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'Walk Like a Chameleon': Reflecting on My Teaching Journey at a South African University

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In 2021, I was asked to give a keynote address at the inaugural symposium of the Swedish national research school, CuEEd-LL – Culturally Empowering Education through Language and Literature, which was to take place in March 2022. I decided to focus my talk on my teaching journey. This paper builds on this keynote and includes my reflections on why and how I teach literature at Rhodes University, a culturally diverse institution. My teaching journey can be described as an unending learning expedition – a journey that has been challenging yet rewarding and continues to enrich me as a Black African female academic in South Africa. In this paper, I draw freely from the elements of a play by dividing my discussion into four parts. I begin with the prologue, which lays out the structure of the paper. Act I is a summary of my teaching journey, where I briefly contextualise higher education in the world, South Africa and Rhodes University before interrogating the role of literature studies in Africa in general and South Africa in particular. Act II contains a discussion of the different theories that inform my teaching philosophy, and the epilogue concludes my teaching journey.

Prologue

In this paper, I use the Igbo simile, 'Walk like a chameleon', to reflect on my teaching journey. I have also structured my paper loosely on the standard elements of a play, in which this prologue serves as a short introduction. In Act I, give a brief context of higher education within the world, South Africa, and Rhodes University. I provide this context to situate my discipline, and to this end, I give a brief history of literary studies in the African and South African contexts. In Act II, I focus on the protagonists of my 'play' – my students and myself – while the various theorists serve as different characters. In addition, I describe my teaching philosophy by drawing on various theories of teaching espoused by bell hooks, Paul Ramsden, John Biggs and Daniel Pratt. In the process, I demonstrate how these philosophies are reflected in my teaching by highlighting a course that I teach and how I interact with students. Finally, the Epilogue gives a brief conclusion of my teaching journey.

Act I — 'Walk Like a Chameleon'

I begin my teaching memoir by quoting extensively from Nigerian feminist Obioma Nnaemeka. On the eve of Nnaemeka' s departure for graduate studies, her great-uncle cautioned her:

> He said, "When you go to obodo oyibo [the land of white people], walk like the chameleon." According to [her] great-uncle [,] the chameleon is an interesting animal to watch. As it walks, it keeps its head straight but looks in different directions. It does not deviate from its goal and grows wiser through the knowledge gleaned from the different perspectives it absorbs along the way. If it sees prey, it does not jump on it immediately. First, it throws out its tongue. If nothing happens to its tongue, it moves ahead and grabs the prey. The chameleon is cautious. When the chameleon comes into a new environment, it takes the colour of the environment without taking over. The chameleon adapts without imposing itself (. …) we need to walk like the chameleon—goal-oriented, cautious, accommodating, adaptable, and open to diverse views. (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 382)

I find it useful to use the metaphor of 'walk like a chameleon' to reflect on my teaching at higher institutions of learning. The metaphor helps me to explain what I teach, how I teach it, and why I teach in this way. In reflecting on my journey through various higher institutions in South Africa, I have been Janus-faced, looking not only back to see where I have come from but also forward to

think of new ways of improving my teaching. Although I have been cautious in my journey, I will demonstrate that it has also been goal-oriented, accommodating, adaptable and open to diverse views.

My journey as an academic started accidentally while I was studying for an Honours degree in English at the University of Pretoria in 1995.[1] I did not have enough money to pay my tuition fees, so I was looking for part-time employment. One of my friends informed me that the Department of English at Vista University in Mamelodi needed additional tutors to teach first-year students.[2] A year after the first democratic elections, the enrolment of first-year students at the university increased dramatically. This was to be my first teaching job at an institution of higher learning In South Africa. In 1996, after I had completed my Honours degree, I was offered a 1-year contract as a temporary junior lecturer. In 1998, I took up a full-time position as a junior lecturer in the same department. By 2000, student enrolment had significantly reduced, which meant that many staff members had to be laid off, and I was one of those who lost their job. Nevertheless, the time at Vista gave me the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2002, I was offered a position as a lecturer in the Department of English Studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA).[3] Thereafter, in 2007, I left UNISA for Stellenbosch University, where I took up a position as a lecturer in the Department of English – a position I held until 2013. On completion of my doctorate at Stellenbosch University, I joined the Department of English at Rhodes University in 2014.

As I reflect on my teaching journey, I recognise that is has been a challenging yet worthwhile experience that continues to enrich me as a Black female academic in South Africa.

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[1] In South Africa, an Honours degree is a postgraduate qualification that is taken after one has completed a 3-year undergraduate degree. In literary studies, one needs to complete an Honours degree before embarking on a Master's degree.

[2] In 2004, Vista University, Mamelodi Campus was incorporated into the University of Pretoria. It is now one of seven campuses of the University of Pretoria.

[3] The University of South Africa (UNISA), is the biggest open distance learning institution in Africa and one of the oldest in the world.

Higher Education in the Global Context

It is necessary for me to begin by briefly contextualising higher education in the world, South Africa and Rhodes University before I situate myself as a Black woman in my discipline. The world is experiencing rapid change, and this is evident in its economic growth and progress in modern forms of technology, which in turn has led to increased urbanisation. In spite of these advances, there has been an upsurge in civil instability and conflict: a global pandemic, an increasingly younger global population, a widening inequality gap, and escalations in intolerance and hostility. During these unsettled times, we have also witnessed an increase in the basic need for human rights and dignity. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report in 2015 titled 'Rethinking education: Towards a global common good?' reflects on the role of education and attempts to address three fundamental questions: 'What education do we need for the 21st century?[4] What is the purpose of education in the current context of societal transformation? How should learning be organized?' (2015, p. 3). To achieve this, a multi-dimensional and holistic approach is needed that considers new forms of basic quality education that provide a solid foundation for lifelong learning in a complex and transforming world. Therefore, to address these challenges, current education systems need to transform learning content and pedagogies by 'taking into account multiple worldviews and alternative knowledge systems' (2015, p. 10).

Higher Education in South Africa

Higher education in South Africa is not exempt from a society that is changing rapidly; yet, there are socio-economic problems specific to South Africa. Twenty-nine years after the dawn of a new democracy, despite many changes, massive challenges remain.[5] Jonathan Jansen argues that 'there are a multitude of changes that have transformed higher education in South Africa' and that 'while continuities remain, the higher education system does not represent the distortion, upheaval and fragmentation that marked the sector at the start of the 1990s' (cited in Badat, 2009, p. 465).

[4] UNESCO's report underlines the following fundamentals: to reaffirm a humanistic approach to education, sustainable development, encourage local and global policy-making in a complex world and recontextualise education and knowledge as global common goods. (UNESCO, 2015)

[5] On 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections.

These upheavals were a result of the apartheid struggle. For example, a racially segregated education system which resulted in constant strikes. In post-apartheid South Africa, it was imperative to transform the education system to a single system that was not divisive, as in, it should not privilege some groups while at the same time marginalise other groups. There was a need for a schooling system that treated everyone equally and accommodated a culturally diverse populace. The only way to redress the inequalities of the past was to have an education system that was inclusive, restored dignity, promoted justice and empowered learners. To this end, according to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, policy development aimed at 'democratising the education system, overcoming unfair discrimination, expanding access to education and training opportunities, and improving the quality of education, training and research' (2013, p. 1). There have been some accomplishments in this regard, for example, a single coordinated system, an increase in enrolment and diversity, an increase in bursaries and loans through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) [6], and better-quality training. A report by Statistics South Africa titled 'Vulnerable Groups Series 1: The Social Profile of Youth, 2009–2014' claims that 'black youths are less educated now than 20 years ago (…) less skilled than their parents', but Nic Spaull argues that this is incorrect. He maintains that research conducted by Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) shows that

> while the number of white graduates produced annually has increased only moderately from about 27 500 to 35 000 in the past 25 years, the number of black graduates has increased sixteenfold from about 3400 in 1986 to more than 63 000 in 2012 (. …) Between 1994 and 2014, the number of black graduates with degrees being produced each year has more than quadrupled, from about 11 339 (in 1994) to 20 513 (in 2004) and 48 686 graduates (in 2014). (Spaull, 2016, p. 30)

Without negating these achievements, Spaull agrees that there is a crisis in the education system, as demonstrated by various student protests such as Rhodes Must Fall. This was a movement that began in March 2015, initially directed at removing a statue at the University of Cape Town that

[6] The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a public body that offers financial aid to learners who have been admitted to various institutions of higher learning but cannot afford to fund their studies.

celebrated Cecil Rhodes. The campaign for the statue's removal led to a wider movement to decolonise education across South Africa. The movement #Feesmustfall was a student-led protest movement that began in mid-October 2015, with the aim to stop increases in student fees as well as a demand for the government to increase the funding allocated to institutions of higher learning. In addition, Chapter 2.12 was a campaign at Rhodes University that addressed rape culture at universities and held University management accountable for the inadequacies in the handling of rape cases. These protests were a stark reminder that more still needs to be done. Saleem Badat (2009) notes that in 'as much as there has been significant institutional change in higher education since 1994, there was no "total, rapid and sweeping displacement" of structures, institutions, policies, and practices' (p. 465). The student protests brought to the fore issues of institutional culture that are insidious and continue to marginalise those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, students continue to call for the curriculum to be reformed, with curriculum practice that speaks to the diverse student population and alternative theoretical frameworks. As Badat (2009) rightly points out,

> institutional change in post-1994 South African higher education has been characterised by stasis in certain areas and great fluidity in others, as well as continuities with the past in some areas and discontinuities in others. There has been stasis with respect to the challenges of decolonising, de-racialising and de-gendering of inherited intellectual spaces, and the nurturing of a new generation of academics who are increasingly black and women. (p. 465–6)

In addition, some setbacks have happened that were not anticipated, for example, according to the White Paper for Post School Education and Training, the financial aid provided by NSFAS does not cater for the 'missing middle', which refers to

> those students whose parental incomes are too high to qualify for funding from NSFAS, but are too low to qualify for loans from private financial institutions. This group of students includes the children of teachers, nurses and police personnel as well as many public servants, clerical workers and skilled manual workers. (2013, p. 8)

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these inequalities, which included internet access, access to personal computers, electricity and conducive learning environments.

In addition to the student movements, scholars such as Jansen, Badat and Spaull revealed the tensions in the higher education sector in South Africa, which precipitated the need to look for solutions for these problems. Now I turn my attention to some of the solutions which contributed to the process of decolonisation and transformation in South Africa before discussing the value of literary studies in the country. Like other African countries, post-apartheid South Africa also inherited a colonial and apartheid education system which indoctrinated all South Africans. Badat (2009) argues in relation to institutional change: 'An analysis of the dynamics of change exposed the inevitable tensions, contestations, paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities' (p. 461). This is why student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall, the Black Student Movement, Chapter 2.12, and Fees Must Fall advocated for a more radical form of decolonisation of the curriculum and transformation of the higher education structures. To quote Badat (2009), students are calling for 'a complete rupture or total displacement of old structures, institutions and practices' (p. 456). Following in the footsteps of other post-colonial countries in Africa, Achille Mbembe argues that 29 years after the demise of apartheid, South Africa is experiencing a negative moment. This moment, which is grey, murky and lacks clarity, is

> when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved (…) when contradictory forces – inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain (. …) a moment when multiple old and recent unresolved crises seem to be on the path towards a collision. Such a collision might happen – or maybe not. It might take the form of outbursts that end up petering out. Whether the collision actually happens or not, the age of innocence and complacency is over. (Mbembe, n.p. 2015)

By his own admission, Mbembe is not saying anything original, but rather he is echoing what other African thinkers such as Ngũgĩ, Fanon, and many others have said. Like Ngũgĩ, Mbembe describes a Eurocentric canon as 'a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production'. This becomes a hegemonic discourse that 'actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames' (Mbembe, 2015). Mbembe suggests that institutions of higher education 'must undergo a process of *decolonization* both of knowledge and of the university as an institution' (2015). Decolonisation, he argues, is about reshaping human beings, rearranging matters and forms, interrogating pre-existing models and rejecting those paradigms.

According to Badat (2009), transformation is about the intentional '*dissolution* of existing social relations and institutions, policies and practices, and their *re-creation* and consolidation into something substantially new' (p. 456). Mbembe's idea of 'pluriversity instead of university', speaks to Badat's concept of the dissolution and recreation of something new. By problematising the term 'university', Mbembe begins to engage in a form of decolonisation. Pluriversity does not regard a Eurocentric model that is supposed to be universal; instead, pluriversities allow us to understand knowledge production as a process that is open to epistemic diversity. This is accomplished by incorporating '*a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic tradition'* (Mbembe, 2015, emphasis in original). I find the idea of pluriversity appealing given that it is one of the ways in which we can begin to transform learning content and pedagogies. Pluriversity speaks to most of the tenets of the UNESCO report as it is a humanistic approach that considers multiple worldviews and alternative knowledge systems.

As one of the 26 public universities in South Africa, my own institution, Rhodes University, gives me hope when it makes explicit the following aspects that speak to similar objectives in the White Paper and the UNESCO report. In particular, these objectives are to develop common values that support basic human and civil rights; to acknowledge problems created by the apartheid legacy, rejecting forms of discrimination and redressing past imbalances; to create research and learning environments that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they become critical and capable graduates who can adapt to changing environments; and to instil a desire for lifelong learning (Rhodes University Calendar, p.iii 2022).

Therefore, what is the role of the humanities? Louise Vincent (2016) makes a convincing case for studying the humanities when she argues that, although the humanities are often dismissed because they do not produce graduates who will 'earn' good money or provide critical and scarce skills or technical and business solutions to problems, they are nevertheless important in this rapidly changing society because it is through the humanities that 'society engages with a conversation with itself' (n.p.). According to Vincent (2016), the aim of the Humanities is to 'produce ethical and reflective citizens capable of adapting to change and leading in innovation because they are creative, lateral and critical thinkers' (n.p). Through the humanities, we are better able to interpret, summarise and critically engage with various forms of information. Therefore, the humanities are ideally placed because its disciplines can offer a humanistic and holistic approach that embraces

values that promote dignity, 'social justice, cultural and social diversity, human solidarity and shared responsibility for a common future' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 38).

Literary Studies in English in Africa

How does the discipline of literary studies in English fit within the broader field of the humanities? As an academic, I am located in the Department of Literary Studies in English. The Department of English, and English literature by extension, carry enormous historical, cultural and political baggage. Generally, in South Africa and Africa, English departments are regarded with scepticism, given that they are considered to represent all that is associated with the British colonial project. There is some legitimacy to these claims, as Njabulo Ndebele (1991) notes in relation to the role of the English language in South Africa: it is a complex and fraught matter 'that goes far beyond the convenience and correctness of its use, for the very convenience, and that very correctness (…) in essence, [is] problematic' (p. 106). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o points out that English studies in British colonial Africa was an overseas extension of the University of London. Also, as Grace A. Musila (2015) reminds us, the 'ostensible mission of the colonial project — civilizing natives — necessitated inducting natives into European cultural and knowledge systems' (p. 120–1). In this regard, the curriculum of the English department involved

> a study of history of English literature from Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton to James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, I.A Richards and the inevitable F.R. Leavis. Matthew Arnold's quest for the sweetness and light of a hellenized English middle class; T.S. Eliot's high culture of an Anglo-Catholic feudal tradition, (…) and to the racial doctrines of those born to rule; the Leavisite selected 'Great Tradition of English Literature' and his insistence on the moral significance of literature. (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 90).

Therefore, as Ngũgĩ (1981) argues, the literature that African students were exposed to was reinforced by 'their study of geography and history, and science and technology where Europe was, once again, the centre. This in turn fitted well with the cultural imperatives of British imperialism' (p. 93). In other words, given that their perspective of the world was Eurocentric, they understood and defined themselves through a European paradigm.

This is why Frantz Fanon advocated for decolonisation that involved

> profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures. It can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts. The end result of decolonization is not only the creation of new kinds of self-governance but also 'the creation of new men' (and women). (cited in Mohanty, 2003, p. 7)

Although English departments seem to receive the bulk of criticism, in my opinion, most disciplines and structures were inherited from the colonial system, and the need for radical change applies to all. While I may acknowledge and understand the suspicion surrounding English literature, I do not think it is useful to jettison the entire 'English tradition'. Instead, taking my cue from scholars such as Ngũgĩ, Chinua Achebe, and Simon Gikandi, who have interrogated various aspects of the 'Great Tradition of English Literature', I argue that it is possible and necessary for me, as a female, Black, African academic to situate myself within English literary studies. The aforementioned critics advocated for more-inclusive literary studies departments that acknowledge and accommodate other forms of literature in order to decolonise and transform the curriculum; for example, in 1968, 'the great Nairobi literature debate' was a rejection of 'the primacy of English literature and cultures' (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 94). However, according to Ngũgĩ, Owuor Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyongo, it was not a total condemnation of English literature. For these critics, it was about prioritising or moving the centre away from English literature and cultures and replacing it with the study of African literatures and cultures, thus affirming African literatures and cultures. As Ngũgĩ (1981) rightly observes, we

> want to establish the centrality of Africa in the department. This, we have argued, is justifiable on various grounds, the most important one being that education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective. (p. 94)

The idea was to use African and African diaspora perspectives to understand ourselves and our relation to the world. It was the rejection of using English culture to understand local cultures and an affirmation of African cultures – a 'project of re-centring' to borrow from Achille Mbembe (2015, emphasis in original). According to Ngũgĩ, this 'project of re-centering' involved a process of 'decolonising the mind'. He regards 'the politics of language in African literature [as] a search

for a liberating perspective which allows us to see ourselves in relation to 'other selves in the universe' (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 87). This 'quest for relevance' (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 87) was not only about the writing of literature but also could be extended to include 'the teaching of that literature in schools and universities and to the critical approaches' (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 87).

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In a different but related context, Achebe (1990) spoke of the African novel as a 'form of fiction [that had] seized the imagination of many African writers and they [could] use it according to their differing abilities, sensibilities and visions without seeking anyone's permission' (p. 99). In other words, according to Ngũgĩ and Achebe, there was a fundamental need for change in English departments, and African literature offered alternative possibilities for understanding ourselves. Although Gikandi (1991) astutely observes that the founders of African literature were a by-product of colonialism and modern 'African literature was produced in the crucible of colonialism' (p. 379), it nevertheless became a tool of cultural resistance against colonialism, as 'it was a discursive mode through which Africans could try to represent and mediate their location both inside and outside colonial culture' (Gikandi, 1991, p. 383). Despite the debates on the definition of African literature, I agree with Gikandi that, in the broad sense, African literature helps us to understand ourselves. For example, it is through literature that we recognise the detriments of the colonial project which used culture and knowledge as a vehicle of subjugation and disempowerment.

Lastly, the changes in East Africa were not limited to what literature was included on the syllabus and how it was taught, but there was also a deliberate and major shift in the very name. The designation 'Department of English' was rejected in favour of 'Department of Literature', which

signified a disavowal of compliance and resistance to structures of cultural domination, specifically, the 'English tradition' and an assertion of more inclusive literary representations such as African, Caribbean, African American and world literatures. It is unfortunate that the South African education system in general and universities in particular, with the exception of the African Literature Department at Wits University, still hold on to the designation 'English department'. Nonetheless, in 2017, my colleagues proposed for a change in name, from the Department of English' to the 'Department of Literary Studies in English'.

I choose to define my discipline as 'literary studies in English', not 'English literary studies', because I position myself differently. I am passionate about literary studies because it allows me to use my specific location to understand the world. It is my experience and perspective as a Black African woman working within a literary studies department that informs what I teach and how I teach.

Literary Studies in English in the Wider South African Context

Where does the discipline of literary studies fit into the broader South African context? According to the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa report, one of the key "binding constraints" on economic and social development has been the 'shortage of skills, — including professional skills such as engineers and scientists; managers such as financial, personnel and project managers; and skilled technical employees such as artisans and IT technicians' (cited in Badat, 2009, p. 457).

In South Africa, there is much emphasis on increasing scarce and critical skills, such as business and technical skills. Implicit in this report is that literary studies, like other disciplines in humanities, do not provide these scarce skills. There tends to be an underlying cynicism and misconception that literary studies has little or no practical value, which is why it does not fall within the ambit of scarce and critical skills. Therefore, by extension, it is not relevant for economic development. Badat (2009) reminds us that

> it cannot be blithely assumed that, if a country produces high-quality graduates, especially in the natural sciences, technology, engineering and other key fields, this will automatically have a profound effect on the economy. The formation of person power through higher education is a

> necessary condition for economic growth and development, but is not a sufficient condition. (p. 463, emphasis in original)

Although literary studies is not considered a critical skill and it is not about learning facts, the study of literature involves 'developing mental skills and habits that will enable [one] to write intelligently about texts [one has] read' (Kane, Byrne & Scheepers, 2006, p. ix). In other words, reading, thinking, discussing, writing and other skills that are developed empower students to think critically about what they are reading. Because the study of literature requires the constant analysis of difficult literary texts, it fosters the development of skills that can be transferred to other contexts. A student who is taught literature will be better equipped than most to read, comprehend, and analyse other kinds of texts such as newspapers, reports, briefs and similar. In other words, studying literature prepares or trains students to understand, apply, analyse, evaluate and construct an argument.

The study of literature encourages a deeper approach to learning, as opposed to a surface approach. I will explain this later when I speak to my teaching philosophy. These skills are valuable for students, but I also read and teach literature because it helps us to simultaneously transcend and relate to different cultures.

Through various representations, such as fiction, drama and poetry, literature teaches us to appreciate diverse cultures, histories and locations. The study of literature allows us to use our imagination to sympathise with other human beings and understand human complexity, which is necessary for enhancing social change. To put it differently, through literary studies, we are able to interrogate different periods and places, and question how diverse forms of reading and representation allow us to understand ourselves and our society. As mentioned, it allows us to 'reveal ourselves to ourselves'.

All disciplines within higher education have immense intrinsic value economically, socially and politically. Martha Nussbaum argues 'that education is intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship, and to the cultivation of humanity' (cited in Badat, 2009, p. 463). For Nussbaum, there are three capacities that are important in fostering humanity. First 'is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions' (cited in Badat, 2009, p. 463). This requires training in logically reasoning, which allows one 'to test what one reads for consistency of

reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgement' (Badat, 2009, p. 463). Second, there is a need for students and learners 'to see themselves "as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern"' (Badat, 2009, p. 463), which is why it is crucial to try and understand 'different cultures and "differences of gender, race, and sexuality"' (Badat, p. 463). Lastly, although 'factual knowledge' is required, what is also necessary is to empathise with another 'to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have' (Badat, p. 463).

Therefore, my role as a literary academic is to encourage the study of local and world literatures written or translated into English; introduce students to different historical periods and genres; expose them to different critical, theoretical and scholarly frameworks; and assist them to develop reading, thinking, writing and verbal skills. I see this as a humanistic approach that promotes 'greater justice, social equity and global solidarity' and hopefully instils a desire for lifelong learning.

ACT II — Teaching Philosophy

The following lengthy background on higher education and literary studies is because I use this context and the theories espoused bell hooks, Paul Ramsden, John Biggs and Daniel Pratt to think critically on how I teach and the principles that inform my teaching. I maintain that part of my current teaching philosophy is what bell hooks has termed 'engaged pedagogy'. hooks describes engaged pedagogy as an interactive relationship between student and teacher. For example, whenever I first encounter students in small groups, such as a tutorial, seminar or elective, I begin by taking the time to get to know my students. I introduce myself, and then the class goes through various kinds of ice-breaking activities. For example, one of the tools I use is a set of interview questions. I pair students and then ask them to interview each other. Once they have filled out the questionnaire, I ask the interviewer to introduce the interviewee to the rest of the class. By the end of this process, which takes approximately 25 minutes, all the students have had the opportunity to share something about who they are.

I have always used this process to get to know students, and according to hooks (2010), it helps me as the teacher to understand where my students 'are coming from and what their hopes and dreams might be' (p. 20). Taking the time to get acquainted, according to hooks, changes the atmosphere in the class to one that is positive and encourages learning. hooks also encourages the

teacher to participate fully in this process and make themselves vulnerable in this shared space. In addition to creating a conducive atmosphere, I have always made sure that in my classes every student is encouraged to participate in class. I achieve this by asking each student to share their ideas or thoughts on the topic or primary text of the day. I discovered this teaching style through hooks, as it encourages collective learning. It also fosters independent thinking, and in the process, it allows or enables students to find their scholarly voice.

Collective learning acknowledges that every student has a valuable contribution to make in the learning process. According to hooks, there is tremendous value in speaking and dialogue, the ability to speak and say something useful, as well as the necessity of active listening. hooks also explains how engaged pedagogy takes place when both teacher and student are able to establish a mutually beneficial relationship where they are able to nurture each other. This kind of interaction supports active learning. It does not focus on getting through all the material in a syllabus, and it is not about covering certain content. Instead, it is a method that strives for a deeper approach to learning, as opposed to a surface approach to learning. According to John Biggs (2012), a 'deep approach refers to activities that are appropriate to handling the task so that an appropriate outcome is achieved', while a 'surface approach refers to activities of an inappropriately low cognitive level, which yields fragmented outcomes that do not convey the meaning of the encounter' (p. 42). In other words, a deep approach to learning occurs when material can be remembered and used after the subject has been completed.

In contrast, a surface approach to learning happens when information is memorised with the sole intention of completing a course, and once the course is over, the material is forgotten. Researchers Ference Marton and Roger Säljö, who are strong proponents of student learning, explain, 'We are not arguing that the deep/holistic approach is always "best": only that it is the best, indeed the only way to understand learning materials' (cited in Ramsden, 2003, p. 46). For Paul Ramsden, surface 'is, at best, about quantity; deep is about quality and quantity' (2003, p. 45). I believe this approach gives all students an equal grounding in the discipline.

Like the goal-oriented chameleon, I constantly seek different perspectives on my teaching practises in an attempt to reflect critically on my views and perceptions. I began by taking Daniel Pratt's Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) online survey. Pratt (2002) defines a perspective on teaching as 'an interrelated set of beliefs and intentions that gives direction and justification to our actions.

It is a lens through which we view teaching and learning' (p. 6). He goes on to identify five perspectives on teaching: transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing and social reform. The results of the survey I took revealed that my dominant perspectives are developmental and nurturing, while transmission is my recessive perspective. Pratt states that most teachers embody all five views, but to varying degrees. I agree with Pratt's argument in 'Good teaching: One size fits all?' that there is no one particular approach to teaching. Therefore, I would argue that although the survey claims my dominant perspectives are developmental, nurturing and apprenticeship, I feel that my philosophical viewpoints are multi-dimensional, and my approach to teaching encapsulates aspects from all five perspectives to varying degrees.

According to Pratt, the developmental perspective focuses on developing students' complex and sophisticated ways of thinking within a particular subject. The teacher uses the prior knowledge that students have and builds on it so that, in the end, their ways of thinking and reasoning are far more sophisticated. The aim of this perspective is not to change how students think, but rather it is about using their own knowledge to construct deeper understanding. This is partly achieved through

> the judicious use of effective questioning that challenges learners to move from relatively simple to more complex forms of thinking and the use of meaningful examples. Questions, problems, cases, and examples form the bridge that teachers use to transport learners from previous ways of thinking and reasoning to new, more complex, and sophisticated forms of reasoning and problem solving. (Pratt, 2002, p. 6)

This perspective is similar to constructive theory, which acknowledges that learners are not passive empty vessels that need to be filled, but rather they have agency in their own learning abilities, and for them, effective learning occurs when they are 'primarily involved in the primary construction of knowledge' (Stewart, 2013, p. 10). For example, in 2019, I offered a third-year elective course titled Global Chick-Lit or Trans-Global Literature? Re-reading Contemporary Women's Fiction (hereafter, 'Chick-lit elective'). After the first introductory class where we got to know each other, I asked the students to go and read any Mills and Boon novel and write a review of it for the next class. Most students have read romance novels at one point or another in their life, but not encountered them in an academic context. Writing a review of one forces them to engage with the text differently.

Once they began to read out their reviews in class, they started to notice that all romance novels are written according to a particular formula. This prompted me to ask, 'If romance novels are formulaic, why do they continue to be successful?'. This question opens up the discussion, not only about the texts but also the role of the writers, the readers and the publishers. After establishing the features of a romance novel, I asked the students to read two or three African romance novels, including Nollybooks, Sapphire Press and Ankara Press. In their reading, I asked them to identify the differences and similarities between Western romances and the African novels. In most cases, my students have encountered the Western romance novel, but not the African romance novels. By the end, the students have begun to understand that romance fiction cannot simply be dismissed, as it is far more complicated than it seems, and there are nuanced ways of understanding what makes this genre highly successful.

Secondly, the nurturing perspective, which I also identify with, presupposes that through diligence and persistence, students are motivated to use their own effort and ability to achieve success. Pratt (2002) notes that students are productive when 'they are working on issues or problems without fear of failure' (p. 11). The learning is not due to the teacher's knowledge, but rather the nurturing environment, created and supported by teachers and peers. According to Pratt (2002), most students come into institutions of higher learning 'with wounds from previous schooling' (p. 11), in other words, they are vulnerable.

As mentioned, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. This inequality is reflected in the education system, which has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the majority of students come from under-resourced schools. In order for such students to become more confident, the nurturing teacher needs 'to find a balance between caring and challenging. To do this, they promote a climate of caring and trust, helping people set reasonable but challenging goals, supporting effort and achievement' (Pratt, p. 11). Like engaged pedagogy, this perspective encourages the student to be less vulnerable. Although some critics feel that nurturing students lowers standards, I disagree. On the contrary, I would argue that it encourages students to draw on into their strengths. As Pratt (2002) contends, nurturing teachers 'make reasonable demands and set high expectations for their learners. For them, caring does not negate having high expectations' (p. 12).

My view is that students learn from their peers. Therefore, in addition to the discussions we have in class, I make sure that I set assessment tasks that encourage students to work with each other, and in the process, I hope that they will learn from each other. For example, in the Chick-lit elective, there are two tasks in which students are expected to work with one another. In the first assessment, they are randomly assigned a group, and each group is given a specific period of feminism criticism to research. Each group then presents their findings to the rest of the class. According to Sally Brown and Phil Race, oral presentations offer a different learning approach which allows students to demonstrate their communications skills, while teamwork provides skills that will be beneficial in the work environment, where, inevitably, they will have to work within groups. Although students tend to be uncomfortable with group presentations, I try to explain that this approach to learning fosters critical thinking, listening skills and oral communication – it is about active participation, which is what engaged pedagogy advocates.

In addition to the group presentations, which tend to focus on oral skills, after the presentations, the groups are dissolved and reassembled in different groups. This time, the assessment requires the students to write a group essay. Lynne Hunt and Denise Chalmers call this the 'jigsaw method'. For this task, students approach the assignment topic from a position of authority, which enables the student to provide an explanation to their peers. This means that each of the students has something valuable to contribute to the assignment. This method prevents students from approaching the topic 'from a position of ignorance', which, in turn, 'has a powerful effect on the quality of learning' (Chalmers & Macdonald 2013, p. 31). This is how I simultaneously set reasonable demands and have high expectations of my students. It is this aspect of my teaching approach that speaks directly to the apprenticeship perspective, and although these are not 'authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice' (Pratt, 2002, p. 9) I hope that students will acquire skills that are transferable to the workplace.

Additionally, when I supervise postgraduate students, I see my role as a supervisor as a form of informal mentorship that is not solely about the academic project. In reflecting on my role as an informal mentor, I recognise that this is how my apprenticeship perspective is manifested in my supervision. As Pratt (2002) notes, 'Learning is facilitated when people work on authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice' (p. 9). In other words, by helping my students to apply for funding, write an abstract, or work on a conference paper, I teach skills that are transferable to the

work environment of a young academic. It would be presumptuous of me to think that I have had a long-term impact on my students, but I hope to have influenced them in some way.

In line with this, I would like to highlight the achievements of some of my postgraduate students. After completing her Master's degree, one former student is employed in the registrar department for an art gallery that focuses on African and African diasporic artists. She oversees and manages all artworks that leave and enter the physical space. Additionally, she is involved in archiving the artworks as well as entering their histories, details and production into the database. A second student's Master's focused on African literature and its growth in the digital publishing industry. She is presently Head Editor at Odd Magazine, where she edits and curates each monthly issue. She is also Submissions Editor at Brittle Paper, where she selects, edits and publishes fiction and essays and is Prose Editor for the Afro Literary Magazine, where she edits and reviews prose submissions. One doctoral student is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Literature at Makerere University. The other is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of Literature. The third is a lecturer at the University of Cape Town in the Historical Studies Department. One is a postdoctoral fellow at the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) at Nelson Mandela University. She acts as coordinator for CriSHET, works as an editorial assistant on book projects, and currently supervises three postgraduate students.

The social reform perspective, according to Pratt (2002), is difficult to define because the teachers tend to be leaders or rebels who seek to interpret and change the world according to a set of ideals: 'Social reform teachers make three assumptions: that their ideals are necessary for a better society, that their ideals are appropriate for all, and that the ultimate goal of teaching is to bring about social change, not simply individual learning' (p. 14). I do not feel as though this perspective describes me, especially the idea of a leader or rebel. However, I identify with some of the attributes of this perspective. Social reform teachers encourage their students to interrogate 'dominant discourses of practice' (Pratt, 2002, p. 13). Within the field of literary studies, most of my teaching interests focus on texts or areas that are considered to be 'marginal'; for example, African literature, women's writing and popular fiction do not always get the recognition that they deserve within the canon of literary studies. They tend to be dismissed because they do not live up to the 'literariness' of canonical texts.

These texts that tend to be dismissed, marginalised, ignored or neglected are the main focus in my teaching. By introducing them to students, I try to encourage them to recognise why and how dominant discourses tend to produce biased forms of knowledge. In other words, like the social reform teacher, I ask students to critique and examine common practices, 'for their implicit values and the ways in which those practices reproduce and maintain untenable conditions. Texts and practices are interrogated for what is said and what is not said, what is included and what is excluded, and who is represented and who is not represented in the dominant discourses of practice' (Pratt, 2002, p. 13). In my classes, I encourage students to try to understand how knowledge is created and to disrupt the hegemonic discourses. I consider this my contribution to providing a curriculum that empowers my students. At the end, I want students to be critical of themselves and of society.

I am not always successful, and it is not always easy, but in my teaching journey, I have chosen to walk like a chameleon. I keep my head straight when I feel something is not working, and I consider new knowledge from different perspectives. As a teacher, I think I am goal-oriented, cautious, accommodating, adaptable, open to diverse views, and always reflective in my teaching practice.

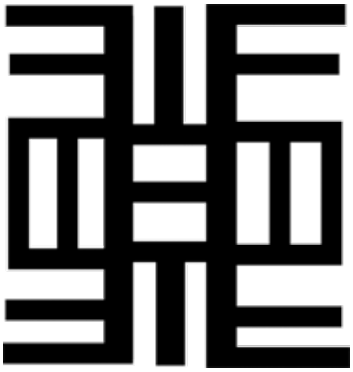
Epilouge

My experiences as a Black female African academic inform my teaching interests and approaches, and the teaching I have described in this paper demonstrates that most of my lectures are on African literature and women's writing. Taking my cue from African intellectuals and thinkers, I choose to place African and women's literary representations at the centre of my teaching. The theoretical frameworks that inform my analysis of these narratives are deeply embedded in various African, feminist, transnational and post-colonial discourses. This is my contribution to 'transforming', 'de-colonising' and 're-centring' the curriculum in my discipline. My approach is not exclusively Eurocentric, but rather it introduces and challenges students to think and recognise that there are alternative ways of understanding local and global contexts.

In my reflections on teaching throughout my teaching journey, I have tried to illustrate that becoming a good teacher is also a learning voyage, a lifelong expedition. Because of my multi-dimensional approaches to teaching and learning, I agree with Hunt et al. (2013), who observe that, effective

> university teaching is a holistic endeavour that embraces not only the practice of teaching but [also] an understanding of how students learn…in an inclusive and supportive learning environment…, assessment and feedback to students…; scholarship and reflective practice…; and continuous quality improvement. (p. 22)

I end with this ancient Andikra symbol, as it represents my views on teaching and learning. This pre-literate symbol from the Akan language in Ghana represents knowledge, lifelong education and the continued quest for knowledge.



Nea Onnim no Sua A Ohu

'One who does not know can know from learning'

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