

Decolonialisation of education: the pre-service teacher turn

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ABSTRACT

Utilising the critically conscious teacher preparation framework and social constructivism, this qualitative case study conducted in 2021 set out to explore how pre-service teachers make the turn towards decolonialisation of education. The research site was a large South African contact-based, research-intensive university situated in the Gauteng province. Data comprised a mix of an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Forty-one pre-service teachers responded to the survey. Twelve pre-service teachers were interviewed. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings reveal that pre-service teachers held divergent and nuanced conceptions of decolonialisation of education which seeped into their practice. Pre-service teachers are constituted of multiple identities. Changes in beliefs, values, attitudes and mind-sets are prerequisites for meaningful educational change. A glimmer of hope surfaced from the few pre-service teachers who 'turned towards' becoming transformative intellectuals and agents of change as they navigated through the road less travelled: the inclusive agentic route.

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Introduction and background context

Like many other countries in the world with a historical legacy of colonialism, South Africa is attempting to shed the colonialist shroud that has enveloped it since its invasion by the western world in 1652. Indigenous knowledge systems and voices that have been subverted and silenced for so many centuries are rising like the phoenix to counter and re(encounter) hegemonic western narratives in an attempt to decolonialise the mind and re-navigate the path of education towards a decolonialisation turn. Pre-service teachers are crucial to this process of re-navigation. They play a vital role in dismantling entrenched western knowledge systems in South African schools. Therefore, increasing efforts should be made to prepare pre-service teachers for a decolonial turn.

South Africa has been subjected to a process of colonialism, which witnessed western scholarship employ a strategy that attributed a negative cognitive and ontological status to everything African (Odora-Hoppers 2001). This process of colonialism was twofold: 'first, the conquering of the physical spaces and bodies of the colonised and second, the colonisation of the mind through education' (Le Grange 2016, 8). The removal of

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a colonial administration and government did not witness the rise of Indigenous voices in South Africa. Instead, South Africa inherited colonial structures and ways of thinking and doing that 'continued to reproduce Eurocentrism in society and in the academe long after the dismantling of the physical empire' (Heleta 2016; Ndlovo-Gatsheni 2016, 34). Thus, there seemed to be a seamless shift from 'global colonialism' to one of 'global coloniality'. The #FeesMustFall movement of 2016 provided the impetus to challenge this coloniality by calling for the decolonialisation of education. In an attempt to address this call, universities swiftly reacted by instructing academics to 're-visit, re-look and revise course materials and study guides' (Vandeyar 2020, 783). However, these attempts at most are superficial and cosmetic in nature. What is required for deep and sustainable change is 'decolonisation of the mind' (Wa Thiong'o 1998).

Identities of many pre-service teachers were constituted, negotiated and represented within the frame of this colonial legacy. Pre-service teachers experience problematic pedagogy not only at the university but also at their previous educational levels, which makes 'decolonialisation of their minds' difficult to achieve. Furthermore, this colonial inheritance significantly influences pre-service teacher training programmes (García et al. 2014) which shape pre-service teachers' beliefs, their everyday behaviours and their expectations (Granados-Beltrán 2016). Thus, necessitating the problematising of university pedagogy in the decolonial moment (Soudien 2020) and, as Jansen (2023, 139) argues, 'the need for a theory of institutions when dealing with radical curriculum change' to address decolonialisation, also necessitates the 'practice architectures' (Kemmis 2009, 25) which 'pull together the "sayings, doings and relatings" which are taken for granted in everyday work of the faculty' (Brennan 2020, 170).

Are pre-service teachers ready to 'decolonise their minds' (Wa Thiong'o 1998) and their ingrained belief and value systems? Are they ready to unlearn, re-learn and fundamentally transform as individuals? And, are they literate about the historical injustices and diverse intellectual debates within their disciplines? (Vandeyar 2020, 787)

Preparing pre-service teachers for the decolonial turn would have far-reaching ramifications as it would 'challenge those university pedagogies-as-usual that translate legacies of coloniality, which further seep into schools' (Brennan 2020, 175–176; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Accordingly, this study asks: how do pre-service teachers make the turn towards decolonialisation of education?

Exploring the terrain: the decolonial turn – voices of the subaltern

The decolonial turn 'refers to a line of thought that critiques the idea of modernity based on the people who now live in former colonies' (Restrepo and Rojas 2010, 20). Decolonial argumentation is embedded in an ethical and political framing and seeks to address social, cultural and cognitive injustices in society (Walsh 2010). The aim of decolonialisation is to acknowledge subaltern communities by recognising and disseminating their ways of knowing and doing and their aspirations and hopes for the world. It advocates for an equality-in-difference or equality-of-cultural trade approach to knowledge construction. Such an approach counters the validity of dominant forms of western universal knowledge, by placing subaltern forms of knowledge on an equal status (Granados-Beltrán 2016). Decolonialisation in higher education has focused mainly on knowledge

and the curriculum and on the cultural consequences of imperialism and the damage to the self (Enslin and Hedge 2024; Le Grange 2016). Enslin and Hedge (2024) emphasise the need to address the material aspects of colonisation and decolonisation and how capitalist structures and practices sustain current forms of coloniality. Maldonado-Torres (2007) claims that coloniality survives colonialism:

Maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243)

Decolonial pedagogy sets out to dismantle polarised knowledge, thinking and practices inherited from colonialism. Decolonial pedagogy proactively strives to question and disrupt received knowledge with 'the purpose of intervening, constructing, creating, and liberating by means of a decolonizing practice' (Granados-Beltrán 2016, 1810), which calls for a 'pluri-versity of approaches' and the use of diverse participatory methodologies (Martinez-Vargas 2020, 112). According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), decolonialisation requires a different praxis altogether to dismantle as it refers 'to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (243). Diaz (2010, 225) claims that such a process would involve 'a critical understanding of history, the redeployment of emancipatory educational practices, and a de-centering of knowledge from the colonial episteme'. Decolonial pedagogy advocates for openness of educational practices that are directed towards the development of a historical consciousness and critical thinking skills that enable learners to question epistemic and other injustices in society.

A review of the literature reveals a few studies that have been conducted with regard to teacher education and transformative agency. The focus of these few studies have been varied. A study conducted by Robinson (2020) focussed on how lectures and school observations impacted on students' own sense of agency within diverse and unequal South African schooling contexts. Conradie (2020) looked at the connectedness and interdependence of the human condition, where people experience themselves in relation to others. Botha (2020) focussed on the alignment of the curriculum to promote engaged and informed citizen teachers. Joorst's (2020) study utilised the methodology of auto-ethnography to provide a voice and window into lived experiences and its influence on pedagogy. A study conducted by Fataar and Feldman (2020) explored students' reflexive engagement with content in relation to their own biographies to make the shift from how they think about themselves in relation to their emerging 'teacherly' identities and how they contest ongoing racialised inequalities in daily life, including the university. And, the development of pre-service teachers as 'epistemic agents' in the science classroom was the focus of the study conducted by Edwards (2020, 146). Few, if any, studies have been conducted on how pre-service teachers could make the turn towards decolonialisation of education.

A number of counterstrategies in the interests of the decolonial turn have been suggested in the literature. Freire (1970, 1973, 1998) advocated for what he termed critical consciousness. Critical consciousness highlights an awareness of self, 'a consciousness of self in a social situation, a transformation of self in relation to others, and a critical and

creative approach to reality' (Granados-Beltrán 2016, 178). Maseko (2018, 78) argues for a culture of critical consciousness that would yield attributes that foster 'epistemic reflectivity and ontological density' in the interest of transformative praxis. Emphasis seems to be placed on the need for teachers to question what they demand from themselves (Agray 2008). Walsh (2010, 78) makes a case for critical interculturality, which aims 'to challenge and transform existing structures, institutions, and social relations that maintain inequality in such a way that other ways of being, thinking, living, learning, and knowing are acknowledged'. Interculturality rests on three prongs, namely relational, functional and critical (Walsh 2010, 78). Relational interculturality focuses on the relation established among cultures by means of contact and exchange. Functional interculturality strives to attain inclusion of different groups by exercising tolerance and opening up dialogue. Critical interculturality is like a tool that 'points out and requires the transformation of structures, institutions and social relations, and the construction of conditions of being, knowing, learning, feeling and living differently' (Walsh 2010, 78). Thus, the emphasis of decolonial pedagogy not only requires an interplay between critical consciousness and subjectivity and critical interculturality but also sets out to address the political dimension in education: 'Pedagogy is understood as an essential methodology within and for social, political, ontological, and epistemic struggles for liberation' (Walsh 2013, 29).

Decolonial pedagogies aim to bring to the fore voices of the subaltern that were silenced by the colonialities of power so that 'possibilities of being, feeling, existing, doing, thinking, seeing, listening, and knowing in an-other way are incited' (Walsh 2013, 28). Freire (1970) claimed that humanisation, emancipatory praxis, horizon of hope and elements of sociogeny (Fanon 1973, 1983) frame decolonial pedagogies. Sociogeny is 'a methodology to study both the ways of being a human and the processes of humanization, de-humanization, and re-humanization in colonial contexts' (Walsh 2013, 45). Sociogeny is concerned with raising awareness, promoting self-agency and action, developing subjectivities and encouraging self-reflection. Problems that arise from coloniality can only be recognised, made visible and understood through awareness-raising, which then serves to drive the process of transformation. Such transformation 'results in (un) learning, invention, intervention, and the flourishing of action from the colonized themselves' (Granados-Beltrán 2016, 180). Intervention is a key tenet of decolonial pedagogy. It enables people to exercise a critical reading of the world by intervening and countering with an accommodative stance, by questioning reality. Freirean pedagogy is based on 'critical praxis – a continuous process and practice of reflection, action, [and] reflection' (Freire 1970, 131), which develops a critique of the self where initiatives are taken by teachers on their own to exercise their subjectivity (Walsh 2010). Day (1999, 3) argues that teachers need to be developed actively; 'they have to be centrally involved in decisions concerning the directions and processes of their own learning'.

Theoretical framework

This study utilises the critically conscious teacher preparation framework (Joseph and Evans 2018). This framework not only highlights the importance of developing knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers but foregrounds the call for action, which is core for critical and transformative teacher preparation. Pre-service

teachers need to become activists and advocates for social justice (Irvine 2004). This framework pivots on four foundations (Joseph and Evans 2018, 54), namely establishing critically conscious pedagogy, disrupting historical regression, revitalising democratic values in education and becoming advocates and action-oriented practitioners.

Establishing critically conscious pedagogy addresses pre-service teachers' understanding of students' backgrounds, interests and competencies and their proficiency in guiding students by scaffolding instruction (Lucas and Villegas 2011). It allows pre-service teachers to examine how particular groups of students have been marginalised and to consider how critical pedagogies can establish cultural pluralism as the norm (Paris and Alim 2017; Souto-Manning 2010; Valenzuela 2016). Joseph and Evans (2018, 55) argue that pertinent to this exercise are questions such as 'whose knowledge is most represented in this practice? Who is benefitting from this practice? Does this practice equitably serve the learners it intends to support? And what is problematic about this practice?'

Disrupting historical regression centres on equipping pre-service teachers with knowledge that will enable them to disrupt and dismantle ideologies and practices that have historically marginalised, discouraged and disempowered students. Pre-service teachers need to be made aware of how issues of segregation, discrimination, resource inequalities and subtractive practices seep into education and continue to let it slip into regression.

Revitalising democratic values in education addresses issues of inequity, power and activism and proposes that these issues become explicit components of the teacher education curriculum. Pre-service teachers need to re-envision an inclusive, democratic educational system that engages and empowers all students through the embodiment of fair and just practices.

Becoming advocates and action-oriented practitioners makes a case for teacher agency. Dubetz and de Jong (2011) argue that pre-service teachers need to take on the role of advocate for their students. They must be ready to act for their students both within and beyond the confines of the classroom.

Research strategy

The meta-theoretical paradigm utilised in this study was social constructivism. Social constructivists argue that knowledge is generated through social interaction, interpretation and understanding and cannot be separated from the social environment from which it occurs (Bruce et al. 2016). The social environment influences the type of knowledge an individual constructs and the meaning that individuals ascribe to it. The socialisation of individuals has a strong influence on how individuals perceive their world. Individuals construct this knowledge based on how their socialisation has impacted on them (Larochelle and Bednarz 2010). Knowledge creation is an active process in which people shape their own minds, through their own actions within socio-cultural settings (Adams 2006). Reality is made and becomes meaningful with interactions from others and is thus also time and context dependent (Adams 2006; Bruce et al. 2016; Krause et al. 2005).

A qualitative single bounded case study research design and in-depth data collection methods (Creswell and Poth 2018) were used to obtain a holistic

understanding of the phenomenon under study (Atkins and Wallace 2012). Qualitative research is:

A type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyses these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective and biased manner. (Creswell 2008, 46)

According to qualitative researchers, there are multiple realities, and therefore, there is no absolute truth (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). The bounded case study provided the 'proximity to reality' of this study by focussing on real-life situations of pre-service teachers (Flyvberg 2011). This study, which took place in 2021, explored pre-service teachers' reflections on how they understand and implement decolonialisation of education.

The research site was a large South African contact-based, research-intensive university situated in the Gauteng province, undergoing the process of decolonialisation of education. Participants comprised pre-service teachers who were completing a full-time Postgraduate Certificate of Education programme (PGCE). Entry requirements for this programme comprised an appropriate Bachelor's degree and particular subject requirements for teaching in the Senior and Further Education and Training phases (Grades 7 to 12). A total of 58 students were briefed on this project and invited to complete an online survey which was submitted to a central repository. The survey was prefaced by a few statistical questions such as age, gender, race and reason for enrolling for the PGCE programme. Forty-one pre-service teachers responded to the survey. Participants who indicated in the online survey that they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview furnished their personal details on the online response form. Twelve participants subsequently participated in a semi-structured interview. Pseudonyms were given to the research site and to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Qualitative data gathered through open-ended questions were coded and categorised to develop themes using inductive thematic analysis (Mayring 2000). This was done through labelling of concepts to develop a pattern which emerged from data. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, annotated and analysed using a thematic approach. Data was re-coded a priori (Charmaz 2017) to accommodate 'new insights' (Sandelowski 2000, 338) and presented as rich and thick analysis.

Research rigour was ensured by means of the following quality criteria: transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability and authenticity. Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the relevant Faculty. The following inclusion criteria were included in the ethical approval for the students described above, namely registered student for the PGCE programme; race, gender, age and reason for choosing to complete the PGCE programme.

Findings

Pre-service teachers' understanding of 'decolonialisation of education'

The term 'decolonialisation of education' evoked varied responses from pre-service teachers. A number of meanings surfaced, namely 'Africanness'; a sense of claiming back; freedom and inclusivity. The majority of participants (26/41) advocated for the

replacement of Eurocentric knowledge with Indigenous knowledge systems. These students equated the term 'decolonialisation of education' with 'Africanness':

Create an African centred education system which prioritises African content and knowledge. (Kayla, White, Afrikaans-speaking, female)

In a nutshell, I would say that put Africa at the centre of an African Education system and everything foreign must be used for supplementary and comparative reasons. (Zama, African, isiZulu-speaking, female)

Deconstructing content to represent the native people, their land, and their prospects. Use content generated in Africa by Africans. (Mosi, African, Xhosa-speaking, male)

It must allow Africans to pen narratives of their own history and from an African perspective. African languages must retain their identity without being versioned from the language of the coloniser. (Lungi, African, Xhosa-speaking, male)

A strong sense of 'claiming back' seemed to emerge in some responses. Some participants expressed that their thinking about education had shifted. They initially accepted Eurocentric knowledge without question, but now representation of Indigenous knowledge in the education system seemed to be of paramount importance to them. Claiming back for these pre-service teachers went beyond content, it was inclusive of language and teaching and methods, as evident from the quotations below:

Decolonialisation of education means getting rid of everything in education that comes from the coloniser's world. It is a way to claim back, claim back Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and living. This is our land. (Xolani, African, isiZulu-speaking, male)

I believe that the curriculum for African children should be written by Africans. African history should be viewed from an African lens and not be written by the colonisers. (Kolisa, African, Sepedi-speaking, female)

South Africa, needs to define for itself what education is and not just accept what has been imported from foreign lands. (Andile, African, Xhosa-speaking, male)

Learn using tried and tested African methods of learning and a recognition of their languages. Ensuring that English does not take preference over native languages. (Mpho, African, isiZulu-speaking, female)

Coupled to this notion of 'claiming back' was what some participants expressed as freedom of choice:

Means freeing a country or a nation from the shackles and domination of another country to be able to independently define its own knowledge, skills, beliefs and values. To replace the 'foreignness of education'. (Melody, Coloured, Afrikaans-speaking, female)

Freedom of choice to engage with the kind of knowledge that speaks to the subaltern group's experiences. And not prioritizing dominant groups' form of knowledge over the dominated. This would translate to relaying knowledge, skills, values and beliefs in ways that are relatable to the dominated group of people. (Karabo, African, isiZulu-speaking, male)

It was refreshing to note that a few participants (4/41) understood the term to mean inclusivity and not the replacement of Eurocentric knowledge with Indigenous knowledge systems. They stated:

For me, decolonialised education must allow Africans to learn from their global counterparts without feeling the pressure to conform to standards that make them lose their 'Africanness'. (Temba, African, Sepedi-speaking, male)

'Decolonialisation of Education' is aimed at transformation and bringing forth change that is both liberal and inclusive. (Linda, White, English-speaking female)

Decolonialising education offers the country an opportunity to have an education system that is inclusive of everyone's knowledge, values, skills and beliefs, including the marginalised group in society. (Nomsa, African, isiZulu-speaking, female)

The education system should be representative of all the people of South Africa, especially the majority – it should not only cater to one minority group. (Shreya, Indian, Tamil-speaking, female)

There were, however, numerous responses (9/41) that clearly indicated a lack of understanding of this term, as evident from the sentiments expressed below:

Decolonialisation of the curriculum is incorporating 21st century methods of teaching and learning. It includes considering educational philosophies such as pragmatism and constructivism to ensure that learning time is maximized by including learners in the learning process and understanding the different ways that different learners learn. (Jane, White, English-speaking, female)

Currently, although the curriculum keeps changing, there is a need for the Education Department to consider the needs and developments that exist in the 21st century. Technology use is growing at an exponential rate and learners need to be equipped with skills that will enable them to deal with this reality. (Sizwe, African, isiZulu-speaking, male)

Pre-service teachers' understanding of 'decolonialisation of education' in their practice

Responses elicited from pre-service teachers in terms of how they would go about implementing 'decolonialisation' in the delivery of the curriculum seemed overwhelmingly in favour of an Afrocentric focus. The majority of participants (26/41) called for the replacement of the Eurocentric education system with an Afrocentric one. They expressed the following sentiments:

I believe in empowering students through materials that represent them, for instance, selecting reading books that include content that they can relate to, so that they can create their own meaning of the content, not what most textbooks, which are influenced by colonial powers such as Britain, tell them. (Neha, Indian, Hindu-speaking, female)

I think what colonialism did was to strip away people's culture, and education means that children are stripped away from the ability to think beyond what the colonizer wants them to think, and only to be content with the ability to read and write English. Therefore, emphasizing the importance of reading and writing in the mother-tongue as well. I would deliver content that is central to our lives as Africans. (Mpumi, African, Sepedi-speaking, female)

Promote our culture at schools and promote literary works from African writers in all content subjects from science, maths, humanities and arts. Learners can now use knowledge generated by African writers and bring solutions derived from African education. (Temba, African, Tswana-speaking, male)

Some participants were overwhelmed and confessed their ignorance (8/41) in terms of decolonising education in their practice. They shared the following sentiments:

I really don't know where to begin. I want to decolonialise education but does this mean I just include sources of other cultural knowledge in my discipline? Do I continue to teach the way I have always done? (Nyathi, Black, Sepedi-speaking, female)

The major challenge has to be the notion of defining decolonialisation. I don't quite understand what is decolonialisation of education. What is it that I need to decolonialise and how? I need clarity on decolonialisation. (Johannes, White, Afrikaans-speaking, male)

Others (3/41) vehemently declared their outright rejection of the decolonialisation agenda:

Are we making use of African content and African case studies to solve African problems? If that's the case then education is bound to fail – just look at what a Black Government has done to South Africa! (Gerhard, White, Afrikaans-speaking, male)

I refuse to take my students backwards! South Africa is way behind the rest of the world. Decolonialisation of education will only take us further back. If we want to prepare our learners for the future than we need to teach Eurocentric knowledge, that is key. (Julia, White, English-speaking, female)

A few pre-service teachers (4/41) viewed themselves as active agents of social reform, as evident from the quotations below:

I feel that I have the responsibility of being an active agent of social reform therefore, thinking about teaching as an enabler of this reformation . . . not only know and believe in one thing as true and definite, but to learn about different perspectives as well. (Linda, White, English-speaking, female)

I need to assess and evaluate my own understanding of what decolonialisation of education is, and what I need to do in my own teaching practice to drive this process. For example, how are school structures a product of colonialism; and how to restructure schools? How is language of instruction a product of colonialism; and how to help in ensuring that mother-tongue languages are not a trade-off in this regard. How is educational content informed by colonial ideologies; and how to help in reversing this in practice? (Nomsa, African, isiZulu-speaking, female)

First, is to consider the students that I am teaching. That means asking myself questions like, what are my students' histories? What are their experiences? And what prior knowledge, skills, values, beliefs are they bringing with them to school? This is to be followed by asking myself a question of, how then do I make education meaningful for everybody involved without at the same time excluding the previously dominant group from the system . . . embrace different knowledge systems on an equal footing. (Shreya, Indian, Tamil-speaking, female)

Juxtaposed against this sense of agency, some pre-service teachers (2/41) expressed a sense of helplessness. They viewed themselves as merely cogs in the expansive education system and exclaimed that 'it's not yet uhuru' for some of them. Uhuru is a Swahili word meaning 'freedom' and therefore means that Africans have not truly been emancipated since independence:

Sometimes you teach just because you have to and cannot change the system. As the saying goes, it's not yet uhuru¹ for some of us, the previously marginalised nation. (*Mandla, African, isiZulu-speaking, male*)

However, a large proportion of pre-service teachers (9/41) expressed a lack of understanding of how to implement decolonialisation of education in their practice, as evident from the quotations below:

I would deliver the lessons using different tools such as PowerPoint presentations, anchor charts, online games like Kahoot and other modern ways to capture the learners' attention and reduce the traditional ways of teaching. (*Angelique, White, Afrikaans-speaking, female*)

I would use co-teaching instead of just transmitting information to learners. I believe that learners would learn more effectively if they felt like active participants in the classroom interaction. (*Ayesha, Indian, Urdu-speaking, female*)

Analysis and discussion

Transformation of the curriculum cannot be viewed in isolation. A number of variables are at play. These variables include, among others, the context, agents of curriculum development and delivery, diverse, heterogeneous group of students and institutional culture, all of which operate within a paradigm of power. Curriculum transformation is framed by the historical, political, social, geographical, ideological, local and global contexts. Agents of change responsible for the development and delivery of the curriculum are not vacuous beings. They are constituted of beliefs, values and attitudes all of which inform their identities, shape their mindsets and seep into their practice.

Findings from this study indicated that pre-service teachers' conceptions of decolonialisation informed their practice. Pre-service teachers had reached a fork in the road on their education journey. The majority of pre-service teachers chose the replacement route (Africanness, Afrocentricism, claiming back, freedom). A large proportion of pre-service teachers followed the lack of understanding, or maybe evasive/skirting the issue/indifference, route. A few pre-service teachers opted for the existing status quo route. Then, there was a very small minority of pre-service teachers who navigated through the road less travelled, namely the inclusive agentic route.

This begs the question, then, are pre-service teachers ready to 'decolonise their minds' (Wa Thiong'o 1998) and their ingrained belief and value systems? Are they ready to unlearn, re-learn and fundamentally transform as individuals? And are they literate about the historical injustices and diverse intellectual debates within their disciplines? It is now their turn. What turns should pre-service teachers take to develop their effectiveness as change agents?

First, although the pre-service teacher turn will be a difficult turn to achieve within the South African context, given that these teachers have been formed from within in a time of coloniality and all that this means, they need to make a turn towards changing their misguided conceptions of decolonialisation of education. It would seem that their conceptions filtered into their practice. To ensure deep, lasting and sustainable change, pre-service teachers need to engage with their subjective realities. Fundamental changes in conception influence knowledge, skills, materials, contexts and institutional culture. Pre-service teachers need to negotiate the relationship

between new change efforts and their subjective realities. They need to establish a critically conscious pedagogy that enables their understanding of students' backgrounds, interests and competencies and informs their practice in scaffolding instruction (Lucas and Villegas 2011). As one respondent mentioned, 'first, is to consider the students that I am teaching. That means asking myself questions like, what are my students' histories? What are their experiences? And what prior knowledge, skills, values, beliefs are they bringing with them to school?'. Such a pedagogy forefronts ways in which students have been marginalised and advocates for cultural pluralism as the norm (Paris and Alim 2017). It also instils a heightened sense of critical awareness in pre-service teachers to consider pertinent issues of inclusion and exclusion, for example 'whose knowledge is most represented in this practice? Who is benefitting from this practice? Does this practice equitably serve the learners it intends to support? And what is problematic about this practice?' (Joseph and Evans 2018, 55). This would enable pre-service teachers to develop a consciousness not only about their own sociocultural identities, but also the valid and diverse identities of others. It would also allow pre-service teachers to recognise the inextricable link between school and the wider sociocultural-political context.

Second, pre-service teachers need to turn towards embracing an inclusive understanding and an inclusive approach to decolonialisation of education. They need to see themselves as agents of social reform by addressing social, cultural and cognitive justice education. Cognitive justice education is based on the recognition of the plurality of knowledge and expresses the right of the different forms of knowledge to co-exist (Visvanathan 2006). This should be a process about how they think about themselves in relation to their emerging 'teacherly' identities, how they contest ongoing racialised inequalities in daily life (Fataar and Feldman 2020) and how they develop as epistemic agents in the classroom (Edwards 2020). Pre-service teachers need to instil a sense of critical consciousness in themselves, which involves an awareness of self, a consciousness of self in a social situation, a transformation of self in relation to others and a critical and creative approach to reality (Fantini 2000; Freire 1998). There is a need for pre-service teachers to question, based on their subjectivities, what they demand from themselves (Agray 2008). A glimmer of hope surfaced in the findings, which revealed that a small minority of students had already begun this process as evident from the following: 'As a teacher, I need to assess and evaluate my own understanding of what decolonialisation of education is, and what I need to do in my own teaching practice to drive this process' and 'I feel that I have the responsibility of being an active agent of social reform therefore, thinking about teaching as an enabler of this reformation'.

Pre-service teachers need to become action-oriented practitioners by highlighting their teacher agency and advocating for an equality-in-difference or equality-of-cultural trade approach to knowledge construction. The validity of dominant forms of western universal knowledge need to be challenged and subaltern forms of knowledge need to be given an equal status (Granados-Beltrán 2016). Pre-service teachers must be ready to take action for their students both within and beyond the confines of the classroom (Dubetz and de Jong 2011). As one pre-service teacher expressed, 'by asking myself how do I make education meaningful for everybody involved without at the same time excluding the previously dominant group from the system ... embrace different knowledge systems on an equal

footing'. Such an inclusive approach would require a re-envisioning of an inclusive, democratic educational system that engages and empowers all students through the embodiment of fair and just practices, as evident from 'Decolonialising education offers the country an opportunity to have an education system that is inclusive of everyone's knowledge, values, skills and beliefs including the marginalised group in society'.

What these pre-service teachers seem to be advocating for was a form of a decolonial pedagogy that will require an interplay between critical consciousness and subjectivity and critical interculturality. Critical consciousness highlights the role of 'self' namely, awareness of self, consciousness of self and transformation of self (Fantini 2000; Freire 1998), in the development of transformative praxis. Critical interculturality recognises how difference has been constructed within a colonial framework, which serves as a 'tool, process and project which is constructed by people as a demand of subalternity' (Walsh 2010, 78). Critical interculturality sets out to challenge and transform existing structures, institutions, and social relations that maintain inequality in such a way that other ways of being, thinking, living, learning and knowing are acknowledged. In so doing, democratic values in education can be revitalised to address issues of inequity, power and activism.

Third, pre-service teachers need to turn away from equating decolonialisation with 'Africanness' and in so doing imposing one knowledge system on another. There seemed to be a strong push to exclude Eurocentric epistemologies and practices in education. For example,

Decolonialisation of education means getting rid of everything in education that comes from the coloniser's world. It is a way to claim back, claim back Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and living. It will take time, but we need to claim back. This is our land.

Deconstructing content to represent the native people, their land, and their prospects. Use content generated in Africa by Africans. A sense of 'Africanness'.

The majority of responses desperately called for disrupting historical regression by dismantling ideologies and practices that have historically suppressed and disempowered marginalised students, as evident from

I think what colonialism did was to strip away people's culture, and education means that children are stripped away from the ability to think beyond what the colonizer wants them to think, and only to be content with the ability to read and write English. Therefore, emphasizing the importance of reading and writing in the mother-tongue as well. I would deliver content that is central to our lives as Africans.

What these pre-service teachers were advocating for was not only openness to educational practices that focussed on 'the development of historical consciousness and the promotion of critical thinking as abilities transcending the classroom' (Diaz 2010, 225), but also a methodology of sociogeny (Walsh 2013). Sociogeny studies 'both the ways of being a human and the processes of humanization, de-humanization, and re-humanization in colonial contexts' (Walsh 2013, 45). It entails a process of awareness-raising, self-agency and action, development of subjectivities and self-reflection. The call for African existential philosophies seemed to be coupled with a concomitant call for epistemic justice.

Fourth, pre-service teachers need to turn away from holding onto stereotypical conceptions of the superiority of knowledge systems, as evident from

I refuse to take my students backwards! South Africa is way behind the rest of the world. Decolonialisation of education will only take us further back. If we want to prepare our learners for the future than we need to teach Eurocentric knowledge, that is key.

Such a response is indicative of this pre-service teacher's unwillingness to establish a critically conscious pedagogy or to revitalise democratic values in education. Such beliefs and attitudes, if left unchecked, have far-reaching consequences as they potentially could seep into this teacher's practice and mould young minds of future generations. Such beliefs and attitudes will also serve to perpetuate the cycle of inequalities.

Fifth, pre-service teachers need to turn away from adopting an 'ignorant' or a neutral stance or an evasive and indifferent approach. Some pre-service teachers seemed to have a lack of understanding of decolonialisation of education, as evident from 'I don't quite understand what is decolonialisation of education. What is it that I need to decolonialise and how? I need clarity on decolonialisation'. Others seemed to skirt the issue or play it safe by equating decolonialisation of education with issues such as '21st century methods', technology and technological tools for teaching: 'I would deliver the lessons using different tools such as PowerPoint presentations, anchor charts, online games like Kahoot and other modern ways to capture the learners' attention and reduce the traditional ways of teaching'. It would seem that these teachers too were unwilling to establish a critically conscious pedagogy and failed to realise that meaningful education cannot be divorced from historical, political, social, geographical, ideological, local and global contexts. It has to embrace and engage with diversity in all its forms.

Conclusion

The act of decolonialising education lies in our capacity to reimagine the possibilities in what we are teaching and how we are teaching this knowledge. With the task of reimagining curricula, the aim becomes excavating knowledge that has historically been marginalised from the mainstream in the education sector. Decolonialising education becomes the project of creating a pluriversal space, where we acknowledge that each knowledge system has something to contribute to the collective project of knowledge generation in its broadest sense. Humanisation, emancipatory praxis, horizon of hope (Freire 1970) and elements of sociogeny (Fanon 1983) frame decolonial pedagogies.

Good teaching is the capacity to be open to critique and having one's ideas challenged and contested. This means developing what Jansen (2016, 15) terms mutual vulnerability and what Khumalo (2018, 2) terms mutual (in)fallibility. This actions the suggestion made by Freire (1970), who thinks about the pedagogic space as one that is constituted by dynamism and the constant shifting of the borders of possibility, that is, what he terms Problem Posing Education as opposed to the notion of the Banking Concept of Education. Only in this way can we begin to see our students as agents of their own learning and subsequently begin to think critically about what it is that we are teaching and how we are teaching it. It is only in being open to critique that we are able to learn from one another and grow not only as scholars, teachers and intellectuals, but also as humans. This predisposition allows us to get to a point of mutual (in)fallibility where we are able to see our own complicity in structures of injustice and domination and work with the younger generations in curating a world that is more just and more equitable.

As we move into the new age of geopolitical systems where our economies are information based, subaltern/Indigenous epistemic frameworks can provide knowledge by way of attempting to reimagine the possibilities of our collective futures. It is in line with this impetus, to reimagine our worlds anew that we have to begin taking seriously the epistemic contributions of knowledge that do not come from the centre so that 'possibilities of being, feeling, existing, doing, thinking, seeing, listening, and knowing in an-other way are incited' (Walsh 2013, 28). This means deconstructing and re-designing the curriculum in such ways that it erodes previous ways of viewing black people, Africans in particular, and their forms of knowledge. Pre-service teachers need to be developed actively to take on an agentic role in countering social, cultural and cognitive injustice education. They play a crucial role in addressing 'social, political, ontological, and epistemic struggles for liberation' (29). Education has to represent the DNA of the society that participates in it.

Preparing pre-service teachers for the decolonial turn would have far-reaching ramifications as it would 'challenge those university pedagogies-as-usual that transmute legacies of coloniality, which further seep into schools' (Brennan 2020, 175–176). This study puts forth a number of recommendations for the professional development of pre-service teachers. First, the problematising of university pedagogy in the decolonial moment (Soudien 2020). Pre-service teachers need to be developed actively to take on an agentic role in countering social, cultural and cognitive injustice education. Second, the need for a theory of institutions when dealing with radical curriculum change (Jansen 2023). Third, the need to address the material aspects of colonisation and how capitalist structures and practices sustain current forms of coloniality (Enslin and Hedge 2024). In so doing, the colonial inheritance that significantly influences pre-service teacher training programmes, which in turn shapes pre-service teachers' beliefs, their everyday behaviours and their expectations, can be challenged. Fourth, endorse a decolonial pedagogy that calls for a 'pluri-versity of approaches' and the use of participatory methodologies in their diverse forms (Martinez-Vargas 2020).

Note

1. Uhuru is often used to describe the freedom of a country to govern itself.

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