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Projections on (re)designing pedagogical pathways towards decolonial praxis in postgraduate literacy education

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ABSTRACT

What would it mean to teach a postgraduate course about literacy education in South Africa in a way attuned to place, bodies, ways of being, and decolonial knowledge making? In this paper, we engage with this question through reflections and projections on our ongoing work of curriculum re-design of a master's level course on literacy theories. This course, which we have taught three times since 2018, seeks to place the existing theoretical architecture of sociocultural literacy under pressure, asking whether these various frameworks still hold relevance for literacy education in South Africa in this post-Fallist and, more recently, post-Covid-19 reality. In each iteration of the course, we have invited students to think together with us about how literacy education in the Global South might respond to the opposing forces of globalisation and decolonisation. Yet, each time, the course has flowed differently as the configuration of bodies, identities, languages, knowledges, dispositions, affects, and materialities of learning mode has changed year by year. We aim to map the pedagogical pathways, in the sense of "configurations that guide the constraints and potentialities shaping the movement of pedagogy" (Madden, 2015:2) of the course. We draw on decolonial theory and transhumanist ideas of relational ontologies to explore selected incidents when significant discursive, affective, institutional, and material elements crystallised into patterns revealing of the ways in which coloniality can be either reproduced or challenged within our particular context. Emerging insights relate to assessment issues, multimodal tasks, article selection, and student reflections across time, and gesture towards a decolonial praxis. We conclude by projecting the lessons learned into the course's future redesign.

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Introduction

What would decolonial pedagogy look like, practically, in a postgraduate course taught in a South African university? As lecturers at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) School of Education, we engage with this question through reflections and projections on our ongoing work of curriculum re-design of a master's level course on literacy education theories. Madden (2015:2) distinguishes between "pedagogical pathways", that is, "configurations that guide the constraints and potentialities shaping the movement of pedagogy", and the flow of pedagogy, which is "the flow of movement" in the actual classroom that "generates immeasurable, unpredictable, additional productions". Pedagogical pathways are mapped out in fairly static ways by established norms and practices, such as assumptions about teaching and learning, or the central themes planned for a course, or institutional requirements around assessment. These (relative) constants can be delineated with some degree of certainty. In contrast, pedagogy as the learning journey is emergent and unpredictable, and always-already exceeds the constraints of pedagogical pathways. The distinction between pathways and pedagogies ensures that the emergent outcomes of what happens in a particular class, with a particular cohort, is not misrepresented as a predetermined outcome brought about by the 'givens' of context combined with the teacher's deliberate choices and plans. Rather, we understand identities, choices, agency, affect, and meaning as distributed across and appearing in the relations between human and more-than-human players in the pedagogical space.

Of the many factors in the pedagogical space of this course, this paper focuses on the relations between knowledge systems and ways of doing knowledge ("knowledging") that we, lecturers and students, bring to the classroom. We draw on various strands of decolonial and Southern epistemological theory, which share the founding insight that the Western understanding of the world is incomplete, and that the diversity of ways of being, thinking, and feeling making up the world exceed any single epistemological tradition (Santos, 2012; Botha, Griffiths & Prozesky, 2021). By working within established pedagogical pathways, and shifting these pathways in transformative directions, we aim to refuse the coloniality in which the South African higher education (HE) system (as all over the world) is deeply implicated, and recentre the work of teaching and learning in local epistemologies and ontologies. This article's contribution is its focus on evolving decolonial praxis, drawing on Walsh's view that "decoloniality in/as praxis necessitates… ongoing processes of thought-analysis-reflection-action" (2020:606). We ask: what pedagogical pathways can we as

lecturers put in place, to foster decolonial knowledging? The theory on which we draw is not yet built on what Santos calls "an epistemology of the South", that is,

> new processes of production and valorisation of valid knowledges … and of new relations among different types of knowledge on the basis of the practices of the classes and social groups that have suffered, in a systematic way, the oppression and discrimination caused by capitalism and colonialism. (2012:51)

Rather, the aim of the transformative pedagogical pathways we envision is, as we explain in the theoretical section below, to build such a Southern epistemology located in the specifics of the South African context. Our focus in this paper is pedagogical, developing locally responsive ways in which we as lecturers and students can become more aware of how we are "entangled in relations" of otherness and difference through which concepts, meanings, affects, and identities come to be for us (Springgay & Truman, 2019:204).

In the flow of pedagogy that emerges in a particular iteration of a pedagogical pathway, as unique arrangements of patterns form and reform, moments of increased intensity arise around pedagogical productions. Madden calls these points of intensity "pedagogical nodes" (2015:2) and contends that they are never the same twice. At these nodes, relations of knowing, being, and making show up for noticing as their interactions spark intensity of learning or resistance. Our aim in this article is to explore selected incidents from the 2018, 2021, and 2023 iterations of the course, when significant discursive, affective, institutional, and material elements crystallised into patterns revealing of the ways in which epistemic coloniality is both reproduced and challenged within our particular context.

The complexity of the knowledge space in which our literacy course operates is increased by South Africa's complex colonial and apartheid history. Our student body includes white settlers, brown and yellow settlers, and multiple Indigenous communities, all of whose epistemologies and world views are entwined in a long history of subjugation and resistance too complex to analyse with any finality. As lecturer-researchers, it is essential to interrogate our own complex positionalities as white, settler, middle-class, cisgender women in particular, as this positionality shapes, in ways both conscious and unconscious, how we plot the pedagogic pathways of the course in question and the relational norms of our pedagogy. We attempt to sustain this strand of reflective inquiry as we discuss our decision-making in relation to both the pedagogic pathways we set up for the course as well as the in-the-moment decisions we make in the flow of interactions with students, taking stock of the tensions and stumbling blocks we encounter. After a brief course description, we outline our theoretical framework and methodology. Thereafter the bulk of the article deals with three

moments or "pedagogical nodes" (Madden 2015) selected from past iterations of the course, which provide us with the opportunity to move between past praxis and future praxis. We thus seek to project forward into what Santos (2012:54) describes as "a future of plural and concrete possibilities, utopian and realist at one time, and constructed in the present by means of activities of care".

Course description and aims

The course in question is a semester-length module in the taught master's programme, titled *Critical Literacy, New Literacy Studies and Multiliteracies*. As the name indicates, the course dealt with the social turn in literacy theory and education (applied linguistics) when the cognitivist, psycholinguistic approach to literacy as a neutral set of cognitive processes was challenged by sociocultural approaches that see literacy as a social practice embedded in the cultural contexts in which it occurs. In redesigning the course for its 2018 iteration, we envisaged reframing it within a decolonial epistemic framework. In short, we were asking the question (simplistically put): if the social turn in literacy studies was a reaction against the limitations of the cognitivist, psycholinguistic approach to literacy, then had literacy theory in South Africa reached a point in its local trajectory where we were in need of a decolonial turn to address the limitations of the literacy theories bequeathed to us by the social turn?

One of the course aims was "To critically explore the changing nature of literacy and the teaching of literacy, especially in relation to the South African context and the imperative to develop a decolonial curriculum and decolonised pedagogical practices" (2018 Course Outline). We wanted to create, with the students, tools, structures, and dispositions to be able to 'do decolonial praxis' in their own, varied literacy and language education contexts.

Theoretical framework

Much work on epistemological decolonisation centres Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which, as Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) emphasise, are not fossilised, but rather have always been alive and adaptive in highly localised ways when encountering colonial knowledge across history. In the South African context of high cultural diversity, and a long colonial and then apartheid history of traumatic social displacement and deliberate cultural erasure, IKSs do persist, but in multiple and fluid forms entangled with competing systems of thought. We therefore approach our classroom as a multicultural, multilingual, multi-epistemic space, to which each learner and educator brings their

heritage, not in the sense of "something of the past but rather as something in flux and intrinsic … based on [their] own personal lived experiences and intersectionality" (Meighan, 2023:296). The classroom is a transcultural "knowledge interface" (Nakata *et al*., 2012:124), although this fact is often occluded by the dominance of Western knowledge forms in the colonial HE institution.

This paper tracks our search for a more deliberate praxis of negotiating this interface in ways that recentre Southern knowledges and foster their emergence in our classroom. Heugh, Harding-Esch and Coleman (2021:45) use "transknowledging" to refer to the "two-way (reciprocal) process of knowledge translation, exchange, production and transfer". Nakata *et al*. (2012:124) develop a similar concept that they call "decolonial knowledge making that re-asserts and draws in concepts and meanings from Indigenous knowledge and systems of thought and experience of the colonial." However, such descriptions assume a kind of transparency to Indigenous knowledge, such that it is stable and available for grasping and sharing. In contrast, Meighan speaks of "transepistemic" work (2023) and foregrounds interrogating the ontological assumptions underlying specific "worldviews" by means of analysing how languages themselves reflect these assumptions. His move inadvertently illustrates the power and challenge of such an approach: as Oyěwùmí (2005:4) points out, the term "worldview" follows the particular "cultural logic" of the Western tendency to privilege the visual, whereas other cultures may privilege other senses. She therefore prefers "world-sense", a less culturally biased term for the always-already situatedness of the processes accepted as valid in a particular community for producing, validating, reproducing and representing knowledge. The aim is to arrive at what Mellor (2022:32) calls "a dialectical understanding of the relationship between bodies of knowledge, whereby different knowledge traditions are formed and positioned in complex relations to each other". This will involve, Santos argues, a "doubly transgressive sociology of absences and emergences" (2012:47). The sociology of absences involves studying how non-hegemonic knowledges and ontologies are actively produced as non-existent or impossible by the "monocultural rationality" of global Western thought. The sociology of emergences pays attention to "the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities" once multiple non-hegemonic knowledges are taken as valid (2012:56). In a pluriversal world, care is the central axiological principle, rather than progress: we value the range of available knowledge traditions, we take seriously the possibilities they open for the future (Santos, 2012). Such care begins with an ethical stance of recognising another knower as the authority on their knowledging, which requires a lived acknowledgement that one's own culture and knowing are incomplete. This stance is incompatible with both a parochial focus on one's own epistemological traditions only, and wilful

ignorance about the damage done by Western epistemic assumptions of universality and neutrality (see Zembylas *et al*., 2014 on irresponsibility or refusal to care).

Such transepistemic work involves not only an ongoing process of meaning-making, but also – simultaneously – exploration of the ontological assumptions underlying our being as knowers. In terms of the hierarchies of coloniality, every member of the class is always-already positioned along multiple intersectional axes of race, gender, ethnicity, language, and epistemology, in complex dynamics of privilege within the classroom space. Decolonising knowledge means uncovering these loci of enunciation, in other words the "geo-political and body-political" locations of the subject who speaks (Grosfoguel, 2011), so in opening the classroom space to transcultural, transepistemic mapping, we discover, negotiate, and perform our positionalities as knowers. In our contemporary world characterised by migration, globalisation, and superdiversity, loci of enunciation "are complex and elusive" (Porto & Byram, 2022:407). Taking locus of enunciation seriously does not mean insisting on working exclusively within one particular (Indigenous or subaltern) knowledge system, but on practical engagement with knowledge and knowers at the "place and people and communities … the ground on which we stand as we speak" (Canagarajah, interview in Porto, 2021:9, in Porto & Byram, 2022:407).

However, multiple tensions run through such work, related to the assumptions underpinning the theory we choose to use. Very obviously, the colonial privilege of whiteness and how it is reproduced within HE spaces has to be acknowledged and refused. There is an enduring danger of appropriation and essentialising of subaltern knowledges, to serve the purposes of the neoliberal university. As white lecturers, we must retain a sense of "the importance of nurturing a consciousness of and intentionality about the roots and destination of the knowledge systems we seek to interact with and become a part of" (Lynch & Motha, 2021:6). Our diverse group of students bring to the class lived identities which "illustrate more expansive senses of self" than the individualist, capitalist approaches to identity prevalent in much Global North theory; we need to think through "the possibilities and complications that arise when localized notions of identity challenge and reformulate those dominant in the Global North" (Lynch & Motha, 2021:8). Many of our students who are non-Indigenous bring other non-white heritages reflecting the diversity of South Africa's colonial history. Other students can explore a range of Indigenous positionalities, negotiating the 'fit' between the axiological assumptions of Western academic knowledge, such as objectivity and abstractness, and those on which other kinds of knowledge are founded, for example, knowledge considered sacred which may be held unsuitable to share in the classroom

space. We need to find ways to let students "make sense of their [positionality and knowledge] work in their own terms" (Lynch & Motha, 2021:6). As lecturers, we work from a "non-innocent" position (Lather, 2007), always-already working within privileged academic knowledge traditions and discourses while striving to destabilize and decentralize them. We can only teach the students what we know, so to decolonise knowledge we as lecturers depend on the students in what must be a more radically horizontal relationship. If the pluriversal is our aim, power in the knowledge space of our classroom becomes "nomadic, and circulating rather than … unidirectional", and opens "the possibility of spaces in which no one isas yet the master versus the 'giving' people power more typical of 'emancipatory' projects" (Lather, 2007:46–47).

The hard question is how to achieve these aims in practice. Among the central means we use in mapping our pedagogical pathway is a disposition which Mellor (2022:32) calls "epistemic responsibility", and Funk (2021) calls "epistemic compassion". Epistemic responsibility requires that we educate ourselves about non-dominant epistemologies and repertoires, not with the aim of 'explaining' and so recolonising them, but rather discussing them alongside dominant and disciplinary knowledges as "part of an ecology of knowledges" (Santos 2014:193). Funk's (2021:2) notion of "cognitive compassion" also centres on relationality, emphasising the practice of "respecting multiple perspectives openly and with compassion" and so "support[ing] diverse relationships to diverse knowledges". While striving to remain critically reflexive about our privilege, we simultaneously understand our positions as teachers and researchers within the colonial university as placing on us an ethical duty to keep moving. We refuse to escape the discomfort of our noninnocence by "resorting to feelings that recentre [our] whiteness, (e.g. shame and guilt)" (Mikulan & Zembylas, 2024: xiv) or reasserting habits of ownership by "essentialia[zing] and diminish[ing] the complexity and contemporaneousness of Indigenous knowledge systems" (Mellor, 2022:32). With a disposition of critical relationality, we can strive towards a decolonial gaze (or decolonial sensing, to take Oyěwùmí 's point!) that is always incomplete but not therefore relativist or hopeless. Lather sees such knowledge-making not as relativism but as ethical relationship, arguing that

> the necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation lets us question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysis, transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings. Such a move is about economies of responsibility within non-innocent space, a 'within/against' location (2007:38).

Each iteration of the course with its pedagogical pathway is such a "failed account" that occasions new positionings. Our design and redesign of the course of necessity are profoundly personal,

localised, ongoing, incomplete, and iterative, a praxis of decolonial knowing and teaching that understands knowing practices, including self-knowing, as "lived, relational and embodied" (Burke & Crozier 2012:6, in Mellor, 2022:30). This article is a meditation on the conditions of possibility emerging in the MEd course we discuss.

Methodology

This research arose within our everyday teaching, in the middle of a busy year, as we completed the 2018 course and were talking about successes and problems we had encountered and scribbling notes for the next iteration. In other words, the research arose in what Deleuze and Guattari call "the middle", where one finds oneself asking questions from within the "immanent modes of thinking-making-doing [that] come from within the processes themselves, not from outside them" (Springgay & Truman, 2018:206). This research is a form of "speculative eventing" in which our thinking about the entangled relations of being and knowing in which we are involved changes those relations, and as teacher-researchers we are "situated and responsive" rather than removed and objective. In thinking back to and recounting our experiences of the three course iterations, we engage in something related to collaborative, multivocal autoethnography (Lapadat, 2017), in which as co-lecturers we collaboratively write, tell, interrogate, and analyse personal narratives, looking both "inward into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences – and outward into our relationships, communities and cultures" (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2015:46). Our method involved a cycle of conversations in which we retold impressions of pertinent moments in the course or returned to course documents and students' work; we followed the traces of affect or insight leading to those moments of intensity in the flow of pedagogy that we are calling nodes. Interspersed with the conversations were writing sessions, both individual and joint, in which we drafted accounts and analyses of these moments. Following a process akin to coding we navigated to those moments which distilled the most significant insights about knowledge-making and pathway design. The writing of this article was part of this ongoing process, occurring not outside of or after but "inside a research event" (Springgay & Truman, 2018:204) that is leading to the next iteration of the course. In this way we draw on the kind of action research methodology that Mendelowitz, Ferreira and Dixon call "pedagogy in motion", in which design during and between iterations combines

> the advance top-down pedagogy that comes from translating pedagogic theories into action; and … the pedagogy from below … that comes from practices that develop more spontaneously and can then be theorized (2023:72).

We are certainly involved in a curriculum design cycle (Laurillard, 2010), but our design practice resists a technicist understanding of curriculum as a 'tool' we use (as the subjects / teachers) to bring about learning in the students (objects). For us as scholar-teachers, research, curriculum design, and teaching are intimately connected, part of our ongoing subjectivity, as Freire recognized:

> I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself (1998:35).

Centrally, in this paper we pay attention to pedagogic nodes. By an intensity of pedagogical flow, be this affect, knowledge making, or epistemological dissonance, these nodes amplify the web of relations shaping the course's landscape. The aim is not to 'gather data from' the course's iterations, or 'extract meanings' that already or objectively 'exist in' our and the students' experiences of the course. Instead, we use a range of methods: reflecting on and narrating our memories of moments in the classroom, revisiting course documents (such as outlines, reading lists, and assessment briefs), returning to students' written work for the course, and rereading reflections from previous planning sessions and conference presentations (South African Education Research Association (SAERA) 2019, SoTL 2023) between the three course iterations. Our aim is to agitate further thinking, which is itself emergent praxis. We use these methods alongside and through ideas from critical decolonial- and feminist-informed epistemological reflexivity, to "activate problems and concepts in the midst of the event" (Springgay & Truman, 2018:207). In the sections that follow, we explore three pedagogical nodes, also referring to additional related moments, to bring out deepening understandings of possible tools, structures, and dispositions that can guide flexible, responsive pedagogies in our postgraduate course. The real-world problem we aim to solve is how to craft a pedagogical pathway that opens a cognitively compassionate space that can be filled by transepistemic work on any cultural interface, depending on which students take part in each iteration of the course and what cultural resources they bring with them. Simultaneously we contribute toward decolonial theorizing of a "new ethics and praxis of relationality and social justice" for higher education teaching (Mikulan & Zembylas, 2024:1).

Pedagogical nodes

Pedagogical Node 1: Contesting starting points or epistemological closure?

All three iterations of the course thus far have begun with a session in which we present to students a range of "what could arguably be considered key texts in the areas of New Literacy Studies (NLS),

Multiliteracies and Critical Literacy (CL)" (2018 Assessment Brief) and ask students to select one to read and report on, outlining for their peers the book's contribution to literacy theory.

In the 2018 iteration of the course, a student vociferously objected to the task of reading and presenting these key texts, which they saw as problematic in that they embodied mainstream Western colonial thought. In the moment, we felt that there was obvious validity to this position but that the student's critique was premature. After all, in plotting out the pedagogic pathway of the course in this way, our intentions had been two-fold: firstly, we wanted to re-turn to now well-established sociocultural theories of literacy and re-read them through a decolonial lens; secondly, we wanted to reduce the time normally allocated to this content. In other words, we sought to 'squeeze' the canon of sociocultural literacy theory into a much smaller curriculum space than usual to make space for alternative perspectives on literacy theory, Indigenous perspectives, Southern perspectives, and perspectives other than those associated with Western epistemic traditions of the Global North. We wondered whether the student's stance towards these texts taken in advance of reading them and based on the single criterion of who wrote them could be seen as a form of "epistemological closure" (Gordon, 2000 in Maldonado-Torres, 2011:4), which is seen as "antipathetic to theoretical reflection" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011:4). As Nakata *et al*. argue (2012:132), resorting to this kind of simplistic colonial critique "works to close down enquiry and limits students' understanding of the complexity being engaged in the decolonial project".

Alongside this insight, however, we have also come to recognise, contained in the intensity of this particular moment or pedagogical node, a pertinent critique of our choice of starting point. We were designing for decoloniality, yet our starting point was the colonial (if by colonial we mean mainstream dominant Western epistemic traditions of, in this case, literacy theory). We do not doubt that multiple different starting points are possible, many of which could conceivably have a more successful decolonial outcome. However, we were uncertain whether a different starting point was possible for us, as white academics who have been steeped in the Western episteme throughout our own graduate and (most of our) academic lives. Our locus of enunciation shapes our access to different epistemes – enabling or facilitating access to some and rendering access to others difficult or not possible. Like Lynch and Motha (2022:2),

> we are conscious that our ideas about who we are and what we teach are racialised and steeped within limited knowledge and ideologies cultivated within the Global North, [and seek] possibilities for us as … teacher educators to reach beyond these epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical boundaries.

Furthermore, we believe that when it comes to bodies of knowledge, while we may need to (re)centre marginalised knowledges, history has bequeathed us knowledges that are intertwined, entangled, and inseparable. As Walsh contends, "decoloniality does not mean the absence or overcoming of coloniality" (2020:606), but rather it means stirring up various forms of resistance, transgression and interruption of the colonial matrix of power and working towards centring previously marginalised ways of being and knowledging. It was a source of some concern for us that in preparation for the 2018 iteration of the course, we could find limited writing of local relevance on decolonising literacy that was suitable for use in the course. This is borne out by Chaka (2023), who found that gate-keeping mechanisms operating in academic publishing continue to legitimate and valorise Northern epistemes while simultaneously invisibilising contributions to knowledge made by Global South authors. The pedagogic pathway we laid out at that point was thus inevitably shaped by lack of available local scholarship. However, what we could do was pose the question about what it might look like to decolonise literacy education in South Africa, and we could create space for multiple responses to this question, from our students as well as from the relevant literature emerging from the Global South.

Pedagogic node 2: Planning pathways for emerging knowledging

In a session on decolonising digital literacies from the 2023 course, we were discussing a paper on digitising Aboriginal knowledges and literacies. The article explores the Yolŋu concept of "garma", which literally means the open ceremonial ground where different social groups come together. Garma has become an important metaphor in Yolŋu education for a curriculum that involves both Indigenous and mainstream Western knowledge in intercultural interplay, and for Yolŋu digital archives that aim to record Indigenous knowledge on its own epistemological terms (Van Gelderen & Guthadjaka, 2017:8). I (Maria) asked the students if they could think of a space or place that might function similarly in conceptualising a South African decolonizing curriculum. After some thought, one student suggested "iziko", the Zulu term for the central hearth in a rural home around which the family gathers in the evenings to listen to the elders, specifically the grandmother, tell stories. Several classmates agreed with some enthusiasm, noting that their related cultural traditions share this cultural practice that is socially and materially located in a special time and place. As lecturer, I had not planned this focus on garma – it emerged in the class discussion. The face-to-face mode of the class was important in allowing this emergence. A space did open, which Funk (2021:2) calls a "respectful sharing, co-creation" space, in which we as lecturers and students had begun to delink from the assumption that local concepts or practices can only be the object of theorizing in a

university classroom, never the conceptual tools for this theorizing. We moved, albeit momentarily, from being cultural spectators of the Yolŋu example, to decolonial knowledge-making rooted in the personal, lived experience of members of the class. In terms of dispositions, this was a moment of "cognitive compassion" (Funk, 2021:2) in which we openly respected multiple knowledge traditions.

However, the conversation did not proceed much further. As lecturer, I did try to guide the students to analyse the relationships between the oral literacies of the iziko space and the written literacies of academia. This would involve interrogating what De Souza (2016:3) calls the "logocentric valorization of alphabetic literacies and written cultures" that is part of the colonial university and its routines of knowledge production. (The class had read De Souza's article together earlier in the course). Nakata *et al*. (2012:121) suggest that it is at such "difficult intersections" between different knowledge systems that students can examine "the limits of their own thinking". In spending time in "open, exploratory, and creative inquiry" at these points, students can "buil[d] language and tools for describing and analysing what they engage with" – in other words, the complex layers of their knowledge-making experience between multiple knowledge systems. However, as a class we had not developed a praxis for managing emerging knowledge or for meaningfully registering the different relationships that different members of the class have with the different knowledges circulating in the classroom space.

A moment from the 2021 course reveals how important such consensus building is. As lecturers we asked students to brainstorm ideas for actual classroom activities that would let other repertoires of knowledge and literacy into a real South African classroom. One West African student said they would not take part in the task, because it is not the black person's role to teach whites how to undo their biases. Arguably, we had not given enough time before the activity to establish consensus, to check each other's assumptions about the cross-cultural sharing we as lecturers were suggesting. The student had not consented to the collaboration, and so his awareness of the very real, lived effects of colonial racialization led to epistemic closure. Had we attempted this pedagogical pathway with better preparation, the student may still have refused the interaction, but with the distributed circulation of knowledges, power, and agency more transparent to everyone in the classroom space. Verran (2015, in Funk, 2021:4) describes the space of transepistemic knowledge sharing not as consensus but "dissensus" or "going-on doing difference together". The act of refusal can then be fully meaningful as part of our collective "custodianship of knowledge", a "relationship with knowledge and its authorities as one of cognitive compassion and care instead of hoarding, hyper-productivity, or data mining" (Funk, 2021:4).

In fact, one of the 2023 students was arguably beginning to explore practical ways to enact cognitive compassion, by negotiating their relationship with various knowledges in a performative way via language. As the course progressed, the student began frequently referring to their Venda identity, for example prefacing their contribution to a discussion with a complaint that while they knew the Venda word, the English one they needed would not rise to their tongue. Quite possibly, both translanguaging and transknowledging were at play here. Canagarajah (2011) describes a translanguaging strategy called "symbolic competence", whereby participants in an international business meeting, for example, open the meeting by joking about their poor language skills; this is a strategy to create a suitable context and safe space for the negotiation of meaning that will follow. Symbolic competence creates "the possibility of resisting conventions and renegotiating contexts for alternate identities and meanings" (Canagarajah, 2011:15). We suggest that our student's performance of their Venda-ness was intended similarly to reshape not only the conventional academic language space but also the knowledge space of our discussion. The student was inviting us as participants in this intercultural and interlinguistic dialogue to have patience while they worked through what they wanted to say, while they introduced knowledge that was different from and outside of what is usually expected and welcomed in academic spaces. Moving forward, in the next iteration of the course, we need practical pedagogies for supporting such symbolic competence, across the time and space of the course's progression.

Pedagogic Node 3: To gambiarra a metaphor

Our third pedagogic node is an extended moment around two interrelated assessment tasks. In 2023, in the second session of the course, we engaged with a reading by Jacobs (2019) in which the author uses an object as a visual metaphor for her sense of herself in the world. It is a two-row wampum belt depicting a canoe and a ship parallel to one another. She describes it as "a document without words" (2019:60) that captures her hybrid digital life as a member of a Canadian First Nation (the Kanien'kehá:ka people) and simultaneously living in a contemporary multicultural ex-British colony. She explains that "colonialism has defined space for us both in the ships and in the canoes, our balancing act, day in and day out, is to ride that river with one foot firmly planted in each boat. This act is tough, but it is what we do in pursuit of the decolonial project: our lives" (2019:60). Following the discussion of this reading, students were asked to design their own visual metaphor that captured how they saw themselves in the world at that moment, attaching a 100-word paragraph that explained their design. We referred to this as Assignment 0 – it was not graded but it served to provide a non-linguistic, multimodal check-in point for students early in the course.

During the semester, a course reading by Duboc and De Souza (2021), titled "Delinking multiliteracies and the reimagining of literacy studies", stood out for us as particularly resonant. The authors reread multiliteracies through a decolonial lens and confront what they see as multiliteracies' "subjection to the digital" in the way it has come to be applied. Drawing from Windle, Silva, Moraes and Cabral (2017), they argue that the concept of design offered by the multiliteracies framework is not easily importable to the Brazilian context. In its stead they offer a new term, from the Global South, "gambiarra". They describe this as "a clumsy alternative metaphor to the neat notion of design in which teachers work on what they have at hand in a process that might include non-high-tech affordances" (2021:556). We spent time discussing the gambiarra metaphor in class, recognising its value for us as part of the Global South community.

While a collective search for a comparable South African term had proven unsuccessful, two weeks later, a reading by Stein (2003) unexpectedly provided us with a local case study that animated in a profound and multifaceted way the notion of gambiarra. In an early literacy story-telling project in an impoverished or 'under-resourced' rural school, teachers were working with their grades one and two learners to make doll figures to represent the characters in their stories. According to Stein, when the papier-mâché mixture that the teachers made for the learners to use in making their doll figures flopped, the learners "turned to their teachers and said, 'Don't worry, we'll make our own figures'" (2003:124). Within a few days, they brought to class a collection of dolls that they, with the help of female adults in their homes and communities, had fashioned out of various available recycled and/or upcycled materials (using, for example, plastic or glass bottles, fabric, bubble-wrap, etc.). This kind of creative improvisation and 'making do' with what is available fashions almost anything into a meaningful resource. Furthermore, by turning to their homes and communities and accessing gendered community funds of knowledge, learners tapped into cultural knowledge about fertility dolls, suggesting that the messy, unpredictable process of the gambiarra (as opposed to the more seamless process of design) (Duboc & De Souza, 2021) has the potential to access traditionally marginalised epistemes and new forms of knowledging.

The term gambiarra became a verb for us as a learning community and towards the end of the course we used it as a conceptual tool in a final reflective assessment task asking students to return to the visual metaphor they had designed in Assignment 0, and to redesign or gambiarra (Duboc & De Souza, 2021) their metaphor to reflect their loci of enunciation as researchers and teachers of literacy theories, there and then, at the end of the course. The metaphor had to be accompanied by a 1000-to-1200-word reflection that explained their (re)design and their redesign/gambiarra

process, and they had to refer to at least two course readings which had shaped their thinking and reflections over this semester.

Based on our reading of the work produced by students, we have identified four points of consideration when moving into future praxis. Firstly, the before-and-after format of the metaphor design task worked across the dimension of time in a way that allowed for reflection and made flows and changes in students' thinking and positionalities visible – to them (during the process of carrying out the task) and then to us (in our reading of their reflections). Secondly, students' written reflections spoke in critical and engaged ways about their selected readings and how they had impacted on their thinking. Overall, the data seemed to reflect a shift from a focus on the individual self in the first metaphor (wampum) and to a more socially located self in the gambiarra-ed metaphor. The choice of course readings can thus be seen as a form of concept selection that become available tools for students to draw on.

Thirdly, we found that the multimodal nature of the activity – drawing on visual tools and repertoires for the metaphor – was somewhat flattened by the students' use of the digital environment to access existing images rather than create their own. Additionally, in the redesigned metaphor, students seemed to stretch themselves further in their reflective writing than they did in their redesigned metaphor; they bypassed the creative potential of the multimodal and targeted the linguistic mode, which as the more familiar, valued way of expression in the academic context, was arguably more comfortable. The non-Western roots of this tool and the open-endedness were intended to give students licence to draw on other epistemic repertoires but there was not clear evidence of this.

Lastly, it would seem that assessment is a pedagogical node (Madden, 2015) in and of itself – not only because there is an intensity of engagement based on grades to be obtained, but also because it is a point of convergence between pedagogic pathways and pedagogic flows. This suggests that, if we can continue to seek ways of framing assessment tasks in relational ways that are locally grounded and encourage transepistemic moves, then it may be possible to leverage assessment for decolonial ends.

Projections

This is not a conclusion, but a projection into future praxis. It is what we have above called a pedagogy in motion, moving towards decolonial praxis in an "ongoing process of thought-analysis-reflection-action" (Walsh 2020:606). And in doing so, we sought to look at the absent and the emergent (Santos 2012) in both our pedagogic pathways and our pedagogic flows. What have we learned from our past praxis that we can project forward into the redesign of the next iteration of our course? In particular, what insights has our focused critical reflective analysis of the three pedagogical nodes offered us for the way we shape our pedagogic pathway? Returning to previous iterations of the course, and specifically the three pedagogical nodes, leads us to a new "speculative middle" (Springgay & Truman, 2018:206).

Overarchingly, we aim to continue developing ways of working compassionately (Funk, 2021), with care (Santos, 2012), within the relationalities of knowledge, and loci of enunciation or ways of being, to allow for the recentring of local knowledges. We seek practical strategies for grounding the epistemological journey of the course in the students' lived identities and varied repertoires, to disrupt the power imbalance between these knowledges and the canonical academic tradition, returning Global North theorizing to its proper place as a local, partial tradition (Santos, 2012). And it is for this reason that we are strongly drawn to two existing studies: Manathunga, Qi, Bunda and Singh's (2019) notion of "time mapping", which they apply as a visual life history methodology to transcultural supervision of doctoral education; and the "Footprints" exercise developed by Lynch and Motha (2021) to help English teachers reflect on their own ways of knowing and being.

Firstly, we can begin with the structures of course sequence and assessment, to give intensity to those fertile intersections between knowledge repertoires and commitments. To open the course, we plan to set a founding assignment that requires students to map their heritage repertoires (including those they may be losing or have lost) and so move their transepistemic knowledging from absent to present in the classroom space. We draw here on Lynch and Motha (2021:6), who use an assignment called "Whose footprints do you walk in?" and the "time maps" used by Manathunga *et al*. (2019). These tools both focus on life histories as accounts of the journey to the moment one arrives in the 'here' and 'now' of the course. We concur with Manathunga *et al*. when they argue that textual approaches alone cannot capture the "emotional" cartography over which we journey. They suggest that each person creates a "time map" of their "micro and macro histories, multiple and fluid geographies and cultural knowledge[s]" (3) by means of any type of visual representation

that the person chooses – cultural symbols, free drawing etc. They contend that "rich, thick and nuanced" accounts of these journeyings help to trace the impact of time, place, and "cultural knowledge" on who the students are, and what they bring to the current learning. The aim is to register memory as not just individual and mental, but collective, social, narrative, and embodied, which allows for the emergence of approaches to knowledge and knowing far broader than 'standard' academic rationality. Opening the course with such an activity for both staff and students amounts to refusing the hierarchical claims of colonial academic tradition to privileged status as the only valid knowledge tradition and could be replicated across disciplines.

Secondly, the time maps we envisage are material and multimodal, involving any type of drawn/hand-written representation that a student chooses. These modal potentialities enable the time maps as representations of transepistemic knowledges to remain open to emergence rather than prematurely tying Southern epistemologies down in terms borrowed from Western theory. In other words, such multimodal artefacts can function as a representational strategy that reminds us to "notice what Britzman (2000) calls 'the vantage of the other and the obligation of our own implication,' all that betrays us in the telling as well as that which cannot be said and that which cannot be heard in the saying" (Lather, 2007:39). Such artefacts or depictions of meaning are deeply context-embedded, and so sharing them across cultures requires genuine care, collaboration, and dialogue. Across disciplines lecturers might use such pedagogies to support their students' creative insight and reflection into their own knowledge making and its underlying assumptions.

Thirdly, to fully realise the time maps' potential for fostering emergence, they must remain live across the timescale of the course as part of regular weekly practice, and of powerful moments such as assessments. Woven into the ongoing pedagogical flow of the course, the time maps can function as a touchstone each student returns to, as they work to negotiate the powerful Western theory we read together in class without losing sight of their transepistemic identities and knowledges. As changing artefacts, the time maps can also document emergent decolonial knowledge-making and identities. Also, positioned as assessments along the pedagogical pathway, we see the time maps as having the potential to become powerful pedagogical nodes where the students' desire to succeed in the course can be recruited into a disposition to value their multiple and non-hegemonic repertoires. Working with powerful institutional structures but diverting them to transformative ends is a particularly effective option at postgraduate level, where both staff and students occupy "non-innocent" positionalities to different extents.

There are several aspects of the course that we would like to retain. We have begun developing a sound collection of readings from the Global South, including those from peripheralised communities in parts of the geographic North. These can provide access to alternative ways of knowledging and, as we have seen with the notion of gambiarra (Duboc & De Souza, 2021), may contain tools which can be drawn out and operationalised in ways that suit the particularities of our context. Thus, decolonial knowledge-making is extending the moves already begun in the readings but localising them here. Alongside this, we would retain our engagement with the key Northern theories. What we take from the student's challenge of being asked to read the mainstream, canonical, Western texts upfront is not that these texts and the bodies of knowledge should be excluded but that they should be repositioned so as not to constitute the starting point of the course. We thus seek to set up new relations with 'canonical' texts and to deal in transparent and explicit ways with the ecology of knowledges when it comes to literacy education.

Conclusion

In the end, however, because this is a literacy course that aims to prioritise decoloniality of thought and practice, what knowledging happens in the classroom depends on who the students are and what ways of knowing they bring with them. Thus, we are setting up pathways that encourage emergence. We want a pathway that opens up a space that can be filled by any cultural interface, depending on which students arrive. It is our aim that the pedagogical flow of the 2024 iteration of the course encourages the emergence of a richer ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2012). And we return to Meighan's point, that delinking from English and Eurocentric epistemological assumptions requires relinking to place, as a pedagogical means to unlock the repertoires of students (in talking about place names, local history, generational memories, for example) and to expose the false universality and decontextualised nature of standard English (2023:298). This method of designing and enacting decolonial pedagogies in an ongoing praxis propels "thinking-making-doing forward into the next speculative middle" (Springgay & Truman, 2018:212), from which we – and our students – can continue research.

ENDNOTES

[1] The books were usually drawn from the list below:
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