



Tutors Becoming Social Justice Facilitators

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This paper provides a discussion and interpretation of how 3 tutors on the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship module at UKZN construct their personal and professional selves in the light of social justice education, and how they negotiate the tensions and challenges which emerge in the process of becoming social justice facilitators. A qualitative study, underpinned by the principle of participation, and the use of personal narratives as the main strategy of inquiry was an attempt to better comprehend the subjective, context-specific, lived experiences of these tutors and to draw on their authentic voices. Adopting a politics of difference is central to investigating how tutors inhabit this space of personal and professional transformation, and allows for the recognition of the complex nature of how tutors negotiate their own transformative and reflexive capacity in challenging existing social and institutional structures, embracing transition and renegotiating their identities.

Keywords: Facilitation, Identity, Social justice education, Transformative capacity

Introduction

The advent of the new democratic South Africa heralded the need to transform our social landscape by creating a radically inclusive and participatory social discourse in which diversity was celebrated and equality of opportunity promoted (Engelbrecht, et al, 1999). But thirty years into our 'new' South Africa, we find that many South Africans are still locked in a mindset where difference and inequality go hand in hand. We still need to find ways of confronting and breaking down old myths, ignorance, prejudice and fundamental disrespect of others. We still need to find ways of relating to each other in ways that sustain social cohesion and co-operation without

suppressing our differences. Although South Africa has comprehensive and ambitious legislature and policies, this is only the initial and simplest step in the change process. Our challenge remains to: cultivate a social landscape that values diversity and tolerance and appreciation of differences; actively develop attitudes, forms of consciousness and commitments that allow a re-understanding and a re-shaping of our world; and ultimately, rid ourselves of exclusionary attitudes and practices.

Education is responsible for nurturing a vision of 'reculturing and restructuring' (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p.101) that takes the project of human liberation and social justice seriously – one that presents students with the means to transcend the divisions of the past, and find alternative frameworks for coexistence between diverse others. The onus falls on educational institutions to develop teaching and learning environments which interrupt historical prejudices and discriminations, and contribute significantly to developing and sustaining democratic students, communities, and societies. Universities, especially, should be sites of struggle towards developing ethical, empathetic and engaged students who will take their rightful place in a democratic, inclusive and socially just society, and who will be able to contribute appropriately and meaningfully as citizens of such a society.

Educators need to develop new ways of thinking and teaching which seriously challenge the prevailing system of social relations and 'enable attitudes to shift and awareness to deepen' (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p.90); to take on the mantle of transformative agents (Giroux, 1988), cultural workers for self and social emancipation (Freire, 1998); and commit to teaching for social responsibility, social change and social justice (Francis & LeRoux, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 1991).

Fuelled by a vision of human rights, inclusion and social justice, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has developed a compulsory module for *all* first-year students entitled Critical Social Justice and Citizenship, designed to identify, challenge and interrupt forms of prejudice and discrimination, and lay the foundation to help students understand, reflect, and explore how their own social positioning, interactions and experiences are informed by the wider context in which they are embedded, and challenge them to align their attitudes, values, and personal practices with a critical social justice perspective.

The module's conceptual understanding of educating for social justice relies heavily on the notion of full and equal participation in both the goals and the processes employed. It is important that its praxis is democratic, participatory, affirming of human agency, affirming of human capacity to create change and to work collaboratively and co-operatively, and to develop students' capacity for reflexivity and transformation (Adams, et al, 2026). Towards this end, the pre-recorded online lectures are interactive, peppered with questions and multiple-choice activities to ensure student engagement with each lecture, before being able to move onto the next; and the in-person small group tutorials are specifically designed for maximum student participation, debating and sharing of opinions and experiences, and discussing ways forward. These tutorials are carefully designed to be spaces that encourage full and free participation of our students, where students' input is valued by foregrounding their voices and encouraging them to share their beliefs, stories and experiences.

This blended approach of on-line lectures and accompanying in-person tutorials is designed to build on each other, including: an investigation of the negative psychological and emotional effects of 'othering' (being marginalized, oppressed, experiencing prejudice and exclusion); understanding how we are all socialised to adopt certain beliefs and attitudes towards difference and 'otherness'; the need to challenge and interrupt these attitudes that have been passed down through the generations (as they manifest themselves as racism, xenophobia, culturalism, sexism, patriarchy, misogyny, gender-based violence, heterosexism, ableism, classism and sizeism, etc); and the importance of a sense of agency and personal responsibility to bring about the change we wish to see in South Africa.

The study

While the module is designed for first-year students, it also has an important component which extends to the development and transformation of the tutors responsible for facilitating the in-person tutorials. Although tutors hold relevant post graduate degrees related to social justice, this does not guarantee that they possess the necessary capacity for compassion and tolerance of diverse identities, nor does it mean they are successful facilitators in line with a pedagogy of social justice. This paper investigates how tutors construct their personal and professional selves in the light of social justice education, and, how they negotiate possible contradictions and tensions that

may emerge in the process of becoming social justice facilitators. Adopting a politics of difference and individualisation is central to the intention to investigate how tutors inhabit this space of transition. It further leads to the recognition of the complex nature of identity and how tutors negotiate their own transformative capacity.

As facilitators for inclusion and social justice, it is essential that tutors be self-reflective about all aspects of their identity which relate to diversity and differential power relations. An important part of this module is facilitating in tutors a willingness to engage with the challenge of interrogating their own situated identities. Extensive tutor training, regular feedback sessions and the opportunity to engage in reflective narrative journaling (where they document their successes and challenges in becoming social justice tutors), supports this process of critical self-reflection. Purposive sampling was used to identify the 3 tutors who expressed an interest in participating in this research endeavor and agreed to making their journals available for the development of this paper and to having their names included as co-authors. They were drawn from the 84 tutors who participated in the 20 hours of tutor training and who facilitated in-person tutorials with about 30 students in the first and second semester of 2025, thus presenting as information-rich cases (Patton, 1990).

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, the central focus of which is the commitment to studying the world from the perspective of the interacting individual. Qualitative research facilitates the investigation of tutors' experiences from their own perspectives, and in terms of the meanings they attach to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The principles of individualisation and participation which underpin this study incorporate concepts such as the celebration and accommodation of diversity, the consideration of subjectivity, context specificity, situated complexities, emphasis on the particular, authentic representations of participant voices, and understanding issues of multiplicity and complexity. The use of narrative journal writing as the main strategy of inquiry resonates with these principles as it attempts to better comprehend the subjective, context-specific, lived experiences of tutors becoming social justice facilitators, and to draw on their authentic voices.

The decision to adopt personal narratives as a strategy of inquiry reflects an appreciation for personal experience and the intention of reflecting individuals' complexities. Narrative inquiry offers an important and legitimate way of knowing (Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey, 2002), in that tutors' narratives capture discourses of meaning and interpretation, ordering experience and constructing reality around the broad and more inclusive notions of context specific and particular meanings. The inspiration for the narrative turn has its roots in the choice to privilege and foreground the voice of participants, where data is gathered and presented in such a way that the participants speak for themselves, and are provided the opportunity for their experiences, perceptions, thoughts and feelings to be recognised as relevant and important (Lyons and Kubler

LaBoskey, 2002). It is a priority of this research to represent tutors in as authentic a way as possible and value their individual and particular perspectives.

Working from the assumptions that identity is produced through narrative (Ricoeur, 1991), and the self and identity is constantly and always in the process of being formulated (Lawler, 2003), reflective journaling engaged participants in the process of identity-construction. Tutor's reflective journals showed them 'in the process of creating, negotiating and performing meaning in a world of others, making their way through a world that poses obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies and moral choices' (Ellis and Bochner, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.748), as embodied, emotional, interactive selves, striving for meaning in wider historically specific social worlds.

The free-flowing texts of tutors' reflective journals were best suited to whole-text analysis, where units of meaning, patterns and categories were identified through inductive and logical analysis and utilised to cross-classify categories with one another (De Vos, 1998; Poggenpoel, 1998). While a commitment to individualisation and the peculiarities of individual contexts cautions against transporting conclusions from the 3 tutor participants to *all* tutors, they do reflect to a large extent, the experiences of the majority of tutors as they navigate their journeys of becoming social justice facilitators. This study hopefully provides a valuable contribution towards the conversation concerning the implementation of social justice education, and contributes to the body of knowledge around tutors becoming social justice facilitators.

Theoretical and conceptual framing

The theoretical and conceptual framing of the module relies on education for liberation as opposed to education for domestication (Freire, 1998) - two opposing approaches to education that have their roots in different paradigms, in turn constructing different kinds of human relationships (Clark, et al, 1995). Educating for critical social justice recognizes that meaning is produced through the construction of forms of power, experiences and identities, and that these need to be analysed in terms of their wider political and cultural significance. It includes a refusal to sustain codes of the dominant culture and existing relations of power and aims to reverse the tradition of demonising the 'other' by affirming diversity. The argument for educational environments as sites of struggle, and for pedagogy as a form of cultural politics is made by Giroux and Simon (1988, p.10), where education expands human capacities to develop critical subjectivity, leading to individuals 'intervening in the formation of their own subjectivities'.

Alternative teaching and learning practices, such as experiential learning and participation of students in sharing their own experiences of otherness, potentially challenge the deep culture of traditional discourses and power relations in academia, which include forms of exclusion, non-participation

and authoritarianism. The participatory exercises that comprise the in-person small group tutorials, are designed to raise awareness and facilitate a shift in consciousness. Students, and tutors alike, are encouraged to reflect on how they are born into a specific set of social identities, which predispose them to unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression (Harro, in Adams et al., 2026); how they have been socialised by powerful sources in their worlds to play the roles prescribed by an inequitable social system; and how they might be participating in maintaining inequality. Identifying, acknowledging and critically examining the messages they have been fed throughout their lives and how these have shaped who they have come to believe they and others are, can cause a dramatic and radical shift in individual perceptions and beliefs. These activities encourage students and tutors to examine critically how they have received systematic training in 'how to be' and how they might begin to question, interrupt and challenge the status quo.

While acknowledging the role that our socialisation plays in moulding our beliefs about who we are and who others are, hooks (1992) questions whether the self is solely created through background beliefs and cycles of socialisation without considering that the self might also be informed and redirected by individuals' self-consciousness. hooks' position is that none of us are passive victims of socialisation but that we can choose to adopt different attitudes and practices from those that we were socialised to accept. This speaks directly to the agency of individuals over their identities and lives. Working from the premise that all forms of prejudice, discrimination and othering are learned behaviours, the module focuses on unlearning certain identities, attitudes and practices, in order to learn new ways of being and showing up in the world.

As important as it is to remember 'where we come from' and how we have been socialised, it is just as important to re-imagine 'who we may yet become' and consider ways in which we can all re-imagine the future (Mitchell, et al, 2011, p.10). This module offers students, and tutors alike, the possibility of breaking down narrow, essentialist and reductionist approaches to our understanding of identity and, recognises the possibility of the evolution of new frames of understanding and new identities, new social spaces and new communities (Gillborn, 1995), where individuals are confronted by a multiplicity of possible identities. According to McLaren (1995), in order to rethink the relationship of self to other, individuals need to develop into 'transformative intellectuals - mobile subjects sensitive to the shifting contexts of contemporary social life, and where individuals engage in the act of cultural struggle, in which new forms of identity and subjective formations are sought, in the context of a deepening democracy' (McLaren, 1995, p.10).

We cannot expect the students on this module to consider the ways in which their experiences and socialisation influence their personal and professional identities, without tutors engaging in the same critical reflection themselves. Interrogating their own situated identities is necessary in order

that tutors facilitate tutorials with a deep sensitivity to diversity and multiculturalism. An important part of this module, therefore, is facilitating in tutors a willingness to engage with this challenge. Extensive tutor training at the outset of every year, regular feedback and support sessions and reflective narrative journaling supports this process of tutors' critical self-reflection and effective facilitation of this in students. This is not a once-off achievement, but rather, an ongoing challenge for all tutors as they become social justice facilitators, facing their own learning curves along the way, as is evident from the following narrative excerpt from Sinethemba.

A challenge which I continue to negotiate, is being honest and disclosing my own experiences with many of the topics we address. I recognize that the questions posed to students necessitate profound self-reflection and discussion of potentially sensitive topics. This is exactly what this module is promoting – creating comfortable tutorials environments where students can feel safe enough to be open and honest and have those uncomfortable conversations. I cannot expect student engagement if I am not equally prepared to participate. That would be somewhat hypocritical. This is as much a learning curve for me as it is for students. I am still navigating my ability to exhibit vulnerability and embrace discomfort in engaging with critical self-reflection. (Sinethemba Zungu).

Discussion and interpretation of findings

Moving from “power over” to “power with”

Adopting a pedagogy for critical social justice education involves redefining traditional understandings of teaching and seriously challenging the prevailing system of social relations, constructing tutors in the role of transformative agents (Giroux, 1988); cultural workers (Freire, 1998), facilitating for social responsibility, social change and social justice (Francis & LeRoux, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 1991). Such radical change requires tutors to develop an alternative sense of themselves, not only as facilitators but also as individuals. More is involved than simply changing attitudes and raising awareness. Tutors need to begin to think differently and reconceptualise who they are and who others are, develop new ways of understanding, and making meaning of the world and the people and social relations within it, in order to model a new way of being for students. This necessarily challenges all tutors' personal values and beliefs, whose socialisation and communities are steeped in the deep culture of traditional values and practices which include forms of exclusion (such as racism and sexism, non-participation, authoritarianism, corporal punishment, rote-learning, ritual and routine) (Mattson & Harley, 2001). The move towards education for critical social justice therefore signifies ‘a fundamental dislocation with the past’ (Parker & Harley, 1999, p.190) for tutors.

During my upbringing, I discerned a subtle message regarding the significance of preserving harmony within familial and social frameworks. Disputes or dialogues concerning contentious subjects such as race or gender roles were frequently evaded or downplayed in my household, subtly

indicating that race or inequality was not matters to be explored or confronted. Conversations about racial or social justice were frequently discouraged or received with unease. When I posed enquiries on inequity or injustice, the typical reaction was to divert the discussion, thereby implicitly upholding the status quo by dissuading any critical examination. Adherence to familial expectations of respectability and diligence, therefore allowed little opportunity for the examination or discourse of complex social concerns.

Religious doctrines and cultural customs significantly influenced my convictions, especially on morality, identity, and social justice. The religious institutions to which I was exposed accentuated specific values that influenced my perspectives on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Religion frequently categorises particular behaviours as "right" or "wrong," exemplified by the condemnation of same-sex partnerships and the promotion of specific binary gender roles. Challenging these roles was regarded as wicked or ethically improper. The discourse about LGBTQI+ matters was overtly negative, perceiving homosexuality as immoral. I found that some groups, notably women and LGBTQI+ individuals, were perceived as "other" or in need of rescue or moral rectification. The presence of LGBTQI+ individuals within the congregation frequently elicited discomfort or an implicit acknowledgement of their "difference," necessitating intervention through prayer and ultimately assimilation and conversion into conventional behaviour. This belief system perpetuated a status quo of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

I discovered the significance of refraining from being "excessively different" or "overly radical," as this would lead to social estrangement. Challenges to the gender binary or conventional definitions of success frequently elicited derision or social ostracism. When a boy expressed interest in "feminine" areas such as literature or the arts, he was frequently ridiculed or disregarded by his classmates. Such communications instructed me to adhere to specific norms and refrain from displaying nonconformity, as departure was linked to adverse repercussions such as exclusion or censure. (Zandile Mpofu).

Zandile's narrative excerpt serves as a reminder that tutors are necessarily products of a society steeped in historic forms of organisation and a system of social relations wherein hierarchies and exclusion, marginalisation and segregation abound, and often make up the very fabric of their sense of self, how they understand themselves and others. It is clear that the module's commitment to principles of diversity, equality, inclusion and social justice are very often in direct contradiction to traditional roots of prejudice, discrimination, exclusion and othering on the basis of difference.

Education for social justice raises important questions about the educational process, and the ways in which the relationship between tutor and student enables or obstructs a critical understanding of inclusion and social justice. It is important that tutors challenge themselves *not* to embody the traditional

authoritarian power relations between educators and students. Facilitating for social justice, involves building relationships of trust and respect and developing power *with* students, rather than perpetuating the historical focus on power *over* them. Fundamental to tutors' roles as transformative agents and cultural workers for social emancipation, is the nature of their relationship with their students - establishing safe environments of mutual trust and respect, coming alongside students in a supportive but challenging way and encouraging them to critically examine sensitive and personal issues through a variety of methodologies and strategies. This ideology of working *with* students towards social transformation within an ethic of collaboration aligns with Kreisberg's (1992) 'power with' vs. 'power over' paradigm for enacting the goals of social justice.

This realization is embodied in Sinethemba's and Zandile's narrative excerpts below.

Initially, I joined the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship module as a facilitator without any prior teaching or tutoring experience. In retrospect, I believe entering with a blank slate and without any preconceived notions of what it means to be an educator (and how I should behave) was highly beneficial. Specifically, I was able to acquire the ability to facilitate from an education for social justice standpoint and develop skills from the extensive in-person tutor training I received. My perspective on the role of a facilitator of learning has certainly evolved as a result of my completion of the training.

Historically, I have always regarded the lecturer or instructor from an authoritarian perspective, as a result of my experiences, where the teacher is the one in charge, and students are expected to comply with their directives without question or sharing their own thoughts. Culturally, it would be considered impolite to express any other opinions when engaging an elder or someone in authority, such as a teacher or the like. This has also influenced my perspective on educational institutions, as spaces that are not conducive to the development of novel or unconventional ideas or opinions outside what one is told. I was under the assumption that in order to succeed, I must adhere to the instructions of the teacher (or person holding authority) and I must recognize that my ideas and opinions are irrelevant or of minimal significance.

This is comparable to the manner in which I was raised and socialized as a black adolescent in a traditional black household, where we were instructed to revere our elders, listen attentively and accept information and directives from them without question. This was also the case when it came to religious choices and beliefs.

The training I received and the facilitating of tutorials on this module has provided me with the confidence and opportunity to facilitate critical learning. I identify as a naturally inquisitive individual who encounters difficulty in environments that are excessively authoritarian and does not embrace difference. I believe that I have consistently

suppressed this aspect of myself in order to conform and, of course, to successfully navigate the educational system. Therefore, I do not believe I have developed an alternative sense of identity, but rather that I have grown in my acceptance of my uniqueness, my tendency to critically engage certain issues, and holding differing opinions from the majority thus challenging the status quo. I am thoroughly enjoying the process of facilitating learning from a shared experiential learning approach, in which we strive to learn from one another's experiences and backgrounds, and how they have influenced our attitudes and beliefs in society, rather than from a top-down approach, where the teacher holds all the power, or from a bottom-up approach, where the student holds all the power. **(Sinethemba Zungu).**

This module's training which focused on tutors as social justice facilitators, has profoundly challenged my ingrained attitudes concerning power relations in teaching and learning. Prior to interacting with this module, I predominantly concentrated on the conventional responsibilities of a tutor: imparting knowledge, confirming student comprehension, and evaluating their advancement. The transition to social justice facilitation has prompted me to perceive my work as extending beyond this traditional instruction of students. The objective is to establish an egalitarian educational atmosphere in which every student, especially those from marginalised groups, feels appreciated, acknowledged and heard.

The power dynamics between tutors and students have been a primary focus of reform. In conventional educational environments, an implicit hierarchy typically exists, wherein educators possess knowledge and authority, while students are expected to assimilate and comply. Social justice facilitation promotes a collaborative and dialogical methodology. I have transitioned from merely delivering information, to facilitating to promote critical thinking, self-awareness, and agency in students. This alteration in power dynamics has necessitated a modification in my communication strategy. I now perceive myself as a guide who collaboratively constructs knowledge *with* students, rather than the expert at the forefront dictating what and how they should learn. This has compelled me to relinquish certain prior preconceptions regarding power and competence, and foster openness and vulnerability in tutorials. Encouraging students to share their personal experiences, concerns, and ideas in a safe and supportive setting cultivates a culture of mutual respect and encourages them to assume responsibility for their learning.

As I continue to evolve in my personal and professional life, I've come to understand that developing a sense of self involves more than just fulfilling the role of a facilitator or educator. It's a multifaceted process where personal growth, learning, and adaptation converge, and where I continuously reshape my understanding of who I am and how I relate to others. This deeper, more reflective process has led me to cultivate an alternative sense of myself, one that integrates both my professional identity and my individuality. **(Zandile Mpofu).**

The tutor training for this module encourages tutors to take on new responsibilities: from the traditional view of teachers as uncritical transmitters of knowledge, to critical practitioners and agents of change (Giroux, 1988). Giroux (1988, p.145) presents the image of schools as 'democratic spheres', where teachers develop a discourse and set of assumptions that allow them to function more specifically as 'transformative intellectuals' able to empower students 'to read the world critically and change it when necessary' (Giroux, 1988, p.xxxiv). Ramphele (2008, p.112) warns that 'all South Africans are newcomers to democracy', and 'it is unlikely that a decade or two of post-apartheid experimentation with democracy would have been enough to exorcise the ghost of authoritarianism'. It is to be expected that many tutors experience difficulties in reconciling the ideological contradictions and tensions which emerge between the old and familiar, on the one hand, and the new and unfamiliar, on the other. The expectation that tutors become *facilitators* inevitably challenges them to navigate the dilemma of having to make choices between two very different identities and opposing social forces. Due to this dilemma, individual tutors may pay lip-service to principles and issues related to social justice, while not having made the shift on a deep personal level (Mattson & Harley, 2001). A lack of understanding of what it entails to facilitate tutorials based on equal power relations between the facilitator and students was evident in the case of some tutors, especially in the area of developing guidelines with students for the tutorials. This early activity was strategic in involving the participation of the students and encouraging their ownership of tutorials as shared discursive spaces, and establishing shared relations of power between facilitators and students. However, some tutors were still referring to these guidelines as 'classroom rules' and were encouraging punitive consequences for students who 'broke the rules'. Such evidence suggests that some tutors have not yet grasped the full extent of what equal power relations in tutorials means, nor fully made the personal shift to integrating the true ideology and pedagogy of social justice education in their facilitation practice. However, in the case of the tutor narratives included in this paper, there is clear evidence that they are consciously aware of how they are being challenged to transform, and are engaging with this process in a critical manner.

Navigating tensions and challenges

The module embraces a pedagogy grounded in a politics of ethics, difference and democracy which advocates a radically inclusive, participatory form of social discourse, in which diversity is celebrated and equality of opportunity promoted. This notion of valuing diversity is intended to allow 'for the reconceptualisation of (pathologised) difference and for the production of non-hierarchical plural identities', and offer 'the possibility of reconceptualising human difference as something to be celebrated' (Benjamin, 2010, p. 9). Given South Africa's history of exclusion, segregation and oppression, tutors inevitably face tensions and challenges in developing attitudes and practices that embrace the understanding that difference does not have to mean deficiency. Zandile's and Sinethemba's

narrative excerpts present insights into their journeys of navigating these tensions and challenges.

This module has encouraged me to critically examine my attitudes towards diversity and my responses to it in tutorials. I have been increasingly aware of how many identities (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic background, ability) affect students' experiences and educational access. Understanding that 'difference' should not merely be tolerated but accepted and celebrated has enabled me to confront any unconscious biases I possess and re-evaluate the methods by which I support students. Prior to this module, I may have presumed that all students enter the classroom with comparable levels of preparedness and resource accessibility. Through the perspective of social justice, I now recognise that diverse elements, including cultural background and social inequities, can profoundly influence students' educational experiences. This change in understanding has led me to modify my approach to facilitation by integrating more inclusive practices, such as employing a range of learning and teaching methods in line with experiential learning and fostering environments for marginalised voices to be acknowledged.

This module has also emphasised for me, the significance of intersectionality. By recognising the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social identities and their influence on students' experiences, I am now more deliberate in confronting issues of privilege and oppression in the classroom. I now recognise the significance of fostering environments which encourage uncomfortable yet essential discussions on social justice, rather than evading challenging debates. This transition has proven to be profoundly rewarding. By understanding the lived experiences of students and promoting a collaborative environment, I am better prepared to establish an inclusive and equitable learning space. The journey to becoming a social justice facilitator is continuous. It has significantly influenced my perception of my position as a tutor and my approach to diversity in my teaching methodology.

As a social justice facilitator, my responsibilities include supporting students towards acknowledging their privileges pertaining to race, gender, socio-economic background, and other factors. This has simultaneously presented me with the personal task of confronting my own privilege. I originate from a background that may provide me with advantages not available to other students. At times, I experience shame or unease regarding my status in relation to others, particularly when witnessing the impact of inequality and oppression on marginalised individuals and communities. The challenge lies in aligning my aspiration to be an ally with the actuality of my own circumstances. It is difficult not to have feelings of guilt or defensiveness when contemplating my own privileges. Acknowledging and accepting my privilege, while avoiding excessive guilt, has been a challenging yet essential aspect of this process.

A fundamental aspect of my duty is to assist students in cultivating critical consciousness, enabling them to recognise

the functioning of power, privilege, and oppression within society and their involvement in maintaining these systems. I receive diverse reactions from students in this regard. Certain students willingly accept the concept of self-reflection and are receptive to scrutinising their contributions to the perpetuation of societal inequality, while some individuals oppose engaging in self-reflection, possibly due to insufficient exposure to critical pedagogy and/or an unease in acknowledging their own privilege. Some individuals respond defensively, perceiving the discussions as allegations, and some regard the subjects as inconsequential to them, having no personal bearing on their lives. It is disconcerting to witness students exhibit such defensiveness or resistance. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that not all students are at the same stage in their journeys of critical awareness. Navigating students' resistance without estranging them demands considerable patience and perseverance. The challenge resides in discerning when to exert greater effort and when to withdraw, permitting students to assimilate the content at their own pace.

Social justice initiatives in education necessitate a knowledge of intersectionality, recognising that individuals simultaneously encounter various forms of oppression or privilege, and that these intersecting identities uniquely influence their experiences. This fundamental notion fosters equity and inclusion but also presents the issue of acknowledging the complexities of each student's identity. As a facilitator, navigating the varied and intersecting perspectives of students' identities can be daunting. Certain students may encounter various sorts of marginalisation, whereas others may not have faced such discrimination whatsoever. Students identifying with marginalised gender identities may encounter distinct challenges compared to those identifying with marginalised racial or ethnic backgrounds. I must be attuned to various forms of oppression while ensuring that no individual or group feels marginalised in the discourse. This challenge necessitates continual reflection on my own prejudices and the potential privileging of certain experiences over others.

I frequently encounter conflict between my personal convictions and my professional obligation to preserve a neutral, supportive, and inclusive atmosphere for all students. As an advocate for social justice, I am dedicated to confronting oppressive systems and supporting marginalised groups; nevertheless, I recognise that students originate from a variety of backgrounds and may possess opinions that directly contradict my own. Some students may possess religious or cultural convictions that denounce specific social justice principles, such as LGBTQI+ rights or racial equality. In these circumstances, I struggle with how to balance the duty of being an ally with honouring students' autonomy and their entitlement to diverse viewpoints. There exists a tension in reconciling the necessity to confront exclusion and a lack of social justice, with the recognition that students are at varying levels of awareness and may require time to unlearn damaging traditional beliefs. I am currently navigating how to address these circumstances with empathy while being steadfast in my dedication to social justice principles. There are instances where I must balance

promoting open discourse with preventing the unfettered propagation of toxic or oppressive perspectives in the classroom.

The tutorial designs necessitate that students interrogate long-held beliefs, including concepts of meritocracy, conventional gender roles, and the perception of racism as an individual rather than a systematic issue. Discussions regarding power, privilege, and oppression compel students to introspect on their identities, potentially eliciting challenging feelings as they acknowledge their own privilege or marginalised position. Students raised in circumstances that reinforce these views may experience feelings of threat or defensiveness when prompted to address these preconceptions, potentially responding with discomfort, denial or hostility. For instance, while discussing race or gender, certain students may experience regret or guilt regarding their privileges or ignorance, while others may feel wrath or irritation stemming from their encounters with prejudice. During times of intensified racial discord or opposition to LGBTQI+ rights, I frequently grapple with how to assist students impacted by these occurrences, while also managing my own emotional responses and professional obligations. Tension emerges through trying to maintain student engagement and motivation in a political context that appears overwhelmingly antagonistic to social justice objectives.

Managing these emotional reactions necessitates care. I continue to struggle with how to successfully confront this resistance, particularly when opposition is perceived as personal. At times, I perceive myself as insufficiently qualified to address issues that arise, or I may lack the experiential knowledge required to fully comprehend the profound challenges encountered by some of my pupils. Mastering the navigation of these feelings of inadequacy and cultivating trust in my capacity to effect change remains a continual effort. I have to remind myself that growth is a process which necessitates my continuous reflection and adaption. (**Zandile Mpofu**).

I have faced tensions and obstacles in confronting my own convictions regarding race and justice. I am still comprehending the characteristics of a socially and racially just society. Daily, I contend with the tension—occasionally more like suppressed anger—in my mind on the nature of racial justice in South Africa. This is influenced by an understanding of the extensive history of racial injustice in South Africa, from colonialism to apartheid, and its profound long-term impact on Black communities. As a resident of Hammarsdale Township (initially established by the apartheid regime), it saddens me when I leave my home and witness the results of decades of black oppression, ranging from extreme poverty to the pervasive internalised feelings of inferiority and self-hatred among the majority of the population, which Steve Biko referred to as psychological oppression.

I frequently observe a little young boy, approximately 4 years old, traversing the road in the morning, often barefoot and

occasionally without pants, heading to an unknown destination. He was born into a destitute environment, where his adolescent mother was also a victim of generational trauma and hardship. I am overwhelmed with a profound anguish that resembles wrath regarding this pernicious loop initiated by one race's belief in its superiority over another.

I am frustrated that Black individuals will continue to endure this generational pain for decades, while my white friends will perpetually enjoy the benefit of being shielded—likely in high-security gated communities—from it, many of whom having never visited a township. I am compelled to conclude that our white counterparts exist within the privilege of ignorance. I reference an event from my first year at university when I played on the university's women's hockey team, during a period characterized by a predominantly white demographic, with only two Black players. We participated in a tournament that concluded late, after dark, when taxis were no longer available. I was abandoned without transportation to my university-assigned accommodation situated in the Durban CBD. The majority of my white peers possessed vehicles, and one extended an offer to transport me to my residence. However, upon learning that I reside in the Durban CBD, she hesitantly rescinded her offer, citing her parents' prohibition against going there.

This recollection remains vivid in my mind, perhaps due to my envy of the privilege she possessed in being sheltered and safeguarded from what are deemed the most socially detrimental aspects and spaces of our society. However, I am equally incensed that the majority of Black individuals have no alternative but to reside in those environments. Numerous individuals born into such circumstances endured the relentless cycle of psychological subjugation, generational poverty, and trauma.

While I recognise it is not their responsibility, I find it challenging to comprehend how we are to cultivate an inclusive climate amidst a populace that is largely indifferent to the majority's circumstances. How do we achieve equality in a nation where inequality is so deeply entrenched? And where the powerful prefer not to associate with the powerless?

While I have faith in humanity's capacity for transformation and improvement, I find it challenging to envision a socio-economically equitable society for majority of Black individuals within my lifetime. How can I persuade my students to maintain optimism for a more socially just future? A tension that exists for me is to what extent becoming a social justice facilitator who is trained to encourage students to confront pain and injustice via continuous contemplation, reflection and dialogue, is actually advocating for real social transformation... **(Sinethemba Zungu).**

It is not a simple task becoming a facilitator of social justice education, as the above narrative excerpts show. It is a journey fraught with challenges and dilemmas, which can often be experienced as overwhelming and elicit strong emotions. There

is no blueprint or one-size-fits-all guide for all tutors to follow. Instead it is a highly personal journey, unique to each. The tutor training emphasises that no-one can claim they have arrived at being the ideal facilitator for social justice education, as we are all on a continuous journey of becoming. Many of the tutors have realised that becoming social justice facilitators is about keeping an open mind and heart, remaining teachable, and being willing to constantly engage in critical conscious reflection of themselves and their practices.

It is important that the tutor training component of the module account for the individual realities and responses of the tutors. As was clear from Sinethemba's narrative, the racial injustices of the past and the present is a highly emotive and triggering issue and the dilemma of navigating the module's restorative social justice stance is something she feels keenly. It is unrealistic to expect tutors to approach their tutorials from a position of neutrality regarding issues related to social justice. Yet, tutors are still expected to be neutral and not show prejudice or bias towards any one social group. A real tension needs to be navigated regarding this particular issue. On the one hand, tutorials require interrogating the burden of years of racism and appropriation, and looking squarely at the core of apartheid (a calculated socio-economic experiment aimed at cementing white dominance), which could understandably result in very real anger and resentment on the part of black tutors. On the other hand, the module offers a politics of hope by encouraging the possibility of negotiating new positions and identities which dare to imagine a different future, free from retributive action. Said (1994) believes that it is within such complex and hybrid positions that counter-narratives arise. Tutors are challenged to embody an 'audacity and generosity of spirit' (Said, 1994, p.340) through their ongoing commitment to social justice and a vision that presents what some may still feel is an impossible union of Black and white South Africans. The tutor training engages openly with any feelings of anger or resentment that emerge against a dominant social group, accepting that anger is a natural and sometimes necessary emotion and should not be ignored. It acknowledges that tutors need to navigate walking this fine line between embodying righteous anger at systemic oppression and encouraging student activism in ways that do not lead to the alienation or segregation of any social groups. The narrative excerpts show tutors willing to constantly critically engage with their positionality and reflect on the potential impact their positionality has on students from all social groups and on the facilitation process (Bourke, 2014).

A journey of becoming a feminist worth taking

Sexism and patriarchy are common features of all South African cultures and are deeply embedded in our social relationships, shaping notions of power in our society (Ramphela, 2008). Challenging these legacies requires a critical understanding of the social construction of gender and the realisation that cultures are not set in stone, but rather, formed by and created in response to people and therefore, able to be recreated and reformed in a way that is fair and socially just for all (Adiche, 2014). Such transformation requires both men and

women to redefine themselves. In this regard the module encourages all students and tutors to align themselves with feminism of the new moral vision, which integrates cultural feminism without the radical feminism, which works towards the goal of addressing inequality as the result of the masculine bias, and creates for both men and women, inclusion in a male dominated society (Donovan, 1994). Male students and tutors are encouraged to become allies in this form of activism, as is embodied in Xolani's narrative excerpt which follows.

During my undergraduate years at university, feminism was often portrayed as a movement that promoted the domination of women or one that sought to "turn the tables" against men. As a result, I never critically engaged with feminism during those years. Like many of my peers, I accepted the prevailing idea that feminism was "anti-men," and I therefore found little reason to explore it further.

Fast forward to 2023, as a PhD candidate, when I was granted the opportunity to serve as a tutor on the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship module. Although I had long held a passion for issues related to justice and equity, I had never truly engaged with feminist theory or critically interrogated its aims and contributions. The tutor training process was transformative. In our preparation sessions, we examined various aspects of justice and inequality, one of which was feminism. It was during this training that feminism was presented not as an attack on men, but as a commitment to equal rights, opportunities, and dignity for all genders, with a specific focus on dismantling the structures and systems that have historically oppressed women and girls. Feminism, I came to understand, challenges traditions and ideologies that restrict people's freedom based on gender. It seeks a society where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive, express themselves freely, and participate equally.

This new understanding sparked a profound transformation in me. I began to read feminist texts more seriously and intentionally. The more I read, the more I understood feminism as a liberatory discourse that includes everyone. I embraced it wholeheartedly. Yet, I soon realised that this was only the beginning. The journey of transformation was, and continues to be, deeply personal and at times unsettling. As I began to challenge my own learned behaviours and beliefs, I felt a sense of fragmentation as if parts of myself were slipping away. These were parts rooted in my socialisation; values I had long held as core to who I was. Questions haunted me: "If I no longer believe in what I was taught to believe, then who am I? What replaces those beliefs?"

This marked the beginning of a deep and ongoing introspection. I had to interrogate the possibility that some of the very values and norms I held sacred were in fact sustaining the injustices I now stood against as a social justice facilitator. I began unearthing layers of my own socialisation. Messages like "men don't cry," "a man must always be strong," and "showing emotion is a weakness" were familiar, yet suffocating. They shaped my behaviour, limited my self-expression, and implicitly taught me that vulnerability equated to weakness. These internalised lessons not only diminished my

humanity but also reinforced toxic masculinity, which I now recognise as harmful not only to women but to men as well.

Through this reflection, I realised that feminism speaks directly to these issues. It affirms that emotional expression, sensitivity, and compassion are not traits exclusive to one gender, and more importantly, that their presence does not diminish one's identity. Feminism allowed me to reclaim my full humanity and prompted me to unlearn the limiting beliefs I had inherited.

Unlearning has not been a simple process. It required me to confront uncomfortable truths about myself. I began asking questions like: "In what ways have I contributed to the very hierarchies I now wish to dismantle?" I had to confront the reality that I once held different standards for men and women. Subtly, but powerfully, I realised I showed greater respect or confidence in men than in women, believing that competence and leadership were male traits, and only extraordinary women occupied such roles.

This realisation unnerved me, but it was necessary in pushing me to critically examine the structures that reinforce gender inequality – that gender roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed and enforced through rewards and punishments, spoken and unspoken. In my upbringing, I was not explicitly told to disrespect women. Instead, the messages were more covert, passed down through jokes, expectations, who got to speak at family events, and who made decisions. These gendered expectations were enforced through praise ("you're a strong boy," "you're not a cry-baby, good!") and through ridicule ("stop acting like a girl," "don't be weak"). Feminism helped me understand that these everyday moments are powerful forces of socialisation. They teach us what to value, who to listen to, and how to behave. To be part of a movement that questions and transforms these norms is, for me, liberating.

Working on this module has been both rewarding and challenging. The most significant tension I encountered was having to constantly reflect on my own position and identity as a facilitator, a fellow traveller on the path to social justice. This was a shift in power dynamics. In our tutorials, I was not the teacher imparting knowledge. I was a facilitator of conversations that often challenged deeply held beliefs, including my own. This position demanded humility, vulnerability, and constant reflection. But it also made the space more authentic. I positioned myself not as someone who has all the answers, but as someone affected by and invested in the same struggles as my students.

Facilitating this module taught me that transformation is not a neat or linear journey. It is messy, complex, and ongoing. Some prejudices are easier to let go of; others are more deeply rooted. I still battle with certain ideas that were ingrained in me through religion and cultural ideas about gender roles, sexuality and identity. I continue to wrestle with lingering discomforts, especially around homosexuality, shaped by years of religious

teaching that framed it as morally wrong. These teachings were enforced through sermons, family conversations, and even community ostracization of those who were “different.” The punishments were subtle but effective - disapproval, exclusion, shaming. These made it difficult to question the status quo. Even now, though I have intellectually unlearned many of these prejudices, emotionally, I still have to work to uproot the discomfort that sometimes resurfaces.

What I have learned is that honesty is crucial in this work. I do not pretend to have fully arrived. I am still becoming a feminist, a facilitator, a more inclusive and socially just human being. But I do so now with clarity and conviction. Feminism, for me, is not a rejection of my identity as a man. It is the expansion of that identity. It is an invitation to live fully, to love without domination, and to engage the world with fairness and compassion. I believe now, more than ever, in the dignity of all people and the necessity of creating a world where everyone, regardless of gender, has the space to be seen, heard and valued.

Feminism, for me, is no longer this distant concept or misunderstood label. It's part of how I live, how I relate to others, and how I see the world. It has made me a better listener, a more compassionate man, and a more reflective human being. I believe now that we all have the capacity to live more freely and fully but only if we're willing to let go of the parts of ourselves that were shaped by inequality. I'm still on that path, but I know it's a journey worth taking. **(Xolani Masuku).**

Having a male tutor speak openly about his journey of becoming a feminist, not only helps other tutors and students realise that embedded patriarchy continues to be reflected in gender identities in South Africa, but is also a brave example of how individuals can change from what they have always considered the norm, to imagining a different way to be and view the world.

While acknowledging the role that his socialisation played in moulding his beliefs about gender and the power relations between them, Xolani's narrative comes out strongly in defence of hooks' (1992) position that none of us are passive victims of socialisation but that we can choose to be anti-sexist. This speaks clearly to the agency of individuals over their identities and lives, and their transformative capacity.

Conclusion

Through the tutor's narrative excerpts included in this paper, it is clear that tutoring on this module demands that tutors' embrace continuous interrogation of themselves and critically re-examine their relationships with students, towards an awareness that their sense of self change in order to enable the required changes in their facilitating (Jita, 2004). Through these narratives, a clearer picture emerges with regard to how new roles and competencies expected of tutors, challenge their individual realities and contexts, and how they are negotiating the inevitable tensions and contradictions which arise.

There is evidence that tutors are genuine in their commitment to the process of social justice education. The narratives speak to success in the area of encouraging in tutors critical thinking, a praxis of self - and social empowerment, where they can realize that they can act in ways other than they have been socialised to, and develop 'a vision of the world which is not yet' (McLaren, 1995, p.77). Tutors are 'intervening in the formation of their own subjectivity' (Giroux and Simon, 1988, p.10), and 'developing a politics of difference which actively contests the devaluation of those who have been relegated as the *other*' (McLaren, 1995, p.29). The narratives are evidence of how tutors are constructing their personal and professional selves, negotiating and exercising their transformative capacity and developing an alternative sense of self, both personally and professionally. There is definite evidence of these tutors' transformative capacity - a sense of something new developing, showing a sense of a willingness to move beyond the familiar.

It is clear that the path of tutors *becoming* social justice facilitators does not appear as linear, with instant transformation from one way of being to another, but instead manifests as messy, murky and multi-dimensional, highlighting the need for the commitment and intention to stay true to the principle of individualisation; the need to resist simple essentialist and reductionist analyses and understandings; and instead, recognise the diversity which exists within and between tutors. This paper is evidence of tutors engaging in the process of forging a new sense of self amid competing and converging influences and tensions, and within sites of contradiction and constraint. However uneven and ambivalent these reconstructions of self may be, transformation, in all its complexity, is taking place. The narrative excerpts from tutors in this paper are evidence of their commitment to carrying the torch of inclusion with passion, sensitivity and effectiveness. In their acknowledging and reflecting on their subjectivity and positionality, and their reclaiming, redefining and transforming their own historical destinies, they are in the process of constructing themselves as transformative agents, cultural workers, and facilitators for social responsibility, social change and social justice.

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