

Teaching about social justice: black lecturer, white students

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This article reports an analysis of white students' reflections on the teaching of social justice issues by their black lecturer. These reflections follow their seemingly resistant behaviour in respect of the social justice-laden content, and the conscious effort by their lecturer at disrupting their silencing behaviour. At face value the reflections contradict the resistance initially displayed in class, with their journals reflecting an overwhelmingly accepting tone towards the social justice issues taught. This article aims to contribute to discussions regarding teaching about social justice.

Onderrig oor sosiale geregtigheid: swart dosent, wit studente

Hierdie artikel rapporteer 'n analise van wit studente se nadenke oor die onderrig van sosiale geregtigheidskwessies deur hul swart dosent. Dit volg na hulle skynbaar weerstandige gedrag teenoor die sosiale geregtigheidsgelade inhoud en die bewuste poging deur die dosent om hulle stilmakende gedrag te onderbreek. Oppervlakkig beskou weerspreek hul nadenke die weerstand wat hulle in die klas vertoon. Hul joernale weerspieël 'n oorwegend aanvaardende toon rakende die sosiale geregtigheidskwessies. Hierdie artikel poog om by te dra tot gesprekke oor die onderrig van sosiale geregtigheid.

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The late South African educationist, Wally Morrow (2007: 173), decried the poverty of a monocultural education.¹ Monocultural education refers to a form of education where students' experiences are consolidated in one specific culture in which its superiority is implicitly assumed and not challenged. The experiences of others who do not belong to this dominant culture are disregarded and marginalised in favour of all that symbolises the dominant culture. Morrow (2007: 173) mentioned that such an education deprives students of developing their moral imagination and fails in awakening students' intellectual curiosity. Insensitivity to the plight of others and even racism are very easily bred and cultivated in a monocultural education framework. Policymakers in higher education have apparently taken Morrow's (2007: 173) caution into account.

One of the outcomes deemed desirable by the Higher Education Act (DoE 1997: 2) is that higher education in South Africa should promote the values underlying an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. The act also states that tolerance of ideas and an appreciation of diversity are the cornerstones of what higher education is meant to instil in students. It can thus be expected that universities would have taken up the challenge to infuse their academic culture with policies and practices that strive towards creating sustainable empowering learning environments. However, a recent summit on higher education in South Africa (MacGregor 2010: 1-2) accepted the findings of a ministerial committee that indicate, among others, a disjunction between "institutional policies and the real-life experiences of staff and students" (Nzimande 2009: 2). This disjuncture manifests in some instances as an intolerance of diversity and as the marginalisation of non-dominant cultures on university campuses.

1 In this article, the terms "black" and "white" are used not in acknowledgment of disgraced biological and politico-administrative notions of race, but to signify the still powerful social construct of race. By using "race" as a signifier I protest the simplistic denial of the power this construct still holds in South African society (Dixon & Tredoux 2006: 461; Francis *et al* 2003: 138).

In 2008, following reports of incidents of intolerance on university campuses, the then Minister of Education established a ministerial committee on progress towards transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions (DoE 2008: 9). This committee's report became known as the "Soudien report", after the chairperson, Professor Crain Soudien (Nzimande 2009: 2). Despite self-critique (DoE 2008: 12) and critique by others (Oloyede 2009: 431) relating to aspects of the report, the Soudien report is lauded as providing firm insight into the extent to which discrimination and intolerance prevail in South African higher education institutions (Nzimande 2009: 2; MacGregor 2010: 1; Moodie 2010: 1). The body representing the vice-chancellors of South African higher education institutions, Higher Education South Africa, welcomed the Soudien report (Moodie 2010: 2). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2009a: 11; 2009b: 85) also accepted the findings of the Soudien report, indicating its own experiences reflect much of the findings. It appears that despite lofty policy ideals to move away from the perils of monocultural education, the university landscape in South Africa is still beset with arrogance and insensitivity to the plight of others.

The Soudien report locates much of the intolerance on historically white universities (DoE 2008: 16). However, according to the report, the disjunction between policy and implementation is not limited to such institutions, but is also evident at historically black universities. In an earlier overview of the contribution of higher education to the reconstruction of South African society, Subotzky (2005: 134) found a delay in the implementation of potentially society-building policies. Although there were obvious changes in higher education, these cannot always be ascribed to policy and planning imperatives (Subotzky 2005: 134). Oloyede (2009: 432) also acknowledges changes in higher education institutions but agrees that they do not reflect a transformation of "the state of things". In his reflection on education reform in the post-apartheid South African school context, when he puts forward the theory of political symbolism, Jansen (2001: 271) asks the painful question: "What if the policy stated was not in the first instance intended to change

practice?”. The question is painful because it exposes non-delivery of policy promises of a better society by means of post-apartheid laws and regulations. As evidenced by the Soudien report (DoE 2008: 11) and Subotzky (2005: 134), one can also ask the same kind of question concerning higher education: “What if higher education institutions’ policies were not in the first instance intended to change practice?”.

Political symbolism can lead to policies that are high on ideals but low on strategies for proper implementation (Jansen 2001: 274). In higher education this political symbolism of policies may have indicated that policies were only intended to symbolically signify how a break was made with an embarrassing past. Real social and other forms of transformation were probably never intended to have happened. In grappling with the issue of policy and practice disjuncture, Reddy (2004: 7) specifies two discourses of social transformation prevalent at universities: the realist-instrumentalist paradigm where quantitative, procedural changes are made by means of regulation and co-ordination using a language which Reddy (2004: 7) calls “part state-speak, part populist and part specialist”, and the discourse of a radical, not reformist, transformation locating the university in the broader struggles of society at large. This paradigm highlights the social conditions of groups of people marginalised under apartheid. The Soudien report, in a sense, echoes Reddy’s (2004: 8) findings that historically white universities, in their response to transformation, remain to a large extent in the realist-instrumentalist paradigm where mere changes in policies are lauded as evidence of transformation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Reddy (2004: 8) and the Soudien report found that much of the struggles of black students and staff at historically white institutions mirror the struggles of black students and staff in the 1980s. For example, the curricula of historically white institutions still contain pre-1994 conservative discourses (Esakov 2009: 79). The curricula of universities are generally resistant to change (Esakov 2009: 73) but as long as curriculum content continues to reflect ideologies of oppression, the university’s role as a critical voice is undermined. Genuine transformation will not happen if the curriculum is devoid

of constructive talk about race (Rusch & Horsford 2009: 307) and engaged citizenship (Waghid 2008: 21). Curriculum transformation needs, among other strategies, to highlight the conditions of those who are negatively affected by apartheid if transformation of the curriculum aims to cultivate students to become compassionate citizens (Waghid 2004: 46). The Soudien report (DoE 2008: 119) explicitly states that a solely technical focus on transforming curricula in terms of skills and competencies is not ideal. It recommends, and the Council for Higher Education (2009a: 10 & 2009b: 86) agrees, that curriculum transformation should provide students with sufficient challenges about their understanding of the current social and political context as well as how they are to contribute to an evolving democratic society. Curriculum content and practices are ideal ways to initiate curriculum transformation in an effort to create sustainable empowering learning environments in higher education. This entails thorough reflection on educational practices, followed by efforts to transform the practices for the benefit of all students (Mahlomaholo 2009: 25).

In an earlier article, I argued for change in the content of the subject educational psychology (Nel 2009: 41). Universities have policies and statements declaring commitments to transformation. Although I was aware that I could expect resistance in the institutional culture of my faculty (Rusch & Horsford 2009: 310), I nonetheless implemented content changes by including community psychology theory and values to reflect a social justice approach in my educational psychology modules. Roux (2010: 2) later argued in more detail concerning the need for deep and meaningful curriculum transformation at our university. The next section describes my experience of how curriculum transformation was experienced in one module.

1. Methodology

The methodology followed in this research can be described as auto-ethnography (Mertens 2009: 270) where the data reflect my own experience (Smith 2005: 71). Therefore, in the tradition of

teachers who carry out research by reflecting upon their practices (Gómez *et al* 2009: 484), I shall narrate and reflect on the experiences.

The present research is located within a faculty of education which has a majority of white students on campus. This university was previously an autonomous white university which has now merged with two other campuses.

In 2009, I was the only black lecturer in a group of twelve lecturers who taught ten different compulsory modules to all postgraduate students in education. The class consisted of 86 students of whom 84 were white and two black. I taught educational psychology and, in particular, a study unit dealing with theoretical perspectives in community psychology.

This module was designed as a continuation of my commitment to curriculum transformation by the inclusion of community psychology in the teaching of educational psychology in our faculty (Nel 2009: 55). Briefly, the argument is that the incorporation of community psychology will prepare our students better for the world of teaching in diverse contexts. One aim of the study unit was to encourage students to act as agents of change by applying the values and principles of community psychology, namely: the need to address oppression; the personal and political empowerment of individuals and communities; the promotion of health and the prevention of ill-health; the development of a psychological sense of community; respect for diversity, and the relativity of culture (Lazarus 2007: 69-71). These values and principles embody what social justice symbolises and were taught as such (Stovall 2006: 244).

From the description it is apparent that this study differs from those that focus on courses and modules solely designed to address issues of social justice. Examples of such studies about dedicated courses are found in the work of Francis *et al* (2003: 140) in a module called “Diversity and learning”, and Francis & Hemson (2007: 100) in a programme on “Social Justice Education” in a South African university. Nagda *et al* (2003: 172) report on work in a dedicated

course called “Intergroup relations and conflict” in an American university.

The study unit in my module addressed, among other topics, social injustice and power relations that are still favouring the privileged. I indicated how current structural and social inequalities are still to a large extent legacies of apartheid planning and practice. The response from my class was a deafening silence with no interaction from students when asked to do so. This class was normally very responsive and interacted with the themes under discussion.

I prepared for the next lecture by reflecting on what transpired previously and by reading Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1996) article “Silences as weapons: challenges of a black professor teaching white students”. I realised that the silence in class was probably neither a sign of agreement nor ignorance or disinterest. The silence could have meant that some students agreed but it could also be interpreted as an act of resistance. I decided to test these interpretations in the subsequent lecture.

At the start of the lecture I shared my observation about the silence in the previous lecture. I sparked significant discussion when I shared a selected extract from the article by Ladson-Billings (1996: 79). I quoted the comment by a white professor that when he taught social justice issues he was perceived by his white students as being objective, scholarly and disinterested. When the same professor’s black colleague taught the same content, the white students perceived her as self-interested, bitter and political. These quotes provoked students into lively participation.

Ten white students stated repeatedly that they did not perceive my teaching to be of less worth than that of their white lecturers. In addition, they argued that they could not be held responsible for the excesses of apartheid and its legacy. I found it difficult to allow the students to accuse me of blaming them for apartheid, without responding. However, I allowed them speaking time without my interrupting them. I had to step in only once to remind a student that, although she disagreed with the sentiment of the majority of the speakers, they were allowed to raise their issues. This discussion

lasted nearly the entire lecture. To conclude the discussion I summarised the students' comments. I requested them to read again the presentation notes of the previous lecture to scrutinise them for any traces of blame. I also reminded them that apartheid was not, to use an analogy, a wedding reception to which one could accept an invitation or not and which was over once the wedding day passed. The requirements for the assignment relating to the study unit were then discussed. In line with the module process, I asked students to complete their expected journal entries concerning the completed study unit and to explicitly state whether I could use the journal entries as data anonymously for research purposes. As indicated earlier, the module I taught was not the only compulsory module taken by students for the postgraduate certificate in education.

In order to perceive how social justice issues are treated in other modules, I did an e-mail survey among the other eleven lecturers. The following questions were posed to them: Does the module you taught include content that deals explicitly with social justice? If you dealt with social justice issues, even if your module does not explicitly include such content, what was the nature of the students' participation? I also browsed through the module outcomes in the study guides of the nine other compulsory modules to determine whether topics such as social justice, diversity, transformation, social context and historical context appeared in the formulations.

2. Findings

The journals were collected at the end of the semester after all study units were covered. Seventy-six students submitted journals and all consented that the entries be used anonymously as data. Of the students who submitted journals, 74 were white. I thoroughly read all the entries concerning the community psychology study unit. All the entries were positive about the contents covered in the study unit. These comments were repeated in different words and formulations.¹

The students' positive-accepting comments concerning the content contradicted the negative-rejecting stance expressed in class.

I telephoned ten white students to ask whether they were truthful in their journal entries. Six students answered their telephones and confirmed that they were truthful and supported their positive entries concerning the contents of the study unit community psychology. I thus accepted that the 74 white students experienced the content as useful and positive.

Of the 74 students, six white students commented about the class discussions. In addition to their positive general comments about the study unit, these students commented negatively on the fact that apartheid was addressed in class.² In summary, these six students were of the opinion that references to apartheid and oppression were out of place in a module on psychology, and that emphasising apartheid and oppression was unnecessary.

The following evidencing quotes were translated from Afrikaans: "Community psychology made me aware of issues in and around my community which I previously never saw or experienced"; "As educator I can make a contribution to community psychology by looking at the community's needs and how it could be met"; "There [was] a feeling that apartheid had nothing to do with psychology, and in this case, community psychology"; "These issues are boring now or overused ...".

Four students expressed a need to move forward into the future and not to remain stuck in the past.³ However, one student mentioned that, despite her personal feelings concerning the topic of apartheid, she realised that apartheid was still a very relevant issue in our country. In summary, five of the six students expressed the wish that I should move on without discussing apartheid and oppression at length. One student cautioned against an insensitive handling of the topic of apartheid and oppression as this can create an unfavourable impression concerning the discipline of community psychology and the lecturer. Another student realised that it is necessary to be aware of how the apartheid past still influences the present.

The findings from the survey with colleagues indicate that I was not the only lecturer who addressed social justice issues in the compulsory modules. Of the eleven colleagues surveyed, five responded

about four modules, as some colleagues shared the teaching of modules. Six colleagues did not respond. The five colleagues indicated that their modules did contain social justice issues. Three colleagues stated that their students participated positively in class activities regarding social justice content in their modules. Two colleagues gave different responses. One mentioned that, after teaching, she gave students an assignment relating to social justice. None of the students chose social justice but rather topics on environmental issues. The other colleague indicated mixed participation when social justice issues were addressed. Some students participated positively-accepting while others were negatively-rejecting. He also mentioned that students' participation was not spontaneous as far as social justice issues were concerned.

Browsing through the study guides of the other nine compulsory modules, I found that four of the nine modules contained terms relating to social justice. These four modules were those about which the five colleagues responded positively regarding the presence of social justice issues in the content they taught. Five of the nine modules contained no direct references to social justice in their module outcomes.

3. Theoretical approaches to discussing the findings

Critical race theory in education is an analytical framework that theorises, examines and challenges the ways in which race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on educational structures, practices and discourses (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995: 48; Ladson-Billings 1996: 85, 1999: 219 & 2005: 230; Stovall 2006: 244). Educational discourses that challenge claims of race neutrality, colour blindness and meritocracy enhance the emancipatory potential of education: "... so forget about the past and just look to the future, because that is what matters"; "Learners and students are sensitive and can get the wrong impression about Community Psychology and even the lecturer or teacher".

In critical community psychology, a complicated, political viewpoint affords an understanding of people and their contexts,² which are considered multidimensional and always influenced by the distribution of power and its relations. In critical community psychology one never assumes expertise about communities because they are regarded as too complex.

4. Discussion

The students' silence following my teaching about social justice as embodied in the values and principles of Community Psychology is interpreted as resistance. The majority of white students thus objected to being taught about social justice issues with examples from the South African historical context. This interpretation is based on the class discussion which was overwhelmingly negative-rejecting and is corroborated by the six students who indicated that they found my reference to the historical context of apartheid unnecessary and inappropriate. In comparing this finding in my module to the feedback by my white colleagues, it does not seem implausible that students could have been negative-rejecting. Two colleagues found a similar reaction in their modules. Mertens (2009: 13) suggests that within the framework of a critical race theory the question can be asked about racial prejudice as possible explanation for a particular finding. Based on my numerical minority of being one black lecturer among eleven white lecturers I dare to interpret the white students' silence as resistance against their black lecturer's handling of social justice issues. As two white colleagues' responses indicated, this interpretation of white silence as resistance to the black lecturer may not be the only way to explain the silence in my class.

This qualitative study leaves room for an alternative interpretation (Terre Blanche *et al* 2006: 337). Silence can simply be explained by the uneven power relation between lecturer and students which made it difficult for students to object directly during the lesson

2 Cf Lazarus 1988: 149 & 2007: 68; Prilleltensky 2009: 5; Prilleltensky & Nelson 2002: 123; Viljoen *et al* 2007: 128.

(Nagda *et al* 2003: 189). As lecturer I have to concede that students may have perceived me as an officer of the university who exercises “practical authority ... relative dominance or control” (Hook 2004: 258). Given this critical community psychology explanation, I can then also interpret the silence as that some students agreed with and accepted the position on social justice. It is evident from my narrative that I did not leave the silence unchallenged.

The reason for my challenging the students’ silence can be found in my willingness, as self-perceived agent of social change (Zipin & Hattam 2009: 511), to problematise the silence or, as Jansen (2009a: 261) suggests, to disrupt the received knowledge the white students might have had about the apartheid past. I could not accept that the silence meant that all students concurred with how I presented the values and principles of community psychology as standing in the service of social justice. Rusch & Horsford (2009: 307) mention the opportunity to unlearn privilege. This unlearning of privilege can occur when a dominant perspective is challenged by a perspective that is unlike the own perspective or from a perspective that is not from the dominant, privileged view. Since my position as single black lecturer in the compulsory modules was a numerical minority position, I also perceive that my views do not reflect those of the dominant, majority white lectureship. Therefore, I decided to challenge the silence by provoking discussion with the reading of the critical race theory views of the article by Ladson-Billings (1996: 84).

As indicated earlier, I interpret the response to my effort at challenging the silence as negative-rejecting. Although some students may have agreed with the content and teaching strategy, the powerful voices of opposition against the use of the politico-historical backdrop probably silenced such agreeing voices. The few students who reflected on the classroom experience in their journals provided a strong indication of the reasons for the eloquent rejection expressed in class. The students’ main reason is that apartheid is dead and belongs to the past. They also expressed a need not to be reminded of the apartheid past as they perceived themselves as moving forward. Leibowitz *et al* (2007: 710) found that students use different strategies to negotiate difference of race, class and power. As with some of

the arguments posed by my students, the study by Leibowitz *et al* (2007: 710, 712) showed a denial of the impact of the past in an effort to quickly move towards shaping the future. From the perspective of a critical race theory, my students' denials could mean a rejection of academic value which their black lecturer could add to discussions about power, race and class. These students, however, chose not to write an assignment based on social justice when a white female lecturer gave them a choice of assignment topics. While the critical race theory may provide some answers, in this instance it does not fully explain the rejection meted out to the white female lecturer's choice of assignment. The critical race theory does not explain the white students' lack of spontaneity experienced by the white male lecturer who also taught social justice issues.

Given the apparent weakness of the critical race theory to adequately explain the negative-rejecting responses by the white students, other theoretical frameworks can be explored. Jansen (2009b: 152) puts forward an underexplored notion of post-conflict pedagogy. He argues that this theory will perceive such negative-rejecting responses in more productive terms as merely clashes of martyrological memories. A post-conflict pedagogy offers a framework to work with rather than against such clashes in an effort to work towards a better understanding of the self and others.

A critical community psychology reading of the situation leads me to accept that the class as a community was more complex than being merely a white majority. In addition to race, other markers of diversity such as age, gender and class could also explain the strong aversion to how I presented the topic of social justice. Although the evidence suggests otherwise, these students may simply have felt overwhelmed by the number of times social justice issues were discussed in their compulsory modules. Therefore, as much as it is alluring to perceive race as the only determining variable for the students' rejection of how I taught social justice issues, it will be too simplistic and essentialist (Kiguwa 2006: 115; Jansen 2009b: 150) an analysis. A cause for concern is the notion expressed by five students that a lecturer needs to speedily move forward to ways of creating an ideal future society instead of analysing issues of oppression

through the lens of social justice. This notion may have links to the hundred percent finding that learning about community psychology was valuable.

As indicated earlier, all students expressed the view that the study unit on community psychology was useful and positive. Taken at face value, an uncritical interpretation of this finding is that the white students were positively challenged by the minority views expressed by their black lecturer. If interpreted as such, it can then be taken that these white students valued the social justice theme running through the values and principles of community psychology. They would then have understood that being made aware of the underlying structural and social power inequalities does not have to translate into blind denial of the impact of the past on current South African realities. However, when I employ critical race theory and critical community psychology readings to the same finding, I arrive at other, less favourable interpretations.

My critical race theory interpretation of this finding points towards a “playing” of the black lecturer by the white students (Nagda *et al* 2003: 189). In other words, the white students may have opted to provide cognitive, shallow feedback as opposed to deeper, feelings-based reflections. The cognitive, shallow feedback in such instances would have masked deeper feelings-based rejection. I refer to the entries as shallow because the reflections, in the majority of instances, merely reproduced the content of the study unit in one form or another. In my interpretation of being “played”, the responses in the journal entries spoke to the academic tasks of the students and confined the role of the lecturer to a mere marker of an academically required task. The critical race theory interpretation leads to an understanding that the white students decided what their black lecturer is supposed to read; therefore they provided him with pre-packaged cognitive offerings. They offered relatively safe, content-based reflections that would not challenge my views on social justice in any way. By offering safe, content-based views the students probably avoided the personal discomfort (Rusch & Horsford 2009: 307) they may have experienced if they gave deep feelings-based responses. Only six students were brave enough to allow their feelings-based

reflections to be entered in their journals. Their reflections show that one can consider views other than critical race theory interpretations about the group's behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Critical community psychology cautions me that any community is a complex, political entity. The class of students that I taught would obviously have been more complex a group than simply a homogeneous conglomerate whose members all decided to act in the interest of protecting their white privilege and power against a black lecturer's onslaught.

As far as the overwhelming positive-accepting finding that all students valued the social justice theme is concerned, I conclude with two interpretations thereof. I allow for interpretations that seek a face-value understanding of the white students' journal entries as honest acceptance of social justice as a leading theme in their preparation for the teaching profession, irrespective of the skin colour of their lecturer. However, I also allow for interpretations cautious of blindly accepting that an initially resistant group of people could all have been simply swayed to agree to social justice understandings of their future role as teachers. However, this article does not only focus on the white students.

I also draw the conclusion that my position as black lecturer to a majority of white students is not insignificant. My deliberate use of critical race theory and critical community psychology perspectives is an effort to understand my evolving identity in an environment so different from the broader South African demographic realities. Being part of a black minority in a faculty dominated, numerically, by a white majority allows me to analyse my teaching practice, for instance, in detail. My numerical position in the faculty is an immediate reminder of our past with an all-powerful racial minority who dominated most aspects of black life. Nonetheless, I have to continuously grapple with the dangerous notion of essentialism and not succumb to the seduction of simplistic binary thoughts and practice. This implies that I consciously have to remind myself that

an unpleasant encounter with an individual or group cannot account for all past and future encounters with other members of the group encountered.

I conclude that the findings succinctly show that it would be disingenuous to argue from a position of black victimhood. The findings clearly indicate narratives that dispel a myth of black victimology since my classroom practices as such (Nagda *et al* 2003: 188) can be scrutinised like those of my white colleagues. For the creation of a sustainable empowering learning environment it is imperative for me as a lecturer to remain committed to social justice through the discipline that I teach and in which I do research. In teaching about social justice I have to create space for dissidence and agreement. Monocultural education has the danger of essentialising difference in relation to a dominant educational culture (Morrow 2007: 173). This study indicated what is possible when a dominant perspective is challenged.

By engaging in continual curriculum transformation, as the Council on Higher Education (2009a: 10) expects, I conclude that universities may be able to grow an anti-essentialist awareness in students and lecturers. Curriculum transformation would entail the taking of intellectual risks in the service of a university's public role to build students' capacity for critical reasoning and democratic deliberation with others (Waghid 2008: 20). The risks may entail confronting the anger and anxiety of white and black students (Jansen 2009a: 123 & 2009b: 149). Curriculum transformation will be especially challenging when working from the perspective of a critical race theory (Ladson-Billings 1998: 18). In the interest of curriculum transformation, students' attempts at silencing lecturers who consciously bring into the classroom the experiences of those still socially and economically deprived cannot be left unchallenged.

Another conclusion from this study is that post-conflict pedagogy (Jansen 2009b: 155), while still critical, is an alternative to other critical pedagogies that tend to drive people away from each other, rather than assisting them to move towards each other. The importance of hope is central within such a post-conflict pedagogy. Hope acts as a driving force in the education interactions where "the

common bonds and bondage of white and black students” and their lecturers are duly recognised (Jansen 2009b: 155). In such instances, the tendency of critical theories, such as the critical race theory, to divide people along oppressed-oppressor binaries in a post-conflict setting such as post-apartheid South Africa becomes problematic (Jansen 2009b: 150).

I finally conclude that, in addition to modules designed to specifically address issues of social justice (Francis *et al* 2003: 140; Francis & Hemson 2007: 100; Nagda *et al* 2003: 172), this study found that ordinary university modules can become spaces where the “bonds and bondages” (Jansen 2009b: 155) can be harnessed to facilitate productive interactions that may lead to deeper understanding and compassionate interactions at and, it is hoped, beyond university.

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