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The Structure and Nature of the Research Field on Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education

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The Future
Reimagined

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning in higher education has been of interest to South African researchers for decades, arguably because of the complexities and varied nature of the learning experiences of students in the system. The need to understand the way context conditions the emergence of research on teaching and learning was identified by Boughey & Niven (2012) in an article looking at work produced by the South African Academic Development (AD) movement. Volbrecht & Boughey (2005:58) define Academic Development as 'an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in HET through integrating student, staff, curriculum, institutional and research development'. This definition is important as much of the research on teaching and learning in the field derives insights from practice, a point which will be taken up later in this review. Volbrecht and Boughey (ibid.) identify three 'phases' of practice in the field: (i) the academic support phase, (ii) the academic development phase and (iii) the higher education development phase but are careful to note that the term 'phase' is used for convenience only as practices overlap in time and are not distinct from each other.

Boughey (2005:1) explores the concept of 'phases' further, arguing that they are indicative of dominant discursive formulations rather than actual periods of time. Following Chouliariki and Fairclough (1999), she then goes on to note (2005:1) that 'these formulations are understood to give rise to "conjunctures" or relatively stable sets of social practices around specific projects (in this case student support)'. In later work, Boughey (2012) adopts a social realist lens in order to see the practices as emerging from the interplay of structures and mechanisms, where 'mechanisms' are understood to be discourses or sets of ideas that constrain and enable their emergence.

Although the point about it being impossible to see the 'stable sets of practices' as distinct and bound by time cannot be over-emphasised, if dates were to be assigned it could be argued that practices associated with 'academic support' began in the very early 1980s or even late 1970s and tended to be focused on the small number of black students who had gained access to the historically white universities. The second set of 'academic development' practices can be dated from the mid 1980s onwards as the realisation dawned that, once a more just social order had been achieved, universities themselves would need to change. The calls for practices to shift from a focus on students to a focus on transforming institutions strengthened following the release of the first democratically elected President, Nelson Mandela, from prison in 1990. By the mid to late 1990s, however, the field of Academic Development faced a number of constraints, many of which were fiscal in origin (see Boughey, 2007, for a more detailed account). Conditions in higher education more generally led to jobs in the field of Academic Development being lost and centres and units closing. As this was happening, the third phase, 'higher education development', was beginning as universities engaged with new discourses and structures related to quality assurance and the need for efficiency and effectiveness in higher education within a broader understanding of the universities to be accountable. The body responsible for quality assurance in South African higher education, the Higher Education Quality Committee, was established in 2002 (CHE, 2002) and a new funding framework which introduced incentive-based funding in order to enhance efficiency was published in 2004. The interplay of discourses and new policy and frameworks privileging quality and efficiency led to new roles for Academic Development centres and units (Quinn, 2007), and practices developed as the roles emerged.

This review of literature on teaching and learning in South African higher education commissioned by the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Teaching and Learning, Professor Shireen Motala, begins by exploring some of the ideas underpinning

research on teaching and learning from the early 1980s onwards. However, the focus of the review is a paper published by Shay in 2012, which interrogates the nature of knowledge produced in the field of 'educational development', the term that tends to be used outside South Africa to denote what had been called, thus far in this piece, 'academic development'. In the context of a review of research on teaching and learning, Shay's work is important not only because of its identification of much of the work on teaching and learning as 'craft knowledge' derived from practice, but also because of its emphasis on the need for the production of what is termed 'systematised, theorised knowledge' with the power to reconceptualise the way students' learning, and the problems so often associated with it, are understood. The review takes up Shay's ideas by asking about the extent to which the call for systematised, theorised knowledge has been heeded in South Africa. In doing this, it also notes the uneven nature of the knowledge production field and the omissions that result from this.

2. Early research on teaching and learning

As already indicated, early research on teaching and learning in South Africa began in a field known as 'Academic Support' which emerged from the late 1970s onwards, in which practitioners attempted to address what they perceived to be the learning problems of black students who had gained access to historically white English-speaking universities. Work at this time was published in conference proceedings entitled 'ASPects' resulting from annual meetings of those providing 'academic support' to students. The first journal in the field, the *South African Journal of Higher Education* (SAJHE), was established in 1986. Another journal, entitled *Academic Development*, was launched by the South African Academic Development Association (SAAAD) in the early 1990s as an ideological alternative to SAJHE. *Academic Development* floundered when SAAAD, the professional organisation to which many practitioners belonged, crashed in 1998 (see Boughey, 2007 for an account). A book series, entitled *AD Dialogues*, was also published by the Academic Development Centre at the University of the Western Cape. Much of the work exists in the fragile form of conference proceedings, however. The South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE) ran an annual conference until about 2008 when the association merged with the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) which emerged out of the ashes of the old SAAAD in the early 2000s (although the association itself was not formalised until a later date)¹.

2.1. Conceptual underpinnings of the early field

Dominant understandings of learning problems in early work on teaching and learning cited students' 'underpreparedness' for tertiary study, a phenomenon seen to result from the poor quality of education available to the majority of black learners. Problems with learning were therefore located 'in' students, and understandings privileged their agency as learners provided gaps and deficits in previous learning were addressed. The way the universities, as institutions, worked to create conditions which favoured some and disadvantaged others was not considered in much of this early work. In addition, and as Boughey (2005) points out, much of the research in this early phase was not strongly theorised, and even drew on the work of 'popular' authors such as Buzan (1974, 1984) and de Bono (1971). As a result, the early work drew on understandings of Academic Development practice as focusing on the provision of a set of neutral, asocial, acultural, apolitical 'skills' needed by students if they were to succeed, and on filling gaps in knowledge that should have been acquired at school.

¹ Given the fragile nature of much of the work in the field of Academic Development, there is a strong case for the digitalisation of early publications such as the *AD Dialogues* series and conference proceedings.

Conceptually, researchers tended to draw on constructivist thinking. For example, Mammen (1996) and Jiya (1993) identify the need for students to 'unlearn' previously developed constructs before building more appropriate constructions. Some authors (see, for example, Starfield, 1990) pointed to the way faulty understandings resulted from black teachers' own impoverished educational backgrounds.

The status of black students as speakers of English as an additional language also received a great deal of attention in this phase. Practitioners in the field of Academic Development drew on understandings of, and approaches to, solving the 'language problem' developed in the Global North where what Pennycook (1994) terms the 'English language teaching industry' was thriving. Christie (1985) sees this work as dependent on an understanding of language as an 'instrument of communication', or an understanding of language as code used to transmit ready-made meanings. The thinking was, therefore, that, if students mastered the 'code' (in the form of grammar and syntax), then they would be able to transmit, and receive, meanings more accurately and would thus be more successful in their learning.

By the late 1980s, dominant constructions of students' learning problems as related to their perceived deficits was beginning to be challenged. In 1985, Vilakazi & Tema published a paper arguing that, following the shift to democracy, the problem of 'underpreparedness' would become a majority rather than a minority phenomenon that needed to be owned by institutions and addressed through structural reform. Mehl (1988:17) followed up by noting that

. . . it is becoming clearer that in relation to the realities of present-day South Africa it is not simply a case of students carrying various educational deficits onto the campus with them because of the socio-economic and political dispensation, but rather a case of the universities themselves, as represented by academic and administrative staff, being deficient, if the vision of a non-racial, democratic South Africa is to be realized.

Interestingly, Mehl (1988:18) also anticipates many of the claims related to the need to decolonise the curriculum that were to become prevalent after the student protests of 2015 and 2016. He observes that the achievement of a non-racial, democratic dispensation had to be linked to the project of Africanisation or 'bringing the university more into contact with the stark reality which the colonized student represents' (ibid.).

This work represented an ideological shift in the conceptual field; a shift away from locating the 'problem' in the student to looking at the institution of the university itself as a structure that constrained access to knowledge and knowing for some social groups. This ideological shift resulted in the establishment of a new professional body for practitioners in the field, the South African Association for Academic Development (SAAAD), as an alternative to the South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAADHE).

This shift towards seeing 'problems' related to students' learning experiences as emerging from structural and cultural conditions in the institutions in which they were studying was accompanied by the introduction of 'new' theory. Seminal in this regard was Mandew's (1993) use of the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1988) on social and cultural capital in a paper presented at an annual SAAAD conference. The concepts of social and cultural capital allowed for an understanding of the way the contexts in which students studied contributed to negative learning experiences, and provided substantiation for calls for the 'transformation' of institutions that would dominate much of the policy work that dominated the 1990s (see, for example, NCHE, 1996; MoE, 1997).

Work by Swedish phenomenologists Marton and Säljö (see, for example, 1976), which was later taken up by others such as Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) and Biggs (1987), also came to be very influential as the field of South African Academic Development matured (see, for example, Case, 2004; Case & Marshall, 2004). One of the problems with this particular body of work is that, as in other places in the world, some South African researchers fell into the trap of misappropriating the concept of 'approaches to learning' and reconstructing it as 'types' of learning and, even, learners (see, Haggis, 2003). Fourie (2003), for example, asks 'What is deep learning?' when the construct of 'deep learning' has never been validated. Marshall and Case's (2005) response to the critique of approaches to learning research made by Haggis makes a number of important points that speak to misappropriations of constructs. One of these points is that context matters. It is not the case that students are born as 'deep learners' or can be transformed into 'deep learners' through pedagogical intervention, but rather that a learner might adopt a deep approach in one context and a surface approach in another depending on the context and their own interpretation of it. This points to the need for ongoing consideration of course design and, particularly, scrutiny of assessment tasks on the part of academic teachers rather than for the use of generic 'study skills' courses to introduce students to what is required.

It was, however, arguably work on language and literacy that most demonstrated what might be termed a 'social turn' in thinking about student learning in the form of the take-up of Street's (1984) 'ideological model' of literacy. Street distinguishes between two models of literacy: the 'autonomous model' and the 'ideological model'. The autonomous model constructs the ability to read and write as a 'technology' focused on mastery of the encoding and decoding of printed text. The ideological model, on the other hand, whilst acknowledging the need to encode and decode, understands literacy as a set of social practices embedded in the contexts in which they emerge. From this perspective, literacy is viewed as a multiple, rather than a singular, phenomenon.

The ideological model led to the identification of 'academic literacy', or the sets of practices dominant in academic settings, with later work (see, for example, Lea and Street, 2006) stressing the multiplicity of academic *literacies* related to their roots in the disciplines. From a perspective in the ideological model, literacy involves a socially derived disposition to read and write certain kinds of texts in ways legitimated by a particular context. In academic work, one generic feature of all academic literacies could be identified as a willingness to engage in a process of ongoing questioning of the text involving the use of background knowledge as well of knowledge other texts. It is not hard to see how this differs from the dispositions/ways of reading that are dominant in other contexts, including schools and religious institutions, where the written text may be understood as 'the word' to be accepted and repeated.

The idea that literacy involves a socially embedded disposition is also evident in the work of Gee (2008) and, particularly, in his identification of the construct of Discourse (always intentionally capitalised to distinguish it from other uses of the term). For Gee, a Discourse is a way of being, a socially acknowledged role in the world that is underpinned by values and beliefs. In academic contexts, Discourses are thus underpinned by values and attitudes towards what can count as knowledge and how it can be known. Gee's work has been particularly influential in South Africa (see, for example, Boughey, 2000; McKenna, 2004; Allie et al., 2009), both because of its ability to explain students' learning experiences as related to identity and because of its implications for the need to make identity shifts if students are to be successful.

Although the availability of theoretical approaches that were rooted in social understandings of language and literacy was important, they were often misinterpreted across the field of Academic Development by those undertaking research in these areas in much the same way as

'approaches to learning' research. Boughey's (2013) analysis of papers presented at one key conference on teaching and learning in South African higher education identifies two main discourses constructing language and literacy: (i) a skills discourse and (ii) a 'workplace' discourse. The skills discourse draws heavily on Street's (1984) autonomous model of literacy in understanding students' experiences of reading and writing in the academy as related to a lack of mastery of English, the language of teaching and learning in the majority of institutions, and a lack of 'skills'. These deficits are then addressed in generic 'academic literacy' courses, descriptions and evaluations of which constituted the bulk of the papers analysed. The 'workplace' discourse widened the focus of the so-called skills needed to succeed in higher education to include those relevant to 21st century workplaces. The emergence of this discourse is arguably related to the identification of universities of technology as an institutional type in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (MoE, 2001). While it is clearly important to understand the demands on language and literacy in the context of the workplace in UoTs, the availability of understandings of literacy and language use as socially embedded practices means that the implications of developing these practices for students who may have had little interaction with those in the kinds of highly skilled jobs to which they are aspiring in their homes of origin has to be considered. Understandings of the demands of the workplace as a set of neutral, a-social, a-cultural, apolitical 'skills' therefore have to be questioned.

In spite of the sustained calls for institutional change which began with the writing of Vilakazi & Tema (1985) and Mehl (1988), Badat (2019) argues that, in the early 1990s, discourses related to 'quality' (where the term 'quality' relates to nebulous definitions of 'excellence' critiqued by the likes of Readings, 1996 and Barnett, 2004²) triumphed over concerns for equity, resulting in the foreclosure of institutional development which could have encompassed meaningful change to the language of instruction, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It is arguably the case that 'quality' or 'excellence' discourses continue to mitigate against change, particularly in a context where universities increasingly seek to be included in international ranking systems.

2.2. The structure of the field

The section above has provided a brief outline of the conceptual field of teaching and learning research up to the late 1990s. Although the analysis above identifies a shift in thinking emerging from the mid 1980s onwards, it is important to note that discourses constructing students' experiences as resulting from deficits related to their education and home backgrounds continued to exist alongside those that identified a role for the institution of the university itself in constructing disadvantage. One of the problems with the field of Academic Development in South Africa has been its instability and its ongoing failure to create a body of practitioners and researchers that could sustain its continuing development, a phenomenon that continues to this day. To a large extent, research in the field of teaching and learning in South Africa since 2000 has been shaped by this instability, a topic to which this review now turns.

The earliest days of the Academic Development movement benefited enormously from soft funding as business and philanthropic foundations supported efforts to allow black students to gain a higher education. By the early 1990s, even larger sums of money became available through the auspices of the Independent Development Trust, which administered project-based funding. Whilst soft funding allowed for important work to be completed it did not, ultimately,

² For Readings (1996:32) 'Excellence is invoked . . . as always, to say precisely nothing at all: it deflects attention from the questions of what quality and pertinence might be, who actually are the judges of a relevant or a good University, and by what authority they become those judges'. Barnett (2004:64), citing Readings, describes the notion of 'excellence' as 'standing for no purpose, no ideal and no concept in particular'. Harvey & Green (1993) also offer a detailed critique of the use of excellence in relation to quality.

contribute to the stability of the field. With the exception of a relatively small number of posts at a few institutions, practitioners were largely employed on temporary contracts, with the result that turnover was high and the experience and understandings necessary to take the field forward were not built.

As Boughey (2007) reports, towards the end of the 1990s many institutions suffered financial crises as state funding for higher education on a per capita basis fell. The historically black institutions also suffered an overall drop in enrolments as black students sought to enrol in historically white institutions they perceived to be more prestigious and better resourced (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). Efforts to save costs were made across the system with particularly harsh cuts in funding for institutional Academic Development programmes. As a result, many posts were lost and, in some cases, centres devoted to teaching and learning were closed. This meant that gains made throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in developing a cadre of practitioners were lost.

By the early 2000s, in the context of new developments such as the need to register qualifications on the newly established National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the introduction of quality assurance to South African higher education, it became apparent that institutions would need to draw on expertise in teaching and learning to comply with the new regulatory environment. The first cycle of quality assurance work conducted by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) between 2005 and 2012, in particular, resulted in the re-establishment of old AD units, this time in the form of teaching and learning centres, and the creation of new posts, sometimes in entities devoted to academic planning or quality assurance. Although some universities appointed practitioners working with teaching and learning in academic positions, the vast majority were engaged in support or professional positions without benefits such as sabbatical leave which would be conducive to research production. Most were not expected to publish or supervise at postgraduate level or, indeed, even to hold doctoral level qualifications.

A few historically white research-focused institutions did maintain their academic development centres in spite of the cuts of the 1990s and, in the first decade of the new century, these were often re-constructed as centres of higher education development. In one case at least, the centre was awarded faculty status³. In others, centres were given full academic status and allowed to develop programmes leading to the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, intended to professionalise academics as teachers. In some cases, master's and doctoral programmes in higher education were introduced. In a few universities, teaching and learning centres were established in addition to pre-existing departments of higher education that had long offered master's and doctoral programmes in higher education studies and which contributed to research in higher education⁴.

Gosling's (2009) survey of directors of academic development commissioned by the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) points to the 'diversity and fragmentation' of the role of academic development nationally. Academic Development centres or units focused on areas such as the professional development of academics in their teaching roles and student development (including development of learning as well as student support functions such as careers counselling and wellness), as well as the provision of support for the use of technology in teaching and learning. Gosling (2009:ii) also noted 'wide variations in ADCs' involvement in quality assurance, curriculum development, the production of learning resources, and research in higher education' and that the 'role of ADCs in

³ The Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at the University of Cape Town has faculty status and is led by a Dean.

⁴ As in the case for the University of the Free State and the University of Stellenbosch.

promoting institutional change is contested'. Of significance in the context of this literature review is that of the nineteen directors of Academic Development who responded to the survey, only six identified the units they headed as having a research function.

3. Evaluating research in the field

Shay (2012) draws on the work of sociologist Basil Bernstein (2000) to explore the field of Educational Development (as already indicated, the term most often used in other parts of the world to refer to what in South Africa is called 'Academic Development') with a particular focus on knowledge and knowledge building. Shay begins by identifying Clegg's (2009) suggestion that Educational Development is a 'region', defined by Bernstein as a field that faces outwards towards an external field of practice and inwards to the disciplines. She concludes that, although the field appears to function as a community of practice looking outwards, it nonetheless has a weak knowledge base. Shay then goes on to draw on Gamble's (2006, 2009) work on knowledge to explore this claim about the weakness of the knowledge base further.

Gamble (2006) begins by making a distinction between 'context dependent' and 'context independent' meanings. Context dependent meanings emerge from a specific time and place from concrete events and experiences. Context independent meanings, on the other hand, exist only in an abstract form and can thus move across contexts. For Gamble, context independent meanings can be termed 'theoretical' or 'general' knowledge and those that are context dependent, 'practical' or 'particular' knowledge'. Gamble then goes on to argue that both theoretical and practical knowledge can be further subdivided into forms of knowledge that are 'principled' and 'procedural'.

Gamble uses the example of crafters to explore the distinction between principled and procedural practical knowledge, pointing out that expert crafters draw on a mental picture of the 'whole' as they produce an artefact, in what Gamble (2006:91) terms 'a personal unity of head and hand'. This 'unity of head and hand' constitutes *principled* practical knowledge, a form of knowledge which is usually tacit. The invention of the printing press in the 16th century led to the development of 'pattern books', which broke the overall conception of an item to be crafted into steps or parts. Ultimately this led to modern assembly lines where, in principle, it is perfectly possible for a worker to be involved in manufacture without knowing what is being made. Manuals and other texts detailing steps in a manufacturing process constitute *procedural* practical knowledge. In the case of practical knowledge, the movement was from the whole to the parts, from principled knowledge to procedural knowledge.

Gamble suggests that 'general' or theoretical knowledge originates in the move to use geometrical principles in the measurement of space by the Greeks in the 6th century BC. Previously space had been measured manually. As learning proceeded, induction and deduction were both used to arrive at the general principles that are now widely taught in formal education. In the case of general or theoretical knowledge, therefore, the movement was from the parts to the whole, from procedural to principled knowledge.

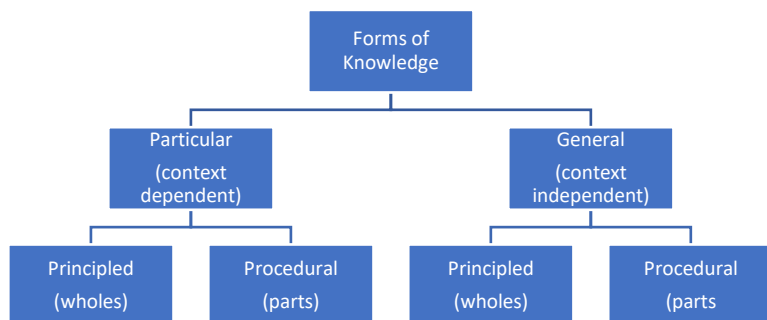


Figure 1: Forms of knowledge (from Gamble, 2006:90)

At this point, the definition of the field of Academic Development as an ‘open set of practices’ (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2005:58) becomes important. Key to Shay’s (2012) exploration of the field of Educational Development is the observation that much of the knowledge developed there is ‘by reference to a particular’ (p.320). Practitioners set out to address problems in specific contexts that are shaped by disciplines, institutional cultures, the backgrounds and experiences of students and the beliefs and values of academic teachers themselves. What emerges is a form of experiential knowledge that is ‘proceduralised’ and ‘takes the form of a set of principles or codes for good practice’ (p.321). The embodied principles of practical knowledge thus become ‘disembodied’. Important, however, is that the observation that the contextualised nature of the knowledge or its ‘particularity weighs it down’ (p.320). As a result, practitioners ‘have to resort to story-telling’ (p.321) in the ‘show and tell’ type presentations prevalent at many educational/academic development? conferences (see, also, Garraway & Bozalek, 2019).

Shay goes on to note that most certificate, diploma and even some master’s programmes offered by those involved in Educational Development (and typically employed in teaching and learning centres) involve asking academic staff registered for the programmes to:

. . . apply principles of ‘good practice’ to solve problems which arise out of their particular contexts, for example, how to design an assessment rubric to ensure reliability, how to facilitate large classes of diversely prepared students (Shay, 2012:320).

Shay's conclusion is that, although there is a place for this kind of work and it can lead to improved practice, the knowledge it encompasses is not ‘systematic’ knowledge with the capacity to *explain* the problem it set out to address.

This leaves the question of how this more systematic knowledge might be developed. For Shay, the development of systematic knowledge involves the use of theory to ‘lift the general principles out of the particular problem in order to return to a recontextualised problem’ (p.321). As a result,

. . . [t]he knowledge building process is thus an iterative movement from the particular to the general and then back to a re-contextualised particular from our context-rich understandings and experiences to generalisable principles that can speak across our varied contexts (p.321).

Shay (2012:321) cites Harland and Staniforth’s (2008) claim that that the field of Academic Development is theoretically fragmented, and notes that the building of the kind of systematic knowledge needed will require researchers to work

. . . collaboratively and comparatively, building up across our respective languages of description – whether it be critical discourse analysis or activity theory or whether we are using Bourdieu, Bernstein or Vygotsky – to develop more elaborated languages of description. In this way educational development will emerge not only as a recognised field of practice addressing relevant and critical problems in higher education but doing so from a strongly theorised multi-disciplinary knowledge base.

Given the institutional conditions in which researchers of teaching and learning in South African higher education work (described in Section 2.2 above), how feasible is Shay's call for researchers to work 'collaboratively and comparatively'? Does the capacity exist at both institutional and individual levels to do the work necessary 'to develop more elaborated languages of description' and to build 'a strongly theorised multi-disciplinary knowledge base'?

As already indicated, capacity across the system is uneven with some universities relying on relatively inexperienced practitioners who come and go in the field. In many respects, the introduction of the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET's) University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) in January 2018, and the earmarked grants associated with it (DHET, 2017), has resulted in a repetition of the events of the early 1990s when funding for improving teaching and learning flooded into South African universities in anticipation of the shift to democracy. This funding, implemented by the Independent Development Trust (IDT), was grant based and focused on the implementation of fixed term projects. Staff, often inexperienced in teaching and learning in higher education, were appointed on contract to work on these projects, but the nature of the work meant that few saw this as a long term career and left to pursue other, more secure, employment as it became available. UCDP funding has also resulted in the employment of many more novice practitioners in teaching and learning centres across the country. Although some can draw on doctorates, few have specialist qualifications in the field of teaching and learning in *higher education* and, as a result, are not always familiar with the kind of research that has been conducted over the years or the way problems have been conceptualised. In many respects therefore, appointments made as a result of this funding often lead to more of the kind of knowledge production critiqued by Shay (2012).

Where capacity does exist for the type of work that can lead to the kind of *systematic* knowledge needed to explain problems (Shay, 2012), this tends to be located in a few centres or units with longstanding roots going back to the 1980s. Of even more concern is the fact that many of these units are located in historically advantaged institutions. Questions then need to be asked about the ability of researchers, who often focus on teaching and learning in their own, highly privileged universities, to frame questions that will explain problems in, say, a historically black university located in a deeply rural area, when they have not taught in this kind of institution and have no experience of the kinds of students it enrolls. Nonetheless, it is to an exploration of the work produced by these units that this review now turns.

4. Towards the production of systematic knowledge

Before turning to looking at the production of 'systematic knowledge' in the field itself, a further comment on the use of theory called for by Shay (2012) is needed. In arguing that researchers need to work collaboratively and comparatively to build increasingly elaborate 'languages of description' that will lift the general out of the particular in ways that will allow us to reconceptualise problems, Shay is drawing on the Bernsteinian (2000) concept of a 'horizontal knowledge structure', distinguished from a 'hierarchical knowledge structure' because of the way knowledge building proceeds. In a hierarchical structure, typical of the natural sciences, myriad observations and measurements of the world (in the form of data) are drawn upon to build ever

more overarching theories and to account for that data. Hierarchical knowledge structures are thus often depicted as having a pyramid type structure. A horizontal knowledge structure, on the other hand, uses different theoretical lenses to look at a phenomenon. The use of these different lenses results in the development of different languages to describe the phenomenon itself.

To what extent, however, are researchers looking at the same phenomenon? Boughey and McKenna (2017, 2021) identify a continuum of theories used to explain learning in South African higher education. At one end of the continuum is what they term the 'model of the decontextualised learner'. This model (or discourse) sees success in higher education as related to factors inherent to the individual such as motivation, aptitude and, even, intelligence. It assumes that, provided students are sufficiently motivated, have the aptitude for what they are studying and are sufficiently 'intelligent' (a term often glossed as 'bright' or 'smart'), then they will be able to succeed in their quest to gain a qualification. The model of the student as a decontextualised learner therefore privileges agency and is meritocratic in the sense that it sees success are related to ability. In its most bald form, it absolves universities that experience large drop-out rates or poor throughput.

At the other end of Boughey and McKenna's (2021) continuum of accounts of student success is what they term the 'model of the student as a social being'. This model, or discourse, acknowledges the role of the university as an institution which structures students' learning experiences and draws on thinking which sees that the 'ways of being' (Gee, 1990) required of students as they work towards a qualification are more difficult to develop for some than for others. The model thus acknowledges the way higher education itself is structured to preserve, rather than challenge, the status quo in terms of who gets into and succeeds in higher education. In its baldest form, the model quashes agency and privileges structure.

Significant in Boughey and McKenna's (2021) analysis is the claim that the model of the student as a decontextualised learner will not account for South African student performance data (published, for example, in the CHE's *Vital Stats* series), which shows that, (i) regardless of the institution at which they are registered, (ii) the field which they are studying and (iii) the level of qualification for which they are enrolled, black South Africans fare less well than their white peers, without retreating into the discourses of deficiency that characterised apartheid. Despite this, the model of the decontextualised student was dominant in all the data emanating from the first cycle of institutional audits conducted by the CHE in the form of self-evaluation reports, institutional profiles drawn from performance data and the reports of audit panels examined by Boughey and McKenna as part of the study commissioned by the CHE. This is arguably because of the model's commonsense appeal and, also, because contemplating a higher education system where unfairness is 'built into' teaching and learning is very uncomfortable. While this may be the case it is also unnerving to realise that the model, when pushed to the limit of its claim that success is related to factors inherent to the individual, when applied to South African student performance data assumes that those factors are not evenly distributed across all social groups. Such claims about inherent ability are too closely related to racist thinking to be acceptable.

What all this means is that researchers looking at teaching and learning in South African higher education may not all be looking at the same phenomenon when the theories they use as languages of description are located along Boughey and McKenna's (2017, 2021) continuum. Some researchers will draw on understandings of the 'problems' they identify as located 'in' students while others will understand those problems as constructed by the contexts in which students learn. The review of scholarly work produced more recently in the field of teaching and learning in South African higher education attempts to locate the work on this continuum whilst

also taking account of the structural and cultural conditions in which it emerged. The review is organised according to the theorist/theory underpinning the research itself.

4.1. Bourdieu

As already indicated, some of the earliest South African work on teaching and learning drawing on social theory used the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Mandew, 1993). The attraction of Bourdieu's work for those interested in teaching and learning can be seen to lie in his attempts to expose higher education as contributing to social injustice and inequity.

Key to Bourdieu's (1977, 1988) thinking are the concepts of 'field', 'capital', 'habitus', and 'doxa', and the idea that social interaction is a 'game' played by agents to establish a monopoly over various forms of capital. In this context, the term 'capital' relates to the forms of power that can be used in a 'field', which is understood as a relatively autonomous area of 'play' governed according to a set of values and regulative principles (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu identifies social and cultural capital as forms of capital but is insistent that the field determines which forms are privileged. In some fields, for example, economic capital will not count as much as social or cultural capital. Although Bourdieu notes the existence of values and regulatory principles governing a field, this does not mean that they are explicit. Rather, agents enter a field and play the game according to their own 'doxa', or beliefs about the way the field operates and what is at stake. The term 'habitus' refers to the embodiment of cultural capital acquired through membership of a particular social group. It thus involves the habits, skills and dispositions acquired through experience of and exposure to particular settings.

The game, or play on a field, is an ongoing struggle for the forms of capital that are at stake. Agents are able to wield power according to the influence they are able to exert on the game, the outcome of which depends on the capital held by players and the skill they are able to muster to play the game itself. The positions agents are able to take up on a field are determined by the nature and forms of the capital held by each and the relations of power between them. Relationships between players are therefore dependent on the forms and amount of capital each player is able to draw upon. Those agents who dominate the field of play at the outset are more able to impose their 'doxa', or ideas about how things should be, and are therefore in a better position to benefit from the outcome of the game itself.

It is not difficult to see why Bourdieu's ideas were attractive to researchers of teaching and learning in South African higher education as the political dispensation changed in the country and a range of black students from different social backgrounds entered spaces that, historically, had been reserved for a white elite. The forms of capital privileged in the universities were very different to those many students were able to draw upon, and therefore students' doxa related to what they needed to do to learn that were very different to those of the powerful players occupying positions as members of the academic staff. However, the complexity of Bourdieu's work and its status as social, rather than learning, theory meant that it was used by a relatively small group of researchers who were able to draw on understandings of sociology. Key to this small body of work is that of Shay (2004, 2005, 2006, 2008), Jawitz (2008, 2009) and Kloot (2009, 2015), developed at the University of Cape Town initially in the form of doctoral studies.

A trio of studies by Shay all look at assessment as an interpretative act. This work was important at the time the work was produced, given the introduction of outcomes-based approaches to assessment that attempted to make judgements about students' learning more objective, transparent and fair through the use of published assessment criteria associated with learning outcomes. The introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa in

the mid 1990s had resulted in the need for all qualifications to be registered on the framework using the construct of a learning outcome as a language of description. This led to the review and development of programmes on a scale possibly never before seen in South Africa. As learning outcomes began to be used to inform curriculum design and programme development, an associated push for the introduction of outcomes-based or criterion-referenced assessment emerged, with many universities introducing compulsory assessment courses for their staff focusing on the use of these approaches. Shay's work is important in that it challenges the idea of objectivity and explores assessment as a much more complex act involving interpretation.

Importantly, two of these pieces of Shay's work (2004, 2006) look at final-year projects (often termed 'graduation' or 'capstone' projects) which required students to submit work which drew on learning in different subject areas. Shay's (2004) interest is in the assessors themselves as they work with the projects, and in showing how different assessors interpret students' work in ways which are shaped by their disciplinary backgrounds and experiences with students themselves. Shay (2006) hones in on the constructs of reliability and validity in assessment and, using Bourdieu, analyses the assessment of the same piece of work by a number of assessors in a practice intended to enhance reliability and validity. In doing this, she shows how 'multi and varied subjectivities . . . shape assessors' interpretations of complex performances' (p.674). In doing this, Shay focuses on what she terms 'one dimension of positionality, that is, the assessors' relation to and investment in the learner and the performance', thus opening the way for other dimensions to be explored. Far from concluding that all assessment is, thus, relative, Shay goes further to argue that every act of assessment draws on two 'readings': an objective reading involving an attempt to 'observe, measure and map reality independently of the representations of those who live in it (both the assessed and the assessor)' (p.675), and a subjective reading 'which is deeply invested with the self, the reading which acknowledges professional judgement as inescapably (in part) an embodiment of the assessor' (p.675).

Shay (2008) continues in this vein by looking at the value systems (the doxa) sustaining assessment practices and, more specifically, at the way particular forms of knowledge shape them, this time in a service-learning course. Again, the focus here is on showing how context (the discipline, the institution, the faculty and the department) shapes an assessment system, the practices associated with it and the results it achieves. In addition to drawing on Bourdieu, Shay also uses the work of Bernstein (2000) and, particularly, his notion of 'regulative discourse', which determines what can be considered as legitimate learning. Importantly, given the interest of those working in the field of Academic Development in social justice in higher education, Shay shows how service learning has the potential to challenge some of the value systems underpinning assessment.

Jawitz (2008, 2009) also draws on the notion of assessment as a social practice and uses Bourdieu to examine how assessors learn to assess. Jawitz (2008) draws on Bourdieu's (1990:58) notion of a 'class habitus', which harmonises practices without 'any calculations or conscious reference to a norm' or 'direct intervention or . . . explicit co-ordination'. In this piece of research, Jawitz picks up on a phenomenon that was still arguably new in historically white universities: the appointment of a black academic to a department dominated by white peers. In doing this, Jawitz (p.1009) notes how the habitus of the black academic

. . . incorporated the experience of being a black student in the department and he displayed an acute awareness of the complexities surrounding his transition from being a black student to being a black academic at SAU. He struggled to define his role as a black academic. He spoke at length about his interaction with the black students in his lab, expressing concern at their view that some of his white colleagues were racist, based

on what they perceived to be preferential treatment given to white students in marking and the allocation of scholarships.

The observations and experiences of black academics were to become much more common as time wore on and as academic employment was obliged to respond to imperatives for transformation. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 brought these experiences to the fore and, on occasions, saw lines of division drawn between different groups of academics.

Jawitz' interests are, however, in learning to assess, and he concludes that, in the particular case he examines, opportunities to learn how to assess through 'peripheral participation' in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) were not available to newcomers. As a result, new academics judged student performances within a 'safe zone' and quickly 'became immune to differences with their colleagues about marks' (2008:1006). The confidence they did gain as assessors resulted from administrative procedures implemented by the Head of Department that involved using arithmetical means to arrive at a consensus about the mark awarded.

Jawitz (2009) explores the development of 'class habitus' more closely by looking at the configuration of communities of practice in three different knowledge areas using a case study approach. Each department studied showed 'distinct clusters of activity around the key functions of teaching, research and professional practice' (p. 604), with each cluster identified, by Jawitz, as a distinct community of practice. In Bourdieu's terms, these communities functioned within larger fields but also resembled fields in that particular forms of cultural capital were valued in each. Significantly, each of the cases showed different paths into assessment for new academics.

Jawitz' work on learning to assess is important not only because it demonstrates the way processes of socialisation work to assimilate newcomers into dominant practices, but also because in doing this it challenges arguments made for the role of staff development as being critical in transforming South African universities (see, also, Behari-Leak, 2017). This point will be taken up later and explored in relation to the use of another theorist (Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000) in order to demonstrate how Shay's call for researchers to work collaboratively and comparatively, drawing on the respective languages of description offered by different theorists to build more elaborate languages to describe problems, shows glimpses of being realised.

Kloot's (2009, 2015) work drawing on Bourdieu focuses more on the structure of the field of higher education. In analysing the field, Kloot (2009) draws on Naidoo's (2004) earlier work which used Bourdieu to analyse the relationship between higher education and inequality. Naidoo organised the field into three tiers of institutions: a dominant tier of English-speaking universities designated 'white', an intermediate tier of Afrikaans-speaking universities also designated 'white', and a subordinate tier of universities established for black social groups. Kloot's specific interest is in the usefulness of Bourdieu's ideas to understand change at a 'top tier' university. More specifically, he uses the concepts of 'academic' capital, defined by Bourdieu (1988:84) as 'obtained and maintained by holding a position enabling domination of other positions and their holders', and 'intellectual capital', which is related to the 'cultural hierarchy' and can be understood as 'scientific renown' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:76). Kloot shows how these two forms of capital played out in the establishment and evolution of a foundation programme aimed at allowing more black students to study in a prestigious professional field. Kloot shows how, in South Africa, struggles related to the different values accorded to teaching and research in most academic contexts (with research mostly privileged over teaching) cannot be seen as separate from political struggles in the wider sense.

A second piece of work (Kloot, 2015) uses Bourdieu to explore the emergence of Academic Development at a research-intensive historically white university. In order to do this, he draws on an additional concept developed by Bourdieu, that of 'refraction'. Refraction refers to the idea that a field is able to refract or deflect forms of power encroaching upon it from other fields (Bourdieu, 1993). The more autonomous a field, the more effectively it is able to deal with these external influences. External forms of power can be deflected but they can also be accommodated within the field itself.

Kloot's argument is that Academic Development, understood by its main protagonist at the university as a means of shifting the structure of the university in order to contribute to the wider social change intended to be associated with the shift to a democratic order, was *accommodated* within the institution in the form of foundation programmes. As a result, it did not achieve the more widespread change initially hoped for by its proponents because the process of accommodation allowed for dominant forms of capital to function.

Foundation programmes have a long history in South African Academic Development (Boughey, 2005). In her analysis of universities, Naidoo (2004) had identified concerns on the part of mainstream academics that 'forces for redress' evident in policy work in the early 1990s would reduce the amount of time available to academics to conduct research. Research, as noted above, is related to intellectual capital. The need to devote more time to teaching in the interests of redress would thus impact on the intellectual capital available to academics. Foundation programmes, which generally offered a set of teaching and learning activities at the 'bottom' of the curriculum usually taught by specialists in Academic Development, solved this problem as they satisfied the calls for redress and change whilst, at the same time, allowing the 'mainstream' curriculum to continue unchanged and, thus, not impacting on the time available for research. In Kloot's analysis, therefore, the external powers wielded by those calling for change were not deflected, a process which would have had enormous significance for the university in question in the political context of the shift to democracy, but rather accommodated.

Kloot goes further by drawing on the following statement by a key actor in Academic Development in the institution in question (2015:971):

I think our fundamental mission, quite clearly to me, is to make the most of the teaching and learning process, to make it as effective as possible, for the widest range of people. And in South Africa, we can never get away – well, we may one day but we can't for a long time – get away from the equity side of that.

For Kloot, the significance of this statement is the shift to a concern with pedagogy and not redress ('our fundamental mission . . . is to make the most of the teaching and learning process . . .'), as it is indicative of the 'academicisation' of radical discourses in the institution. In other words (2015:972),

. . . academic development staff had to learn to speak the language of the field and wield the types of power recognised by the field in order to bring about change. In doing so, they were inevitably influenced by the habitus of *Homo academicus*, which allowed the field to settle into another equilibrium.

Kloot's work analysing Academic Development at one university adds to a body of work on the field produced by other researchers using other theoretical approaches (see, for example Boughey, 2012; Quinn, 2012). In doing so, it once again shows how Shay's identification of the need for researchers to work comparatively and use different languages of description to explore

problems in teaching and learning allows us to describe the object of interest in different ways and, thus, to begin to reconceptualise it.

4.2. Archer

The work of British sociologist Margaret Archer (1995, 1996, 2000) has been used widely in research on teaching and learning in South Africa, mostly by groups of researchers working at Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town. Archer's work draws on Bhaskar's (1979) critical realism, which posits a stratified view of reality and, in doing so, offers the opportunity of combining the relativism of human experiences and observations with a layer of reality consisting of relatively enduring structures and mechanisms that exist independently of human thought and action.

In her work, Archer addresses the ages old debate between determinism and free will. She terms the idea that human beings are able to control the environments in which they live through the exercise of reason 'upwards conflation' or 'Modernity's Man'; the opposing view privileging determinism is termed 'downwards conflation' or 'Society's Being'. Archer criticises both positions along with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory which, she claims (1996:87), locks structure and agency in a 'conceptual vice'. Her solution is to accord powers and properties to both the 'parts' (structure and culture) and the 'people' (agency). Importantly, she sees structural emergent powers and properties (SEPs) and cultural emergent powers and properties (CEPs) as dormant until activated by the personal emergent powers and properties (PEPs) of agents. This would mean, for example, that a discourse, seen as a mechanism existing in the domain of culture, exerts no power until drawn upon by agents. Once agents begin to draw on the discourse, it is able to enable or constrain different kinds of actions. Archer is insistent on the need for the theoretical separation of structure, culture and agency for analytical purposes (1996:66). For Archer, 'structure' refers to the means of distributing access to the 'goods' of the world, while 'culture' is about ideas, beliefs and ideologies. Her morphogenetic framework then allows for an exploration of the interplay between these domains over time in order to account for change or non-change in a social system as well as for change or non-change in agency. Archer's work has been used in South Africa to explore the agency of students and staff members.

Luckett and Luckett (2009), for example, explore the way the agency of black, working class students in a mentoring programme at a historically white university is transformed over time. Archer provides an account of the development of agency involving a movement from the 'I' (the personal) to the 'you' (the social), which originates with the 'continuous sense of self' (2000:2) (the 'I') which she claims is experienced by all individuals. This continuous sense of self develops into the personal identity. In developing a social identity, individuals begin as primary agents (the 'me') defined by Archer as 'collectivities sharing the same life chances' (2000:263). Primary agents are conditioned, but not determined, by the social and cultural conditions into which they are born. Although primary agents 'play no part in the strategic guidance of society because they literally have no say' (2000:268), the PEPs accorded to them by Archer mean that they can exercise the power of *reflexivity* in relation to the SEPs and CEPs that both enable and constrain them. In pursuit of change, primary agents can transform themselves into 'corporate agents' or groups 'who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organized in order to get it, and can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question' (1995:258). This ability to act collectively is seen as another PEP. The final transformation of social agency is seen in the emergence of the social actor whose powers accrue from the position or rank held.

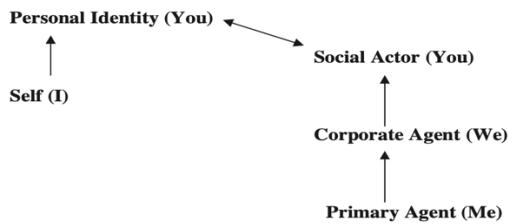


Figure 2: Stratified personal and social identity in a dialectical relationship (Lockett & Lockett, 2009:474)

Lockett and Lockett's work shows that most of the undergraduate students who participated in their study were in the process of developing what Archer terms 'personal' as well as 'social' identities. As already indicated, Archer identifies reflexivity as a key PEP. Archer identifies four kinds of reflexives: (i) 'fractured reflexives', whose internal conversations draw on the distress they are already experiencing and who, thus, are unable to move forward; (ii) 'communicative reflexives', who rely on conversations with others to talk things through and affirm what they themselves are thinking; (iii) 'autonomous reflexives', who are in control of their own lives and who are self-confident in moving forward; and (iv) 'meta reflexives', who tend to draw on ideals or transcendental concerns and who conduct value-oriented conversations with themselves about these, often failing to advance themselves in a material sense as a result. Lockett and Lockett argue that the movement into professional employment via higher education requires a *shift from communicative to autonomous reflexivity* and that, therefore, Archer's work can be used as a conceptual framework informing support programmes in South African higher education.

The use of Archer's work on reflexivity allows Lockett and Lockett to make a number of inferences about the experiences of black South African students in historically advantaged universities. As already indicated, communicative reflexives rely on conversations with others to affirm what they are thinking. Lockett and Lockett (2009: 478) explain this point thus:

Communicative reflexives prioritise self-worth in relation to their social order, i.e. their families and friends. Typically their internal conversations are realised through external conversations; they need 'similar and familiars' with whom to talk things through in order to complete and confirm their internal conversations.

Black students entering the historically white advantaged universities enter a different context which privileges individuality over the collective and where 'similar and familiars' are not abundant. The need to shift towards the autonomous reflexivity required by the university and the workplaces to which students aspire is therefore complex and involves much more than the acquisition of a set of neutral skills and competencies assumed to be lacking by those involved in early work in the Academic Development movement.

Mentoring has been a dominant practice in Academic Development since its earliest years (see, for example, Kitchin & Frame, 1991). As Boughey (2005) points out, the focus in early mentoring programmes tended to draw on what Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) term a 'cultural literacy' model focused on the inculcation of western norms and values. In many respects, this process of assimilation continues to this day. In the early days, assimilation tended to be understood as the need to develop the academic practices that would allow students to learn and, thus, graduate. However, arguably a new form of assimilation is now taking place.

In South Africa, 'graduate attributes', or the 'qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution'

(Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts, 2000:1), are being used increasingly to inform curriculum design as well as the qualification standard setting processes developed by the CHE (see for example, CHE, 2018). Much of this move is informed by the perceived need for employability and for graduates who can serve the globalised knowledge economy. As a result, according to Barnett (2009:438), universities have shifted from 'a dogma of knowledge . . . to a dogma of skills: the knowing student has been replaced by the performative student'.

Luckett and Luckett's (2009:480) work is important. It shows that skills development is 'not just a matter of imparting certain knowledge and skills to large numbers of people who don't have them' but also involves 'negotiating shifts in consciousness, identity and modes of reflexivity related to severe contextual discontinuity'. This opens the way to questioning the ethics of what is being done in the universities. In the protests of 2015 and 2016, many students expressed their anger at the profound sense of alienation they experienced at the universities and called for decolonised institutions and curricula. Their objections arguably related not only to the 'performativity' required of them but also to other forms of assimilation related to, for example, the privileging of the individual over the collective. Luckett and Luckett's (2009) use of Archer as a theoretical lens therefore serves as another example of the knowledge building called for by Shay (2012) and, in doing so, calls into question many of the assumptions underpinning practices in teaching and learning.

Another example of the use of Archer's work on agency is found in Case's (2014) study of the way fourteen third-year students made their way through a programme in Chemical Engineering. Case's study reveals the complex and unexpected ways that students exercise their agency and, once again, challenges assumptions made by those working in teaching and learning development over the years.

Archer's work on agency was used again in another study exploring the experiences of students who had dropped out of three South African universities (Case, Marshall, McKenna and Mogoshana, 2018). Concern at the 'dropout rate' is common in the context of a funding formula for public higher education that privileges efficiency (MoE, 2004), and the 'wastage' that results, critiqued from a number of perspectives including the economic and the social (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007). The work of Case, Marshall, McKenna and Mogoshana is important, not least because it shows how students who did 'drop out' did not 'waste' what they had learned in their time in a university and were, in fact, thriving because of what they had learned. The study not only challenges a lot of public discourse in South African higher education but also opens the way to an understanding of the experiences of students in our universities and of the knowledge and characteristics they should develop in their time there (often in contrast to what is intended they should develop by those designing curricula and teaching).

As indicated, Archer's work has not only been used to explore the experiences of students in South African higher education but also those of staff. Behari-Leak (2017) explores the way that new academics who had completed a course intended to develop their capacity as educators were able to exercise their agency as they tried to implement what they had learned after the course had finished. Behari-Leak identifies constraints to the exercise of agency, which call into question the privileging of staff development courses as a means of improving teaching and learning not only in South Africa but across the world. The use of analytical dualism allows Behari-Leak to show that the privileging of agency (or upwards conflation) in the context of an 'untransformed' institution is problematic as new academics confront racialised discourses as well as structures, in the form of academic hierarchies, that draw on discourses legitimating traditional forms of teaching and assessment.

Archer's work has also been used in a number of studies of institutional and system level change. One of the earliest studies to do this was Quinn's (2007) doctoral work that looked at the emergence of a programme leading to a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education intended to develop staff in their roles as academic teachers at a historically white research-focused university. Part of the study involved the analysis of discourses which, following Archer, were conceptualised as mechanisms in the domain of culture that constrained the emergence of staff development initiatives (see Quinn, 2012).

A large study looking at the interplay of structure, culture and agency in the emergence of professional development programmes drawing on the work of Archer was also conducted by a team of researchers led by Brenda Leibowitz. Part of this work (Leibowitz, Bozalek, Winberg & van Schalkwyk, 2015) looked at the conditions enabling and constraining staff development at different kinds of institutions. It concluded that (2015:328)

. . . socio-economic features, including geography and history, play a strong role in influencing quality teaching and participation in professional development. Thus a concern for equity and social justice should remain a dominant element in discourses about higher education learning and teaching enhancement in South Africa—as well as elsewhere in the world. Inequality is global.

Quality assurance was introduced to South African higher education as a result of the White Paper on Higher Education (MoE, 1997). Luckett (2007) provides a critique of the approach to quality assurance adopted by the Higher Education Quality Committee in South Africa (HEQC, 2002, 2004a,b,c,d), drawing on Bhaskar's (1979) critical realism on the basis that although the methods might be 'useful for checking that certain inputs, processes and outputs are in place, they do not have the methodological capacity to effect long-term continuous improvement or radical change' (p.10). For radical change to be possible, a more in-depth investigation of the structural and cultural conditions from which the status quo emerges would be necessary.

Quinn and Boughey (2009) take up Luckett's critique and use the work of Archer in a case study of one institutional audit, arguing that social realism 'provides for an understanding of the necessary conditions for change to be developed in audit processes'. In their case study, the domain of culture was a particular area identified as needing change. This claim is taken up in Boughey and McKenna's (2017) analysis of an entire cycle of institutional audits using data provided by the HEQC. This work shows that, although the audits resulted in the appointment of key agents to manage teaching and learning and the development of institutional arrangements with the same aim, discourses in the domain of culture explaining student success and access (and on which agents drew to develop policy and initiatives) could not explain student performance data without retreating to racist ideology constructing black students as inferior (see, also, Boughey & McKenna, 2021). One implication of this was that future quality-related work needed to strengthen the stock of ideas available to explain learning and success in learning on which those trying to enhance quality could draw. Boughey and McKenna's (2021) work goes beyond quality assurance in that it uses a social realist framework to analyse change in the South African higher education system since the shift to democracy. In order to do this, it uses another element of Archer's theoretical work, namely her 'morphogenetic framework' (Archer, 1995) which allows for the exploration of change in never ending cycles.

As this review has attempted to show, Archer's social realism has provided for a rich vein of work on teaching and learning in South African higher education. More importantly, it has provided a theoretical lens for the process of knowledge building identified as key to the development of the field of Educational Development.

4.3. Bernstein

The use of the construct of the learning outcome as a 'language of description' to register qualifications on qualifications frameworks has already been identified earlier in this review. The movement towards using learning outcomes in curriculum design that then followed resulted in a great deal of work in the field known as the 'sociology of knowledge'. This field originated with the work of British sociologist Basil Bernstein and was continued by others including Johann Muller (see, for example, 2000), Michael Young (see, for example, 2007) and Rob Moore (see, for example, 2007).

The use of work by Bernstein in South Africa relates to the introduction of curriculum reforms following the first democratic election. Hoadley (2015:737) describes shifts in these reforms in the school curriculum as follows:

The politics of *whose* knowledge and interests were foregrounded through the integration of learner's everyday reality into schooling and a learner-centred pedagogy. The form of the first post-apartheid curriculum—C2005—was termed 'Transformational OBE [Outcomes-based education]'. 'Transformational' referred to the radical constructivist pedagogy that was proposed in response to the oppressive fundamental pedagogics that had preceded it. In privileging a political aim of empowering and affirming learners, C2005 placed an emphasis on group work, relevance, local curriculum construction and local choice of content. There was also a shift away from strong disciplinary boundaries to an emphasis on the integration of traditional curriculum subjects and school and everyday knowledge. [Emphasis in original]

Although the universities did not follow the same radical path, the need for transformation privileged in policy documents including the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (1996) and the White Paper (MoE, 1997) was associated strongly with curriculum reform. However, higher education was also coping with other discourses that emphasised universities producing 'knowledge workers' for the global economy. As registration of qualifications on the national qualifications framework proceeded, therefore, many universities embarked on processes of curriculum review that not only drew on the construct of the learning outcome as an organising principle, but also involved the reconfiguration of knowledge areas to produce curricula focused on outcomes oriented at specific vocational and professional areas. This process was then accelerated by the identification of three new institutional types in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001). As a result of the introduction of the learning outcome as a principle in curriculum design and the focus on learning for employment, a heavy focus on skills, rather than knowledge, emerged.

Bernstein (2000) provided a set of conceptual tools, which allow us to see how the curriculum works as a device for distributing access to knowledge. Critiques of the focus on skills in outcomes-based curriculum design soon emerged, one of the most significant of which was the claim that powerful disciplinary knowledge was being neglected (Wheelahan, 2010) in the design of curricula, which were 'knowledge poor'. Bernstein (1999) makes a distinction between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' discourse where 'horizontal discourse' refers to the commonsense knowledge derived from experience in everyday life and 'vertical discourse' refers to the theorised, systematised knowledge associated with formal education. The argument of scholars such as Wheelahan and, in South Africa, Muller (2000), Allais (2014), Gamble (2014) and Ensor (2014), is that the principled, theoretical knowledge characteristic of vertical discourse and the academic disciplines is 'powerful' as it allows knowers to move beyond and across contexts. In outcomes-based approaches, knowledge is typically selected for inclusion in a curriculum on the

basis that it is necessary for the performance of the outcomes specified. Selection is thus on the principle of 'just enough', with the result that knowledge becomes discrete and learners are not exposed to the full 'knowledge structure' which will allow them to move beyond the context in which it is envisaged an outcome will be used. Wheelahan (2010) offers a particular caution in noting that many of the vocational and professional areas for which learners are prepared in outcomes-based curricula may well cease to exist in the course of the working lifetimes of those at whom they are addressed, given the pace of technological development. Without the powerful knowledge of the knowledge structure, workers will be unable to move into new contexts and perform other types of work. Particularly important in the South African context is the argument that powerful disciplinary knowledge is transformational in the sense that it allows worlds that do not yet exist to be imagined.

Ultimately, the argument of social realists such as Muller (2000) and Young (2007) focuses on the existence of a form of knowledge that is separate from knowers' (relative) experiences of the world. Early attempts at curriculum reform in the school system had privileged the relativity of human experience in approaches that privileged everyday knowledge (or Bernstein's horizontal discourse) in social constructivist views of knowledge (Hoadley, 2015). This kind of thinking leads to a proliferation of ways of understanding the world from different positions (standpoint epistemology), reduces 'knowledge claims to the social characteristics of the group voicing them', and eliminates the 'possibility of a neutral voice or ultimate truth' (Maton 2014:29).

As already indicated, the NPHE (MoE, 2001) resulted in the identification of three new institutional types in the South African higher education system: traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities. The institutions of the apartheid system then had to be reconfigured, using a process of mergers and incorporations, into new institutions falling into these three types. The focus of the traditional universities was to offer 'traditional' academic programmes across a range of qualification types, although many reconfigured departments into new entities in order to promote inter- and trans- disciplinaryity. The focus of the universities of technology was to produce applied knowledge and graduates who could work in professional and vocational areas. The comprehensives were to offer a mix of 'traditional' and vocational programmes.

A key area of work for those drawing on Bernsteinian thinking was curriculum planning for the comprehensives in a project funded by the South African Norway Tertiary Education (SANTED) project. Muller (2008) provides an excellent introduction to the use of Bernstein's ideas in a report which was prepared for the project and which draws on the concepts of 'conceptual coherence' and 'contextual coherence'. 'Conceptual coherence' curricula, according to Muller (2008:21), increase levels of abstraction and conceptual demand as a programme proceeds. Those that demonstrate contextual coherence, however, are segmentally organised with each segment oriented towards a particular context. In a contextually coherent curriculum, professions or professional bodies 'guarantee' the curriculum. In a conceptually coherent curriculum, the logic of the discipline provides the guarantee.

Muller goes on to note that the more 'vertical' a curriculum (i.e. the more it builds principles and abstractions), the more sequencing matters. The more segmental the curriculum, the less sequencing matters as each curriculum unit relates to the context, to the outside world, and not to the inner logic of the discipline. The more conceptually coherent a curriculum is, the more important it is to provide 'knowledge signposts' that will allow students to 'know what counts as a good answer'. The more contextually coherent a curriculum, the more students can look to the context to see whether what they know is adequate.

Muller then goes on to use the concepts of 'conceptual coherence' and 'contextual coherence' to develop a framework of occupational fields, the knowledge required in those fields and the qualifications associated with them, which will allow comprehensive universities to develop a range of programmes appropriate to their 'institutional type'.

Shay (2012) and Shay, Oosthuizen, Paxton and van der Merwe (2011) outline work that used the ideas delineated by Muller (2008) and Gamble (2009, reviewed in Section 3 above) to address two key challenges: (i) the need to bring together qualification types across a spectrum of vocational, professional, and academic education to allow for progression and articulation, and (ii) the development of a qualification framework that holds the tension between 'hierarchical prestige and functional specialisation' (Shay et al., 2011:95). This tension is evident in what is termed 'qualification drift' or the tendency to want to develop, for example at universities of technology, bachelor's level programmes in areas previously served by the old national diplomas awarded by the former technikons or, equally, the tendency for traditional universities to develop vocational degree programmes.

Drawing on the work of Muller (2008) and Gamble (2009), Shay et al. use a series of case studies of programmes in four knowledge areas, Architecture, Chemistry, Built Environment, and Journalism and Media Studies to build a typology of curriculum types.

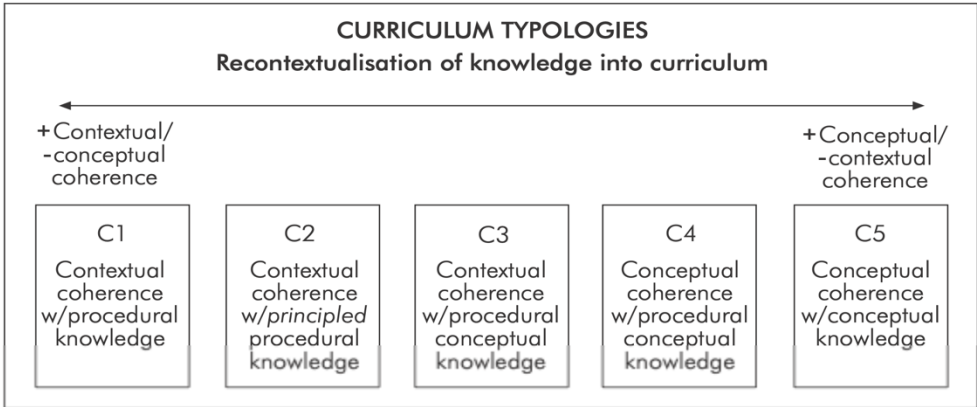


Figure 3: Curriculum typologies (from Shay, Oosthuizen, Paxton & van der Merwe, 2011:98)

Shay et al. proceed with their analysis by using a framework for analysing cognitive demand adapted from Gamble (2009). This then allows them to identify a number of key principles for curriculum design. The first is that all curricula, regardless of whether they are vocationally, professionally or academically oriented, should encompass a proportion of modules of the C3, C4 or C5 type identified in the typology above. Shay et al. go on to note that the qualifications that are most at risk at being constructed in ways that are 'knowledge poor' are those that draw on knowledge areas with a horizontal structure (Bernstein, 2000, see Section 3 above). In qualifications that draw on knowledge areas with a hierarchical structure (the example of Analytical Chemistry is used by Shay et al.), there is generally agreement about the knowledge that should be included. In areas such as Journalism and Media Studies, theory needs to be 'borrowed' (from, for example, linguistics, semiotics and so on) and, as a result, there is likely to be contestation about what should be included.

A second principle relates to progression and the need for increased cognitive demand as a programme proceeds. Shay et al. point out that qualifications that are particularly at risk of not

following this principle are those that incorporate significant amounts of work-based learning in the more senior years.

The final principle relates to the concept of 'articulation', heavily privileged by the original designers of the South African national qualifications framework as a means of providing access to qualifications to a wide range of learners. Shay et al. argue that any articulation must be based on curriculum typology. This would mean, for example, that a diploma which was contextually coherent and which drew on principled procedural knowledge (i.e. type C2) would not articulate well with a degree of types C3 (contextual coherence with conceptual procedural knowledge) or C4 (conceptual coherence with conceptual procedural knowledge).

In line with other work produced by contemporary researchers, thinkers such as Shay et al. succeed in moving the field of research in teaching and learning forward towards the development of the *systematic* knowledge needed to engage with problems in teaching and learning. Early practice on curriculum development from the mid 1990s onwards somewhat simplistically drew on the concept of the learning outcome and to count credits and take cognisance of NQF levels. As a result, practitioners in the field of Educational Development 'taught' simple approaches in their work with the academic staff responsible for curriculum design. The use of the work of Bernstein has troubled these formulaic approaches and has led to much deeper understandings of the curriculum and its design.

4.4. Maton

Karl Maton, now based at the University of Sydney, has expanded on Bernstein's work in the sociology of knowledge with the development of *Legitimation Code Theory* (LCT) (Maton, 2014). As well as drawing on Bernstein, LCT also draws on the work of Bourdieu (see 4.1 above). LCT responds to what Maton terms 'knowledge blindness' thanks to the focus on constructivist learning theories. This focus on the processes of learning serves to elide knowledge from the field of enquiry. He therefore joins others working on the sociology of knowledge such as Young (2007) in the call to 'bring knowledge back in'. LCT provides a set of tools that is used to analyse the organising principles from which knowledge practices emerge. In making the knowledge principles overt, LCT aims to identify the 'rules of the game' (cf. Bourdieu) on any field of practice. LCT is a relatively new theory with the result that tools are still being developed. The two most developed tools are located in the dimensions of 'specialisation' and 'semantics'. Work on the dimension of 'autonomy' is ongoing.

'Specialisation' understands knowledge practices as knowledge–knower structures. These structures are defined by their relations to knowledge itself (epistemic relations) and relations to knowers and ways of knowing (social relations). These concepts are mapped onto a plane to identify a number of codes:

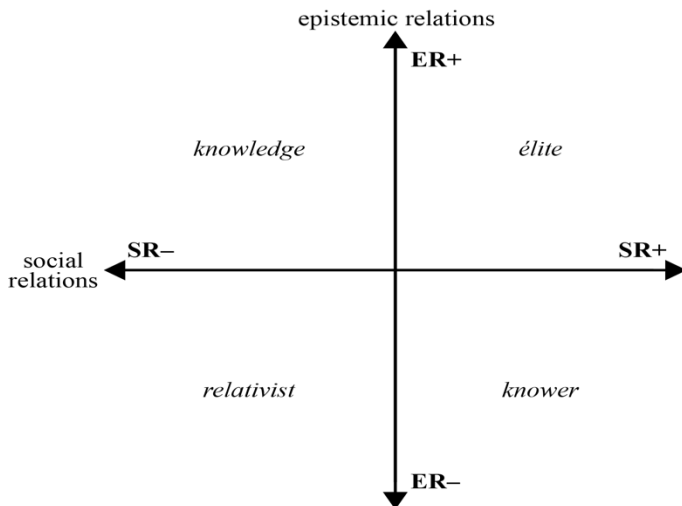


Figure 4: The specialisation plane (Maton, 2014:30)

Knowledge codes (ER+) emphasise the ‘what’ of knowing. Knower codes (SR+) privilege the ‘who’ of the knower. Practices drawing on knowledge codes (ER+/SR-) are therefore potentially open to anyone, as the ‘who’ of the knower is downplayed in favour of knowledge itself. In practices drawing on knower codes (ER-/SR+), the ‘who’ of the knower is what counts. Elite codes (ER+/SR-) emphasise specialist knowledge and the ‘right’ kind of knower, while relativist codes (ER-/SR-) allow for a wide range of knowledge and different types of knowers.

The use of specialisation as a tool to analyse knowledge practices can reveal ‘code clashes’ between, for example, the dispositions of learners and pedagogy and curriculum and pedagogy. In the South African context, it has been used to explore courses where the dispositions of black working class students clash with knowledge and pedagogic practices that assume a different kind of knower (Ellery, 2017, 2018; Mkhize, 2015; Clarence, 2014). Wolff (2018) uses specialisation to explore problem solving in engineering education.

The dimension of specialisation also develops the concept of ‘gazes’ within knower codes (SR+/ER-). Maton identifies two kinds of social relations: subjective relations (SubR) between knowledge practices and ‘kinds of knowers’, and interactional relations (IR) between knowledge practices and ways of knowing. Both SubR and IR can be stronger or weaker, a characteristic denoted by using the symbol +/- . Again, these social relations are placed on a plane to develop a series of ‘gazes’:

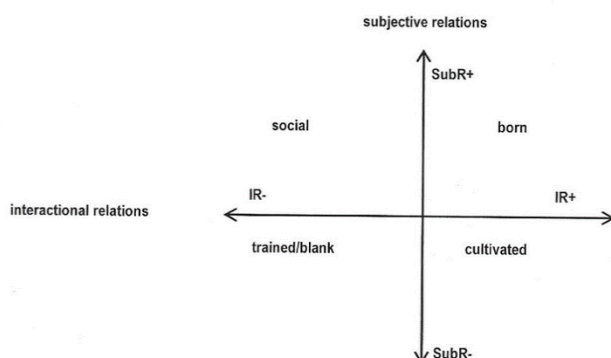


Figure 5: The social gazes plane (Maton, 2014:186)

A cultivated gaze is characterised by weak boundaries and controls between legitimate categories of knowers (SubR-) and strong boundaries between legitimate interactions (IR+). A cultivated gaze therefore demonstrates a 'feel' for a set of practices (in, for example, music) and is developed through sustained engagement and exposure to those who have already acquired the gaze.

A social gaze demonstrates strong boundaries on the kinds of knowers (SubR+) who can claim to know and weak control on their ways of knowing (IR-). A social gaze is thus associated with standpoint theories based on categories such as race or gender.

A born gaze exercises strong boundaries on who can know as well as on ways of knowing (SubR+/IR+). A born gaze is thus associated with natural ability.

A trained gaze demonstrates weak boundaries on who can know (SubR-) and on ways of knowing (IR-). It thus assumes that anyone can develop into a legitimate knower.

Lockett and Hunma (2014) use the concept of gazes to analyse four courses in the humanities with the aim of using insights to inform the development of a foundation course. As already noted, foundation courses have a long history in South Africa as attempts to promote access and success. Early courses drew on discourses constructing students as lacking skills and experiencing gaps in knowledge. The introduction of earmarked funding for foundation level work in 2004 by the DHET saw a set of strict criteria for the inclusion of 120 'developmental credits' in formally accredited programmes. As a result, courses used these technical requirements in their design, but tended to continue to draw on deficiency discourses identifying gaps in students' knowledge and skills. Lockett and Hunma's (2014) work is yet another example of researchers using a particular theoretical lens, in this case LCT, to try to develop systematic knowledge about the design of these courses (Shay, 2012).

Winberg (2012) uses specialisation in a study of a community engagement (CE) project in mechanical engineering, pointing out that the professional practice of mechanical engineering is different from the development of knowledge in engineering. Academic teachers involved in the project did not anticipate how difficult it would be to address and respond to the needs and priorities of the community with which they worked, as these were outside the concerns of their discipline and their work as educators. The curriculum demonstrated a strong knowledge code while the needs of the community required it to shift to becoming more socially relevant – in other words, to develop more of a knower code (SR+). CE is often presented as an easy solution to achieve social relevance in what is taught in universities. The use of LCT allowed this assumption to be troubled in significant ways.

Semantics explores the context dependency and complexity of knowledge practices by using the concepts of 'semantic gravity' (context-dependence) and 'semantic density' (complexity). These concepts can be drawn upon independently or jointly to identify semantic codes represented on a plane:

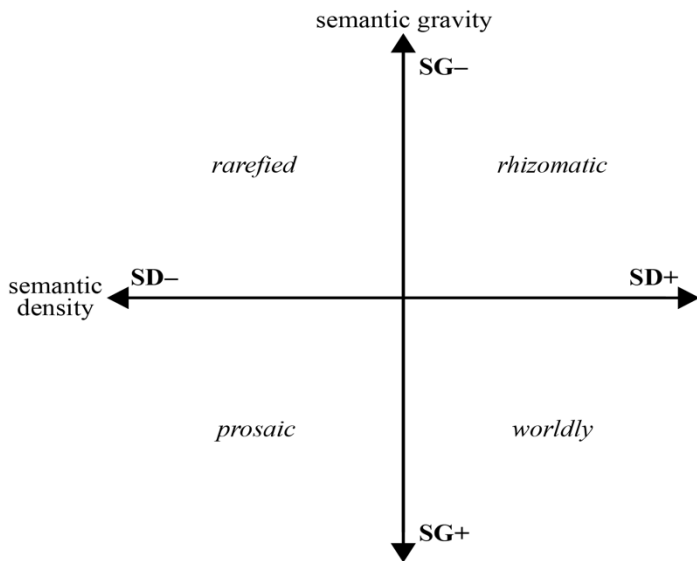


Figure 6: The semantic plane (Maton, 2014:131)

Key to work using semantics is the identification of 'semantic waves' that can be used to build knowledge over time.

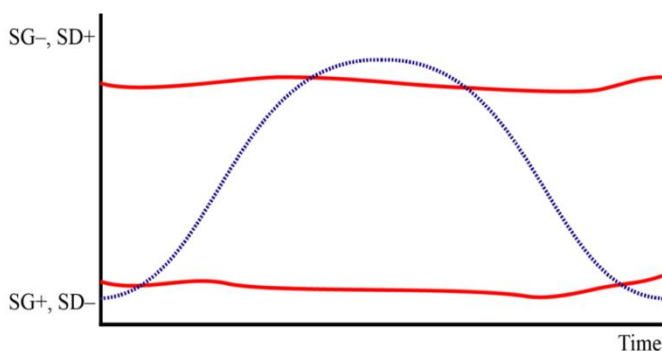


Figure 7: Semantic waves (Maton: 2014:131)

Figure 7 above could be used to illustrate pedagogic practice, where a teacher begins by using an example of a phenomenon from the world with which students are familiar, described in ordinary, everyday language, and then moves into a more theoretical explication of that phenomenon, which removes it from the everyday world and which, at the same time, 'condenses' meanings into more complex terminology. Work in South Africa that draws on the concept of semantics includes Clarence's (2016) exploration of pedagogy in law and political science courses, Blackie's (2014) work in chemistry and Rootman-le Grange & Blackie's (2018) 'assessment of an assessment'.

Winberg, Winberg, Jacobs, Garraway and Engel-Hills (2016) draw on the dimension of semantics to explain how students progress through an engineering curriculum and, in doing so, identify strategies that could be used to support students as they develop mastery of the complex concepts necessary to move through the levels of the programme. Their study showed that the engineering curriculum they studied was characterised by changing relationships between semantic gravity and semantic density. Reduced semantic gravity allowed for increases in semantic density. Examples used from everyday contexts were not useful as they served to oversimplify semantic density. They go on to identify the need for simple and more complex

application contexts to be balanced in order to ensure that an appropriate level of semantic density is achieved. As a result, they proceed to identify the need for a 'semantic gravity wave [that] travels across transitions, reducing contextual complexity to enable a focus on "high level" abstractions in parts, but increasing the complexity and level of cognitive challenge in others' (p.410).

Also associated with semantics is the concept of 'constellation analysis', which allows for the exploration of complexity in sets of knowledge practices. Elements of a set of practices are seen as 'nodes' or 'starts' that are connected together in much the same way as constellations in the heavens. Each idea in an epistemic constellation can have stronger or weaker semantic density. An idea in a constellation is related to other ideas and objects in networks that are more or less dense. A dense network of ideas (a constellation) has stronger semantic density than one consisting of simple ideas with fewer links between each. In formalised bodies of knowledge, the core concepts that comprise them and the relationships between those concepts are subject to ongoing scrutiny. Ruzsnyak (2020) uses constellation analysis to explore two different courses, in history and sociology, located at first-year level in a teacher education programme, to show how knowledge is built differently in each. As a result of doing this, she is able to identify not only the limitations of generic student support courses, but also the importance of academic teachers 'working more intentionally to make the conceptual moves clear in their teaching' (p.103).

The use of the dimension of autonomy has been less well explored in research on teaching and learning. This dimension of LCT offers a set of tools that explores the relations between different sets of practices and is based on the idea that 'any set of practices comprises constituents that are related together in particular ways' (Maton and Howard, 2018:6). Constituents can take many forms including ideas, actors, tools and so on. Constituents will also relate together differently. Sometimes the relationships between them are tacit but they can also be explicit. Autonomy codes identify and analyse the boundaries around constituents and show how they relate together using the concepts of 'positional autonomy' and 'relational autonomy'. Positional autonomy (PA) describes the relations between the positions of constituents in a context or category. PA can be stronger or weaker (PA+/PA-). Relational autonomy (RA) concerns the relations between principles and ways of working in a particular context or category and the principles in another context or category. In other words, RA refers to the way things are arranged in relation to each other. RA can also be stronger or weaker (RA+/RA-). Adendorff and Blackie (2020:243) provide a simple explanation of PA and RA thus:

. . . if a practice says there should be stronger boundaries between what is in this context and what lies beyond, that is stronger positional autonomy (PA+) and if it effectively announces that there should be stronger boundaries between how we do things here and how they are done elsewhere that is stronger relational autonomy (RA+).

As with other dimensions of LCT, these relations can be mapped onto a plane:

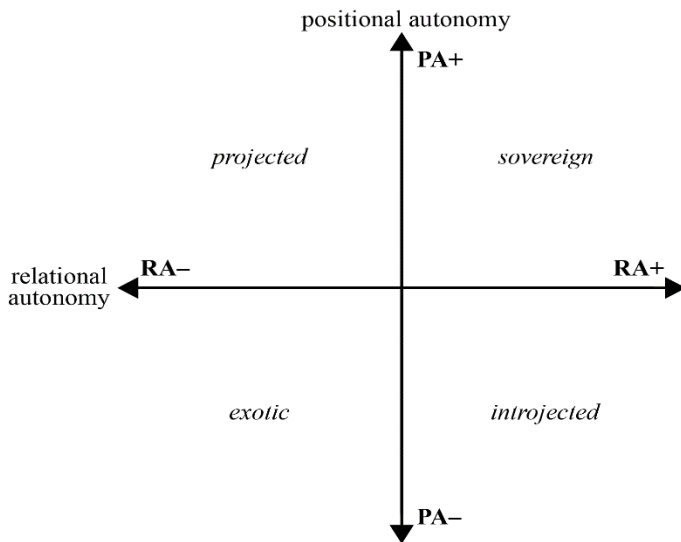


Figure 8: The autonomy plane (Maton & Howard, 2018:6)

Vorster (2020) uses the dimension of autonomy to examine Academic Development as a practice, noting its potential to explain the poor uptake of opportunities on the part of academic teachers to engage with professional development programmes. The concept of positional autonomy has the potential to describe, for example, the relations between academic developers and other actors in an institution (for example, senior managers and academic teachers). In cases where academic developers are appointed as professional or support staff, the relations between them and academic teachers would be PA+. When academic developers are understood and appointed as fully fledged academics, the relations between them and academics would be PA-. Academic Developers draw on a set of theories from the field of higher education studies to explain, amongst other things, teaching, learning and assessment. Amongst academic developers relational autonomy is weak (RA-). Academic teachers draw on other principles and theories and, although they need to teach and assess, are generally more interested in the phenomena or objects bound by their discipline, than in teaching and learning per se. The relational autonomy between academic teachers and academic developers is therefore strong (RA+).

Vorster uses a series of interviews with actors at different kinds of institutions in the South African system to show how academic developers are legitimated in the different institutions. In doing this, she builds on the insights developed in Gosling's (2009) survey of directors of Academic Development in South Africa by beginning to explain the principles underpinning the wide range of practices and positions he identified.

Adendorff and Blackie (2020) also draw on the dimension of autonomy, this time in an analysis of a video of an interaction between students and academics in the protests of 2015 and 2016. As already indicated the protests called for the decolonisation of the curriculum, and the video, shared widely on social media, drew comment internationally. Adendorff and Blackie see the dispute in the video as stemming from participants in the dispute drawing on different 'gazes', a concept drawn from the dimension of specialisation. However, they go on to use the dimension of autonomy to note that the demands of the Fallists in the video clip are located in an exotic code (RA-/PA-) and those of the western trained scientists responding to them in a sovereign code (PA+/RA+) 'making only occasional tours to the projected code and introjected code' (p.247). As a result, the speakers in the video clip are alienated from each other.

The use of codes from the autonomy plane then allow Adendorff and Blackie to go on and ask what a decolonised curriculum in science might look like. They suggest that what Maton and Howard (2018) term an 'autonomy tour', involving the inclusion of codes other than the dominant sovereign code, might be a possibility. They conclude that this is still not enough as it does not involve thinking about 'how the object of study itself is constituted, what tools are used to study it and what concepts are used to frame it' (Garuba, 2015).

Garraway and Reddy (2016) draw on the dimension of autonomy to explore assessment in relation to work-integrated learning, pointing out that if assessment takes place in the workplace it is likely to look to practice but that if it takes place in the university, it is more likely to look towards the curriculum. The concept of autonomy is therefore well suited to exploring assessment in a work-integrated learning context. Garraway and Reddy explore assessment in four clusters of programmes in the environmental, chemical/biological, applied mathematical and agricultural sciences. As all the clusters were in the sciences, strong PA (PA+) would refer to a strong focus on scientific theory and practice in the formal curriculum of the university. Weak PA (PA-) would reference principles and theories from the field of practice. With respect to relational autonomy, where the knowledge and practices required by assessment were used to privilege the science curriculum then the RA would be strong (RA+). When knowledge was being used to further something outside the science curriculum then the RA would be weaker (RA-).

Like Adendorff and Blackie (2020), Garraway and Reddy (2016) draw on the concept of an 'autonomy journey' that takes students through the quadrants of the autonomy plane, showing that, in the programmes they examined, students were given opportunities to rework university knowledge for the workplace and workplace knowledge for the university. However, what they had not expected to find was the emergence of an 'exotic code' (RA-/PA-) in which work-integrated learning was understood to 'privilege the advancement of students' knowledge of workplaces so that they [could] come to understand how the field function[ed]' (p.305). The identification of an exotic code was an indication of the university curriculum and the workplace not being integrated.

As noted at the beginning of this section, LCT is a relatively new theory but its potential to illuminate issues in teaching and learning has emerged very quickly. A recent publication (Clarence, 2021) focuses on making LCT accessible for academic teachers to use in their own work, with the aim of promoting its use as a lens to illuminate problems. What emerges quite clearly from the review of work already produced is how researchers on teaching and learning are using a particular theoretical lens in an attempt to build the systematic knowledge necessary to address problems in teaching and learning in South African higher education identified by Shay (2012).

4.5. Capabilities theory

Capabilities theory draws on the work of economist Amartya Sen, who has long been associated with a concern for social justice. The capability approach is rooted in a critique of other approaches to understanding human wellbeing that are concerned with concepts such as standards of living and justice as a form of fairness (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). According to Sen (1993:30), 'capabilities are opportunities or freedoms to achieve what an individual collectively considers valuable'. In education, the idea of 'what an individual collectively considers valuable' contrasts with dominant approaches where policy makers determine what learners should achieve as a result of being educated. Theorists such as Bernstein (2000) and Bourdieu (1988) and, indeed, Marx, have criticised the way education works to ensure that individuals develop the knowledge and skills that will allow them to act as members of the social groups to

which they are deemed to belong. A capabilities approach to education requires that individuals should not be constructed as a means to economic growth or social stability but, rather, that the individual her/himself is the end of the process. For this to happen, a capabilities approach does not involve asking people what they want, as this would likely result in those with most power being privileged, but rather in creating the conditions which will allow individuals themselves to take decisions based on what *they* value. These conditions will vary depending on the context. A capabilities approach thus involves developing the conditions that will allow people 'to choose the lives that they have reason to value' (Sen, 1992:81).

Another key concept in the capabilities approach is that of 'functionings', defined as achieved outcomes. In schooling, reading might be a functioning. Walker and Unterhalter (2007:4) note that the 'difference between a capability and a functioning is one between opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome'. Key to this distinction is that the same functionings may be underpinned by very different capabilities. Taking a capabilities approach requires researchers to evaluate the opportunity each individual had to achieve what they valued, and not simply evaluate the achievement itself. This allows us to see equality very differently.

A capabilities approach requires that people are accorded the agency to be active participants in social life and that individuals have the ability to shape their own life rather than having it shaped for them. This means that questions need to be asked about the extent to which individuals are recognised as having equal claims on opportunities and resources, a situation which was not the case in, for example, apartheid South Africa. Black learners did not have the freedom to choose or to shape their lives, as their choices were limited by the lack of opportunities available to them. When this happens, agency is diminished.

In South African higher education, the use of the capabilities approach is most strongly associated with the work of Melanie Walker, SARChI chair located at the University of the Free State, and colleagues at the Miratho Centre. Much of Walker's work has been 'philosophical' in nature in that she has reflected on issues such as the contribution of universities to the public good (Walker & McLean, 2013) and employability (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). A capabilities approach has been used to address the idea of pedagogy and what can be socially just (Walker & Wilson-Strydom, 2017), although essays comprising the collection do so from a global and not only a South African perspective.

Wilson-Strydom (2014, 2015) uses a capabilities approach to trouble the question of access to higher education, arguing the need to rethink the concept of 'readiness'. The result of her study is the identification of seven capabilities for university readiness: practical reason (the ability to make choices about study in higher education that are well informed); knowledge and imagination (the ability to identify and understand multiple perspectives and complex problems); learning disposition (the curiosity and desire to learn); social relations and social networks (the ability to participate and work with others on complex tasks); respect, dignity and recognition (having respect for oneself and for others); emotional health (being free from fear); and competence in the language of teaching and learning. Pym (2017) also deals with the construct of access by using a capabilities approach to examine the elements of what is termed an 'extended programme with an integrated foundation phase' in Commerce at a historically white South African university, which aims to promote access and success for black working class students. A capabilities approach has also been used to inform the development of disability-inclusive policy for South African universities (Mutanga & Walker, 2015).

4.6. A pedagogy of discomfort, critical hope and the ethics of care

The concept of a 'pedagogy of discomfort' arises from the work of Boler (2004), who argues for the need for the assumptions of students and academic teachers to be 'decentred' in a process that facilitates discomfort but, at the same time, is supportive. Boler & Zembylas (2003:107) note that

. . . asking students to radically re-evaluate their world views . . . can incur feelings of anger, grief, disappointment and resistance, but the process also offers students new windows on the world . . . [and] requires not only cognitive but emotional labour.

Boler and Zembylas proceed to identify three 'models of difference': the celebration/tolerance model, the denial/sameness model and the natural response/biological model. The celebration/tolerance model acknowledges difference and argues that it should be respected. However, in doing so, it ignores structural discrimination and only tolerates, rather than celebrates, some differences. The model often leads to legislation to protect rights in neo-liberal societies, although Boler and Zembylas point to the irony that that dominant cultural norms are not seen to be in need of protection. The denial/sameness model attempts to elide difference and results in claims that people do not 'see' difference, a stance which denies those who are different from the dominant norm. The response/biological model claims that differences are inborn and that fear of difference is thus 'natural'. As a result, fear is used to the detriment of other groups, a response often seen in the actions of police across the world. Boler and Zembylas go on to claim that adherence to any of these models is an unwillingness to see how differences are produced as well as a reluctance to re-construct one's own beliefs and values.

Related to the construct of a pedagogy of discomfort is the notion of 'critical hope'. Zembylas (2013) and Boler (2004, 2013) make a distinction between 'critical hope' and 'naive hope', where critical hope involves acknowledging the injustices in society and the ways in which privilege is forged at the expense of the abilities of others. Naive hope, in contrast, is described by Boler (2004:36) as being construed by 'platitudes that directly serve the hegemonic interest of maintaining the status quo', where 'platitudes' would include beliefs in hard work and equal opportunity. For Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen and Boler (2013), the attainment of critical hope is dependent on the reflexivity that they see as leading to transformative action.

It is not hard to see the potential of a pedagogy of discomfort and the nurturing of critical hope in a country such as South Africa where, in spite of the shift to democracy, the legacy of apartheid continues to impact on students, academic teachers and institutions themselves. What is different now, however, is the intersectionality of race and other characteristics, especially social class, in structuring the way students gain access to different types of university, levels of qualifications and the subject areas associated with them, as well as the way they experience the opportunities afforded to them once they have access to higher education and even in the same institution.

The use of a pedagogy of discomfort and the notion of 'critical hope' were explored in a project that brought together psychology, social work and occupational therapy students from two very different institutions in the Western Cape – the University of Stellenbosch and the University of the Western Cape. Students completed a module on community, self and identity at the institutions at which they were registered, but were required to interact with each other across disciplinary and institutional boundaries in three workshops at the beginning, middle and end of the learning period. Leibowitz, Bozalek, Carolissen, Nicholls, Rohleder and Swartz (2010) explore the impact of the interaction on both students and educators. The students, who were all

being trained for 'caring professions', identified the impact of the experience on their own understanding of themselves, as well as the emotional demands it imposed. Although those teaching on the project had anticipated the demands it would make of students, they had not realised that they themselves would also be impacted.

Another concept associated with the work of Bozalek (see, for example, Bozalek, McMillan, Marshall, November, Daniels & Sylvester, 2014; Bozalek, Mitchell, Dison, & Alperstien, 2016) is that of Tronto's (1993) 'ethics of care' in academic development practices. In contrast to other approaches that view humans as disembodied, rational and autonomous, ethics of care approaches see them as relational beings. For Tronto (1993:10), care is

. . . a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Care is seen to comprise five elements: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust. Attentiveness involves recognising and acknowledging need, which is then taken up in the responsibility to address it. Competence relates to the need for care work to be done well, and responsiveness to the reactions of the receiver of care to the care itself, since care itself inevitably involves vulnerability and inequality. The final element, trust, is seen as holding the other elements together.

Bozalek et al. (2014) explore the use of an ethics of care perspective in professional development at one university in order to evaluate its usefulness as a normative framework for evaluating this area of practice. In doing so, they point to the tendency for professional development activities to be evaluated within an efficiency framework that, for example, privileges the agency of academics to drive improvement in, for example, throughput and dropout rates. For Bozalek et al. (2014:457),

. . . [t]he political ethics of care thus provides a holistic framework to make judgements about how well professional development practices and processes are able to meet identified needs. It provides a way of establishing where imbalances between the elements may be impacting on how well care is practised.

A second piece of work (Bozalek et al., 2016) explores the use of an ethics of care framework in a course aimed at providing participants with insights into the way technologies could be used to enhance teaching and learning, showing how awareness of the elements of the framework were used by course participants as they gave and responded to feedback.

The use of ethics of care as a normative framework in the field of academic development is taken up by Bozalek and Winberg (2018) in a special issue of the *South African Journal of Higher Education* (32(6)) devoted to papers presented at a conference which aimed to explore what higher education might look like if it were guided by an ethics of care framework. In one of the papers in the special edition, Tronto (2018) argues that academic developers face a special challenge in relation to the way they locate themselves and their work. Do they simply work towards helping students and staff to accept their place in a world that is unjust, or do they aim to transform inequalities? In many respects, and as indicated in the early sections of this review, this dilemma has split the Academic Development movement since its earliest days, with early work focused on assimilation until challenges emerged from the mid 1980s onwards arguing the need for institutions themselves to change. These two positions continue to co-exist in work on

teaching and learning and in policy and policy-related work. While, for example, the DHET's University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) (DHET, 2017) draws on discourses of transformation, the Student Development sub-programme funds initiatives such as supplemental instruction and 'psycho-social support', long criticised by those drawing on the need for widescale curriculum reform and other changes if South African universities are to meet the needs of a changed student body.

At least one university, the University of the North West, is now using the concept of an ethics of care as a framework to guide teaching and learning in the institution. How, in what ways, and to what extent the concept may be shifted from its position in a concern for structural inequality to a liberal concern with equal opportunity in practice is yet to emerge.

4.7. Student engagement

Work on the way students engage with the learning expected of them in a university in South Africa is most strongly associated with the Siyaphumalela project funded by the Kresge Foundation. Siyaphumalela has its roots in another Kresge funded project in the United States known as 'Achieving the Dream', which aims to promote access to higher education via community colleges for marginalised groups. Key to 'Achieving the Dream' is the use of data analytics to find out what works and what does not work in promoting access and success. Data analytics also underpin the Siyaphumalela project.

Student engagement data is used to develop 'evidence-based' understandings of the time and effort expended by students on their studies in the context of resources provided by different universities. The problem with using data is that it is simply data until viewed through a theoretical lens. Strydom (2017) cites Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), who note that some of the best predictors of whether or not a student will succeed are academic preparation and motivation. The problem is that it is possible to construct 'academic preparation' in very different ways depending on the extent to which higher education is seen as neutral and, therefore potentially open to all, or whether it is understood as a profoundly social, cultural and political phenomenon structured to privilege some ways of being over others (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In a similar vein, and depending on the stance taken, it is possible not to see motivation if it is not demonstrated in ways that are recognisable to some social groups.

One of the problems with the work on student engagement conducted under the Siyaphumelela project is that it does not necessarily make clear the ideological assumptions on which it is based, in spite of the fact that Strydom and Foxcroft (2017:28) point out that studies of student engagement do aim to produce intersectional analyses, and 'richer understandings of how multiple social identities interact help to avoid the challenge of advancing equality in one area while perpetuating inequalities in other areas'. Student engagement research is also reliant on students' self-reports and, as Strydom and Foxcroft point out in relation to the use of learning strategies, these can be problematic. In one survey of first-year students all, irrespective of race, gender or whether they were first in their families to go to a university, believed they were well prepared. However, other data (see for example, CHE, 2020) shows that attrition at first-year level is a persistent problem.

In spite of these critiques, the appeal of student engagement research is strong and many universities draw on it to develop approaches to improving teaching and learning. The extent to which work on student engagement contributes to the building of the systematic knowledge called for by Shay (2012) is, however, questionable.

4.8 Decolonial theory

The student protests of 2015 and 2016 saw students calling not only for free higher education but also for the decolonisation of curricula and of institutions themselves. A number of researchers such as Behari-Leak (2019, 2020), Behari-Leak and Mokou (2019), Fataar (2016) and Heleta (2016) have drawn on the work of thinkers such as Freire (1970/1996), de Sousa Santos (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Grosfuegel (2011) and Mignolo (2001, 2011) to echo the calls made by students. This work cites the imposition of forms of knowledge and ways of knowing imported to South Africa from the Global North as 'epistemic violence' and as depriving indigenous peoples of their humanity.

Behari-Leak (2019) reports on the work of a Curriculum Change Working Group, 'established as a 'black-led, inclusive and broadly representative grouping, comprising academics and students traditionally excluded from formal institutional structures and processes of curriculum oversight' (CCWG 2018:1, in Behari-Leak 2019), at a historically white, research-intensive university. In reflecting on the work of the group, Behari-Leak identifies resistance encountered to the idea of decolonisation. What is really important to note, however, is that resistance to change at the level of curriculum is deeply embedded in the system itself. Although the introduction of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2014) was not framed by the need for decolonisation, it nonetheless offered an opportunity for institutions to engage with widescale curriculum review. The response to the need to register qualifications on the sub-framework was largely technical, however, with concerns focusing on meeting the requirements of qualifications described on the framework particularly with regard to credit values and HEQSF levels. At many universities, centres and units with responsibility for curriculum development and review have been established largely in response to the requirements for the accreditation of programmes developed by the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004). What has arguably become the case is that sets of practices related to curriculum development have been 'proceduralised' (Gamble, 2006) and have come to constitute the 'set[s] of principles or codes for good practice' identified by Shay (2012:321) as 'craft knowledge'. Decolonial theory has the potential to allow for the emergence of the systematised, theorised knowledge identified by Shay as key to taking the field of educational development forward. The use of this theory allows the curriculum to be reconceptualised, and for students' experiences as they engage with curricula in specific knowledge areas to be seen differently. Many universities have established institution-wide projects aimed at curriculum renewal within the decolonial turn. What is now needed is research on the way decolonial theory can be used to reconstruct the actual practice of curriculum development.

Jansen's (2019) edited collection of essays offers a range of insightful observations on what is termed 'doing decolonisation'. Le Grange (2019), for example, notes that even though indigenous knowledges are officially recognised in Australasia, the tendency has been to incorporate other forms of knowledge and ways of knowing as specific modules in a largely unchanged curriculum structure. Another author in the collection, Lis Lange (2018), makes an important distinction between the 'academic curriculum', or the practices of knowledge and knowing in teaching, learning and assessment, and the 'institutional curriculum', manifest in rules, regulations related to change and authority. Efforts to decolonise are therefore about more than simply working with and engaging with academic teachers, as there is also work to be done in challenging institutional arrangements within the university itself. This latter task presents challenges for many working in teaching and learning because of their roles in centres and units on the periphery of academic life, and because of their own lack of academic status in comparison to powerful actors at institutional level. All this points to the need to conceptualise decolonisation as widely as possible.

Related to the use of decolonial theory is the concept of 'humanising pedagogy' emanating from the work of Freire (1970/1996) and taken up by Salazar (2013). Humanising pedagogy has been introduced by at least one university⁵ as part of an overarching teaching and learning strategy. Section 4.6 above identifies the need to be wary of concepts such as an 'ethic of care' being misappropriated, with the result that a concern for inequity and inequality is neglected. The same caution needs to be applied to humanising pedagogy, which can so easily slip into understandings of the need for those who wield more power in teaching and learning relationships to be 'nice' to students by enquiring about their lives outside the academy. Drawing on a humanising pedagogy requires constant vigilance with regard to the way power plays out in relation to knowledge and ways of knowing.

5. Conclusion

This review of the literature in the field of teaching and learning in South African higher education began with the claim that it is necessary to see research in relation to the context from which it emerged. The overview of work in the field presented at the beginning of the review identified two main conceptual understandings of work on teaching and learning: work which sees problems as located 'in' students and, slightly later, work which sees students' learning experiences as emerging from the structural and cultural arrangements of universities themselves.

The review then engaged with an important piece of work on the nature of knowledge on teaching and learning, mostly generated by those working in the field of Academic Development (Shay, 2012), which argues for the need for a body of theorised, 'systematic' knowledge in contrast to the 'craft' knowledge which characterised many reports on practice. As a result of this call for the need to produce a body of systematic knowledge, the review then moved to explore the way a number of theories had been used in teaching and learning in South African higher education.

A number of observations can be made at this point. The first is that it is clear that different theoretical lenses are being brought to bear on problems that have long troubled those working in the field including assessment and curriculum design. What is apparent is that the use of these lenses illuminates the way structural and cultural conditions in universities work to advantage some and disadvantage others. However, the research reviewed in Section 4 of the review has largely been produced by groups of researchers located at a few historically white universities that have developed or maintained teaching and learning centres or departments of higher education studies over a long period of time. In contrast, the bulk of the work on teaching and learning drawing on what Shay terms 'craft' knowledge is produced by researchers/practitioners who have much less experience in the field and who are located in centres or units with less of the 'intellectual capital' built over time. To what extent then, can the knowledge building on the part of a small set of researchers often drawing on data from privileged contexts be said to be building systematic knowledge of teaching and learning in the South African system?

One of the most persistent problems in teaching and learning in South Africa has been the need to develop a cadre of scholar-practitioners who can draw on, undertake research in, and engage in the theorising necessary to inform practice in a sustained manner. Although efforts are being made to develop this expertise, whether or not they will succeed in producing the people who can do the heavy work of theory building has yet to be seen.

⁵ Nelson Mandela University, see <https://www.mandela.ac.za/Learning-and-Teaching>

A second observation relates to the fact that most attempts to advance the systematic knowledge called for by Shay have drawn on theory produced in the Global North. It is only recently that theory produced in the Global South has been drawn upon to reconceptualise students' experiences of learning in South African universities (see, for example, Behari-Leak 2019, 2020; Behari-Leak and Mokou, 2019). This work is still relatively broad in that it does not provide a close-up examination of pedagogy and assessment, with the result that we still do not have accounts of what, say, a decolonised pedagogy could look like in practice. Following Shay's (2012) call for systematised, theorised knowledge to be produced in the field of educational development, we need work that will draw on finely grained explorations of students' experiences as they are assessed, taught and learn from a perspective in decolonial theory. It is only when this work is produced and engaged with that we can begin to say that a systematised, theorised body of knowledge appropriate to the African continent is being produced.

6. References

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