

Ethnocentric shapeshifting: Seeking traces of culturally responsive teaching and caring amongst early childhood education lecturers

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs) remain fraught with student activism because transforming and decolonising curricula to promote culturally responsive education is still lingering. Prolonging a trajectory of culturally apathetic education will not only lead to impoverished and decoupled human knowledge systems but also quell democratic citizenry and social justice. South Africa's educational trajectory can be explored using the methodology for critical instance cases for traces of cultural responsiveness and accountability in its academic cohort and andragogy, which is the focus of this inquiry. Foregrounding former traces of uncharitable andragogy can help HEIs to understand students' impulse to protest. We interpreted literature and the critical instance case study by integrating the seminal work of Diamond and Moore (1995) and Gay's (2018) views on culturally responsive teaching and care (CRTC). Interpreting this moment in an HEIs education trajectory in early childhood education indicated traces of superficial understanding of culture, cultural relevance, and cultural responsiveness. We perceived ethnocentrism in the academic cohort, as the lecturer-participants' own geography, socio-economic status, and historical heritage succoured how diverse groups were educated. We learned that critical instance case studies could serve as a rear-view mirror for HEIs to identify signs of ethnocentrism that counteract cultural relativism. South Africa's complex historical trajectory constructed many critical instance case studies for appraising, offering HEIs a head start to transform and decolonise initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and adopt CRTC educational philosophy. Scouring lecturers' perceptions, frames of reference, and assumptions about CRTC practices awakens one's conscious state of mind, creating opportunities for capacity building and mobilising academic and teacher citizenry.

Keywords: citizenry; cultural responsiveness; decolonisation; early childhood education; higher education institutions; indigenous knowledge systems

Introduction

Action and cognisance to transform higher education institutions (HEIs) through decolonisation are a global plea to redress injustices done by former colonised countries and colonisers (Van Heest 2021; Wimpenny Beelen, Sjoer, King and Hindrix 2021). Student activism and protest action have and will continue to represent a wider social concern because they are imbedded in

human desire to be acknowledged, understood, and valued (Luescher, Loader, and Mugume 2017) in their efforts in search of “forever becoming” (Le Grange 2016). Ebersöhn (2012) celebrates that “flocking partnerships,” like a student protest, could be viewed as a collective coping mechanism. Voicing their shared interpretation of painful experiences to wider society helps the “flock” to maintain a shared state of human well-being. Our understanding of a shared interpretation is a form of ethnocentrism — since the “flock” applies their newly joint ethnicity as a frame of reference to judge and challenge history, practices, beliefs, and cultures. Because protest actions are unpredictable in their reason, engagement strategy, and socio-historical context, we coin the idea of ethnocentric shapeshifting as a rhetorical effect to convey our understanding of this phenomenon.

We argue that ethnocentric shapeshifting should not be decoupled from education, its historical trajectory, or social context. Van Heest (2021) proposes, with good reason, that HEIs can act as agents for human and societal well-being. Therefore, we utilised the methodology of critical instance case study to search for historical traces where students will continue to seek out and engage with historically white universities (HWU) for change. Now is the time for HEIs to become proactive academic citizens who serve as agents of change, cultural responsiveness catalysts, interpreters of tensions, and narrators of conversations that will lead to dismantling biases and tearing down ethnocentrism that sustains segregation and intersectional power.

Background and rationale

Citizens of all ages in South Africa will not only benefit from but also desperately need a historical consciousness because no citizen is born with knowledge of the past and for them to belong to a future society requires a grounded awareness of their heritage (Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto, and Wolhuter 2013). Contemporary research is not waiting on societies to discover their roots nor protracting constructive educational trajectories, rather “social institutions” are glamorised by reporting on HEIs under siege such as acts of arson, unprecedented vandalism, and intimidation; that is to say, motivations behind student protests¹ and occurrences² are studied in isolation. Rather,

¹ sustaining financing of HEIs without fee increases; pursuing free education for all; decolonisation of tertiary curricula; confronting ethnocentrism; promoting democratic citizenry in a post-apartheid era (Butler-Adam, 2016; Du Preez, 2018)

² for example #Fallism, #MustFall movement, #GenderViolence (Du Preez, Simmonds and Chetty, 2017)

HEIs should be held responsible to continuously inspect their socio-educational trajectory for traces of ethnocentrism to timeously inform and include a culturally responsive philosophy in their education.

The need for culturally responsive teaching and care (CRTC) in South African higher education is unavoidable and demands decolonisation. To deconstruct colonial ideologies of the supremacy and authority of modern scientific knowledge systems (e.g., Euro- and American-centric) calls for, amongst other elements, the integration and appreciation of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in university curricula and academic cohorts. Efforts to implement culturally responsive educational philosophies, appointing lecturing cohorts representative of national demographics, and dismantling constitutions that prolong current status quo to sustain unbalanced power dynamics must become visible (Council on Higher Education 2013; Higgs 2016; Lockett 2016). Following the educational transformation in South Africa since 1994, HWUs have experienced an influx of Black students. Nic Spaul (Mail & Guardian 2016) and the fundamental work of Ladson-Billings (2001) succinctly postulate that a shift towards a more representative Black student profile indicates that disadvantaged learners are looking towards tertiary education as a vehicle for social advancement and equity. Van Broekhuizen (2016) reported that while the number of White graduates has moderately increased over the past 25 years, the number of Black graduates has increased more than sixteen-fold in the last decade. Student enrolments at HEIs in 2018 indicated that three-quarters (75%) represent a Black African population (Statista Research Department 2021). To put it into perspective, Pachler, Makoe, Burns, and Blommaert (2008, 444) assert that “the hang-over effect of an entrenched policy, institutional practices and attitudes operating at every level in society for almost 300 years continues the norm of an unequal and divided education system.”

To illustrate the point, the Council for Higher Education (CHE 2013) reports that even though the number of Black first-degree graduates has grown considerably, it is still lower than the number of White and Indian/Asian graduates. Although the racial profile of students enrolled at HEIs has changed considerably, it does not mean ethnocentrism does not still lurk in the corridors and lecturing halls. As Jansen (2017) elegantly states, the end of colonialism does not automatically mean transformed understanding. HEIs in post-apartheid South Africa must intensify the

internationalisation of tertiary curricula by mobilising students and academics to access transcontinental knowledge systems and societies (Du Preez 2018). Although HEIs' primary task is academic in their role to ensuring success, students must be able to relate to the institutional culture, their lecturers, and the programme content. The low throughput and completion rate of Black students, especially in teacher training studies, prompts the question asked by Martin and Pirbair-Illich (2016): Have South African universities adapted their westernised education or are modern scientific knowledge systems still considered as the natural way of being and knowing?

Santos (as quoted in Fataar and Subreenduth 2015, 107) uses the concept "cognitive injustice" to explain the unwillingness of HEIs to adapt curriculum and challenges lecturers' ethnocentrism to accommodate "different ways of knowing," admitting that "knowing" manifests within specific socio-cultural and political educational contexts, and that failure to incorporate this "knowing" in educational knowledge systems "create[s] epistemological inequity, imbalance and conflict within educational and societal structures."

Gay (2018) strongly argues that student-teachers desperately need to experience and receive CRTc to become culturally responsive educators. South African institutions for initial teacher education (ITE) urgently need to scrutinise their intended and implemented curricula in search of:










- capacity and cultural relevance to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Ball 2006; Hannaway, Steyn, and Hartell 2014);
- colonial and Euroamerican superiority that could be substituted for indigenous thinking and teaching (Higgs 2016);
- advocating a historical consciousness by reconnecting and integrating preserved indigenous knowledge systems to promote citizenship (Du Preez and Van Niekerk 2018);
- ethics and addressing unbalanced power dynamics (Du Preez, Simmonds, and Chetty 2017); and
- utilising #Fallism and CRTc to invite lecturers from other racial groups to enter the workforce that is predominantly White (Garton 2019).

In the light of the above, we argue the need to investigate a critical instance case study for the shapeshifting phenomena by starting to look towards: How culturally responsive are early childhood education lecturers at a historically White university in South Africa?

Literature review and conceptual framework

CRTC utilises cultural backgrounds and unique situated lived-experiences as conceptual links to introduce subject content (Farinde-Wu, Glover, and Williams 2017). Thus, students' ability to add value to discussions from their own frame of reference is recognised because they have a higher interest appeal even if they do not adhere to modern scientific (e.g., Euro- and American-centric) knowledge systems and cultures (Brown 2007). All students possess a wealth of knowledge which can be utilised to enrich a learning experience and serve as epistemological point of departure. To only have pedagogical knowledge of multiculturalism or cultural responsiveness is not sufficient, rather these concepts need to be internalised into the educator's beliefs about the relationship between culture, ethnicity, and intellectual ability (Gay 2018, 70). CRTC, as an educational philosophy, is conceptualised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Culturally responsive teaching and caring

Cultural organisers		Cultural mediators		Orchestrators of social context	
	Pedagogy that invites personal and cultural expression		Challenge one's own cultural lens, biases, and prejudices		Pedagogy is compatible with sociocultural contexts and frames of references
	Encourage and radiate respect for ethnic diversity		Encourage critical and culturally responsive dialogue		Integrate cultural and ethnic diversity in curriculum
	High academic achievement for all students		Positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships		Include cultural expertise in learning resources

Adapted from: Diamond and Moore (1995) and Gay (2018)

With reference to the category cultural organisers, an educator needs to understand that more diverse learning opportunities and an environment which culminates in culturally responsive behavioural patterns shapes future citizenry (Diamond and Moore 1995; Gay 2018). Similarly, Villegas and Lucas (2002) encourage lecturers to enrich learning opportunities by embracing their students' diverse backgrounds, unique frames of reference and outlook on learning. In other words, all students, regardless of their academic or cultural backgrounds, should be viewed "as learners who already know a great deal and who have experiences, concepts and languages that can be built on and expanded to help them learn even more" (Huerta and Brittain 2010, 388).

As for cultural mediators, the educator should encourage cultural dialogue where members of different cultures can discuss possible inconsistencies or where priority is given to one knowledge system to the detriment of another. Diamond and Moore (1995) suggest that cultural mediators should, first, come to terms with their own ethnicity preferences and biases before encouraging culturally responsive dialogue. Using dialogues, educators guide students' identity pursuit so that students may become successful and abled students who value society's heterogeneity (Diamond and Moore 1995) and tackle ethnocentrism. Howard and Del Rosario (as quoted in Barnes 2006, 85) argue that educators "must model and practice cultural dialogue to become knowledgeable, perceptive and skilled to engage in discourse that seeks equality, equity and excellent education for all in our increasingly global society." Educators should recognise and address biases in the system because HEIs are sites for social transformation and exchanges of beliefs and experiences (Villegas and Lucas 2002).

In fulfilment of the role as social orchestrators, Diamond and Moore (1995) accentuate the value of authentic learning where the social construction of concepts in contexts that involve real-world problems are recognised. Gay (2018) and Muschell and Roberts (2011) encourage educators, as orchestrators of social contexts, to value students' unique sets of life experiences, values, and cultural norms to develop cultural responsiveness and appreciation for diversity. Educators as social agents also need communities of practice to continually professionalise their teaching identities by collaborating with local agencies and organisations to adapt educational resources to promote cultural relativism in their classrooms.

Ladson-Billings (2001) and Van Heest (2021) are convinced that to succeed in CRTC, educators must commit to democracy, social justice and internalise decolonisation to ensure students receive

the education they are entitled to. To Ball (2006, 2), a positive attitude is the most important factor when teaching “historically underserved students and eschewing a ‘taken-for granted assumption about racial groups,’ families and their cultures.” No amount of accommodation for Black students at HWUs will have any impact, if ethnocentrism and colonised viewpoints are not conquered (Kaburise 2014).

Methodological considerations

Drawing on the potentiality of critical instance case study, this qualitative design offered opportunity to explore highly generalised and particularly universal phenomenon for answers using a detailed study of a single instance (Hayes, Kyer, and Weber 2015). A global migration denotes that a culturally heterogenic student population is becoming the norm, therefore lecturers in HEIs worldwide should be sensitised to CRTCC and its requirements. One would think that in the year 2022 cultural relativism, as one practice to counteract ethnocentrism, has already reached significant impact in changing the face of higher education and training. However, the progress from ethnocentrism to cultural relativism is slow, complex, and multifaceted. Up until today, acts of ethnocentrism, or ethnocentric shapeshifting as we like to call it, is still experienced even in international academic settings (Van Heest 2021, 1). Thus, the words of Ladson-Billings (2001, 37) two decades later still carry truth, namely that the status quo or “cultural makeup of the teacher education profession is embarrassingly homogeneous.”

Critical instance case study

South Africa has been lifting itself of the quagmire of apartheid to bring together citizens and unifying streams of nation building and democracy. Concerted efforts at HWUs have been made to transform curricula and cultivate a democratic character that accommodates and mediates conflict and adversarial interest without oppression and injustice (Department of Education 2001). Critical instance case study offers a way to investigate a case of cultural relativism by looking at increased staff representativity with whom Black students can identify. As evidenced in policy changes, signs of progression will promote democracy, cultivate cultural relativism, address segregation and recruit Black staff with rich cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Also, it should be expected of existing corps of White lecturers to transform curricula and pedagogy to become culturally responsive to attract Black students and to retain those already in the system.

The South African HEI used as research site is one of eight HWUs which all are still categorised as “a White male, Euromerican-centric culture that many Black and female academics and students experience as alienating” (Young and Campbell 2014, 361). Up until 2016, Afrikaans was predominantly applied as the medium of instruction at this HWU. The demographic profile of the research site, at the point of data generation around 2016, favoured White female lecturers and White female teacher-students. At the time of this research, the appointed staff-ratio consisted of eight females, of which seven were White and one Black. It is important to note that the general teacher profile in early childhood education consists predominantly of women (Petersen 2014) justifying the reason for not reporting on men. All eight lecturers (participants A–H) were selected purposively from the HWU, with the criteria that they were responsible for the education of student-teachers throughout their four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) studies, making certain the findings cover the complete range experiences of the students.

Meaning-making framework and scientific process

To explore lecturers’ cognisance of cultural responsiveness at this HWU, we utilised CRTC as a theoretical framing. The eight lecturer-participants were interviewed inside their personal secluded offices where they shared their perceptions, views, experiences, and circumstances to explore how CRTC can attract and retain more Black students in the BEd Early Childhood Development and Education programme, specifically: (1) opportunities for personal and cultural expression and, (2) how lecturer-participants challenged their own biases and encouraged critical cultural dialogues. Socially generated data sets were organised and prepared by electronically filing each piece of verbatim typed, scanned, or transcribed data for each participant. Following that, the data sets were broken down by categorising and coding the various segments and establishing a pattern for the set by connecting the codes. The codes emerging from the analysis were deductively organised into broader themes that represents Diamond and Moore’s (1995, 35) three categories with Gay’s (2018) conceptual descriptors. This study sought to accurately reconstruct and represent participants’ accounts of cultural responsiveness by addressing criteria such a member checking and reflexivity throughout data analysis to establish trustworthiness.

Participants were asked for their informed consent in accordance with the ethical norms of the institution monitoring this study, which assured their safety during participation as well as the

absence of any physical danger or psychological harm. The study was completely voluntary, and participants were free to leave at any time. Ethical clearance was obtained from the responsible ethics committee and research data securely stored in accordance with the applicable data management measures. Since recruited staff from this HEI were participants, the Dean of the Faculty of Education also approved the application and accompanying documents explicating recruitment terms and conditions, informed consent and data generation instruments.

Data presentation

Theoretical theme 1: Cultural organisers

Cultural organisers suggest that lecturers must structure and mould opportunities for personal and cultural expression so that the voices of all students may be “heard and considered” (Diamond and Moore 1995). We wanted to understand how the lecturer-participants viewed themselves as cultural organisers by exploring how Black students were invited to share their cultural expression to raise awareness of diversity whilst expecting high academic achievements for all students regardless of race.

Participant E remarked that she attempts to involve Black students in discussion, but “they have problems with language, as English is not their home language,” and Participant A concurred by saying: “Academic English is above their heads.”

Most lecturer-participants raised the issue that Black students usually came late and unprepared for class, then struggled to pick up the gist of the discussion. In addition, “the class attendance is a lot worse than that of the White students, especially the lectures that we have early in the morning” (Participant G).

Majority of the lecturer-participants expressed their concern of Black students’ unpreparedness to cope with the workload: “the information they get from the schools were not as they’ve expected ... especially the workload ... the due dates” (Participant A). Participant C indicated that “entry level should be ... there should be a standard.”

Although lecturers encouraged Black students to make use of the tutor system, student support services, exam preparation guidelines, revision, or extra lessons, “none of them came; they only show up for test and exams,” according to Participant C. Participant F said: “A lot of them came to see me and said, ‘we don’t understand what you are telling us.’ Many of them struggle.” Another aspect of concern was that “their English comprehension and spelling is problematic, because their

writing skills are very poor” (Participant D). An interesting disclosure from the Black lecturer was that she encouraged students to consult with her, even about another module or subject, as she came to learn “that sometimes they are a bit shy to go to the White lecturers” (Participant B).

Theoretical theme 2: Cultural mediators

As cultural mediators, lecturers should create opportunities to debate various cultural issues and biases vigorously. Cultural mediators should communicate their expectations to their students and design opportunities for academic and social interaction and relationship-building (Villegas and Lucas 2002). We wanted to understand how lecturer-participants challenged their own biases and encouraged critical cultural dialogues in class that promote positive cross-cultural relationships.

“If I hand out tests or assignments, they don’t react and during group activities they do not really talk to other students except their own cultural group” (Participant G). One lecturer-participant questioned whether the Black students lack confidence: “It takes a lot of guts to speak up and speak out and make yourself heard” (Participant F). It seemed that lecturers try to encourage interaction but found that Black students were reluctant to participate. “I think if we can get them to feel at ease and to share, they can really have wonderful things to share. By creating openness, students may give their opinions and share their experiences,” Participant A added. In general, participants were of opinion that Black students were not open to establishing cross-cultural relationships as they rather came to their offices individually, rather than sharing in the lecture hall; “they come to you but not during the day as they feel others will see them,” according to Participant F. The Black lecturer, Participant B, indicated that many Black students would rather come to her, “because we come from the same background.”

Theoretical theme 3: Orchestrators of social context

Orchestrators of social context can be considered as the link between governance, citizenship, and education as educators can engage with students in diverse ways which encourage reflection on which teaching style, classroom management, and instructional modes, educational philosophy, and context promote integration and transformation (Gay, 2018). The nature of the question posed related to how the curriculum, teaching methods and resources were diversified to link Black students’ existing knowledge systems and frames of reference with the learning experience.

Only one-third of the lecturer-participants indicated that they are cognisant of westernised and indigenous teaching methodologies, but how to apply it and what their Black students' cultural backgrounds and needs were remained unknown to them. "I keep them in mind when writing the learning material" (Participant A), whereas two lecturers (Participant D and Participant G) indicated: "I really try to involve them in any demonstration and I engage them in discussions and practical activities." Very few lecturers varied their instruction to accommodate the diverse student population which could also indicate the majority did not utilise indigenous methods. "I try to have examples from diverse contexts, i.e., the alphabet in African languages or posters with Black children. I also encourage students to share their cultural perspective and indigenous knowledge in modules where relevant" (Participant B).











In response to how they perceive themselves as incorporating various culturally related information, Participant D expressed: "I firmly believe in the positive aspects of bringing cultural capital of different cultural groups to enrich classroom experience"; while another one said: "we talk about different genres and different contexts of a story/picture book ... they can make their own books from their own cultural background. They even write stories in their mother tongue from their cultural settings. I consider my lecture room a place of sharing" (Participant F).

Most participants acknowledged that the learning activities, and even the whole programme, needed to change to accommodate students from all cultures. Participant H specifically indicated that: "Our programme is not suitable for them. It is usually the majority White and female that dictate the instruction ... we need to make changes. We also have to change our method ... our ability to bring them back to a basic method." This lecturer believed that one teaching method should be used and that students should adapt their own teaching methods based on their own knowledge and experience. This methodological recipe is a transitional step as "they just apply it and they add on their own situation" (Participant H).

In regard to including cultural expertise in resources, Participant C alluded to that "if you have only a blackboard, then do it, and if you can only use a poster, then just do it perfectly. I let them ... design their own skipping ropes out of plastic bags ... or balls out of panty hose." Participant E's observation was that "White students enjoy making the media whereas the Black students don't want to use waste material because they want to get out of that poverty mentality."

In Table 2, an overview of emerging codes and the alignment with conceptual descriptors, categories, and theoretical themes is presented.

Table 2: Overview of data analysis

Emerging Codes		Conceptual Descriptors	Theoretical Theme
Poor language proficiency in (academic) English	Disparity and Discrepancy	 Pedagogy that invites personal and cultural expression	Cultural organisers
Poor class attendance and dawdling		 Encourage and radiate respect for ethnic diversity	
Unprepared and burdened by heavy workload		 High academic achievement for all students	
<i>not identified</i>		 Challenge one's own cultural lens, biases, and prejudices	Cultural mediators
Shyness and little collective interaction		 Encourage critical and culturally responsive dialogue	
Reserved and prefer individual correspondence		 Positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships	
Isolated incidents where curriculum matches cultural context		 Pedagogy is compatible with sociocultural contexts and frames of references	Orchestrators of social context
White student dominance promotes westernised instruction		 Integrate cultural and ethnic diversity in curriculum	
Cultural expertise is associated with poor socio-economic mentality		 Include cultural expertise in learning resources	

Adapted from: Diamond and Moore (1995) and Gay (2018)

Interpretation and discussion

Cultural organisers

Pappamihel and Moreno (2011) argue that to encourage students to share their cultural experiences and backgrounds, lecturers first must be cognisant of their own identity and how it impacts others. The early childhood education lecturers consider their role as cultural organisers as being compromised because Black students: (1) are not proficient in English nor academic English; (2) show poor class attendance and dawdling behaviour; and (3) are unprepared for class and struggle to cope with academic workload. The lecturer-participants felt that they could not engage adequately with Black students, nor draw on their funds of knowledge in classroom activities due to the aforementioned challenges. An interesting observation is that although the participants were aware of their Black students' challenges, they still regarded these as the result of the students' own shortcomings, rather than legitimate barriers that need to be taken into consideration in the classroom situation.

Gist (2014) refers to such attitudes as having a lack of "sociocultural consciousness," meaning being unaware of socially related issues that impact on the learning experiences of students. Another notion of value is Kozlowski's (2015) achievement gap between cultures. She asserts that three elements are present when considering achievement disparities, namely cultural capital mismatch, teacher bias, and oppositional culture. In other words, the lecturer-participants evaluated students' efforts and achievement of success as being on time for class, attending tutorials, coping with workload or speaking academic English. Swidler (as quoted in Kozlowski 2015) alludes to cultural toolkits that students acquire, which are either predictable or conflicting with the measures of acceptable practices. This then influences lecturers' perceptions of students and, indirectly, the subconscious decision to involve students from diverse cultures in the teaching-learning situation.

Cultural mediators

As cultural mediators, lecturers should tap into the lifeworld of their students and allow them to share their viewpoints, lived-experiences, and establish cross-cultural relationships that are culturally related to the topic of discussion (Gay 2018). The lecturer-participants' role as cultural mediators is compromised because Black students: (1) seem shy and lacking confidence to

promote collective interaction, and (2) are reserved and prefer individual correspondence. An interesting concept which Itzigsohn and Brown (2015, 233) studied is double consciousness, or the internal conflict that colonised or minority groups experience in an oppressive situation, which suggests there are “limits to communication and to mutual recognition under conditions of racialisation.” Translated to this incident, the majority of students are White females with White lecturers, which leads to social exclusion, because the dominant group ascribes racial identities to a relationship or social situation, which the minority does not identify itself to. This leads to being perceived and labelled as so-called quiet, unresponsiveness and reserved, and ultimately incapable. Cultural lenses, biases, and prejudices detected in the interviews may indicate ethnocentrism. Lucas and Villegas (2013) advocate that student-teachers should be trained to teach students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Because student-teachers are still creating their belief systems about cultural diversity, in other words, student-teachers are still uncontaminated by prevailing ideologies that may determine their attitudes and practices, the lecturers’ role as cultural mediators becomes essential.

Orchestrators of social context

As cultural orchestrators, lecturers should vary their instruction to provide for students’ diverse backgrounds and design education in such a way “to perpetuate and enrich the culture of a people and equip them with the tools to become functional participants in society, if they so choose” (Gay 2018, 45).

The lecturer-participants’ role as orchestrators of social context is unclear because Black students’ (1) cultural context only matches isolated incidents in the curriculum; (2) are in the minority and White dominance promotes westernised instruction; and (3) cultural expertise is associated with socio-economic mentality. There is some level of awareness that lecturers ought to know their Black students and that the curriculum is “not suitable” or transformed enough for Black students to identify with. In this regard, Pappamihiel and Moreno (2011, 337) feel that if differences are acknowledged, “then we are ethically obligated to make provisions for them.” Pappamihiel and Moreno (2011) are also of opinion that lecturers cannot adopt the role of the cultural expert and expect transformation to occur, rather external guidance should be sought after. To become socio-culturally aware, Gist (2014) suggests that an academic cohort jointly design a community of

social, cultural, and professional experiences and practices that promotes CRTC and teacher citizenry.

Conclusion and recommendations

Utilising critical instance case study design enabled us to reflect on this HWU's educational trajectory in early childhood when there was a shortage of Black staff and students, and the retention of Black students was a matter of concern. Exploring lecturers' cognisance of cultural responsiveness, at this historic moment, signals how serious HEIs should be about developing, shaping, and empowering their academic cohort to be culturally responsive to future teachers — which now has a more representative demographic student and staff profile. This by no means suggests a new form of ethnocentrism in favour of the majority's ethnicity — on the contrary, every effort should be made to constructively progress on the educational trajectory and not to repeat regressive past disparities. HEIs in post-apartheid South Africa should also intensify the internationalisation of tertiary curricula by mobilising students and academics to access transcontinental knowledge systems and diverse societies (Du Preez 2018).

This study foregrounded a rigorous method to explore a phenomenon conceptually and contextually despite only including one critical instance case study in this educational trajectory. Therefore, exploring CRTC, in historic moments within and across HEIs, is heralded to intentionally transform and decolonise ITE utilising a culturally responsive philosophy. When considering the principles of CRTC, Pappamihiel and Moreno (2011) emphasise that diverse knowledge funds are regarded as invaluable elements for education.

The findings suggest there are traces of ethnocentrism visible in this particular academic cohort, and although a sincere effort is made to understand and implement CRTC, it remains sadly absent. Lecturer-participants demonstrated a superficial understanding of cultural relevance and interpreted Black culture mainly in terms of developmental backlog and poor economic status. Lecturers demonstrated a deficit model thinking, whereby they “blamed” Black students or their struggles, albeit unintentionally. Although there was an awareness of the overwhelming obstacles facing Black students and their academic pursuits, these were not viewed as legitimate reasons for the changing of attitudes and practices. While the generated data is based on a small group of lecturers, from a specific department at an HWU, this critical instance case study can signal

evidence of ethnocentrism shapeshifting as the status quo at other South African HWUs. A follow-up study on this critical case is advised to explore its trajectory towards cultural relativism.

The way forward requires rethinking the primary purpose of higher educational institutions.

Students will continue to engage with HEIs to effect change, and CRTC, transformation and decolonisation of higher education can only succeed if it is internalised in the entire education sector, both amongst educators and in each curriculum (Van Heest 2021). The quest for dispensing all knowledge systems, not just Euromerican but indigenous too, should be accessible, relatable, relevant, and inclusive to all students, so that all lives and futures can be “transformed.” This implies intentional integration and involvement of all students in the wider society and a genuine regard for their cultural capital by further researching:

- pedagogy that: invites personal and cultural expression; encourages and radiates ethnic diversity; is compatible with sociocultural contexts and frames of references; integrates cultural and ethnic diversity in curriculum; includes cultural expertise in learning resources.
- lecturer attitude that: envisions high academic achievement for all students; challenges one’s own cultural lens, biases, and prejudices; encourages critical and culturally responsive dialogue; and sustains positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships.

The value of exposing ethnocentrism is that academic cohorts will begin to realise and appreciate that students are honorary cultural organisers, mediators, and orchestrators who have accumulated intercultural capital from their ongoing lived-experiences of negotiating and reconciling different ideas, languages, and cultures (Kim and Slapac 2015).

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