

**Decolonial impulses for assessment: Re-imagining an exam as a podcast**<https://doi.org/10.36615/reweaw33>**Sarah Godsell**<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3431-2868>Wits School of Education, University of the  
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa[sarah.godsell@wits.ac.za](mailto:sarah.godsell@wits.ac.za)**ABSTRACT**

In education spaces, decoloniality is more frequently discussed in pedagogy and curriculum, with decolonial impulses towards assessment less explored, even though this is an important power nexus in education. This paper presents a case study of a final exam in a teacher education course where critical dialogic pedagogy is presented as a tool towards decolonisation. For this to be effective students need to be engaged, tying the themes of the content and readings into their own lives, so the curriculum has resonance. The intention is to facilitate student voice (in the literal and figurative configuration) to show deep course learning, in an oral format. For the podcasts the students need to gather and marshal their thoughts orally, and their ideas emerge through critical dialogue and discussion with their peers, with an interlocutor (either inside or outside the classroom), with another set of podcasts, and with the course material. The methodology for the research is qualitative case-study, with data gathered from student reflections on the podcast exam. The paper argues that this method poses a potential learning-centred and decolonised formal assessment, which throughout the scaffolding process fulfils both formative and summative functions.

Submitted: November 11, 2024

Accepted: November 12, 2025

## Introduction

Decolonial discourse exists within the current heaviness of institutional co-option, dilution of the meaning of decolonisation (Smith & Lovat 2003; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Fúnez-Flores 2023 ). This notwithstanding, decolonial work remains important in disrupting coloniality in higher education in South Africa, even as it is embroiled in debate (Maluleka, 2023). Decoloniality in higher education is a project that has been expressed in a variety of ways, and so it is necessary for me to map out my position, as well as my positionality, in relation to it. As higher education in South Africa was a colonial project, even after 1994, we experience the tendrils of coloniality, defined by Maldonado-Torres (2016) as the continued impacts of colonialism after it has officially ended. In higher education in South Africa, coloniality is experienced in the epistemes espoused, the spaces created, and the structures lived in, in this case by students and staff in higher education in South Africa. A decolonial project in higher education must therefore involve the colonialities of power, being, and knowledge (Wynter, 2003; de Sousa Santos 2015; Heleta, 2018; Ndlovu 2018). These projects are proliferated through curricula, pedagogies, institutional culture, interpersonal relations, hierarchies, and, of particular influence for this paper, assessment. My decolonial project then is to think about how assessment addresses coloniality, in the ways that students are treated as knowledge producers versus knowledge reproducers, in how student voice is valued, and in how assessment is treated as for learning rather than for measuring. This can overlap with various approaches to assessment, including those espoused in the 2023 SoTL for the South special issues, as well as authentic assessment (Maniram & Maistry 2018; Padayachee & Naidoo 2023). I am choosing decoloniality as the framework, as I believe it addresses the concerns most cohesively, accounting for the interrelations between epistemes, power hierarchies, being, and assessment practices. I also believe it centers on the important historical occurrences that created the conditions we now live with. My own positionality becomes relevant in this and is discussed further below.

In this paper, I talk about decolonial impulses; this is an acknowledgment that decolonisation and decoloniality are never completed projects, and also of the contestation that exists over the terms and work around them. By using the phrase “decolonial impulse” I am implying an understanding of decolonisation as working against coloniality, working towards rehumanisation of indigenous peoples, ways of knowing, and of being, but something that is never a completed action, but that is moving towards decoloniality. In this way, it can be thought of as gesturing towards decoloniality, rather than claiming it. This also reverberates with the problematics of my own positionality as a white academic working on decolonial issues.

The decolonisation of pedagogy is a growing and rapidly expanding field, as scholars apply decolonial epistemic theories into the practical fields of pedagogy (Shahjahan, Estera, Surla & Edwards. 2022). This growing field calls for informed experimentation with different kinds of pedagogy applied in different ways in the classroom, without simplifying the complexities of decolonisation, or making the process about “solutions”, maintaining the focus on processes of decoloniality, involving reflexivity as well as transformative action. Decolonisation is an important imperative for places steeped in coloniality, and South African universities fall into that category. We deal with legacies of apartheid and colonialism daily in the knowledges we use in the classroom, the pedagogies we practice, and the assessments we employ (Heleta 2016; Morreira, Lockett, Kumalo & Ramgotra, 2020). Explorations into different pedagogical and assessment experiments become an important part of a decolonial impulse, moving towards addressing the continued dehumanisation of students. Coloniality also lives in the hierarchies we maintain in our classrooms, in the way we either teach or learn with our students, in the ways in which we (as lecturers, but also in my own case as a white coloniser) hold power in the forms of assessment (Mellor, 2022). These processes are iterative and multiply constructed. Keeping them unsettled (allowing space inside the structures, inside the assessments) is argued as a decolonial impulse. Padayachee and Naidoo aver, in a special issue of *SoTL for the South*, that assessment needs to become more participatory, more ethically driven, more socially just and inclusive, and more flexible (Padayachee & Naidoo, 2023). I would argue that a move towards decolonisation in assessment addresses these needs, coming from, as explored above, a need to counter the coloniality of knowledge, of power, and of being, as experienced in higher education.

This paper explores critical dialogic pedagogy as a theoretical angle for decolonising pedagogy and assessment, through a case study of an assessment carried out in a history methodology course in a teacher education programme. I draw from a qualitative study from a bachelor of education history methodology course. This course has been taught for four years, with detailed data from two of those years. The data is from the final assessment for the year-long course - a podcast that the students are expected to record and submit as their year-end exam. The podcast enables students to interact with their own voice in different ways; in one way, the most superficial way, the podcast is literally in the students' own voices, they are speaking, and in this way, the exam is a form of oral exam. But student “voice” also emerges in the choices they make around their podcasts: they choose what has been impactful for them in the course; they choose which theorists they want to interact with; they choose what angles the discussion should take; and what questions they should

ask. This podcast is a knowledge-generating exercise, and students are creating multiply-rooted knowledges through dialogue in this assessment.

Critical dialogic pedagogy is a pedagogy that is concerned with creating knowledge through the dialogic. This needs to happen through deep listening and deep reading, which facilitates the interaction with different and contrasting voices, narratives, and lifeworlds. It is concerned with bringing student worlds into the knowledge creation process, so the knowledge is deeply contextual and embedded in student worlds and lives (Ferreira & Godsell, forthcoming). In these ways, the pedagogy is argued as moving toward decolonisation, engaging pluralised knowledge ecologies (de Sousa Santos, 2015), student voice (literally and metaphorically), and a decolonial humanising impulse (Zembylas, 2018a).

### **Critical dialogic pedagogy**

Critical dialogic pedagogy is an unfolding concept which draws from both critical pedagogy and dialogic pedagogy and is being explored as decolonial praxis in the context of the Global South (Ferreira & Godsell, forthcoming). I have moved towards critical dialogic pedagogy as a decolonial pedagogy for three reasons. Firstly, it is a pedagogy that treats the dialogic seriously, and so considers knowledge as produced through dialogic interactions (between students and students, students and lecturers, students and texts, students and histories, students and their lives and contexts). In this, it challenges the coloniality held in the idea of who produces knowledge and who consumes it. Secondly, it considers student voice as both powerful and important, interacting with students as full beings with their own contexts and histories, and so their own (valued) knowledges. This is important in a similar way to the first reason. Thirdly, critical dialogic pedagogy works to undo the hierarchies between lecturers and students, which has a humanising function, as well as an epistemic function, that can both be considered decolonial.

As roots, both Freire and Bakhtin are important influences in critical dialogic pedagogy (Bakhtin, Holquist & Emerson, 1981; Freire & Shor 1987; Freire 1996). Humanising pedagogy as decolonial pedagogy is also an important theoretical strand (Zembylas, 2018a). Critical dialogic pedagogy is an attempt to draw together these different influences into a pedagogy that supports dialogue, critical consciousness, and multidiscursivity. It also facilitates many contesting voices, critical reflexivity, and immersion in own knowledge towards new knowledge creation. All the aspects listed above fit into different pedagogical theoretical frameworks, including decolonial and critical pedagogies. There is a

clash between critical pedagogy and decolonial pedagogy, in that critical pedagogy, and Freire himself, are critiqued even for the humanising impulse: that impulse came from a European universal idea of the “human”, rather than a decolonial pluriversal idea of human, and more-than-human. Freire, and critical pedagogy, are also critiqued as Eurocentric and, perhaps more urgently, uncritical of the “modernity” which decoloniality critiques. Zembylas (2018b) argues that critical pedagogy can be reinvented as decolonising pedagogy through the use of empathy by asking, “In which ways does the pursuit of critical consciousness through empathy map onto colonial histories and conditions?” (Zembylas 2018b: 2). I would argue that the same is possible through the dialogic, which embraces empathy.

Although they diverge, Freire and Bakhtin also align in important ways. Critical dialogic pedagogy draws them together. “Each promotes a form of pedagogy that encourages socially constructed meaning, the explicit affirmation of the social worlds of students, explicit critique, and the creation of authentic work products” (Morrell, 2004: 91). The dialogic is important to them both. Dialogue, in this sense, is more than just a back-and-forth. It is a back-and-forth that critically questions, that makes meaning, that draws from the worlds of the participants. These theorists also see education as political, so as having a transformative purpose. This is another important decolonial element; instead of transformation, decolonisation works to dismantle coloniality in every space in which it lurks. Freire and Bakhtin also differ in important ways (Rule, 2011) but critical dialogic pedagogy focuses on their overlap rather than their divergence. Also important to both Freire and Bakhtin is the world context in which learning is happening, and the different frames that are brought into dialogue. Freire expresses this in “Reading the world/reading the word” (Freire, 1985). For Bakhtin, dialogism is found in many aspects beyond the words themselves; the different frameworks, texts, ideas, worldviews, and contexts that are brought into the dialogue all contribute to the dialogism. This becomes important in the assessment created for this course.

Morrell draws attention to the fact that the pedagogy that Bakhtin urges (dialogic rather than monologic) requires different types of assessment: “The dialogic pedagogy that B12/12/2025 10:00:00akhtin presents in this formative experiment also demands different forms of assessment” (Morrell 2004: 91). It is precisely this aspect of critical dialogic pedagogy that this assessment seeks to address. With it I attempt to answer the question “How do we incorporate the critical dialogic in assessment, in an accessible and meaningful way, as a decolonial impulse?”

From a decolonial standpoint, critical dialogic pedagogy is argued as a humanising and decolonising pedagogy. There is a tension in these two standpoints, and there is a tension in working with Freire in any decolonial praxis. Freire has been critiqued for, among others, functioning with a Western paradigm, not contextualising struggles (particularly around gender and race), and not clearly delineating who the oppressors and the oppressed were (Zembylas, 2018a). I thus use his influence critically; however, Zembylas (2018) has suggested that humanising pedagogy (such as that of Freire) can be combined with decolonial frameworks to create decolonial pedagogies. It is this combining that I attempted to do in this course. Zembylas (2018: 5) describes decolonial pedagogies as “processes, practices and paths of struggle that oppose ongoing colonisation on an everyday basis and seek to reclaim humanity beyond its colonial legacies.” In this description, critical dialogic pedagogy functions as decolonial process, practice, and path. It is also important to pay attention to the modes of knowledge production, where knowledge of students is centred over Eurocentric knowledge and knowledge structures, as well as centring previously silenced voices. Heleta (2018) writes: “Decolonization of knowledge implies the end of reliance on imposed knowledge, theories and interpretations, and theorizing based on one’s own past and present experiences and interpretation of the world” (Heleta 2018: 48). In terms of drawing on one’s own interpretations of the world, students are theorising in the podcast, drawing on their own experiences as well as the theories we have explored in class (some Eurocentric, some not).

For Bakhtin, dialogic pedagogy is expansive, bringing in multiple diverse frameworks and voices, as opposed to monologic pedagogy, where the teacher is producing the knowledge, or the knowledge is coming from one source (Nesari, 2015). The dialogue is about more than just the people involved (it is important to note that it is not just two people involved in a dialogue); it is also the texts, the frames, the worlds, and worldviews that form the dialogue (Bakhtin et al., 1981). From a decolonial standpoint, this means that indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing are included in the knowledge-making.

Bakhtin’s expansive vision of dialogue enabled me to see the various dialogues happening in the class, both during the term-time, and in the assessment task of the podcast recordings. It allowed for the worldviews of the participants – the student-teachers and the teacher-students – to be taken seriously and become part of the theoretical knowledge in and of the class. Both Freire and Bakhtin note the contextual and temporal nature of the dialogic; it occurs in a specific time and place. This influences the nature of the dialogic pedagogy as it unfolds; people’s own references, the present world, moment, context, frameworks - all press in to influence the unfolding and becoming.

Unfolding and becoming became important to me in the course as all the elements that influence our student-teachers are often either discarded or treated as context that is important to them being in the class, but not necessarily to the knowledge produced in the class. Critical dialogic pedagogy enables the influence of lifeworlds on knowledge production through the dialogic.

The idea of dialogism, an interaction in which things are drawn out, unearthed, explored, expanded, and excavated as they interact, promises a lot as a pedagogy. However, it is hard to achieve true dialogism in a classroom setting (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). This paper explores the quality of the dialogues achieved in the assessment, but beyond that, also explores critical dialogic pedagogy as a method for transformation, decolonisation, knowledge production, and becoming.

In the critical aspect of critical dialogic pedagogy there is an aspect of engagement with power structures in society, and of resistance to the oppressions created by these power structures. Decoloniality brings the remnants of colonialism that are left inside South Africa's education system to the fore - allowing us to contend with how the previously colonised are continually dehumanised and removed from their histories and knowledge systems. Orality in the podcast works to countermand this. With the critical aspect of critical dialogic pedagogy, there is a move towards social justice and resistance to both oppression and dehumanisation - although decolonisation is not synonymous with social justice (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The voice – embodied and heard – is an expression of humanity, and this deep focus on knowledge production through a transformational humanity is a crucial aspect of critical dialogic pedagogy (Gennrich & Dison, 2018).

### **Decolonisation and decoloniality: Methods and power in research**

The terms decolonisation and decoloniality are not synonymous and I use them in a specific way in this article. Decoloniality refers to the processes developed against coloniality (the afterlives of colonisation experienced in very real ways in knowledge, power, and being, after colonisation has ended) (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Decolonisation in the American literature is used more to refer to physical processes around the end of physical colonisation and land restitution (Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, in the African context and literature, decolonisation has also been about knowledge, power, and being (Thiong'O 1986; Fanon 2001; 2008). For this reason, I use the terminology of both decolonisation and decoloniality.

In order to address this section in requisite depth and conciseness, I need to draw on arguments around the complexity and situatedness of knowledge, and the way in which knowledge is multiply constructed (de Sousa Santos 2015; Prozesky & Ferreira 2024). A premise of decoloniality that I am working with in this paper is the idea of the coloniality of knowledge (Ndlovu, 2018), that EuroWestern knowledge is imposed as a universal way of knowing in institutions in which higher education exists within coloniality, as in South Africa. I am not separate from this process, as a white (and so coloniser) middle-class lecturer, in a position of power within the snares of coloniality. In this paper, I am trying to think about the knowledges created, and the ways of being enacted, through an assessment technique, and acknowledging my own positionality and power are necessary to do this honestly. This has been described as part of a set of “moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang 2012), and this is an important critique which I take very seriously. At the same time, I feel like the work that needs to be done in South African higher education is decolonial, and I think that white people abdicating that work is another form of violence. I attempt to embark on this work conscious of my privilege and position, and most importantly my lack of lived knowledge, and so non-Indigenous perspective (Mellor, 2022), and to work with this constructively in classrooms, to open to multiply-constructed sets of knowledge and ways of being in ways that push back against the coloniality of knowledge, and of being (Wynter, 2003)

Decolonisation of higher education has been an important and contested playing field globally since the early 2000s, and in South Africa since it was brought onto the national agenda through the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests of 2015 and 2016. Although the theoretical and practical work I do is aligned with decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) and with working against the remnants of coloniality in a system that has been physically decolonised, I retain the language of the #MustFall movements and name the praxis I engage decolonisation. I take on board Tuck and Yang (2012)’s arguments about decolonisation not being a metaphor, and being essentially about land, acknowledging that land remains an unsettled question in South Africa. Land remains key in decolonisation debates, but I argue that the language of decolonisation, congruent with decoloniality in higher education in South Africa, was inscribed by and through the student movement, and is relevant in the histories of resistance in South African universities (Maluleka, 2021).

Since 2015/2016, the writing on decoloniality in education in South Africa has expanded widely, both in the practical and theoretical arenas, notably linking with thinking on Africanisation and Indigenous Knowledge systems (Ramoupi & Ntongwe, 2017; Maditsi, Rasehlomi & Seemise, 2024). I approach

this writing taking into account the false universality of Western ways of knowing, being, and doing of coloniality, and looking for “decolonial cracks” in that (Walsh, 2023), while at the same time pushing against the impulse to make solidified or concretised moves towards decolonisation, which is always a process of doing and undoing.

Decolonisation and decoloniality of pedagogy and curricula in higher education remains a complex arena of praxis, expanding within the Global South more broadly, as well as in South Africa (Heleta 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Zembylas, 2018a; Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Decolonising assessment is a smaller and more experimental, although growing, field (Eizadirad, 2019; Godsell, 2021; Crossouard & Oprandi, 2022; Hill, Thomas & Robb-Hagg, 2023). Exploring this field is crucial to move towards a decolonised education, as assessment holds so much power in education; if we stop decolonial processes before assessment we risk leaving the power structures of higher education untouched (McArthur, 2016). This is because assessment holds value in two ways; in one way it is literally where the power of assessment lies, in that it determines who passes or fails, and so who gets certified. Interlinked with this, assessment chooses which knowledge is valued, and this is internalised by students, and so plays a role in the coloniality of knowledge (Ndlovu, 2018). In this paper, I argue for the podcast assessment as a decolonial method, also through arguing for critical dialogic pedagogy. In this specific assessment, I attempt this through working with voice and knowledge creation

## Methodology

This paper draws on a case study, qualitative methodology, which allows a textured portrayal of the processes of student experience of and reaction to these podcasts (Bhattacharya, 2017; Maniram & Maistry 2018; Mellor 2022). I analyse datasets over two years, while drawing on my own reflections of teaching and experiencing this course over four years (Mellor, 2022). This research was confirmed and ethically passed the protocols of the Wits Ethics Committee, under protocol number H22/09/6. The course I am examining for this study is a history methodology course in a Bachelor of Education programme. I describe this course in detail below. I teach the course myself. The ethical considerations of studying one’s own course are under debate, but I dealt with these by only collecting data after the students’ final marks had been posted, and by approaching the issue of informed consent very carefully, not to put any pressure on the students. In light of this, I obtained consent from about one-third of the class consistently across the two years. This means that I do not

have a majority of the class for analysis, but the proportion that I do have can still provide meaningful insights into the experiences of students, and I am looking at individual submissions for thematic analysis and texture of the submissions, to gauge for critical dialogism, for voice, and decoloniality. For the analysis I used 20 podcasts and 20 reflections, so as to do meaningful thematic analysis.

The two datasets I use for this study are the set of reflections that students wrote about their process with their podcasts, and the actual podcasts themselves. Using the reflections about the podcasts gives me the ability to draw on the metacognition around the project, to see how students experienced the process. The podcasts themselves allow me to see how the thinking and discussions unfolded in the podcasts; to listen for voice, ideas, and thought processes. The podcasts and the reflections were purposefully coded together to gain codes that spoke both to the content of the podcasts and the students' experience of the podcasts. The podcasts have been coded on their own in a separate book chapter (Godsell, forthcoming) which gives separate conclusions for history education.

I use thematic analysis to draw themes arising from across the reflections and podcasts (Alhojailan Ibrahim, 2012), and an inductive research process to understand the themes. In addition to this I use each piece of data holistically to get a sense of each participant's process.

The initial analysis of the two data sets gave 38 codes, which were initially grouped into 12, and then further narrowed into 10 themes. I then went through a process of backlinking to the original codes to ensure coherence, and that the development of the themes had not warped the meaning. Some of these themes were almost self-naming (such as decolonisation), and some required more nuanced thematic analysis, such as ones around listening and voicing of opinions. In order to ensure rigour, I highlighted phrases as codes in different colours, and then analysed these direct phrases thematically, to arrive at the final 10 themes. I found these themes overlapped with both the themes of the course and with the objectives of the course, and did an extra examination of the data after coding and arranging in themes to ensure I had not merely found what I had expected to find as the creator of the course. This was to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. There is always an element of positionality and subjectivity in qualitative research, and as the sole person working on this data, my lens informed the data that I drew. This has both a positive effect and a drawback; as the creator of this course, I was able to read contextually, and often to locate things beyond the data itself. However, the drawback is that it also allows for researcher bias. To counter this, I followed a

systematic process of coding and thematic analysis, using multiple checks to balance my own lens. Using two datasets also meant that I obtained data on students' perspective on the podcast, in the reflection, as well as the data from the actual podcast. This increases reliability (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Another issue with the data in terms of reliability is that there is the possibility of a self-selection bias, where students who enjoyed the course produced podcasts and reflections that demonstrated they were more likely to sign up to be part of the research. I have taken this into account and so do not claim that the data is generalisable for the whole class, but rather that the specific points found in the data show valid existing themes.

### The course

In this section, I will provide a detailed explanation of the student body, and then the course, so that the context can be well understood, to allow for transferability.

The course from which this study is drawn has between 50 and 80 students, with the majority of students being Black African, 6 – 8 being Indian, 1 -2 Coloured<sup>1</sup>, and 1 -2 white. What emerges quickly in the discussions is that students come from a variety of backgrounds, across class, religion, ethnicity, language, and life experience. This means that the discussions in class were broadened and held from different, often contesting, perspectives. This contributed to the critical dialogic pedagogy in the class and to the need for student voice and knowledge to be more active in the class.

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<sup>1</sup> Race is a contested and socially constructed category, with very real lived realities. South Africa lives with apartheid remnants (and categories) of this. I have generally used how students self-identify, but the complexities of race in South Africa go beyond the scope of this article. "Coloured" is a complex term in South Africa, historically and in the present moment. It comes from an apartheid category which differentiated people designated as "coloured" from those who were "Black" or Indian, and encompassed a group of people including those understood as descending from Cape Malay (some descending from those identified (these identifiers are in themselves problematic and inaccurate) San or Khoi, and at that point some mixed race South Africans, or those whose identity had evolved, especially in the Cape, from different intertwined communities. Today, it is understood as an identity with a corresponding culture and history, if a complex one. I use it here because it is how some students self-identify and respecting that is important. It does not hold the same derogatory connotations as it does in the United States (US), and this is important to note. The term holds a history of identity and resistance, as well as a specific historical and social meaning, and thus, even with its apartheid origins, it is complicated to replace with something else. It should also be noted that this term is different from "mixed race", which does not include the shared history and identity that are important, particularly in the Western and Northern Cape.

This course is taught in a Historically White University (HWU) in South Africa, which holds a specific form of trauma, particularly for Black (using the term to incorporate Indian and Coloured) students. This context informs the potential for student voice in the course, and also the constraints on decolonisation; the constraints being institutional, epistemic, and pedagogic. With that said, there is room in this course for pedagogic and assessment innovation, and it was this space that I used in designing the podcast exam.

The course is a history methodology course in a Bachelor of Education programme. The course runs for the whole year, so there are three modules of teaching (with one module taken up by Teaching Experience, where students go and teach in schools). It is to learn to teach the FET (grades 10 – 12) phase history, so we work through topics in that curriculum. The course contains both third- and fourth-year students, depending on whether history is their major or sub-major. This means this is both a final and pre-final year course, and there are students with different levels of training in other areas of education (e.g., education theory). In this course, we are concerned with how to teach history to grade 10 – grade 12 high school students. We cover practical issues such as lesson plans and unit designs, as well as pedagogical strategies and historical thinking, to more abstract concepts such as positionality, neutrality, difficult or controversial histories, and decolonisation.

I attempt to make decolonisation both method and content in this course, where possible, in the confines of the coloniality in the higher education system. I do this in different ways (which are steeped in different methodologies, including critical dialogic pedagogy); one of the ways is elevating student voice – I do this through discourse and writing exercises. I also try to give students input into both the form and the format of the assessment structure – although this aspect is still so imbued in power relations that students struggle to have a voice. We discuss and amend rubrics together, for example, so that the students' idea of what is important in their learning is represented in the marking. We have two two-hour classes a week; one a discussion class, the other one where students present and give each other feedback on a type of microteaching. The discussion class requires the students to respond both to readings and to the issues that I raise in class, as well as to the issues that emerge in and through the discussion. The readings are selected to provide a range of South African and international issues and literature, centering African knowledge but not isolating it.

The method of the class takes decolonial impulses seriously in terms of consistently valuing and development of student voice (Godsell & Maluleka, 2025) However, I cannot claim that this is always

effective; there is a selection of students who attend regularly and who regularly voice opinions and thoughts. There are some who attend regularly and who are quiet, so they benefit more from the freewriting (Godsell & Maluleka, 2025). There are those who do not attend but access all the material online, who I only know through their assessment submissions. There is some blended strategy built into the course to combat this, with “Wiki” (like a Google doc) being used for students to express their opinions, but they do not have the immediacy of the class discussion and so are not as effective. The course evolves each time I teach it, and the pedagogies for each year are adapted for that specific class. bell hooks is used as a foundation, drawing on a pedagogy of care, but also a transgressive pedagogy to question hierarchy and power (hooks, 1994). I also draw on a philosophy of decolonial love (Maluleka, 2023). However, students’ voices as mattering, their thoughts as being important, and their knowledge as being valid is something I try to inculcate from the beginning of the year.

### The podcast assessment

The data that this paper is based on are drawn from an exam equivalent set for the course described above. The paper is the final exam but counts 25% of the course, with the June exam counting 25% and the rest being made up by coursework. The exam is for the students to record a podcast for a series called “Teaching History” in which they must draw on their choice of material from the course, their own voice, and their own lived experience. The instructions for the podcast are as follows:

**Your instructions for the podcast are as follows:**

A podcast is a medium for discussing and unpacking information on a specific subject in each episode, often with experts and a well-read presenter, so that information can be explored in depth. Concepts and ideas are debated, making the podcast a mode of knowledge creation in itself.

You and your classmates will create a podcast in which you will have an in-depth discussion of the content and concepts from this course, focusing on how you understand them (the content and concepts). You will integrate these into your own ideas. The podcast must fit into the overall theme “Teaching History.”

Choose someone from the class with whom to have the conversation. The podcast must be in the form of a conversation between 2 or 3 people within the class. If you want to choose someone outside the class, you need to have a conversation with me to motivate for it. The conversation can be facilitated through questions but remember that it is not just an interview and we expect an in-depth conversation from all participants rather than one-word answers.

**In the podcast you are asked to engage some of the aspects listed below. You can link ideas and engagements on these in any way but remember some in-depth discussion and unpacking of concepts and your ideas of them are required. Please note that a), b), and c) are compulsory – you need to bring some ideas around these into the podcast in some way.**

- a) The materials from the course up until now
- b) Ideas of different pedagogies of history
- c) Your ideas and experiences of history and teaching history
- d) Some ideas of content or skills from the CAPS FET Curriculum
- e) The podcasts that were recorded for the course.
- f) Ideas of decolonisation of history content or pedagogy.

There was also a reflection, which counted 25% of the mark, where students had to reflect on their podcast process, and think about what, if anything, they had learned.

We worked with the idea of the podcast from the beginning of the year, as it is a novel idea for students and the idea of using it as an exam can be scary. I recorded a series of podcasts with post-graduate students and new teachers as exemplars, as well as material for the students to engage with. We scaffolded this through a pre-exam task which the students needed to submit, in which we could check that everyone had a partner for the podcast, and a good idea of what they were going to do. This task received extensive feedback. If someone did not have access to a device (a laptop or phone) to record, I made my own laptop and office available to them and availed myself for technological support, if it was needed. I stressed that the technological expectations for the podcast were very low, and that the only criterion was that I could hear the conversation. Thus, no editing skills or specific sound equipment were needed. There was more excitement than anxiety in the class, even though this was an exam. The format that I ended up with in my third year of doing this exam was pairing students in the class, as this meant that they were both discussing things they had been exposed to together, rather than creating a dynamic of one “expert” and another “interviewer” that sometimes happened.

### Data presentation

Below I first present a table of the 10 key themes identified across the combination of the podcast and reflection data, and then unpack the themes further. However, in order to identify critical dialogic pedagogy, I also performed an analysis that looked for moments of thinking. This is also unpacked below.

Table 1: Themes

Theme	Explanation	Quotation
1. Decolonisation	This theme dealt with both the content and the method on the course but was most often discussed in terms of how history was taught in the school classroom, especially in the CAPS curriculum. It was also used to discuss pedagogy and content, and occasionally to reflect on the course, but the application of decolonisation was mostly about CAPS in the classroom, like in this example about assessment.	“My issue with pursuing a decolonised curriculum was assessment, I always thought that assessment is very restrictive, based on my experience in high school and my teaching experience as a pre-service teacher, however, engaging with the different podcasts ... I got to understand that a teacher can still meet the requirements of CAPS with regards to assessment but still pursue decolonisation for the young minds.” ST11
2. Theoretical learning vs physical application	This theme explored the ever-present gap between the theory learned in teacher education, and the realities experienced in the classroom, as these pre-service teachers experienced in their Teaching Experience practical. This theme often overlapped with decolonisation and neutrality/difficult histories, as well as the CAPS curriculum.	“I felt as if the theory I learnt was keeping me back from teaching to the best of my ability, not because the methods or tactics do not work, but because I am stuck there teaching these difficult histories while overthinking the difficult history content and walking on eggshells.” S7
3. View broadened or enriched through podcast	This theme came up most in the reflections and showcased the way in which students’ views were broadened during the podcast making, through dialogic interaction.	“Overall, making this podcast opened my eyes to new ways other history student teachers view history and in turn enriched my views as well.” ST 10
4. Expansion/change of thinking	Similar to the previous theme, this one was chosen for its importance to critical dialogic pedagogy and showcases the live thinking taking place during the podcast interaction.	“My thinking shifted during the podcast.” ST11
5. Voice (voicing of opinions)	In this theme students discussed their own voice, or their own speaking, and this was often specifically related to the podcast format.	“This podcast was a very informative experience as it allowed us to go beyond the walls of speaking about history as we know it and allowed us to voice our opinions far easier as we were able to speak our minds more fluently than we would have been able to in an essay.” ST8
6. Active listening	This theme, also important in critical dialogic pedagogy, is related to voice, but spoke of the act of listening, and the way in which students had to listen to each other in to make the podcast work.	“The overall experience of the podcast prep and process was extremely rewarding. It taught me the value of listening, active listening which is something a good teacher needs to know how to do.” ST3
7. Conflicting views	This theme is linked to themes 3 and 4, and demonstrates the different views that students brought into the podcast, and the ways in which these views interacted in the discussion.	“Despite Thandeka [name changed] and I having conflicting views, I do agree with her point that...”. ST5
8. The history curriculum and the importance of history	These two are grouped together (although initially separated) because they often appeared together, with the faults of the curriculum often being discussed in relation to how important history is.	“To me, it was an opportunity to voice out what I feel like are the faults of history curriculum and history methodology in a friendly mode like I have been waiting forever since I was in high school.” S19

9. Anxieties	This quote (the strongest example of this theme in the data) was generally expressed as anxiety about a different format of assessment from a standard essay.	“It is imperative, that I express my extreme stress levels and anxiety at the thought of having to undertake this exam due to my technophobia (borne out of the lack of access to technological devices at an early age).” S 21
10. Neutrality and difficult histories	This theme connects difficult and controversial histories with the idea of “neutrality” which had been very contested in the class. These debates, and the differing views on the subject, became clear in the podcasts.	“I learnt that there is no neutrality in history and there are no equal sides of the story although most teachers try to be objective and teach sensitive topics carefully. However, there will always be influences from our backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs.” S23

### Discussion of themes

In the section below I will discuss selected themes to unpack them more, and to relate them to both decoloniality and critical dialogic pedagogy. Where relevant, this is supported with more quotes from the data. This is tied back into the course methods, in terms of creating the assessment, in the discussion.

#### Theme One: Decolonisation

One of the strongest themes that arose was decolonisation, which is unsurprising as this was a main pillar of the course, in both content and method. I do not take this theme, as content, as evidence of a decolonial assessment, but rather examine it as how the students theorised their experience. However, some of the podcasts mentioned that the assessment itself was decolonising; this was an aim of re-imagining the exam, to decolonise an aspect of the assessment of the course. Even though this aspect did come up, more of the discussion on decolonisation in the data was thinking through what the term meant, and reflecting on the different views that emerged, in a reflective way: “It has expanded my thinking of not just Teaching History but also provided first-hand experience of decolonial methods of teaching it.” ST6 It also showed a deepening of students’ thoughts on decolonisation itself.

Overall, the making of the podcast was a way for me to consolidate my thoughts around the decolonisation of history education in South Africa. I have accepted that decolonisation of education is a process that can sometimes be frustratingly slow. However, it requires commitment and empathy from educators for any real change to occur. The process begins with us as teachers holding one another and ourselves accountable to decolonial thinking and teaching. S14

### Themes Three and Four: Views Broadened and Thinking Changed

With asking for the reflection, I had asked about how, or if, students' thinking had shifted as a result of the podcast. This is because I wanted them to reflect on their attitudes and knowledge before and after the podcast. The data shows that this had a significant impact on the participants and contributed to the critical dialogic nature of the podcast assessment. However, this also functions to gauge a level of knowledge creation, linked to decolonising knowledge. New knowledge is made in the podcast through the conversation between the participants. This is part of what I argue makes the podcast a dialogic decolonial method; students themselves are creating new knowledge through their discussion and reflection. To expand a quote from the theme above:

Despite Thandeka and I having conflicting views, I do agree with her point that as teachers we can influence our learners' thinking, so I might change my methods and only introducing my personal perspective after having gauged what the learners think and believe. ST5

From the same reflection, the student continues to show how having views broadened and thinking changed (as part of a dialogic method) is beneficial and linked to decolonisation.

Thandeka's reference to the Wills (2016) article revealed to me how I have neglected women voices in history that my focus has been more on the black community as a whole but rarely ever pointing out the need for women voice, which I see now can be detrimental in decolonisation because my decolonised class might still have patriarchal ideas which I do not want. ST5

### Themes 5 and 9: Voicing and Anxieties

These themes are discussed together because they often appeared as interrelated; although there were anxieties, the experience was usually ultimately positive. Another important aspect of the reflection was to ask the students to think about the format, what was difficult for them, and what they gained from it. This provoked reflections about a range of things, from challenges about recording (expressed in the "anxieties" theme) to reflections about the difficulties of teamwork, to the affordances of the podcast as a form of expression. Several students mentioned that the podcast had given them a space to express themselves, to air their voices and theorise about the topics in an active, relational way, and so in a different way than an essay would have done (theme 5). This became especially relevant in the fact that this course had been run over years where Covid-19 had impacted the way in which voice had been present on the course.

There was so much that I wanted to cover, perhaps because as an online student for most of this course, I didn't quite yet feel that my voice had been heard, or that I had been given the opportunity to discuss topics in-depth or to a point that I was satisfied with my position. I took the process of designing my podcast, with the notes that I had on the podcast series posted online, as a moment of reflection, to establish how I felt at the end of my Teaching History modules and establish what type of history teacher I would like to become. ST4

This suggests that the podcast created a space for the physical voices of the students to express and develop ideas outside the strictures of the standard essay. The free-flowing conversation of the podcast, structured around preparation that guides the conversation through the material of the course, allows for the critical dialogic in the unfolding of the exam. The above quote demonstrates critical dialogism as the student is in dialogue with themselves, about their own position and their feelings at the end of the course.

The process of the podcast preparation also came up in the reflections, partially as anxieties (tech-related or otherwise). This showed a lack of trust that students had in their own knowledge or ability to converse. This resulted in the pre-podcast task being "overloaded" with content, and they were gently guided to both include specific questions to guide the podcast and to allow space for the discussion to develop. This contributed to the decolonial humanising impact of the podcasts, allowing them to trust their voices and knowledges, and build with these in the podcast.

We did not feel that we knew enough or had enough points to discuss – feeling that we needed to include more content or try and relate to more topics. Yet, feedback indicated that we were too broad – our questions were vague and did not relate to the topic we wanted to discuss. To counter this, we instead decided to let the conversation flow and have questions arise in response to content but being cognisant of the topic – opting for a more natural approach similar to a conversation. This worked well – the discussion was lively and natural, which showed me that planning questions and answers may prevent the speaker from critically engaging in a discussion. ST7

Theme 5 furthers this decolonial humanisation process through students exploring the presence, import, and value of their voice through the physical act of voicing through discussion, producing an

orality rather than a written product. This was linked to “being” a history teacher, and the myriad responses of this.

This podcast was a very informative experience as it allowed us to go beyond the walls of speaking about history as we know it and allowed us to voice our opinions far easier as we were able to speak our minds more fluently than we would have been able to in an essay. The use of the podcasts provided me with a deeper understanding of what it means to think and respond like a history educator so that the knowledge I provide is easily understandable to all and the injustices that I speak out against are clear for all to see, the desperate need for us as the youth to solve before the joy of learning history is lost forever. ST9

This suggests the link between voice and being a history educator, with students linking their conversation in the podcast to their future praxis in the classroom, and the complexities of knowledge iterations that they will encounter and need to navigate.

### **Themes Three and Six: Views Broadened and Active Listening**

Themes three and six show how participants experienced the podcasts as a space for active listening and thinking, developing ideas, or the shifting of ideas in and through the course and the podcasts, either between the students and their chosen partners, or students in their own reflective processes. Podcasts thus provided an active and dialogic space for thinking, listening, and reflecting, rather than the passive or restricted space of an individual essay. This speaks to the assessment valuing students’ thinking processes rather than just the products. It also deepened the knowledge production aspect of the podcasts, linking to decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Zembylas, 2018a).

I take away from this podcast process a valuable and ever-developing idea that the environment that I create in my classrooms will be an element that I wish to reflect on daily. ST4

This active thinking space is further discussed in the section on making meaning through dialogue below.

## Theme 8: The History Curriculum and the Purpose of History

Theme eight showed a content engagement with the history curriculum, its implications, its limitations, and the ultimate importance of history as a school subject. This had the implications of students being in the position of experts in their subject, drawing conclusions and analysis that contributed to knowledge creation on History Education. It also showed the podcast as a genuine space of reflection of the course content, as their positions on these concepts were evidenced in their thinking about what had come up as important for them.

Lastly, I learned that it is important that all learners learn history as this will serve as a site for them to make choices about their own identities and how they will act upon their own histories. ST4

What the podcasts exposed me to is that no matter how good the curriculum is on paper, the teachers have a great responsibility to bring it to life otherwise it is of no good. ST5

Overall, the data analysed in the thematic analysis suggests a range of themes that show students producing knowledge (and theorising), and reflecting on knowledge, and their own positions and experiences.

### Making meaning through dialogue: “Am I making sense?”

To unpack the nature of the critical dialogic in the podcasts, it was not possible to only use coding, but each podcast had to be looked at holistically, to gauge the depth of the engagement. This process showed that there were indeed critical dialogic aspects to the podcasts, where participants invoked, implicitly or explicitly, texts, lifeworlds, and other frames of reference to build their own dialogues. Once I had identified that these moments existed, I especially listened for thinking that happened in the podcast itself. I listened for the student voices in both the questions and the answers, rather than looking at the complete or “correct” ness of the answers. Demonstrating this is not always possible through quotations, but there are some examples, such as:

ST13: Am I making sense?

ST14: You are making sense. But I don't have an answer to your question.

The genuine excavation of the conversation is heard in the small interchanges and interactions. This kind of engagement was heard universally across the podcasts I analysed and seems to point to a critical dialogic process taking place in the assessment.<sup>2</sup>

This engagement shows the thinking happening; there was a questioning of the sense-making – a referring to the person’s engagement, an affirmation from that person, but also a referring to a question that continues to be open. It is visible again in the ending of the podcast between ST5, ST7, and ST11:

ST5: I hope that our insights, although insights that I think obviously must be challenged and critiqued by all of you who listen. And obviously always available to engage and discuss these things further with anyone. But really a privilege and thank you so much for having this.

In this quote, ST5 is referring not only to the knowledge (insights) built into the podcast, but also to the potential knowledge and insights created and provoked in listeners, whom he here constructs as participants in an ongoing dialogue and engagement. This inclusion extends the critical dialogic pedagogy into a new set of frames; potential listeners, and those who will be drawn into the conversations. This reflection, and active thinking, also extended to after the podcast, into and through the reflection:

It is now only in hindsight, and in my reflections, after doing the podcast and then re-listening to it a few times over, that the journey to and my thoughts on becoming a history teacher has still not quite settled inside of me. This is not because of a lack of inner confidence, or a reflection of the course, but it is in the realisation that there was a key element missing from my inner thought processes. ST4

These kinds of engagements, I argue, show a critical dialogic engagement; that knowledge is being produced, discussed, and tested in these environments, and reflected on beyond the moment of its making. This engagement is different when it occurs between two or three people to how it takes place in an essay. Not only are the voices literally more present, but the discourse itself produces the knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> There was a danger, in the assessment, that people would simply script the podcast and so it would not be dialogic. Or that it would be a back-and-forth with no in-depth discussion, no excavation of ideas, and no knowledge creation. This, across the podcasts that I marked, occurred once or twice – but not in any of the podcasts that I used for analysis. This again suggests that those who took part in the research engaged deeply in the podcast process but suggests a bias in the data; further research will need to find ways to access the experience of those who did not necessarily enjoy the podcast exam.

Ferreira (forthcoming) argues that critical dialogic pedagogy occurs in a multidiscursive landscape, and it was these aspects that the students were negotiating in their podcasts. The dialogism spread across multiple different topics, ranging from decolonisation to historical thinking to curriculum to pedagogy. The assessment explicitly allowed for this dialogism, giving the students space to choose which elements of the course they integrated and engaged with in their podcasts. This setup deliberately forced a choice and an engagement, rather than prescribing one.

It became clear that often the most in-depth conversations were between class members. When outside “experts” were approached, the students tended to defer to them, which defeated the purpose of putting the students in the “experts” position. While those podcasts were interesting, it seemed to depend on the power positions of the experts and how much those drew the students themselves into dialogue. This was, in a sense, a failure in the podcasts, which made me decide to keep the podcast partners limited to students in class moving forward. However, there were beautiful podcasts between peers who were not in the class together. In this instance, students from the class took the expert’s position to either inform or engage their peers about history teaching.

This positioning made me reflect on how we use “experts” in our teaching, and how we manage that engagement. We use theorists as experts and want the students to explore or interact with them. However, there is an automatic power relation that we do not often consider. The power relation can be heightened if there are other levels of “otherness” with the theorist; from language to race to nationality to date of writing. While this reality should certainly not preclude us from using a wide range of theorists to explore our courses, as coloniality is often perpetuated in the choices we make, we need to take these power relations into account. Thus, the dialogism that emerged in podcasts between class members showed dialogic thinking in action, and, in a decolonial impulse, put students in the position of “experts” and allowed them to claim that thinking.

## Discussion

In this section, I will discuss how the data speaks to the themes of decoloniality of assessment and critical dialogic pedagogy, through interacting with the data and the creation of the assessment.

The data above points to the students theorising their own knowledge, which suggests they were participating in knowledge production, as their voices had been developed as knowledge producers throughout the course. This supports the notion that this assessment may be conceived of as a

decolonial assessment, working with principles of dialogic knowledge production and critical humanising pedagogy. The instances of clear back-and-forth thought (visible in the moments such as “am I making sense”) demonstrate the knowledge being produced in the dialogic. While this pushback against the coloniality of knowledge production is on a micro-scale, I argue that it is important in considering the ecology of knowledges present in the class, and the way these were invited into the assessment process. Prozesky and Ferreira argue for care as an axiological principle, and the stance around knowledge(s) created within that:

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 (Prozesky & Ferreira 2024: 70).

Working in a similar context to mine, these approaches to knowledging are a crucial aspect of the assessment attempt to take students’ knowledges, voices, and dialogues seriously in ways which push back against ideas of objectivity or anonymity in the assessment process (McArthur 2016). The knowledges are formed, and beings affirmed, in a critical dialogic process. The life-worlds of the students are brought into the knowledges and theorisations in meaningful ways, valuing them as knowledge producers, with the critical dialogic being the method for knowledge production. In this way, I argue that the process, and the critical dialogic pedagogy that was the theory for the assessment, works with decolonial impulses as students theorise their own positions, and produce knowledges informed by (and affirming) their beings.

I attempted to open the praxis of these assessments to decolonial through the critical dialogic in several ways; firstly, the process of the assessments. This was only partially successful as I still made most of the decisions around the podcasts, even though the students were offered input into some of the parts of the process, in a way that was both dialogic and critical, in that it invited discussion and it pushed against hierarchies. I found that to fulfil the objectives of the course, and the decolonial impulse, I had to make some of the decisions and could not leave aspects as open as I wanted. This speaks to two obstacles to decolonised assessment, both lying in different levels of the education system; firstly, the structured nature of the assessment system that needs a specific set of circumstances to create the exam. It needs individual marks for one thing, and that prohibits a more collective or open approach. Ungrading would be a potential way out of this, but there are issues with this approach as well, apart from it being relatively untested in South Africa (Blum & Kohn, 2020; von Renesse & Wegner, 2022). Secondly, not explicitly in the structures, but still located in the coloniality of (higher) education, are the anxieties of students around assessments, especially exams. The anxiety theme above suggests that even though students expressed that they were excited for

the podcast, they were also anxious about a new format of assessment for their final exam (often these were final-year students), since they were used to writing essays. This speaks to the urgency of decolonisation of assessment more broadly in higher education.

There are two other elements of decoloniality through the critical dialogic in the podcasts: surrounding voice and knowledging. I analyse the knowledges produced through the critical dialogic assessment as a decolonial element in the way that decolonisation needs to examine who produces the knowledge, and in what way. The data above shows that students produced knowledge on a variety of themes emerging from the course. This assessment aims to put the student in the position of the expert and take seriously the knowledges (indigenous and plural) that are produced in the podcast as a contribution to a more generalised discussion on history teaching. In this way, this assessment is also authentic, as the product produced is fit for an external platform, and the students' voices are a crucial point of the assessment (Maniram & Maistry, 2018). Looking at this, from the theorisations in the data presented above, is also another take on Indigenous Knowledge itself, rather than Indigenous Knowledge systems. The students in the class represent different relations to indigeneity, but the majority are Black African<sup>3</sup>, and the elevating of their voices to expert level speaks to both a decoloniality of being as well as knowledge (Wynter, 2003). A Freirean (so critical) perspective on education speaks to the teacher-student aspect rather than them being in a 'student mode' for this assessment.

What is understood as Western knowledge has been elevated over other knowledge systems and ways of knowing. This course users access a pluriversality of knowledge, using both Western and African knowledges (Gills & Hosseini, 2022). The students as agents of knowledge disrupt the knowledge hierarchy in the classroom and do this in the hallowed space of the final exam for the course. Inviting student voice – literal voice – moves students from the position of anonymous numbers in a written exam into the space of individuals with voices expressing their knowledge as drawn from the course.

The data discussed above reflects a level of relationality in the dialogism; students are talking about their own views in relation to the lessons, the theories, and their peers. This relationality relates to

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<sup>3</sup> I want to acknowledge the diversity in the class, and that each person is in their own positionality in axes of race, gender, class, sexuality, ideology, religion, age, ability, and other dynamics. The point I am making above is that most of these students do not fulfil the criteria for the coloniality of being (Wynter, 2012) to render them as knowledge producers in a system with multiple axes of oppression and coloniality acting against them.

critical dialogic pedagogy in that all these elements were Bakhtinian parts of the dialogue itself, and in a Freirian sense, world and word were both being read and reflected on.

The range of themes in the data is in itself interesting. Although the data shows a wide range of topics, and thus choices made, the choices students made for the podcast were carefully scaffolded; in class, in the pre-podcast task, and in the rubrics. Within this scaffolding, there was also a wide range of choice as they could choose from a range of topics, readings, discussions, and podcasts. However, the final 10 themes arrived at show commonalities in the class dialogic, as well as the individual. This suggests that critical dialogic pedagogy also involves a class discourse, as well as individual knowledge production.

The amount of choice in the exam and the impact this had is also reflected in the data; the themes where students speak about how their voices, opinions, and thoughts were taken seriously show a level of reflection on their own knowledge. Their appreciation of the difference they experienced between this and other forms of assessment also speaks to a decolonial impulse in assessment, i.e., disrupting the rigid boundaries of assessment within which the student is dictated to and provided very specific margins within which to draw on the knowledge to answer a very specific question. This approach, rather, invites student voice, student choice, and student expertise in their having participated in the course, to display what they feel is relevant for their chosen profession.

Language did come up as a topic of discussion in the course and is, of course, very relevant to decoloniality, as well as to the issue of student voice and expression. The classroom discussions and free writing were open to any language the students wanted to speak in, and I did allow students to speak in any chosen language for parts of their podcast, and so practice translanguaging. However, while we did have this open language policy, most of the podcasts were exclusively in English. This suggests two things; firstly, language policy needs to be applied consistently throughout the course, and as the lectures and readings were in English, this imposed a language of learning and a language hierarchy. Secondly, it shows a potential anxiety in students is being assessed in their mother tongue, and so a reluctance to incorporate it.

With what students have shared in reflections, their voices and choices, their modes of navigating this assessment, are evident, as is their learning. While this is also apparent in the actual podcasts, the reflections draw on the students' metacognition and their expression of their own experiences, and the potential shifts in their thinking. This self-reporting has certain drawbacks in methodology,

as it was part of an exam, however, the diversity of responses suggests that students did not feel constrained to answer in one way. Analysing the responses through thematic analysis has raised a range of themes that speak to course involvement, critical dialogic pedagogy, and a decolonising process in assessment.

### Limitations

This paper is a study of one course, in one particular context, and without the participation of the entire course. This acts as a limitation as it impacts transferability and is examining a sample of podcasts and reflections rather than those of the whole class. However, I feel this paper is still important because it offers up the potential of critical dialogic pedagogy as a decolonial pedagogy. The data used represents the content of and reflections on podcasts by students, and these are no less valid for being a sample of the class. Showing what the podcasts have achieved in some cases demonstrates the potential of the method, which could be applied and adapted to different contexts. One limit to transferability would be class size, as podcasts take quite long to mark as they need a set time for listening to, once for content, and twice for marking. However, the method could be adapted by making classes smaller. The Global South context, where coloniality is still prevalent, might benefit most from these methods, however, dialogism and reflexivity are useful tools in myriad contexts.

### Conclusion

This paper is argued on a micro level but poses a bigger question about the potentials of decolonial impulses and actions in the more macro higher education space. Walsh argues, in part of a bigger argument, that decolonisation needs to move beyond justice, for the “decolonial cracks”.

These cracks, while not solutions, are part of a decolonial(izing) praxis that opens toward other realities, other ways of seeing and perceiving, of becoming, thinking, knowing, doing, and living; of pedagogies and praxis that are not simply for justice but more crucially for existence, dignity, and life (Walsh, 2023: 513).

Within the assessment structures we have, we can generally only work in the cracks. At the HWU where this work was conducted there is an assessment policy (although this was not the case during the time of this research) which foregrounds continuous and formative assessment, allowing for dialogism, student involvement, and decolonial impulses. This is not the case around the globe. At

the same time, assessment is a key element of the design and constructive alignment of a course, and so to decolonise pedagogy requires this attention is also paid to assessment (Biggs, 2014).

This paper has argued that reimagining a final exam as a podcast assessment, using critical dialogic pedagogy in both the course and in the assessment itself, is a decolonial impulse, pushing against coloniality of knowledge and being. However, the decolonisation of assessment is still a developing field, and needs to work with complex notions of knowledges, and knowers (ecologies of knowledge) as a helpful framework (Fataar & Subreenduth, 2015)). In South Africa, in 2025, all the students occupy complex positionalities, but all are still impacted in one way or another by coloniality. In pushing back against this I tried to prioritise student voice, agency, and creativity. To return to Bakhtin, Morrell writes, "... it is rather important to him that students are encouraged to be expressive and bold, that they participate in lively discussions, and that they gain an awareness of their ability to be creative as speakers and writers (Morrell, 2004: 93). This creativity itself speaks to agency and to voice. This was a key aspect of leaning towards a decolonial impulse. These decolonial cracks, these impulses, can be worked in and through by including student voice, students as knowledge creators, student agency in assessment structures, and critical dialogism in assessment processes.

Heleta argues that: "The universities have done very little since 1994 to open up 'to different bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making in new and exploratory ways' " (Heleta 2016: 2). This paper argues for a reimagining of a final exam as a podcast to address these very issues of traditions of knowledge and knowledge making within the sphere of assessment. While this is a case study of one course in a South African university, the questions raised in the paper speak to much broader issues. How do we draw issues of decolonisation into the question of assessment? What are the potentials of a critical dialogic pedagogy in this process? How do we treat student voice in assessment, especially final assessment, where the students often do not get feedback on the final product? How do we make that assessment meaningful beyond the mark that allows students to progress or not progress? I do not offer solid answers to any of these questions but have explored them in the assessment example I offer above. The argument that I do offer is that these explorations, in courses throughout the Global South, are important, and that these questions are worth leaning into, working through, and working towards finding answers for.

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