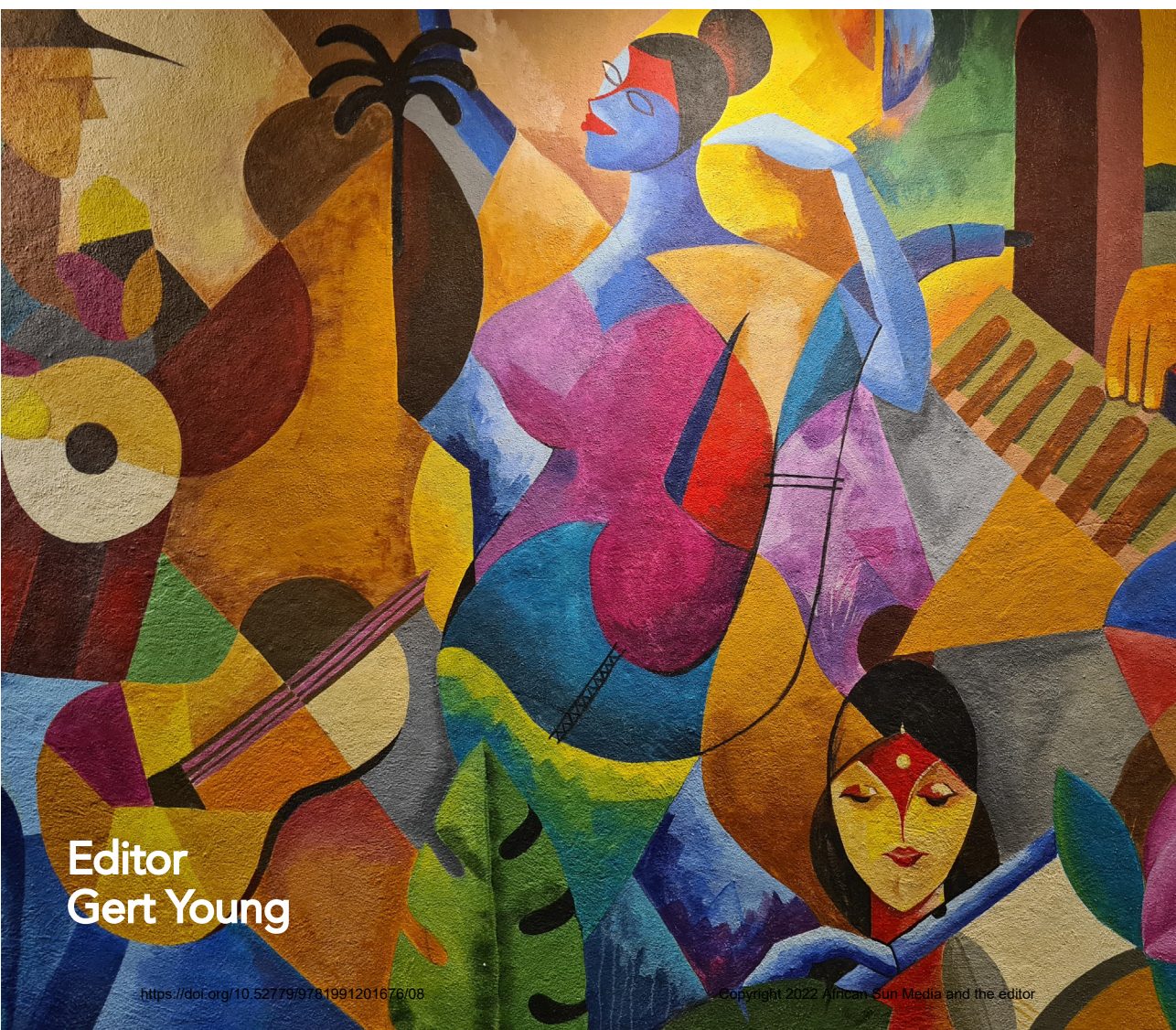


Academic Development and its Practitioners

A View from the Inside



Editor
Gert Young

Abbreviations

APQ	Academic planning and Quality Assurance
BLC	Blended learning coordinator
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CHEC	Cape Higher Education Consortium
CLT	Centre for Learning Technologies
CoP	Community of practice
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DLTE	Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement
DRD	Division for Research Development
ECAs	Early Career Academics
FIGs	Focused Interest Groups
FIRLT	Fund for Innovation and Research in Learning and Teaching
FMF	Fees Must Fall
FYA	First-Year Academy
GAs	Graduate Attributes
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HELTASA	Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HoD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LC	Language Centre
LCT	Legitimation Code Theory
NAA	Newly appointed academics
NRF	National Research Foundation
PASS	Professional and Administrative Support Services

PGDip	Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education
PL	Professional learning
PREDAC	Professional Educational Development for Academics
REEP	Recommended Engineering Education Practices
SAHEI	South African Higher Education Institution
SAS	Student Academic Support Services
SoEL	Scholarship of Educational Leadership
SOTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
SU	Stellenbosch University
T&L	Teaching and Learning
UBC	University of British Columbia
UniEd	Division of University Education

DECOLONIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Third spaces as a deconstructive site of learning for teachers @CTL
@ SU

Jean Farmer

Content warning: Sexual abuses, racism

1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to recognise the transformative learning opportunities which exist for academics in hybrid spaces, also known as Third Spaces. The motivation of investigating opportunities is to help shift South African Higher Education institutions (SAHEIs) such as Stellenbosch University closer to being transformed as socially just institutions. I suggest one way for this to happen is by introducing disruptive conversations in our spaces regarding issues which affect our institutions, academics, and students but which are seldom spoken about. Third Spaces or “zones of development”, “expand learning” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejada, 1999) beyond what is considered comfortable or easy.

The scope of this chapter should reach beyond Stellenbosch University. SAHEIs are still unequally differentiated as well as contexts where discomfiting occurrences happen. Examples of these are the remnants of the unequal past; patriarchal and misogynistic cultures are maintained despite the concerns raised by, for example, #EndGender-basedViolence and #FeesMustFall instigating the review of 2015-2016 national education policies (Lewis & Hendricks, 2017; Langa, 2017). The demands to charge rape-accused and acknowledge misogynistic culture, have not resulted in safer campuses for women (including transgender persons). The demands to address or remove problematic images of the past powerful patriarchal figures from some campuses, have not resulted in universities no longer being dominated and managed by men. Transformation, in this instance, is concerned with changing perceptions of appreciated opinion, social power and inclusion. The idea is that everyone has equitable access, chances of success and the right to experience the institution with a sense of safety and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Moore, 2017).

2 Disruptive conversations

These may be social and political conversations we tend to avoid or prefer not to reflect on too deeply or for too long. The conversation forces us to engage with others within our

communities who may have conflicting emotions and opinions and we fear those relationships, peer or hierarchical, may be threatened. Third Spaces can, however, create viable and dynamic opportunities for the necessary social learning and professional development academics need to make but are slow to learn because of lack of opportunity.

2.1 Positionality

As academic developers/advisors at Stellenbosch University (SU) at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) we are in positions to offer opportunities where academics may engage in formal and less formal ways. SU aims to offer a “care-full” (Herman, 2015) environment for academics while at the same time to be at the forefront of research, including teaching and learning research, in South Africa, Africa and with global impact. The vision and mission statement (Stellenbosch University, 2019) poses the questions of where SU will be positioned and indicates as core themes “social impact” which should mean towards social justice. The vision 2040 also asks us to remember that “if we change nothing, nothing will change” (2019:5).

Academics working in habitual spaces tend to become accustomed to the dominant culture within these spaces, ignoring or not directly integrating notions with the broader discourses that take place in the meso and macro cultures (Roxa, 2015). Unfortunately, opinions, culture and dominant discourse do not automatically change and cultures are slower to adapt as the majority of people’s minds do not shift alongside when constitution and transformative policies are approved. SU is just one of those institutions where, for some, change is slow (McKenna, 2012; Soudien, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016). Dissent is present, protest occurs, at times finding expression through conversation, political debates, social media interactions, the arts and riots (Costandius, 2012; Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017; Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017; Lewis & Hendricks, 2017b; Langa, 2017; Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017). However, these disruptive events and opportunities to engage in our discomfort, can soon be forgotten as the need to return to the business of “normal” teaching and learning takes precedence.

This chapter problematises the discomfiting yet complex relationships and discussions (or lack of) which can develop in academic spaces to help with the desired changes for SU to being recognised, not only for academic excellence but also, as a socially just institution. While SU is making efforts and strides, it is often also publicly identified as an institution which is slow in addressing the changing needs of society (Leseka, Cosser, Breier & Visser, 2010; Van Rooi, 2021). We design and redesign excellent teaching and learning programmes for academics to engage critically with teaching matters but often miss the opportunities to open the disruptive conversations to meaningful engagement that thus may lead to deliberate change. Being learning-centred in our foci and creating events with teaching academics, we put in a lot of effort to accommodate the needs of our lecturers by taking seriously the critical feedback received. We know that we get a lot right because we have positive feedback. The pace of change towards social justice may be too slow because there are taboo issues, possibly within our control to introduce and navigate but which are never addressed and thus not commented upon.

2.2 Possibilities

Sharing common spaces around a common issue, for example, being enrolled for and teaching a course about teaching at an institution can ensure that we develop “community of practice” (CoP) (Murray & Newton, 2009) in spaces such as conference settings. CoP gives us a sense of belonging and working towards common goals, especially for those who may previously have felt excluded from the type of institution (Mohope, 2014; Lyners-Cleophas, 2014).

SU staff are from different historical and unequal backgrounds and do not share the same perceptions and value systems about how change can occur or the types of topics that can cause discomfort or unease. Those who have always been part of and now have to deal with change might feel that they are constantly at the receiving end of criticism (Di’Angelo & Sensoy, 2012) while others feel uncomfortable criticising their new community where there are “dominant narratives” of which we are not part (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Hasford, 2016). These narratives could include different races, gender identities, disability or perceptions of society. Within any community, and especially one with a past such as South Africa, there are conflicting or oppositional ideas which cannot always be placed or mediated within a 15-minute workshop exercise. We cannot ignore the conflicts, no matter how friendly the space appears.

3 Theoretical approaches and perspective

For a postpragmatist feminist, there is no neutral standpoint, no objective God’s eye view of the world. The meaning of a concept, or line of action, or a representation lies in the practical, political, moral and social consequences it produces for an actor of collectivity. (Denzin, 2009:49)

A researcher is allowed to interrogate conceptually what emerges from their context to develop an understanding and look for responses from the community to further “emergent theoretical understandings” (Denzin, 2009:91). An observer who reflects on interactions within a community or culture can research notions of what may progress that culture. There are various lenses which may be employed. I choose advancing a socially just culture, similar to my institution. I would like to speed up the process with opportunities for open dialogue on discomforting topics.

Theoretical approaches to pedagogical spaces as places of hope and interaction could require mind shifts which will benefit the university community (Freire, 2001, 2005) if we do not always think of the issues as oppositional but rather as new frames of reference. It could merely mean dealing with other life perspectives that differ to our own, depending on past experiences. The critical question posed is how to open additional or third spaces and opportunities for teaching academics and academic developers to discuss the social and political issues which are often perceived as threatening our comfort zones. We have to acknowledge, firstly, that we are not isolated in our problems as these are often issues which affect HEIs nationally and globally. The institution is part of broader society where we and our students are affected by the surrounding culture. In many ways we are also affected by the practices within our immediate culture, learning ways of doing and interacting with those we know (Ndebele, 2014b; Jawitz & Perez, n. d.). Culture can also be seen as alienating unless we are able to use our sense

of agency to change it or adapt ourselves (Tierney, 1998; Ndebele, 2014a; Van Schalkwyk & Mcmillan, 2016; Carolissen & Kiguwa, 2018). Women in historically masculine domains, disabled people without convenient access to bathrooms and Black staff may all have difficulty speaking up where the dominant culture does not recognise or have not previously been expected to address their needs.

HEIs operate within and between macro, meso and micro contexts which can be either the world in general or all higher education institutions. In simple terms, the contexts can be considered as follows: i) macro is the global context ii) meso, the national or individual universities and iii) micro, the specific institutional context within its society or smaller organisations within an institution. Contexts exist in form due to structures and cultures influenced in turn by sociopolitical and economic factors. Within these contexts, there are offerings, expectations of ways of being. Our contexts can be either enabling or constraining of growth for the “resident” and the institution (Leibowitz, et al., 2015).

3.1 Method of open discussions to change culture

This is not a qualitative exploration of the institution but here it gives recognition to the importance of investigating the contextual issues as relevant to deconstructing notions around pertaining social issues such as gender and race which affect, for example, the times that students walk to examinations or that Black students have to receive lectures in halls named after apartheid icons. The idea is to re-create the institution to one that is “conducive” to change where all its members experience a sense of belonging and the freedom to exercise agency to open opportunities for the necessary changes to occur (Leibowitz, 2014). For an institution to identify and address the necessary change can be challenging with the many possible socio-political and educational patriarchal considerations of staff and students (Cooper, 2015; Carolissen & Kiguwa, 2018). Denzin’s (2009) aptly named book title uses the words “qualitative inquiry under fire”. Denzin writes towards progressing social justice through more than just empirical inquiry. Developing and building theoretical and conceptual bases for further study and aspects of inquiry is important to research, including teaching and learning research. Investigating teaching and learning institutions through ever-changing lenses is a way of doing this where meaning is “multiple, plural and unclear” (Denzin, 2009:76).

The metaphorical “elephant in the room” does not disappear simply because of refusal to open discussions. While these discussions may not be considered as part of the curriculum or part of the programme to be learned, the political and social influence our students’ learning, and so it also affects our teaching and other interactions. How can this be ignored while teaching and learning about, for example, essay writing skills, cloud formation or architecture? Why can Third Spaces not be the zones where academics learn what affects the institution and its participants and how to integrate these in their teaching and assessments?

Excellence in education in South Africa should include a dedication towards social justice and transformation in teaching and learning. This should be a “care-full” institution (Herman, 2015; Leibowitz, Bozalek, Farmer, Garraway, et al., 2017), honest and evident in every aspect. When the transformation process is as slow-paced as it has been at certain institutions in South Africa, it remains “lip-service” and becomes frustrating to those who wish to see somewhat

transformed rather than *transforming* institutions. Inclusivity and belonging inscribed in policy should be exercised in practice and be the gold standard for a definition of excellence (DeLeon, 2010; Carolissen, 2016; Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017). Many will continue to feel that they do not belong while others will always feel that they do belong and even own that space. Unless we engage in conversations in, we never get to tell our stories or hear the stories of others and how we are all affected by our past (Tsalach, 2013; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015; Salem, 2016). The relaxed atmosphere which exists within the Third Space, with debate and humour, should be recognised as a source for building the energy towards transformational engagement as our social awareness is constructed and deepened; DeLeon, 2010; Sue, 2011; Lewis & Hendricks, 2017b).

Transforming the dominant culture in any university is slow and tiresome despite policies aimed at fast-tracking redress against discrimination. It is understandable that comparisons cannot automatically be drawn regarding pace of transformation because contexts differ (Leibowitz, et al., 2015; Leibowitz, 2016). Methods of redress and addressing the issues must be adaptable and context-dependent (Boughey, 2011; Kang'ethe & Chivanga, 2016). For HEIs, like SU, to transform to become socially just a process of deconstruction of the conditions that maintain the status quo is necessary. Opportunity, action and agency are required for these changes to occur (Boler, Leibowitz & Carolissen, 2013; Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017).

The question remains: What learning happens for lecturers in the spaces that are not "controlled" through academic activities? Dominant notions and habits will long exist to which most "residents" remain true or conform. For the sake of this chapter, I concentrate on the institutional (micro) context, keeping in mind that the institution is in many ways a microcosm of the macro context. Factors from the macro context as well as the immediate society, influence micro contexts of the institution. These influences can be rated by importance as to how they affect the operations of the institution. The macro influencers can be considered more enduring, for example, academic writing style. Meso influencers could be, for example, the renewal of policies regarding equity and five-year monetary budget for education. Micro factors might be, for example, matriculant pass rates of the previous year and a publication which brings the institution into disrepute. The weight of the influence on the institution may depend on the meso-level sociocultural interferences or interaction such as news reports. The influence on the microcultures of an institution depends on communication amongst the 'residents' of the institution. Communication around the issues is key to the actions agents and individual academics will take. Offering opportunities for communication and discussion is imperative to changing culture and transforming institutions to become socially just spaces.

The nature and depth of engagement depends on the structure of the CTL opportunity which can vary in length from four-hour workshops with one tea break to a writing retreat where participants are resident at a country lodge for four days, sharing mealtimes and leisure times in each other's company. In the diverse third space structures, the level of engagement and the nature of the relationship/s that develop, is most often the choice of the individual participants (Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017)

Agency is a determining factor within the third space. Those who have taken advantage of the opportunity to learn and engage in their professional roles, have already exercised their agency by attending (Leibowitz, 2014; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015; Behari-Leak, 2017). Participants show agentic effort by whom they choose to engage in any myriad of ways, for example, sharing jokes, personal stories or political viewpoints. The designed/programmed opportunity, where the facilitator expects a certain level of engagement from each participant, is often the catalyst for the creation of third-space relationships. At writing retreats, for example, the facilitator divides the participants so that they can work with a diverse range of others in large and small group interactions. The discussions range from semi-formal about their writing experiences to informal as the conversation about writing is exhausted and other topics surface. At leisure and dinner times, conversations flow easily, often ranging from institutional and societal issues to the personal. These are almost invariably socio-political in nature. Participants choose to be silent or verbally engage in socio-political informal conversation with others. The length of time spent on topics, variation of topics, intensity and number of engagement opportunities are determined by a number of factors including personalities and topics under discussion. The third space is the nexus of institutional interaction. This means that everything comes together here – personalities, background, culture, political ideas, knowledge, and individual blind spots. There can be polite commentary to robust debate to intentional humour. Communication of this nature has the potential imagining of hope despite the history of the country and the institution. Third spaces can be the “educational practice of a progressive option”. The learning is not always comfortable, because the more intense the conversations become the more it will reveal the “dominant lies” or discomfiting issues of the context that contradictorily lead us away from the “Utopia” of our dreams and hopes (Freire, 1992:1). However, it shows that as colleagues we can recognise that a change of the discourse within a context, is possible.

The absolute necessity of it is inarguable given the history of South Africa. While most recognise that change is needed, the slow pace and intricacy of the process in South Africa, often raises concern. Tension also exists between addressing the issues superficially and delving deeper to engage honestly. Firstly, we may have to acknowledge that as HEIs, we are nowhere near the goal of an equitable society. This is partly due to our culture, practices and sticking adamantly to our dominant discourses. Political expression is necessary, yet often restrained and polite for fear of offending someone (Freire & Shor, 1987; Iskander, 2010). Amongst various institutional groups, the transformation culture is either recognised as necessary or it is a topic of contention. We are often given limited opportunity for honest discussions, such as a 20-minute presentation at a conference and demanding “safe spaces” for discussions on inequality. These overly measured interactions, are a hindrance to the transformational process, may stunt and be stunted by the academic culture in universities.

Our institutions have successive cohorts of students, academics and practitioners who are introduced to the established ways of being in the institution but who also could introduce new ways of doing in institutions and work groups. This should be part of the purpose of teachers’ professional development (Behari-Leak, 2017). One of the issues maintaining static microcultures is the minimal recognition of societal influences in our institutions. Poorly resourced institutions still have over 90% of Black students from poorer backgrounds while better resourced institutions, like Stellenbosch University, cater mostly for the middle class and wealthy students and staff (Langa, 2017). Rape culture is seldom addressed in lectures other

than in the social sciences. In many other faculties it seems not to affect teaching and learning while violence against women and transgender students and staff does not discern based on a field of study.

Being part of the teaching and learning staff community, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) advisors often create spaces for the older and newer ideologies to be shared. The CTL creates opportunities for teaching academics from across various faculties to form a community where they share their interest in student interactions of teaching, learning and assessment. While they are part of their other communities, such as their field of research or faculty boards, academics now become part of another community of shared interest as teachers. These spaces are recognised as opportunities to learn, debate and show care for those within our communities of practice (Leibowitz, et al., 2016; Herman, 2015). The space allows for critique of practices, policies, frameworks and introduce other ways of doing and being. Inherited curricula can be questioned and changed, and everyone can argue the powerful knowledge in the macro or meso contexts. These spaces exist primarily for critical conversations which impact the teaching, learning and assessment practices.

The micro-level contexts of small group discussions which take place at the CTL events are safer spaces to debate amongst peers. Perceptions of who holds “social power”, academic power and economic power are moved further from the immediate consciousness and academics in communities of practice can express their opinions on these matters. Such opportunities exist in less formal, conversational “third spaces” (Garaway, 2017; Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017) where the dominance of institutional culture and practices can be challenged and questions can be asked about which are the relevant issues, who belongs and whose opinions matter (Boler, Leibowitz & Carolissen, 2013; Di Masso, 2015). Change is initiated by those who dare to discuss, reflect on own and inherited practices, critique, “experiment, take risks and above all, learn ... how to agitate for a better future for all” (Leibowitz, 2012). “Third space” interactions which occur outside of the usual order of business domains, are ideal opportunities for these kinds of reflective interrogations. It requires a different mindset and set of social skills and interactions.

Aspects of reflexivity and agency following “third space” interactions are important to change occurring within the individual and the institution. Academic engagement should lead towards deconstructing notions that dominate higher education domains. Teaching and learning in higher education in South Africa cannot be removed from the honest realisation that privilege allows us to aspire to the highest form of knowledge while existing in an unequal society. The vast majority of those who enter academia are from the middle-class sector of society. The few students and academics from working-class backgrounds are admitted by criteria still decided by those in charge – most of whom historically possess cultural capital in HEIs. Thus, certain higher education institutions remain dominated and dependent on the educated “elite”. This can hamper building a university community as a domain for social justice. This bothersome dominance is centuries old and has proven slow to change. The power to reconstruct or maintain resides equally within all who enter the institution. Building a cohort of people that will be stronger than the ideologies which remain dominant and exclusionary is what is needed to decolonise the institution. The questions posed are important:

- ▶ Where else would the space for critiquing and changing practices and culture of our institutions exist if not in the spaces where we meet?
- ▶ What is required for a socially just university to flourish?
- ▶ How can we the (re)purpose the third space interactions?

The demands of being a researcher and teacher who must work towards a changing the university, makes academic life challenging. Working in isolation is widely considered as necessary for research but it can also leave one feeling detached from a community. This is especially true for those who are new to academia or those who come from a different social class and culture (Behari-Leak, 2017). The isolation often deemed necessary for effective writing and research, could constrain the vital social integration needed for effective change. Both experienced and newer academics can gain from interaction with one another. At centres like the CTL, creating teaching and learning events are geared towards supporting academics in enhancing their teaching (Boler, Leibowitz & Carolissen, 2013; Bozalek, et al., 2014; Leibowitz, 2016). Therefore, while publications and conference presentations are encouraged, a caring environment must offer a space to interact with the broader academic culture through more than formal sessions, through informal conversations that happen during non-working time. The third space, found at opportune events such as PREDAC, SoTL and writing retreats, are ideal for creating community spaces, even though their primary aim is to focus on teaching, learning and assessment skills and development (Murray, et al., 2009). The time spent “out-of-office” at these events is for teaching academics to engage with others in similar positions. At the same time, the third spaces are seldom investigated as learning opportunities where communities go beyond obvious practice and where the potential for improving the transformative stature of a university increases. These opportunities broaden perspectives through engagement within the community but outside of the formal learning event structure for which academics are enrolled.

The aspect in focus is the unintended transformative potential of agentic interaction in the extended conversations (third spaces). The academics who step out of their faculties to take up formal offerings for enhancing their teaching from the CTL have already exercised agency in doing so. Third space gatherings, informal conversations at workshops or seminars, are seldom recognised as (extensions of) educational spaces. The third space could be recognised as contributing to growing the professional role of teaching and learning staff.

4 The institution in context

Due to the Apartheid past of South Africa, many institutions like SU still have remnants of the past in its practices and culture despite policies that have been put in place to correct the injustices. The continued dominance of one culture while ignoring the importance of those considered to be different, for example, lack of acceptance of the differing gender identities, is one such issue (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Winkle-Wagner, 2014; Maddock & Maroun, 2018). Due to the remnants of a colonial past, another issue affecting interactions is the misperceptions South Africans have of one another. I would argue that we are often not aware of our own blind spots in how we perceive the “other”. The ideas that we had grown up with will continue if we do not engage more honestly and affect the development of trust amongst us (McKenna & Boughey, 2014).

Excellence in teaching is reflected in learning and vice versa. SU prides itself on excellence and has, over the past years, changed its motto from Pedagogy of Hope (Botman, 2009; Freire, 1972) to Excellence (Stellenbosch University, 2019). SU prides itself on being a renowned research institution that delivers top academic researchers and graduates, and it continues to cater to select academics and students. SU further prides itself in striving to produce thought-leaders as it remains an institution that has historically enjoyed top global rankings, high-volume publication record and admirable throughput. The inclusion of the number of Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gendered academics and students since 1995, has not rid the institution of the reputation amongst some of being one of the higher education institutions that is slow to transform. Due to its past, SU can easily become the institution where its efforts to transform are not recognised and acknowledged. The institutions graduate attributes (Stellenbosch University, 2019) which are the basis of our practices sets out what we strive towards. A key element in the vision and mission of Stellenbosch University is that it aims to be recognised as an institution of "excellence" "in Africa, for Africa" with all the correct wording for the creation of a socially just, forward-looking institution ('Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework Together Our Vision 2040', 2019:4). Excellence has a multiplicity of meanings, which for some translates to high graduate throughput, publication output and world ranking while for others it means being highly transformed in social justice matters in an unequal context.

5 The CTL

The CTL offers formal opportunities for academics to learn about, innovate and research their teaching. Professional learning opportunities such as the Stellenbosch Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) conference, the Professional Education for the Development of Academics (PREDAC), Fund for Innovation and Research in Learning and Teaching (FIRLT) proposal writing, Auxin & Teaching and Learning seminars, writing retreats for researching teaching, among others (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2015). The influences on learning, teaching and agency of such professional learning opportunities for academics have been well researched (Leibowitz, 2014; Mcmillan & Gordon, 2016). Included in these influences are enablers and constraints which can be unique to the institution even within the same country (Bozalek, et al., 2014; Ndebele, 2014; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015b).

Presenting opportunities for thoughtfulness in planning curricula, programmes, conferences, research and seminars around the pillar of learning and teaching at SU, is the remit of the CTL (Bozalek, et al., 2014; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015). While showing care and consideration, ideas which are daring and discomforting are encouraged. There is always the expectation that teachers who engage with the CTL become reflective practitioners (Mcmillan & Gordon, 2016). This is a necessary element but engaging academics must dare to develop in further enhancing their interactions in their teaching activities (Soudien, 2013; Henkeman, 2016). Learning and teaching take place in various spaces ranging from formal to informal engagement. When any of these, including the third space interactions, lead to critical engagement, the important issues of transformation can be carried over from one domain to the next (Jawitz & Williams, 2015; Clegg, 2016). Through interactions with others across faculties, teachers can unconsciously change in their own thinking as well as those of colleagues and students. The interactions could also be conscious and lead to their agentic powers being exercised. In turn, when academics

exercise individual or group agency they can positively influence the institution's transformation efforts and as such contribute to rectifying the unequal society towards a socially just one (Ndlovu-gatsheni, 2015; Naidoo, 2016; Walton, 2018).

One of the influences is the dominant discourse of the institution, which can powerfully determine the practices and habits despite policies. (Collins & Essed, 1992; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015). South African institutions are not devoid of prejudices, sensitivities and resistance to change instilled by patriarchal society. Over the years, however, the cohort of students and academics have become more diverse in terms of gender identity, race, nationality and religion (Badat, 2010; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Pease, 2010; Behari-Leak, 2017; Lewis & Hendricks, 2017b). Those willing, as well as those reluctant, to change meet at many teaching and learning events, which is a space away from their base or "comfort zone". Events, such as those hosted by the CTL, allow hybrid communities to be created. This is where academics from various faculties, cultures, political and theoretical viewpoints come together to exchange ideas.

In South Africa with continued post-Apartheid inequality burdens upon society, the higher education sector is not lacking in the challenging socio-economic issues. The ways of doing within a department, faculty or institution can be stifling to finding creative ways of addressing pertinent political issues and crossing boundaries through communication (Bleiklie, 2014; Mohope, 2014). The justification for funding for academics seem like a high-cost luxury while the outcomes and impact, such as tracking publications, are difficult to be ascertained (Paxton, et al., 2017). Other than the positive feedback received ("wonderful venue", "good food", "valuable time away from the office") from academics, it becomes an imperative to prove that the institutional community and culture benefit from the cost of these events.

An investigation of the participants' learning towards transformation which in turn is relayed to their teaching may show evidence that there is more value gained from the time spent "out-of-office" which may not happen in first and second spaces. The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Stellenbosch University operates from a basis of offering a caring and appreciative environment for teachers at the university (Herman, 2015:12; Van Schalkwyk, et al., 2015). The Fund for Innovation and Research in Learning and Teaching (FIRLT) is one example of the care instituted at SU. FIRLT is managed by the centre and the related retreats are funded by the SU Skills Fund and are for staff involved in teaching and learning research or innovation. A key criterion for all offering by the CTL is the enhancement of student learning through access to knowledge. One of the main ways to do this, is through enhancement of lecturer learning (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018).

The learning and research opportunities offered to university staff are privileged yet, it could be argued, contextually necessary spaces for effective and productive academic work towards the development of teaching strategies aimed at enhancing student-learning. The chapter aims to show that the intangible benefits for lecturers that happen in third spaces can be uncomfortable. The discomfiting positions could mean that important thresholds in understanding can be recognised (McKenna & Boughey, 2014) even if not immediately crossed. Informal conversations help us move away from exclusion towards inclusion while the neutral space

offered by the retreat allows for more of an equal sense of (non)belonging in the space (Yuval- Davis, 2010; Condor, 2011; Leibowitz, et al., 2012). Our face-to-face conversational interactions influence our thinking, being and doing, arguably in varying degrees.

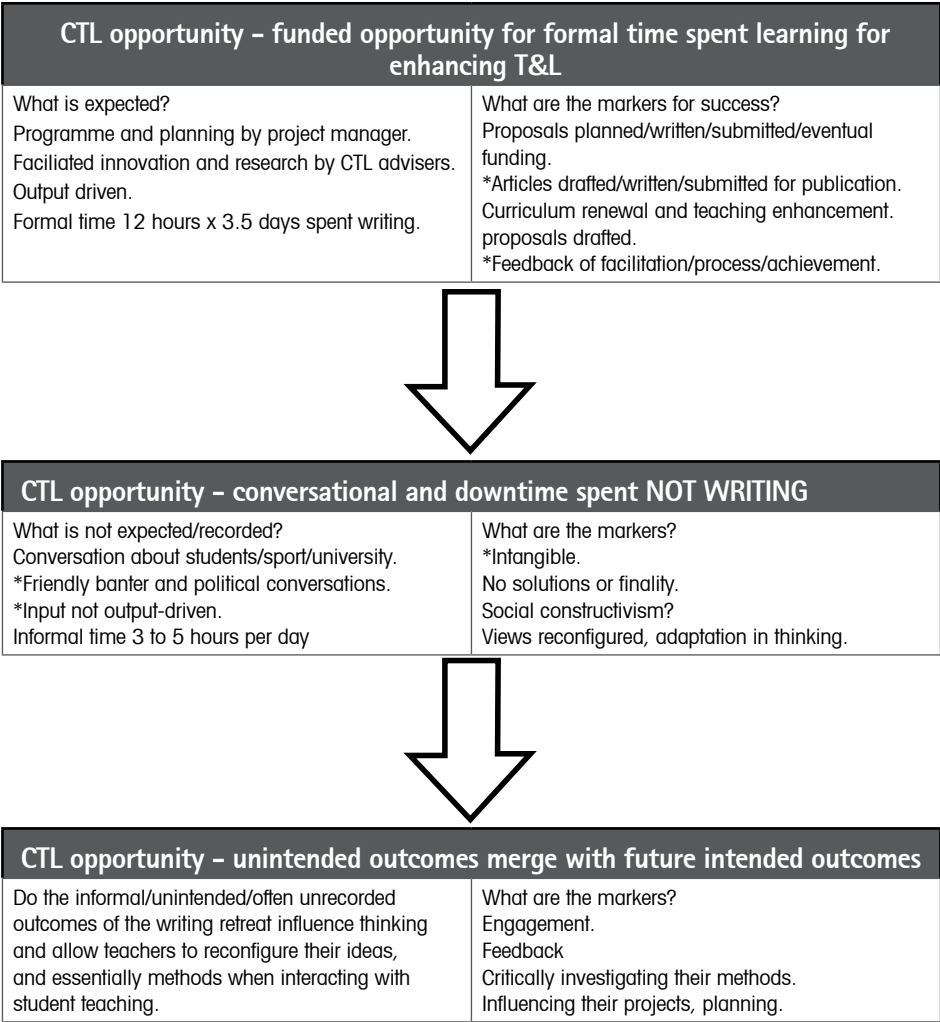


Figure 8.1 Example of intended and unintended outcomes of a learning opportunity for teachers at SU

Academic teachers cannot adequately reshape the way that they think around integrating their teaching with social and political issues by simply being offered opportunities, theories and tips on how to teach through formal professional development. As seen in the diagram above, extended opportunities add extra value to learning opportunities. To really grapple with and debate diverse or opposing ideas, opportunities to develop deeper trust and sense of belonging need to be created. In order to start or take discomforting discussions further, more events, longer periods and various and differing networking or what Engeström (1999) in Gutierrez, et al. describes as an “expanded opportunity” must be on offer. The institution expects

a cultural shift of its inhabitants towards its practices, but this should not be an expectation of blind assimilation or a one-way change. The culture of the institution also needs to shift with the needs of society and those who enter it from outside its habitual context. This can only happen if critique is encouraged between institution, academics, students and broader society. Institutions can view “these points of disruption as the building blocks to potential learning” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999). Third Spaces are the ideal continuation of formal learning and teaching events. “The influence is reciprocal; individuals as knowledgeable agents can influence the existing norms in the microculture, but due to the complexity in the day-to-day situations they mostly do not.” (Roxa, 2015:1) Within the context of the institutions, we might consider the specific faculty or area of study as the “home”, “comfort zone” or “base” of these academics and call it the first space (Ghasemi, Sasani & Nemati, 2017). This is where habits and ways of being and doing are formed. Participants who take up opportunities firstly exercise agency by enrolling and then entering the CTL-created (Leibowitz) second space where they engage in learning together with others who arrive from a different first space. The recess or third space at these conferences, retreats, seminars, is created within or as a result of the second space interaction.

6 Conclusion

Contextual issues and important information about an institution as well as teaching can be introduced within a course or programme. Time and opportunity are needed to reflect, engage and re-evaluate thinking and practices. Whilst the university is influenced by and related to society, it is also particular and special; it is a place where there is the opportunity to experiment, take risks and, above all, learn. Learn how to agitate for a better future for all.

Teachers can start to subconsciously construct change from the unconscious addition to their notions through their experiences in the third space. They may even then become consciously constructive of their ideas of the world which have already been extended by these interactions. The boundary-crossing, questioning of prejudices and habits through conversations with other academics, serves to open academics to a better understanding of various socio-political and educational differences. The third space discourses offer participants an opportunity to learn from interactions which, I argue, can profoundly influence lecturers’ considerations in preparing for and teaching their students. This might not only enhance the student experience of sense of belonging but also lecturers and other staff. While the third space is relaxed, the interactions can often elicit uncomfortable conversations where there is a diverse mix of participants from historically segregated communities and topics of conversation vary in political controversies that they learn from interactions and that profoundly influence their consideration in T&L.

The experience of care for the lecturer is reciprocal between the institution, CTL advisor and the lecturer. The teacher is also not just influenced by the CTL for their preparing for and teaching their students, but also by other teachers’ varying experiences which may be closer to their students’ realities. This may be the crux of their professional development as academics as reflective practitioners, critical social beings and agents for transformative practices, research, learning and teaching.

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