfully in education to foster and prioritise human flourishing. She calls for a pedagogy of 'inreach and outreach' which requires 'seeing teacher and student well-being as inherently relational, as open to human vulnerability, and for a need for compassionate love' (O'Brien, 2021: 45). She proposes that this dynamic model can help us to explore and understand the relationship between '(in)equality, (in)justice in the social contexts of life and also care and concern for well/ill-being at the level of the self and the other' (2021: 46). Within the COVID-19 context, she highlights the importance

of both the collective and personal and the need to hold the balance between the 'inner and outer, the self and the world' (2021: 46).

A key element of the curriculum design in the B.Ed Honours modules was to strengthen learning through forming collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) in both a face-to-face and online environment. Emphasis was placed on how we work together to support each other. Here the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on learning through communities of practice helps to inform how learning is socially constructed through participation in a community with a common learning need. Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) according to Hord (1997, 2004) and Carpenter (2017) should include the following characteristics: shared practice, collaborative inquiry, supportive conditions, collective learning and application of learning, a shared vision and values and shared leadership. A number of PLCs were formed - the class as a whole, student groups, and a PLC involving the lecturer and Writing Centre staff.

Reflection on the humanising and relational elements and principles that emerged out of and informed our practices

In this section we use the key elements of a response-able pedagogy (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) to organise and explore curriculum and learning design principles that informed and arose from our iterative processes of practice and reflection. We also draw on the theoretical streams of a political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013); well-being, and professional learning communities which informed our practice. We focused on the affective, cognitive, and organisational dimensions of our curriculum, assessment and learning design and highlight key design principles.

Attentiveness

Attentiveness in pedagogy 'involves the ability to pay due attention, to read, or listen with discernment and care to what is and what is not being expressed' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 67). Robinson (2011: 853) argues that there is a need for 'a longer-term commitment of listening and responding to the needs of those who are excluded and marginalised … and therefore vulnerable'. She uses listening to mean 'not just hearing the words that are spoken, but being attentive to and understanding the concerns, needs and aims of others in the dialogue' (Robinson, 2011: 847). For a response-able pedagogy, engagements across differences and the form that they take are very important. These engagements require the ability to be attentive, to listen, to be open and respectful and to observe just practices in collective spaces (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017).

In our project we were attentive to the students' particular needs as part-time honours students for developing academic literacies. In order to identify students' needs, tutors met with students both online and face-to-face after the hard lockdown to identify what their particular individual needs were. Google Drive was used to elicit student feedback and the aspects they required feedback on. In addition, students were requested to highlight in a written message to

tutors the areas they needed feedback on. Students, the lecturer, and Writing Centre staff maintained a continuity of attention to each other through the use of multiple contact platforms as they juggled their academic and domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, access to recordings of meetings and lectures provided the opportunity asynchronously for staff, faculty and students to catch-up or deepen their understanding of issues raised in online meetings or the lecture. In an online PLC engagement, Mpho said:

> 'My attention is split with the kids here. Is it ok if I just listen in? I can ask questions or contribute meaningfully later via email.'
> Ruth, '… That's fine. You can watch the video when you have time if you want and then ask questions to clarify.' (PLC engagement, August 2021)

We also realised that the facilitation of academic literacies development needed to be embedded within the curriculum and assessment design of the module. This was based on two factors. Firstly, the honours students, pre-COVID-19, did not have access to place- and time-bound support services of the university, such as the Writing Centre. Secondly, our understanding of students' development of academic literacies was that it needs to take place within disciplinary contexts (Lea & Street, 1998; Jacobs, 2021).

Attentiveness to students' needs was met through providing formative feedback on scaffolded writing tasks building up to a complex research essay and the provision of formative feedback by peers and Writing Centre tutors. One of the tutors, Mpho commented that having planning conversations with students supported attentiveness, she said,

> 'I found that encouraging students to plan their essays first before they start writing really helps in that they can (1) answer the questions completely and (2) achieve cohesion and coherence' (PLC engagement, August 2021).

Scaffolding assessment tasks created multiple opportunities to receive attentive feedback, which was facilitated through a range of technological platforms, such as Google Drive and Turnitin. When universities moved into emergency remote teaching, the structure of the integrated, formative feedback tasks and the engagement between students and tutors through technology facilitated continuity of learning and the ability to be attentive to supporting the needs of students. In the light of the destabilisation of the COVID-19 context, tutors were required to be more attentive to the psycho-social elements of their interaction with students. For example, the tutors found that as students felt more vulnerable during the lockdown period they tended to make additional contact online. Iris, one of the tutors, took particular care to ascertain how her students were receiving the feedback. Concerned that 'the feedback might overwhelm or not be well understood, [she] wrote an email or sent the student a WhatsApp text to reassure them' (PLC engagement, August 2020).

Within the course, there was an emphasis on fostering a culture of attentiveness and trust among the lecturer, the students, and tutors. At the beginning of the course, the lecturer negotiated a set of behavioural and thinking norms with the students. This included guidelines for giving and receiving feedback. These are in essence based on attentiveness to affective factors and care for the other person. These norms involve paying attention to what the person is trying to achieve in their writing and assisting them to do that more effectively, rather than imposing generic rules and conventions (Molloy, et al., 2012; Collett & Dison, 2019).

A fundamental aspect of attentiveness is attentive listening (Tronto, 1993, 2013, Sevenhuijsen, 2003). Bourgault (2016: 318) argues that 'listening is an embodied act'. Communication relies not only on verbal communication but on subtleties of facial expression, hand gestures, posture and eye contact amongst other physical means of communication (Bourgault, 2016). Metlevskiene (2011) refers to research on the important role of embodiment and embodied interaction in facilitating learning and poses a question as to whether embodied elements of interaction are possible in online learning environments. In online meeting platforms, it was our experience that being able to switch one's video camera on, helped to provide some of the sensory information of a face-to-face setting. However, many students were not in a position to do so because of data constraints or lack of private space. Multiple interactions using various technological modes encouraged relational engagements which worked to counter the isolation and detachment which could characterise online study.

Principles underlying practices of attentiveness could include:

- Being attentive to the nature of students' academic literacy needs.
- Being attentive to the development of student academic literacies within the course curriculum and assessment design.
- Being attentive to issues of inclusion or exclusion in relation to language, race, gender, technological resources, and connectivity etc., and their influence on participation by students, lecturers, and tutors.
- Developing a culture of attentiveness and trust through shared norms and processes.
- Design for access to numerous online platforms to support attentive contact both synchronistically and asynchronistically for participants.
- Creating ongoing opportunities to reflect on, acknowledge and surface feelings and tacit knowledge about giving, receiving, and incorporating feedback.

Curiosity

Curiosity is identified as an important aspect by Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) of creating a response-able teaching and learning environment. They argue that curiosity is strongly connected to the ability to pay attention and a willingness to 'risk opening up to encounters with the unexpected, to create enlarged mentalities' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 68). Curiosity is linked strongly to an openness to experiencing how 'all are changed in the process of encounters in unanticipated ways, becoming with each other' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 68).

In the design of this course, we provided opportunities for students, tutors, and the lecturer to engage with each other and interact on multiple platforms. The engagements, both planned and unplanned, precipitated numerous generative possibilities where curiosity was stirred. Curiosity was stirred through class engagement on Google Drive and Turnitin on feedback received and as well as whole class reflections on feedback from peers, tutors and the lecturer against assessment criteria. These comments, taken from student course evaluations, illustrate how curiosity was stirred through multiple engagements with each other and tutors and a range of technologies:

> It helped me open up more. (Student course evaluation, 2022)

> Loved it! Nice to know what younger students are thinking! (Student course evaluation, 2022)

> I really learnt a lot of skills with regards to using technology. For example, I never knew how to engage in Google Drive discussions, do an assignment with other people at the same time on the drive. I have basically gained skills that I will continue using post the course. (Student course evaluation, 2022)

For students in the course, multiple opportunities were created for peers to explore each other's writing and ideas and to review each other's work. Reading each other's writing and responding to each other's ideas had multiple influences on students' own thinking, writing and relating. One of the students commented that she had 'benefitted personally' from getting feedback on her writing on Turnitin. She said that 'it changed [her] whole mindset … [She was] sceptical in the beginning, but towards the latter part of the semester it was really a benefit' (Interview, October 2021).

Tutors, through their exposure to students and the lecturer in this class community, felt that they had begun to think differently and in new ways about how they could give feedback and how they could better help to scaffold students' writing. Exposure to using different online tools such as Turnitin and Google Drive and their range of affordances opened them up to exploring how they could use these tools in other contexts. Iris, one of the tutors, reflected on how learning to give feedback on Google Docs, enabled a shift from 'being editors of students' work and towards becoming facilitators in the acquisition of academic literacies among our clients.' She added that she had since then used Google Docs when giving feedback to a colleague or student using the 'suggesting' function:

> The student cannot simply just accept the changes (edited work) … Rather, this function asks them to consider some revisions or additional analyses of their ideas, which ensures a level of effort on their part to engage with the feedback. (Tutor narrative, September 2022)

The lecturer felt that her curiosity and awareness of developing students' writing and feedback literacies had grown through the reflection and conversations she had with the tutors and the Writing Centre coordinator. She began deepening her reading about academic literacies and became interested in researching this practice with colleagues. The entanglement of colleagues from transdisciplinary backgrounds enriched the context for curiosity and the unexpected to arise.

Participants in the class community experienced themselves being changed in unanticipated ways through these encounters. Some encounters happened synchronistically while others happened asynchronously. The record of accessing notes and conversations in text left a footprint to generate further curiosity and engagement. Comments found in students' and tutors' evaluations on feedback using a range of platforms such as Turnitin and Google Drive showed evidence of shifts in student writing and thinking based on the feedback they received. Students commented on the value of being able to read the feedback that other students had received from tutors and the lecturer in their own time. The lecturer was also able to review peer and tutor feedback on these platforms and identify areas for further engagement during synchronous class time.

Principles underlying practices of curiosity could include:

- Creating multiple opportunities for engagements across the class community via online and face-to-face connections.
- Flexibility to explore and innovate with the curriculum and learning design as a result of new ideas and learning being shared from multiple perspectives and in multiple modes.

Responsibility

Responsibility, within a political ethics of care framework, refers to taking responsibility for initiating and sustaining caring activities (Tronto, 1993, 2013; Sevenhuijsen, 2003). It involves 'seeing what is necessary in a particular situation' and implementing action to attend to the needs appropriately (Sevenhuijsen, 2003: 94). Czerniewicz, et al. (2020: 964) observed that during COVID remote learning conditions, in cases where institutional care and support were not in place, lecturers and learning professionals stepped in 'to form relationships and communities of practice to facilitate self-care and care for others'.

Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) extend the ethics of care notion of responsibility from a feminist materialist perspective. The relational ontology that they draw on is not just about relationships between humans but extends to the enacting of relationships between humans and other species and material elements, which they refer to as 'more than human' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 68):

> Responsibility or accountability is about how entanglements are enacted. Responsibility is ongoing and also never solely located inside disembodied subjects, in dualistic or human

> relationships but rather in multidirectional relationships including other species and more than human partners (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 68).

Thus, responsibility is not located purely within individuals or human relationships. Rather entanglements are formed which are sites of intra-action between various agents through which responsibility is distributed. We go on to explore the responsibility for care and learning taking place through intra-action amongst the humans involved in processes of facilitating learning as well as the technology used to make the intra-action possible in an online environment.

Various opportunities for intra-action were provided through online Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These generated multiple engagements and encounters. Care and responsibility were enacted through multi-directional relationships. Responsibility was not just taken by the lecturer for students' learning, but distributed in the interactions between students and peers, students and tutors, and the lecturer in relation to the Writing Centre and other participants. Furthermore, these intra-actions were enabled by the varied and flexible use of different forms of online technology. The ethos built up in the class community was premised on the values and practices of ethical relational learning (Tronto, 2013).

The PLCs were established in a class at three formal levels and a number of informal levels via WhatApp and email. Firstly, a PLC was established through engagement between the lecturer and the students in the class. This functioned initially within a physical classroom setting before the pandemic and then at an online level via Google Meet during lockdown conditions. In addition, students communicated with each other both informally and formally using email and WhatsApp.

Secondly, there was a PLC that functioned through mainly online engagement between tutors and groups of students as well as between peers. The central engagement of this PLC was through peer and tutor online formative feedback on the students' tasks. This took place through Google Drive and Turnitin, where synchronous and asynchronous feedback took place through the writing of feedback comments and suggestions.

Thirdly, there was a PLC which included the lecturer, the Writing Centre Coordinator, and tutors in a PLC. This community met face-to-face before lockdown and then online via Google Meet during lockdown. The purpose of these meetings was for the group to jointly reflect on the process of feedback and response and adapt practices accordingly. Bozalek and Zembylas (2017: 68) point out that 'the asymmetrical power differentials implicit in relationships need to be borne in mind when thinking about responsibility and accountability'. Writing Centre staff, particularly tutors, invariably occupy less powerful positions than university lecturers in the hierarchical structure of a university. Within these PLCs, Writing Centre tutors found their observations and opinions listened to attentively. For example, Polelwa, one of the tutors reflected that

> while giving formative feedback to students [she was] able to assess whether tasks were properly scaffolded to facilitate learning and could provide feedback to the lecturer. (PLC engagement, August 2021)

On the basis of such feedback from tutors, the lecturer made changes to task design in response to the writing tutors' feedback. This is one of the ways in which responsibility for facilitation of students' learning and development of academic literacies was shared between the lecturer, tutors, and the Writing Centre Coordinator.

An important concept that emerged for us was that of feedback literacy. This is defined as the 'understanding [on the part of students mainly] of what feedback is and how it can be managed effectively; capacities and dispositions to make productive use of feedback, and appreciation of the roles of teachers and themselves in these processes' (Carless & Boud, 2019: 2). Development of feedback literacy and responsibility for giving and engaging with feedback was strongly built into the curriculum and assessment design. For us it was an ethical responsibility to build student capacity, particularly since the students were educators who were giving feedback as part of their professional practice.

Creating opportunities for students to be able to take action, respond to feedback from peers and tutors, through reflective processes, built reciprocity and awareness in the feedback process. Here the building of reflective processes and time for reflection on feedback was critically important (Molloy & Boud, 2012). An aspect that was challenging was encouraging students to take responsibility to elicit the specific feedback that they required from peers and tutors. We found that development of such agentic responsibility took time to cultivate and required opportunities for students to reflect on their responses to feedback. Building in opportunities for reflection on feedback aimed to facilitate meta-cognitive inquiry about how feedback informs learning. This also developed a common language to scaffold our discussion and enhance feedback literacy.

There was a need to recognise the realities of local contexts and the challenges that students had in relation to access to devices, connectivity, bandwidth, loadshedding. We were aware that students play multiple roles in terms of work, parenting and other family responsibilities etc. Thus, we were flexible about the platforms used and submission dates.

Principles underlying practices of responsibility could include:

- Form relational learning communities such as PLC's that enable multiple levels of support, engagement, and reciprocal and multidirectional responsibility.
- Create multiple opportunities for participants to engage with each other, technology, and texts.
- Embed structured opportunities for development of academic literacies in curriculum and assessment design.
- Design for collaboration with institutional support resources (such as the Writing Centre) in the curriculum and assessment design.
- Use multiple types of technology, Google Drive, Turnitin, learning management systems, WhatsApp, to facilitate a more relational and "embodied" connection.
- Build in support to enhance inclusion by addressing barriers to participation related to language, race, gender, technological resources, and connectivity etc.

- Encourage students to elicit specific feedback comments from peers and tutors.
- Build in opportunities for students to be able to take action, to respond to feedback from others and enhance their uptake of feedback through reflexive processes.

Rendering each other capable

An intention to 'enlarge the competency of all role players' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 69) is at the heart of rendering each other capable. This approach acknowledges the role that both the human and non-human agents play in rendering capability. The capacity to render another capable is not built out of duty but from 'the capacity to respond to what matters' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 69).

Designing for the continuity of support and engagement with students through formative feedback provided multiple opportunities for students to build their scholarly competence. Peers were encouraged to take on the ethical responsibility of giving each other feedback and supporting each other by sharing ideas, new readings and suggestions for improvement. A student makes the following comment in the course evaluation about how her experience of the course and the use of various online platforms, as well as support in the development of her academic literacies had rendered her more capable:

> I am more confident in my presentation skills and I have learnt how to support my arguments, using literature. I still need to improve, but I have learnt a lot. I am confident that I can be an online teacher or presenter with the knowledge and skills that I have gained. (Student evaluation comment, 2022 course)

One of the values of engagement in the class was to embrace the spirit of ubuntu in supporting each other's learning. Through the planning of peer to peer feedback using both Google drive and Turnitin, students were able to experience ubuntu in practice. Thoko, one of the tutors, found that students in her group tended to respond well to peer feedback. She thought that 'it was an unusual year' (during COVID-19) and because 'they [were] all in the same boat', there was camaraderie among them (PLC engagement, August 2021).

From the perspective of the lecturer and the Writing Centre consultants this spirit of ubuntu was experienced in the classes. Peer feedback and the sharing of the development of their writing shifted students away from traditional competitive patterns of individualism in academia and brought home an experience of 'ubuntu pedagogy' (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). These scholars argue that it is 'through engagement with other people that a person grows more fully human, more truly in their identity … Ubuntu pedagogy, therefore, places value in collective learning through interactions and participation' (2021: 5).

The lecturer was rendered capable through her intra-action with the tutors and the Writing Centre coordinator to strengthen both the embedding of academic literacies development in her course as well as to design more careful scaffolding of assessment tasks. She also identified the need to review the complexity of the formative tasks and reduce the number of tasks.

The nature of the writing tutors' involvement in the course enabled them to gain an insider perspective into the principles, processes, and theory which the lecturer drew on in the design and delivery of the course. Tutors were rendered more capable by their role of supporting students within a course, rather than giving feedback in a decontextualised writing centre consultation. Polelwa reflected that involvement in the B.Ed Honours project had exposed her to processes that take place 'behind the scenes' to facilitate learning. She added that 'prior to working at the Writing Centre, [she] had limited understanding of how lectures and modules are planned to ensure learning outcomes are achieved'. As a participant in the project, she 'not only [gave] feedback on students' essays, but also discuss[ed] tasks before they [were] assigned to students. The latter activity provided opportunities to draw links between tasks and their intended learning outcomes' (Tutor narrative, September 2022). Tutors were able to make direct input into the structuring, scaffolding, and wording of assessment tasks. Bozalek and Zembylas, (2017: 69) argue that 'rendering each other capable does not happen through duty ethics - feeling that one has to do something - but through the capacity to respond to what matters'. Through tutors being included in collective meetings with the lecturer and the Writing Centre coordinator, they were capacitated to respond to 'what-matters' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017: 69).

These meetings created a number of opportunities to reflect on the growth and development of both students, tutors and the lecturer. The PLC reflections helped to make conscious the extent to which participants experienced themselves growing, through a collective and reciprocal process. This quote by the lecturer illustrates shifts in her own thinking as a result of engagement with tutors and the Writing Centre Coordinator, 'It's been very helpful for me, this engagement and really sparked many ideas, I think I need to do a lot of refinement' (PLC engagement, August 2021).

Through the lecturer and the Writing Centre Coordinator researching their practice of developing academic literacies, as well as through their co-writing of articles with tutors, they were encouraged to make their tacit knowledge about the curriculum and learning design explicit to each other. This also developed their collective capacity as academic staff and tutors to develop their scholarly writing of papers. This "making-with" invited new ideas, challenges, and possibilities. The central focus of engagement was the strengthening of care-full, ethical practices of facilitating students' development of academic literacies and learning.

Design principles underlying practices of rendering each other capable could include:

- Planning for collaborative engagement between the lecturer, support service (Writing Centre) and tutors in the design, delivery, and evaluation of course and assessment design.
- Structuring in collaborative reflection on practice.
- Promoting collaborative research into curriculum and learning design practice to enhance student academic literacies.
- Accessing both the financial support and human resources to support a collaborative and integrated approach.

- Building in capacity development opportunities for tutors, the lecturer, and Writing Centre coordinator.

In summary we would propose the following key principles which could provide a useful guide to inform the strengthening of academic literacies support in course and assessment design:

- Embedding the development of academic literacies development within the course and assessment design.
- Using a range of appropriate and accessible online platforms and apps such as WhatsApp, which build a web of connectivity and caring within the inter-web.
- Paying attention to the relational and humanising aspects of the teaching and learning environment through building an ethic of care and response-ability.
- Fostering collaborative relationships between lecturers and support services such as the Writing Centre.
- Training students, tutors, and lecturers in the use of a range of ICT platforms to facilitate learning.
- Designing nested, scaffolded assessment tasks that build up to a more complex assessment with multiple opportunities for peer, tutor, and lecturer formative feedback.

Conclusion

This paper has reflected on the curriculum and learning design principles which informed a collaborative intervention between Writing Centre staff and an Education lecturer as they strengthened the embedding of student academic literacies development in a Bachelor of Education Honours module, both prior to and during COVID-19 remote learning conditions.

The key elements of a response-able pedagogy (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), namely: attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility, and rendering each other capable, as well as the theoretical streams of a political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013), well-being and professional learning communities were drawn on to explore the curriculum and learning design principles which informed our practice.

In a local, national, and international context, where existing inequality and poverty have been exacerbated by COVID-19, students have experienced increased alienation and marginalisation. In our work with the Honours students, we became aware that it is not sufficient for hybrid and online learning to focus only on the cognitive and organisational aspects of learning. In addition, it is necessary to focus on those invisible and affective dimensions of learning such as trust and care. Designing learning and assessment around building webs of support to enhance the development of student academic literacies all contributed to us experiencing a more just pedagogy (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017).

Designing and implementing these courses has been labour intensive and it has been possible to implement this care-full and response-able approach in an intense way because there were a small number of students. In addition, the involvement of the Writing Centre provided additional capacity and expertise which may not be sustainable given the limited resources of writing centres and teaching and learning centres. We suggest that creative ways can be explored to embed caring and response-able practices and principles in courses, which are responsive to the particular needs and constraints of the courses. For example, peer feedback can be integrated into large classes and departmental tutors or teaching assistants can play an important role in providing webs of support for students' learning and well-being. Accessing a range of technologies can support multiple forms of interaction and learning. University structures such as writing centres and teaching and learning centres need to be provided with more support and resources to work with disciplinary lecturers on collaborative, generative projects involving learning and curriculum design.

These insights, and design principles based on our empirical work and consideration of our practice, can contribute to informing curriculum and assessment design that places the building of relational and caring elements at the centre in online and hybrid learning environments.

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