

## **Experiencing ‘otherness’: Teacher educators’ journey with first year pre-service teachers**

**Anthony Mpsi, Emma Groenewald and Emma Barnett**

*University of Sol Plaatje, South Africa*

Teaching is complicated, and is compounded by changes in the education landscape as far as diversity is concerned. This has forced education planners to reconsider the manner in which initial teacher education programs are structured, to meet the needs of the diverse classroom population. This study reports on the experiences of South African university teacher educators, from diverse backgrounds, who facilitated a first-year education module, “The Individual in Context”, which relates to the way identity is constructed and, as a result, ‘otherness’ is perceived. If pre-service teachers are to adjust to the new, diverse university context, they constantly have to navigate and negotiate the university space, while re-evaluating and reconstructing their own perceptions of ‘otherness’. The article argues that, in order for the teacher educators to effectively facilitate the module, they, too, had to subject themselves to a soul-searching process of reflection, re-evaluation and reconstruction of their own perceptions of ‘otherness’. A narrative methodology was employed to explore how these teacher educators’ own identities were constructed, and how this influenced their perceptions of ‘otherness’. The findings of the narratives reveal that these teacher educators constantly had to unlearn prior understandings of ‘otherness’.

### **Introduction**

Teaching is a complicated and complex profession. The complexity of the profession was emphasised by Shulman (2005), who claimed that good teaching combines a number of knowledge bases, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. While the knowledge bases referred to by Shulman (2005) are important, the knowledge bases fail to include the strong role that teacher identity formation plays in ensuring good teaching. The role of the teacher has changed during the last several years, due to increased classroom diversity (Lindgren, 2005). Issues relating to social justice and equity have also recently been foregrounded in the profession (Cho, 2017). These changes have placed further demands on teachers, as they now have the concomitant responsibility to acquire and develop the skills needed to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse learner population. Haritos (2004) argued that many novice teachers enter the profession using an interpretive lens, through which they attempt to understand the realities playing out in the classroom. In some instances, this lens is constructed according to the teachers’ own biases, stereotypes and lived experiences. It is, therefore, of cardinal importance that initial teacher training programs prepare pre-service teachers, so that they can understand and interpret the diverse classroom context.

One way of achieving this aim is to help them to understand how identities are constructed in society. Raffo and Hall (2006, p. 60) reiterated this recommendation, and contended that “the complex and real interdependencies of personal biography, identity, predispositions and the social and cultural dimensions of context create particular

paradigms of understanding". Teacher educators, therefore, have a didactic responsibility to assist pre-service teachers to understand and deal with the intricacies of the profession, while simultaneously shaping a professional identity constructed on peculiar personal experiences and abilities of pre-service teachers (Younger, Brindley, Peddar & Hagger, 2004). Conklin (2015) reiterated that the beliefs and background that are brought into a classroom by all participants play an integral role in the teaching and learning environment.

Teacher educators are in an ideal position to assist their students to achieve these objectives, by modelling social justice and equity practices in the classroom during lessons. Modelling is viewed as one of the most effective means of learning any novel skill or acquiring knowledge (Bandura, 1986). When teacher educators model social justice and equity, their students are presented with practical examples of how social justice and equity could be practised in an actual diverse classroom context. Modelling to pre-service teachers, therefore, requires that teacher educators, themselves, should already have made the cognitive shift to becoming agents of change.

Recent literature agrees with the current discourse that the primary aim of initial teacher education (ITE) programs is "to prepare pre-service teachers to teach effectively in diverse classrooms" (Moosa 2018: p. 57). In order to achieve this aim, ITE programs should focus on transferring both theoretical and professional knowledge (Shay, 2013). Moosa (2018) explained that ITE programs are professional and theoretical in nature, because teaching practices originate from theory, and the rationale of a definite discipline is explored with pre-service teachers. The expectation is, therefore, that ITE programs will equip pre-service teachers with a set of approaches that will enable them make well informed judgements in different classroom contexts (Hoban, 2005).

The article argues that self-transformation of teacher educators is a prerequisite for effective class facilitation. It postulates that, for teacher educators to advocate for social justice and equity, they should, first, be prepared to transform themselves, in order to take agency, particularly where issues of social justice and equity are concerned. For the purpose of the article, agency means, "understanding of the dynamic and dialectical nature of the interaction between individual and social context, and the active role of the individual in the process of identity construction and teaching for social justice" (Francis & Le Roux, 2011, p. 52) – although we concede that other issues, such as equity, human rights, inclusivity, and social justice seem to be further encapsulating factors. For the teacher educator, social justice involves not only teaching pre-service teachers about these issues, but also demonstrating these issues during lesson planning, facilitation, classroom practices and assessment, and while interacting with pre-service teachers.

Hence, it would seem that agency can only occur if teacher educators sincerely confront their own prejudices, stereotypes and biases against the backdrop of their own socialisation, history and lived experience, as it manifests within a specific space and time. The article draws strongly on the narratives and reflections of teacher educators' lived experiences and personal socialisation.

## Transformative initial teacher education programs

For many years, education and ITE programs have been the target of criticism. Sayed (2004) reported that, in South Africa, teacher education during the apartheid era was characterised by separation and unequal access to knowledge, and was geared to reduce teachers to state-controlled officials. He opined that teacher training was fashioned to prepare teachers to teach in segregated schools, and to prepare learners for a society where submissiveness to the state was essential, in an attempt to maintain the social order of inequality. Given the country's history of segregation and inequality, the dismantling of apartheid meant that education, ITE programs included, had to be transformed in a manner that meant that democracy constituted the foundational pillars. November (2010) stated that transforming an education system means prompting citizens to be critical, so that they are able to operate within a democratic society. The arguments by Sayed (2004) and November (2010) support the notion that pre-service teachers should be prepared to understand and function in diverse classrooms that operate according to democratic values. The authors agree that sincere transformation is possible when teacher educators and pre-service teachers are prepared to make a concerted effort to change their selves. Arvantis (2017) argued that transformative education seeks to build a personality that is measured by a deep knowledge and capability to find its way in a setting of constant change and intense diversity.

For ITE programs, this means structuring in such a way that the learning environment prepares pre-service teachers to recognise others' oppressive practices and, more importantly, their own. The challenge, therefore, lies in constructing learning that is more realistic, more suitable and more contextualised, in order to prepare students to solve problems that confront them in the classroom. In order to address social and cultural changes, teacher educators are now required to ask probing questions about how to organise schooling, teaching and learning so that it will enable a younger generation (the students) to adapt and cope with the demands of the diverse classroom (De Kock, Slegers & Voeten, 2004).

Sol Plaatje University (SPU) is one of the first two post-apartheid universities that were established to respond to the challenges facing teacher education, by commencing with a re-curriculated BEd program in 2014. The program was conceptualised within the context of the national policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). The overarching aim of the program was to develop graduates who would enter the profession having completed an intellectually challenging curriculum that developed content knowledge, pedagogical skills, management expertise and, moreover, the ability to identify and arrest oppressive practices – to make them effective schoolteachers. As part of the BEd curriculum, a core module in education, *The individual in context*, is offered to first-year students.

### The module: The individual in context

The module departs from the premise that education is both an academic and a social project (Kumashiro, 2002; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The module, therefore, taps into the

lived experiences of first-year pre-service teachers, that is, their personal upbringing, their years of schooling and interactions related to their social relationships. The aim is to build on these experiences to help make meaning of how identities are constructed. Numerous scholars agree that identity construction is much more than a way individuals define themselves, and that it involves interconnectivity with their broader social context (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A thorough understanding of how identities are constructed is, therefore, important for pre-service teachers, because, when they commence with their profession as teachers, they will be expected to shape the identities of their learners in some way. An expanded description of the module is provided in appendix A.

### **Statement of the problem**

According to Rusznyak (2016), it is imperative to encourage pre-service teachers to acquire critical sensibilities in relation to unjust or ineffective educational practices, to establish conditions where it is possible for teachers to recognise ineffective or unjust teaching practices at their schools, and to resist them. In this way, student teachers are alerted to teaching as a moral practice, which seeks education justice for all. It is against this background that the study sought to explore how:

- Teacher educators construct their narrative identities;
- Teacher educators construct their own identities in a higher education space, where networks of time and space continuously overlap; and
- The lived experiences of teacher educators and students influence their understanding of 'otherness'.

### **Literature on otherness**

Tatum (2013) referred to categories of 'otherness', and explained that the dominant group (agent) experiences privilege, and the subdominant group (target) experiences disadvantage. In the pre-democratic South African context, whites belonged to the dominant group, while blacks belonged to the subdominant group. Socialisation prepares us for dominant and subdominant roles in society (Harro, 2010a). The dominant group holds the power and authority in society (relative to the subordinates), and determines how the power and authority may be used. Our own multiple identities can, therefore, be both dominant and targeted at the same time, depending on the context we move into. Rodriguez & Magill (2016: p.9) argued that student teachers tend to brand learners, using organisational codes, such as risk and low socio-economic status to comprehend 'otherness'. Importantly, a person's identity will shift over time, and individuals negotiate and navigate as they move from context to context. Not only do individuals carry with them their unique stories embedded in culture and history, but also the interconnection between different racial, language, gender and cultural groups, which create new chances for identity construction (Groenewald, 2018).

Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979) is a lens to obtain a better understanding of the self and of others. The social identity theory takes the cultural and historical embeddedness of individuals into account and explains that social identity is

simultaneously individual and social – every individual has a self and multiple social identities, depending on the context. Social identity explains intergroup differentiation, and serves as a bridge between the individual and the community. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed three processes through which the in-group (us) can be evaluated against the out-group (them), namely, self-categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

Social categorisation can be seen as the social representation of the individual in context. Self-categorisation is a reflective appraisal, and involves the individual describing himself or herself against his or her own reference framework. Individuals are bound to a certain social category (race, gender, class or religion) by a sense of belonging. Through social categorisation, we describe ourselves and the people who differ from us. Social identification is the process during which individuals identify openly with an in-group. A positive association with groups will impact positively on social identities and create communality. Conversely, individuals who are other than the ‘in-group’ or dominant group, struggle to feel a sense of belonging (Patel & Uys, 2012). Social comparison takes place continuously as individuals navigate and negotiate their social identities. Social identity theory helps us to read and interpret the narratives of student-educators in the context where they live and act.

Harro’s cycle of socialisation (2010a) illustrated how people acquire certain attitudes or master language and other skills in order to act effectively in a specific context. The way we experience our identity depends on and is mediated by the social group or category membership – race, class, gender, religion, language, sexual orientation, or physical ability (Francis, 2006). Depending on the context we move into, we form part of the in-group (us) or the out-group (them). By opening themselves to new experiences and stories, student educators become aware of their own prejudices and stereotyping and how their own socialisation shapes their individual perceptions. By listening to the experiences of a diverse group of students, student educators’ assumptions of the other can change, thereby creating possibilities for them to become agents of change.

Nevertheless, developing a liberatory consciousness requires continuous critical reflection on self-perceptions, as well as on the perceptions of the other. A liberatory consciousness will lead to an awareness of oppressive practices in communities and institutions, while the perceptions and assumptions learned through socialisation become secondary (Love, 2010). Harro’s cycle of liberation (2010b) described how people become aware of oppression and discriminatory practices, and how intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional change can lead to transformation. Freire’s (1990) critical pedagogy aimed to develop student’s socio-political consciousness where both students and teacher-educators examine unequal power relation and contribute to knowledge production. Reflection and dialogue foster critical consciousness to develop change agents.

Our narratives illustrate our unique socialisation during a system of apartheid, and how our experiences and institutional practices helped us to envisage social justice education.

## Research question

The study was guided by the following research question:

How do teacher educators construct their narrative identities in the context of a newly established, diverse university?

## Method

According to Mertens (2010) a paradigm is a way of looking at the world. Mertens (1999, p. 4) stated that, "The transformative paradigm is characterized as placing central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalized groups ...". When embracing this paradigm, efforts are made by inquirers to "... link the results of social inquiry to action, and to ... to wider questions of social inequity and social justice". In this article, we used a qualitative methodology, which coincided with our assumption that reality is socially constructed. We followed a narrative approach, whereby the story is the participant's description, while narrative refers to the presentation of the stories. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) viewed a story as the portal through which the individual enters the social world, to give meaning to experiences.

Narrative can be seen as a meaning-making process. Through narratives, student educators have the opportunity to relive, re-tell and reconstruct their past experiences. Thus, as a "mediating artefact" (Lantolf, 2004, p. 23), narratives can restructure experience, bring a new way of thinking, and ultimately lead to social justice. Narratives empower "teachers, within an ever-changing present, to interpret a series of experiences, to reconcile what is known with that which is hidden, and to construct and reconstruct understandings of themselves as teachers and of their teaching with an eye to the future" (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 308).

Fylkesne, Mausethagen & Nilsen (2018: p.17) posited that we have limited information about the knowledge and values held and conveyed by teacher educators. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how teacher educators construct their narrative identities in the context of a newly established, diverse university. As authors of this article, we reflected on our own personal experiences teaching a first year module for education students. Reflection is a "process of self-examination and self-evaluation, in which effective educators often engage to improve their professional practices" (Shandomo, 2010, p.103). We realised that self-study requires openness and vulnerability since the focus is on the self. Bernard (2002) referred to the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. We met the requirements for this enquiry, had previous experience of working as teachers, and had been offering the module for over three years

As over fifty years of age facilitators, we have different racial identities, and were differently influenced by the system of apartheid. To increase the credibility and validity of the study, we met on a regular basis to discuss our experiences. We completed a narrative

by reflecting on the past and how it influences our teaching of the module, as well as our interaction in class with the students. Jindal-Snape and Holmes (2009, p.220) considered “reflection as a process of focused and structured thinking, which is conscious and active, rather than free-floating” thought, as in general thinking. Reflection helps us to think about what is happening in our daily lives, and to assess our experiences, in order to acknowledge where we have been and where we want to go next. Clarke and Erickson (2004, p. 59) claimed that “for teaching to occur, there must be a *some how* [bold and italics in original], a way for an educator to know, recognize, explore, and act upon his or her practice”. We concur with Kosnik, Beck, Freese and Samaras (2006) that reflection on our own experiences contribute to personal, professional and program reconstruction. In the next section, we present our respective narratives.

## Findings and discussion

### Narrative of teacher educator Anthony

Anthony was born in Kimberley in the mid-sixties, at the height of apartheid in South Africa, into a loving family comprising a mother, father and four siblings. His father, although qualified as a teacher, elected to quit the profession very early to take up a job in sales at a local wholesaler. Anthony’s mother was a stay-at-home mother and a devoted homemaker. “We lived in a modest, but comfortable home and most of our lives centred my parents, siblings and, of course, the Anglican Church, where we worshipped”. Anthony and his siblings were fortunate to have good, hard-working parents, who placed a high premium on good manners and education. The latter may well represent what Harro (2010a) termed the first socialisation. Anthony fondly recalls how, after work, his father kept the children occupied while their mother prepared dinner or did the laundry. “Dad was fun – he played with us until we grew tired”. In this sense, according to the categorisation of Harro (2010a), Anthony belonged to the dominant group, because he had been born into a family with both a stay-at-home mother and a present father, which was rare in their immediate community at that time.

My father was from mixed-race parents, while his mom was classified coloured ... Bearing an African surname was not easy, we constantly had to this explain [why they had an African surname and not fit the stereotypical notion of people with African surnames] to the authorities and others, as they found it hard to “box” the family according to South African racial demarcation laws.

Anthony was unable to speak an African language, which made matters worse. From the onset, based on the views of Harro (2010a), Anthony’s social identity (mixed-race heritage, inability to speak an African language, and African surname) subjected him to an uneven role in the forceful system of oppression. This ties in with Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory which demonstrates how Anthony’s cultural and historical background resulted in him having multiple dynamic positioning, because of the specific social context he finds himself in – and because of one aspect of his identity, namely race.

As Anthony grew older he became increasingly aware of the inequalities that existed between him and his white fellow citizens. Whites had more privileges, such as being able to frequent restaurants, while Anthony and his family had to settle for shopping through a window at the same establishment. Although Anthony found this odd, he gradually grew to tolerate the fact that some people were more privileged than others. This observation could be equated to the institutional and cultural socialisation Harro (2010a) referred to. The latter confirmed Love's (2010) description of the socialisation processes, as "every member of society learns the attitudes, language, behaviours and skills that are necessary to function effectively in the existing society".

Facilitating the education module "proved to be both challenging and interesting, because I now had to facilitate classes constituted of different races, dealing with the rather contentious issues of race, culture, privilege and oppressed groups". Before Anthony could engage with his classes, he had to read intensively on the topics to be dealt with. For Anthony, "studying the literature proved to be thought-provoking, enlightening and empowering", as he started to truly understand the nature and extent of oppression and his own role in the phenomenon. Engaging with the literature was indeed "a revelation for me and motivated me to make the mind shift", in an attempt to interrupt the cycle of his own thought patterns in relation to oppression. The mind shift seems to be in line with the opinion of Harro (2010a), that socially conscious people sincerely desire to address the injustice they perceive in society. He, furthermore, came to the realisation that he enters the classroom as a multidimensional individual (Tatum, 2013). He, as a teacher educator, carried his own history, lived experience, prejudice, stereotypes and ideas of privilege and oppression, as did his students. In a sense, this realisation concurs with the sentiments of Love (2010), that human beings have internalised the attitudes, understandings and thought patterns that permit them to operate in and cooperate with systems of oppression. From the onset, "I realised that I had to push my own subjective understanding of oppression to the backburners", while simultaneously remaining aware of his multidimensional self that Tajfel and Turner (1979) referred to.

This realisation compelled Anthony to "engage in deep soul-searching exercises, reflecting on my own prejudice and stereotypes I had constructed about other races, because of my upbringing, lived experiences and student activism involvement". This soul-searching exercise was necessary, because he realised that he was "a product of my own socialisation" and might be tempted, during facilitation, to follow "the habits of mind and thought that have been instilled in [him]" (Love 2000, p. 89). Reflection helped Anthony to "stop blaming others for the existence of oppression" and, instead, consider ways of disrupting the system of oppression. As he continued to engage with all his students, and encouraged them to tell their stories, "I gradually came to the realisation that there was some commonality between myself and the various races". Anthony made a concerted effort to understand the cultural practices and values of his students, by asking questions to gain clarity during classroom discussions.

Some of the class discussions became "heated and emotional and one could at times detect strong emotions of anger and guilt among students". As the facilitator, Anthony tried to influence the discussions as little as possible. It was in the heat of such



discussions, that “I was obliged to confront and interrogate my own biases, stereotypes and prejudices”. Listening to the viewpoints of the different students, especially those whom he had previously considered as “other”, afforded him “the opportunity to place myself in their shoes”. This correlates with findings of Tajfel and Turner (1979), which suggested that the social identity theory can be used as a guide to gain a better understanding of both the self and of others.

Anthony now had the opportunity to listen to the stories and experiences of many students, the dominant, as well as that of the subordinate, “as told first-hand, not by the media”. Students were encouraged to form (diverse) groups outside of class time to discuss certain controversial topics in education. According to Love (2010), developing a liberatory conscience means, in essence, to be aware of oppressive practices and trying to change it, instead of reverting to one’s ingrained socialisation. Anthony came to realise “the immense hurt the previous political system had inflicted on both the privileged and oppressed”, and that this was an ideal opportunity to try to break the cycle, and to encourage students, and himself, to become agents of change. Anthony and his students collaboratively decided to start a new culture in class, a culture that required any form of oppressive practice being flagged and interrogated during class discussions.

Anthony confessed that facilitating the module made him more aware of “how perfunctory oppressive, exclusive and prejudicial behaviour had manifested in my own life”. He now finds himself being more sensitive to ‘otherness’, not only in class, but also in other spheres of his own life. He finds working and interacting with the “other” very rewarding and believes that this module really provided him with the skills to embrace diversity. However, he laments the fact that he “did not have the privilege to have been exposed to such enlightenment as a student”.

### **Narrative of teacher educator Emma G**

Emma G is a white, female lecturer at SPU. She was born in the sixties, as one of the previously advantaged racial groups in South Africa. Harro (2010a) pointed out that the individual has no control in this first step of the socialisation process. During apartheid, white racial groups were the dominant groups and held the power. Emma G’s father was a teacher and her mother, a secretary. In her Grade 6 year, her family moved to a farm, where her mother managed the day-to-day farming activities, even though her father remained the “dominant figure in our household”. Harro (2010a) indicated that self-concepts and self-perceptions are formed by the people we love and trust.

Regarding race, Emma G remembers that she “played with the children of the farm workers, laughing and reciting poems”. Emma G had no idea of the nature of Paulina and her other black friends’ households, “where they went to school or what they ate”. She heard stories of “overcrowded classrooms in the township schools”, while she was fortunate to be in a class of only 10 learners. She remembers the “separate entrances for whites only and for blacks”, and that she never had to wait long in a queue. The system of apartheid created institutional structures of oppression that caused the subdominant black, coloured and Indian racial groups to internalise their inferiority. As part of the dominant

racial group that was seen as the norm for humanity during apartheid, Emma G never experienced the need to learn anything about subordinate racial groups (Tatum, 2013). Emma G's family never had discussions about apartheid or other racial groups. Instead, her father and mother told "stories about the Great Depression and the Anglo-Boer War when thousands of Afrikaner women and children died in the British concentration camps". Regarding socioeconomic class, Emma G was part of a middle-class family. After her father had matriculated, he started working and saved to finance his university studies. Emma G's mother had decided to leave school in Grade 10, find a job and become independent.

During Emma G's university years, she was still one of the dominant racial groups. "The few coloured and black students would commute each day to university", while she had accommodation in a white women's hostel. Emma G never questioned the norms and rules of society while she was growing up. Emma G received her schooling and tertiary education in her home language, Afrikaans. She was raised with Christian norms and beliefs, "to respect elders and not to question their actions". Tajfel and Turner (1979) noted that categorisation is a cognitive way of classifying the environment in which individuals act, and that it assists the individual to understand the self and others. Emma G's categorising of being white, middle class and Christian helped her to evaluate people who differed from herself.

Emma G's interaction with members of other racial groups was minimal, and she could, therefore, never get a first-hand understanding of these groups. Before Emma G joined SPU, she had been a teacher for 13 years, at a predominately coloured school, where "the majority of the learners came from poor households". At school and in the community, Emma G started to interact with different racial groups. This was also the first time that her neighbours were from other racial groups. "The love and care I received from community members" gave her a new understanding of other racial groups. Emma G learned to respect and appreciate people for who they are. She realised that, "if you are willing to take a step forward, you might be surprised with your new knowledge of the other". She also learnt valuable life lessons from poorly educated people. Harro (2010b) referred to the waking-up phase as the first step of moving forward to being an agent of change.

Lecturing the module, *The individual in the learning context*, Emma G started to realise that each category of her identity (race, class, gender, language, religion) "can be defined as other, and be targeted or subdominant", depending on the context she moved into. "The otherness can lead to different forms of oppression" – racism, sexism, or classism (Tatum, 2013). Emma G was also aware that each identity category carries a unique, embedded story. She was "conscious of her whiteness, and the history of my racial dimension". Tajfel and Turner (1979) indicated that social identity comprises a cognitive component, an evaluation component and an emotional component. Emma G realised that the students "born after 1994 are supposed to be born-frees", with opportunities that the generation before them did not have. Emma G concluded that, although the students had no first-hand experience of apartheid, "the intergenerational knowledge from their parents might influence them". She listened to stories of students experiencing discrimination

because of their race. Different racial groups unpacked their stories of how they experienced other racial groups – “whites perceived as racists, blacks as criminals and coloureds as drunks”. Students’ own socialisation, norms and contexts influence their understanding of otherness (Harro, 2010). Emma G believes that we are consciously or unconsciously all guilty of oppressive practices, and we all marginalise and exclude people who differ from ourselves. She reminded the class “not to generalise as one individual’s actions cannot represent the whole group”. Emma G recognises institutionalised oppression, but since the focus of the module is on the self in context she wanted students to become aware of their own prejudices and stereotyping.

While listening to students’ negative experiences of other racial groups, she realised “how difficult it is to put yourself in the other’s shoes.” By sharing stories of race, class, gender, religion and language from different perspectives, the students and Emma G became aware of their own prejudices and stereotypes. According to Harro (2010), the getting-ready phase in the cycle of liberation is the phase we begin to dismantle our discriminatory beliefs and actions.

The majority of students in Emma G’s class were Setswana-speaking, with Afrikaans the second-largest language group; smaller language groups in class were isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sotho and Sepedi. The students’ community narratives illustrate that language creates a social identity and fosters a sense of belonging. Emma G explained that “multilingualism can be a barrier and contribute to social exclusion but at the same time it creates an opportunity to learn another language”. To be an agent of change and to create a community of belonging in a diverse context, “we need to engage and interact with people who are different from us” (Harro, 2010b). In order to adapt to English as the medium of instruction at SPU, and to engage and communicate on a diverse university campus, students have to constantly negotiate and navigate their language use. Emma G cautioned the students that “the dominant status of a language can lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of other language groups”. She challenged the students to be sensitive about their informal language use on campus. When engaging in their home language with their own language groups, students should always be conscious of the possibility of excluding or marginalising students who are not competent in the specific language. As future teachers, “students realised that language can foster social cohesion and create a sense of belonging”. Although the students realised the vision of transformation in developing an inclusive, just education system, the practical implementation of this vision seemed to be difficult.

Emma G pointed out to the students that our socialisation occurred at a specific time and in a specific place. “Each dimension of our identity has its own history and the people who moulded us, did the best they could within that specific context and timeframe”. Emma G believes that “we have the choice to act as agents of change, to start with a new direction, to give voice to the voiceless and to include everyone”. Emma G substantiated that experiencing and understanding otherness is a continuous journey, and should be practised every day (Love, 2010). The more we open ourselves to people who differ from us, the better our chances are of understanding and respecting otherness and creating change.

### **Narrative of teacher educator Emma B**

In offering the module relating to the different dimensions of identity, Emma B realised how stereotypes have shaped her life, and that of other people. "I constantly had to reshape my perceptions of stereotyping after engaging with the module and listening to students' discussions". Love (2010) mentioned that members of society want to work for change – the ones who benefit from oppression, as well as the those who are at a disadvantage. Furthermore, because of their socialisation, people follow the habits of mind and thoughts that have been instilled in them. For Emma B, presenting the module was a crucial step in the development of a liberatory consciousness. Liberatory consciousness enables humans to live outside the patterns of thought and behaviour learned through the socialisation process. In discussions, teacher educators focus on class, race, gender, sexuality, religion and abilities, as well as HIV/Aids.

She was always questioned, "who we are and who I am". She shared with students all the privileges she had enjoyed in relation to the topics, as well as the oppression that she had endured, indicating, "My blackness was often questioned, as my father [was] a priest from a Scottish descent, and my mother, a nurse from Setswana ethnic group. I identify as black and female". According to Tatum (2013), our identity is shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Society placed her family in a privileged middle class position. Born and raised in this diverse family had a great influence on how Emma B was socialised. According to Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979), we are categorised as the "in group" or "targeted group", and that is how people perceive us. Currently, Emma B is an academic at SPU, and she has worked in the education field as a teacher, and has occupied various of positions at the Department of Basic Education.

Tatum (2013, p.10) stated that "people are commonly defined as "other" on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical appearance and mental ability". In relation to the latter, when Emma B introduced herself to a diverse group of students during the first lesson, she decided to create some credibility on her part, to show that she might have the same identities as the students. Emma B shared her story to get the students out of their comfort zones. Thereafter, she requested that they sit next to somebody they have never spoken to, for two weeks, and to share their feelings and perceptions on the identity of their fellow students. This instruction pushed students to the edge and created a great deal of tension in the class, as "my position of power threatened students and they had to negotiate their relationship in the first few weeks". According to Love (2010), people within social groups can assist other members of their own role group to recognise and eliminate those patterns of thought and behaviour that originate in internalised subordination and/or domination. Emma B realised that she was unable to remain detached from the discussions during which students raised their opinions. Students were angry that they had to share how they were socialised by their families and institutions. Emma B came to value the assumptions and perspectives of others as they engaged with the topics of stereotyping and prejudice regarding all aspects of otherness. Emma B said, "I gave my views, but always incorporate the voices of the student". The students and Emma B became aware, through the

discussions, that everyone is both a dominant and subordinate being. Through the discussions they all became aware of their multiple identities, which could be “dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership), and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged)”, as explained by Tatum (2013).

“Sharing the lived experiences made the discussions more interesting”. Although they could refer to the study material to enrich the knowledge space. In some instances, she brought biases to class, as she did not know differently, as she had been shaped by her institutions to have certain views about people and life. Due to the three participants’ different backgrounds and their open discussions of stereotyping, their prejudices about students exposed the reasons behind their views; doing so also “made me to reflect and to acknowledge my vulnerabilities and misconceptions”. In sharing their views, some students reported the same experiences as Emma B had had in terms of family descent and cultural background. With time, the trust relationship became stronger. Love (2010) supported this activity, and indicated that we need to learn about internalised domination and internalised subordination as they manifest in our lives, and agree as a group that we will act to interrupt it. Emma B said “I found it challenging to accommodate the dominant thinking about certain aspects and lack of cultural[ly] appropriate knowledge of the groups”. Some students believed that she did not understand where they come from, because they perceived her to be “bourgeois”, with many privileges. Tatum (2013, p.12) stated that, 'because of the risks inherent in unequal relationships, subordinates often develop covert ways of resisting or undermining the power of the dominant group'. Emma B had to constantly be aware of “my facilitator’s position in the process, in terms of understanding otherness, sharing and negotiating my stance as well as hearing the students’ voices”.

## **Findings and recommendations**

As teacher educators in a new, democratic South Africa, we kept the vision of a transformed and inclusive education in mind. The narratives illustrate how all three of made a concerted effort to approach classes bearing transformation and inclusivity in mind. However, confronting one's own prejudices and stereotypes was very challenging. These aspects of their identity had been part of them all their lives and never before were they placed in a situation to confront it. Their respective challenges were compounded by the fact, that the notions they held with regard to aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, etcetera, was the result of their own socialisation that transpired in a specific space and time, and was thus an inherent to part of their identity. One teacher educator who was privileged during the apartheid era had to learn how to function in an environment where racial privilege was replaced by equality. While the other teacher educators, who previously belonged to the subordinate group had to learn how to cooperate with a previously privileged colleague, as equals and not as marginalised and oppressed individuals. The male teacher educator, who was previously privileged because of his gender also had to readjust to cooperate with his previously subordinate female colleagues in a space where gender equity was paramount.

Their respective challenges were further exacerbated by a tendency to fall back on their initially socialised prejudices and stereotypes, especially during heated classroom discussions, when accusations of privilege and disadvantage are dominating the discussion. Shedding feelings of guilt, because of privilege on the one hand and grudge harbouring, because of subjugation on the other, was all part of the difficult journey.

All three of them realised that transformation is only possible if they themselves are prepared to change. The teacher educators also realised that they needed to empower themselves and learn more about people and 'otherness', in spaces that were more objective, as opposed to those where their own socialisation took place. The module, *The individual in the learning context*, encouraged critical reflection, which, in turn, led to critical consciousness of the marginalised and the oppressed. Critical reflection and knowledge of the other can challenge our stereotypical assumptions and assist us to become agents of change.

One of the objectives of the article was to explore how teacher educators construct their narrative identities in a newly established higher education institution. The exploration required the three SPU teacher educators to engage with the literature on identity formation, the cycle of socialisation, and the cycle of liberation. Ways of understanding oppression and domination expressed by individuals and groups on the basis of race, were also thoroughly engaged with in the literature review. The exploration involved, furthermore, that the teacher educators engaged in a process of reflection, where their own understanding of 'otherness', stereotypes, and prejudices about race, culture, privilege and oppressed groups were foregrounded. The three teacher educators made use of narratives and employed Harro's (2010a) cycle of socialisation, to make sense of how the aforementioned phenomena had developed and, finally, manifested. In their respective narratives, the teacher educators describe how they were socialised on a personal level, by their parents and close families in their home environments. Their narratives explore how the socialisation that took place on a personal level was reinforced by institutions, such as the church, the school and the pervasive nuances of culture and the media. In some instances, the narratives allude to how one of the then subordinate teacher educators "tolerated" the injustice, as a means of survival, while the other then privileged one and her family elected to avoid discussion on such topics. The narratives highlight how these teacher educators were bound to renegotiate and reconstruct their identities at the newly established Sol Plaatje University space. Renegotiating and reconstructing their own identities were a prerequisite for functioning optimally and aptly in a space where the fundamental tenets of the university and the module encapsulated the principles of social justice and equity.

Moreover, the narratives advance an exposition of the challenging and soul-searching journeys these teacher educators had to embark on to make the transition from teacher educators within the contexts of their respective diverse lived experiences in a pre-democratic era, to that of change agents. The liberation cycle of Harro (2010) served as a guideline for analysing the social relationships between the teacher educators and students, within the classroom space, over time.

The narratives reveal that teacher educators constantly have to unlearn prior understandings of 'otherness', stereotypes, and prejudice about race, culture, privilege and oppressed groups. Where 'otherness' from a subordinate's perspective meant viewing the dominant as only occupying the powerful positions because of being fortunate to have been born into a specific race and class. While to the dominant, 'otherness' meant intuitively reaping the concomitant benefits of belonging to dominant group, without any guilt.

The teacher educators had to open themselves up to new knowledge, by listening to their students' stories and identifying and making sense of the context from which it is being told, in an unbiased and subjective manner. The latter in itself was not easy, since transitioning to being change agents is a not a once-off event. Transitioning should, instead be regarded as a constant and ongoing process – a process characterised by observation, reflection, self-interrogation, questioning, self-talk, making mistakes, recognising mistakes, rectifying them and moving along this tedious, but crucial journey. The afore-mentioned is clearly demonstrated by the narratives of the teacher educators. It means that one should constantly work on strategies to make the necessary cognitive adjustments that will enable one to envision futures where social justice, equity and democracy prevail. Admittedly, at times the teacher educators intuitively tended to revert to their original stereotypical and racial tendencies. Finally, it is important that the envisaged future does not only remain a vision, but that it becomes automatic and finds expression in daily interactions with others in society.

## Conclusion

Teacher educators have a responsibility to assist pre-service teachers to understand and interpret a diverse classroom context. Teaching in a diverse classroom can only be effective through teacher identity formation. By facilitating a module that develops critical understanding of dominant and subdominant structures in society, teacher educators needed to reflect on their own socialisation and identity formation. Through classroom discussions, pre-service teachers and teacher educators were able to share their experiences and understanding of otherness. By acknowledging their own biases, stereotyping and prejudices, teacher educators were able to make a paradigm shift and become change agents. Their narratives illustrate the importance of being open, and engaging in reflection, dialogue and reframing, before they could model the principles of social justice and equity. A future study is envisaged where the narratives of student teachers will be explored.

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## Appendix A: Expanded description of module: The individual in the learning context

### Assessment activities

The module required students to complete the following summative assessment activities, namely: one individual assignment, one group assignment, one role-play activity, two semester tests. The following is a description of each of the summative assessment activities:

#### *Semester tests*

Students' knowledge on key concepts of social identity, oppression and liberation were assessed. Students were also challenged to apply their knowledge.

#### *Individual assignment*

Students were requested to write a reflection report which counted 30 marks.

#### *Assignment:*

Read the article *The cycle of socialisation* by B. Harro (2000) and reflect on your own socialisation and your specific set of social identities.

Explain how you were socialised according to your social identities (race, class, gender, language, religion and sexual orientation).

Refer to the following in your reflection:

- Your intra- and interpersonal identities
- The norms, roles and rules that you had to follow / messages that you received
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Conscious and unconscious forms of oppression
- Dominant and subdominant groups

#### *Group assignment*

Students had to work in groups of four and the assignment counted 50 marks.

#### *Assignment:*

Read the following articles: *Developing a liberatory consciousness* by B. Love (2000) and *The cycle of socialisation* by B. Harro (2000) and reflect on your desire to be an agent of change.

Focus on **ONE** category (race, class, gender, language, ability, religion) of otherness where you would like to do something about injustices and play a role in critical transformation.

#### *Role-play*

Students were expected to role-play (in groups of six) how they would confront oppression and become allies or change agent. The role-play activity counted 16 marks.

#### *Assignment:*

This assignment requires you to work in your chosen groups and role-play a scenario on challenging any form of oppression in different spheres of influence in a class or school situation.

#### Instructions

1. Each group has only 5 minutes to perform their acted scenario

2. All members of the group should have a part to play
3. Absence, reluctance or poor performance of one member of the group, will result in a loss of marks for the entire group
4. Groups should be well organised and stick to the 5 minutes time frame
5. Acts should be audible
6. The role-play should clearly depict the following:
  - ✓ The form of oppression
  - ✓ The actions taken to challenge oppression
  - ✓ The reason why you are challenging this form of oppression
  - ✓ The risks involved in challenging the oppression
  - ✓ The consequences for challenging the form of oppression
  - ✓ Conclusion and summary of the scenario (what is the moral of the story)

### **Contact hours**

Two weekly contact sessions of ninety minutes each for the semester.

### **Typical number of students each year**

The course attracts between 200 and 359 students each year.

### **Ethnic backgrounds of students and international students**

The first year Education student population comprises 69% African black (ethnic groupings are Setswana, isi Xhosa, Sesotho and isi Zulu), 28% Coloured (South Africans of mixed race descent), 2% White and only 1% Indian students. There are no international students at this stage. All students are full time students between the ages of 18 to 20 years of age, who have just completed their basic schooling.

**Anthony Mpsi** holds a PhD (Psychology of Education, University of the Free State, South Africa). His research specialisation is in diversity education studies and teaching practice.

Email: [tony.mpsi@spu.ac.za](mailto:tony.mpsi@spu.ac.za)

**Emma Groenewald** holds a PhD (Philosophy of Education, University of the Free State, South Africa). She specialises in narrative identity construction of students.

Email: [Emma.Groenewald@spu.ac.za](mailto:Emma.Groenewald@spu.ac.za)

**Emma Barnett** holds a PhD (Comparative Studies, University of the Western Cape, South Africa). She specialises in comparative and policy studies with a focus on policy implementation.

Email: [emma.barnett@spu.ac.za](mailto:emma.barnett@spu.ac.za)

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