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EDITORIAL
Theory as contestation

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In this issue of *Access: Critical explorations of equity in higher education,* we introduce work that explores questions of access and equity through the *use of theory* and the *practice of theorising*. We consider how these are deployed as forms of contestation of hegemonic epistemologies, theories, pedagogies and subjectivities. The papers in the issue aim at questioning key aspects of equity policy, research and practice that go by unnoticed far too often. These papers extend the debates and perspectives this journal seeks to facilitate given that a guiding commitment for the publication is to draw on and develop critical praxis. Such development requires to bring theory and practice together in approaches that seek to challenge social inequalities within different contexts of higher education (Bunn et al. 2021).

The *use of theory* and the *practices of theorizing* invite reflection on an important question: 'What is theory and who is it for?' (Budgeon 2020). The term 'theory' is used in many ways across the literatures from which the authors and readers of this journal will be familiar. The different translations of 'theory', and the ways specific theoretical frameworks are put to use, has significant implications for analysis and interpretation. Abend (2008) identifies seven different ways in which 'theory' is commonly deployed in contemporary sociology and makes the case for explicit conceptualisation to avoid inevitable muddles and miscommunications. This is crucial not only for clarity, but for vigilance against the turning of theory toward the purposes of hegemony. As Askland et al. call attention to in this issue, theory is not only contested, but in the case of Indigenous knowledges can be used as another tool of colonialism and dispossession. Theory can be *appropriated* from its original creators and turned toward new objectives. Theory and the means to be able to theorise to explain and to produce knowledge is inevitably connected to symbolic power across a range of social sites and relations of inequality. These re/produce the unequal power dynamics in which recognition as a legitimate knowledge producer plays out, often in ways that marginalises knowledge that has been historically excluded from practices of legitimisation. The denial of recognition as a knowledge-maker means that a wide variety of classed, gendered, racialised and colonial theories and knowledges are naturalised, whilst being constructed as value-free, displacing other claims to knowledge. This is achieved through hegemonic discourses that reclaim the terms on which legitimate knowledge is recognised and produced. As Weedon explains in relation to contestations over claims to knowledge and 'truth':

'Who and what is privileged is an ongoing site of political struggle' (Weedon 1999, p. 108). Abend describes contemporary *critical theory*, *feminist theory* and *postcolonial theory* as explicitly non-normative projects, 'which usually reject the fact/value dichotomy, and hence the supposedly value-neutral sociological theory' (Abend 2008, p. 180). Moreover, in using the verb 'theorising' above, we follow Ahmed's (2000) effort to signal processes that do not lead in neat or linear forms to static outcomes. Instead, we see the role of theorising in praxis-based frameworks as something endlessly on the move; restless and responding. Ahmed, drawing on De Lauretis, makes the case that feminist work becomes most recognisable theoretically when it challenges existing theoretical contributions that apprehend and explain highly gendered norms when it troubles the categories of analysis and interpretation that these have made possible, including by other feminisms (Ahmed 2000). Asking 'What counts as feminist theory', Ahmed asserts the importance of feminist theory that works simultaneously at multiple registers of contestation:

> […] it will both contest other ways of understanding the world (those theories that are often not seen as theories as they are assumed to be "common sense"), and it will contest itself, as a way of interpreting the world (or of "making sense" in a way which contests what is "common").
> (Ahmed 2000, p. 101)

The idea of theory contesting itself might seem counterintuitive. However, it strikes at the heart of critical projects embedded in practical contexts where a belief that arbitrary conditions that have become naturalised are not 'correct', even if there is trouble in every direction. A willingness to use theory to trouble, and to theorise as a practice of unsettling, requires a commitment to the idea of knowledge as ever partial and grounded, and it demands 'a self-reflexive stance to its own production as a site of knowledge/power' (Budgeon 2020). This is crucial to making sense of access and equity in relation to entrenched structures of oppression that play out not only in the wider world but also in the production of subjectivity and self. This then requires a deep commitment to self-reflexivity to examine 'that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us' (Lorde 1984, p. 123 in Weedon 1999, p. 185).

Mellor in this issue takes a strong reflexive approach in her search for the theoretical tools that would help to 'avoid oppositional polarities', which she was concerned could 'reproduce polarised thinking by always looking for examples of oppression and not resistance or agency'. By privileging the theoretical resources that emerged from feminist, Indigenous and Black theorisation of higher education practices, she was able to examine the 'racialisations and epistemic injustice in knowing practices', and identify 'spaces of reordering and remaking'. This reflexive methodological framework foregrounded the importance of 'resistance to reproductions of (un)settler-colonial dehumanisation of Indigenous (and other marginalised) peoples' and worked towards building understandings of anti-racist, anti-patriarchal struggle in relation to broadly conceived questions of access in and through higher education curricular and pedagogical practices. Her commitment to continually exercising reflexivity in relation to scholarly work across related fields as well as the accounts of students and staff, helped her find a 'way to negotiate the politics of location' and to recognise 'subjects formed "in-between"' (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). Drawing from post-structuralism enabled a concept of subjectivity as 'always in a state of change, as discursively produced and relational' and this shaped her 'analyses of self and participants and the multiplicity of my/their positioning'.

Mellor's approach demonstrates that theory can be *disguised*. The construction of equity policy itself rests on a theory of the social that removes many aspects of the political construction of

concepts and representations. These frame what is possible and legitimate and, therefore, exclude alternative or lateral conceptualisations. Dent in this issue draws attention to this problem through the notion of 'non-traditional' students. This term refers to an attempt to broadly categorise students who have been systematically and historically marginalised from higher education participation. This innocuous term dismisses the entire *history* of the production of social closure in and through higher education. In its place is the projection of higher education access as a result of 'tradition'. Through this dehistoricisation and depoliticisation, marginalisation is created as a callous recognition of those students who, historically, would not have been admitted, as *non-normative*. The *in situ* experience of being labelled 'non-traditional' is often felt as a painful marker of difference.

The words used to articulate dominant conceptions of equity carry a theory of the social that maintains the effects of inequality while annihilating their historical cause and creation. Indeed, terms displace *other terms* that are connected to other imaginings of inequality, marginalisation and social justice. As Ahmed notes, 'the arrival of the term "diversity" involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms' (Ahmed 2012, p. 1). It allows for a hegemonic framing of the very means we have to understand, interpret and theorise what is broadly referred to here as equity frameworks. This is embedded even in the enshrining policy frameworks that have brought equity, diversity and inclusion into being. Lumb et al. seek to problematise the clumsy beginnings of the notion of 'rural' as it began to frame policymaking imaginaries in Australian higher education. Rural, regional and remote (RRR) higher education is produced as a problem largely for creating economic growth but soon after entangles rurality in equity policy. The concern for social justice comes *after* the concern for growth in particular economic subjectivities, those more carefully aligned with the constantly emerging conditions of a global neoliberalism. The authors show that this categorisation of rural/regional/remote does little to acknowledge the wide varieties of lives, identities and experiences circulating in non-urban Australia, and that contemporary RRR policy and practice commonly ignores 'the *specific and historical construction* of marginality within RRR regions and places'. Marginality is of course not an issue that is experienced simply as rural vs. urban in this context, and the authors here contend that we must recognise how rural places involve a wide range of inequalities *within* them that prevent meaningful higher education pathways from emerging.

These cases show how the absence of rigorous theories of equity that illuminate its social conditions lead towards a form of vacuous representation alien to most social actors. However, it only ever reaffirms the category as a social reality because it has not interrogated the basis of the category. In this way, uncritical research can become locked into re-creating particular categorisations of students (e.g. rural or non-traditional) by looking in the most convenient places. It presents *methodologies* that search for imagined 'equity groups' as if they are real. Wacquant summarises this well, albeit via an overtly masculine analogy, as he accounts for Bourdieu's critique of 'methodologism':

> Methodology then carries over into an implicit theory of the social which makes researchers act in the manner of the late-night drunk evoked in Kaplan (1964) who, having lost the keys to his house, persists in searching for them under the nearest lamp post because this is where he has the most light. (Wacquant 1992, p. 28)

This plays into the hands of institutional objectives, where research 'is premised on findings that institutions *want found*' (Ahmed 2012, p. 10, italics in original). Lacking a theoretically rigorous engagement the dominant account appears as the neutral account. Yet this continually displaces

any means of apprehending the complex and messy differences for groups who have been marginalised from institutionally legitimised knowledge-production, and even marginalised from the means for constructing knowledge about themselves. Instead, these groups are neatly bound into equity groups and representations by those who have the privileged social position to generate these representations. Indeed, this lends itself to 'inequality regimes' dressed up as social justice: 'a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed' (Ahmed 2012, p. 8).

The contestation of theory interrogates hegemonic forms of knowledge and knowing must also consider this in relation to the construction of the hegemonic body. Bateman's paper in this issue draws on Crip and queer theory to trouble the normative and ableist subject positions of higher education. She claims that drawing on language such as 'Crip' (from the word cripple), which might create a sense of profound discomfort, enables 'a part of the contestatory impact of what it is to be crip'. Engaging Butler's concept of 'mattering' she suggests that queer theory exposes 'how crip bodies do not come to matter within a higher education institution', 'bringing to light the imperative to critique dimensions of subjective formation that are naturalised and taken for granted in hegemonic discourses of equity in higher education' (Bateman 2022). Interrogating normative subjectivity in relation to forms of symbolic violence, she explains that violence is the result of ableist normativities, which 'continually gets reiterated in the experience of pain'.

Contesting theory requires contesting both the theories themselves, and the conditions from which theory emerges. Despite views to the contrary, theory is not able to transcend the circumstances of its production. To express this, Askland and colleagues use the very apt quote 'higher education is not a neutral enterprise' (Kirkness & Bernhard 1991, quoted in Askland, Irwin & Kilmister 2022). Theory is built on top of a politics of competition and attrition for academic positions, of the successful funding of research, on the selection of approaches, languages and theoretical lineages, and the interpersonal and macro politics of the production of knowledge. Even the theories that become more famed or more pertinent are still subject to the competition and struggle to be the strongest voice. As Askland et al. highlight, theory and theorising is entrenched and entangled in the neoliberal university. The modes by which it can highlight resistance and emancipation go hand in hand with whether or not it can be profitable for an institution. The very structures of higher education must thus be interrogated and contested as part of a recognition of what enables certain kinds of theory to emerge and to be put to work in particular ways. Like Mellor, Askland et al. point toward the very basis of knowledge production that takes for granted its White Western and colonial platform. Thus the challenge to decolonise theory requires a decolonisation of the means of theoretical production. Equity and social justice theory, then, is enabled, if not overshadowed by agendas counter to its intended outcomes. Yet, this also presents opportunities for contestation and transformation through understanding the context of the generation of theory as a vehicle of social justice.

Finally, the contestation of theory also requires *time*, or 'patient praxis' (Bunn & Lumb 2019). As Little and colleagues show, moving out of the expectations of higher educational roles is no easy feat. Academic time is largely invested in the narrow demands of a discipline, through teaching and research. Despite being framed as a place of careful knowledge production, an accelerating higher education system rarely allows for staff to dedicate their time examining and contesting the basis through which theory and knowledge are produced. Little et al. show how valuable this time is. Their account of being provided funding for research was as much about having the time to undertake research on equity outside of their disciplinary contexts as it was about the importance of being able to take the time to think, explore and forge new collegial engagements through praxis.

This collection of papers makes a contribution to thinking with, through and against theory, to consider its relation to systems, structures and practices of oppression and injustice and to draw on the insights that enable a deeply critical and analytical approach to questions of access, equity and social justice.

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Justice-centred curriculum: Decolonising educational practices to create lateral learning spaces online

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This article interrogates pedagogical practices that seek to decolonise curriculum in the context of online teaching. Calls to recognise how colonial structures continue to be reinforced through higher education has led to significant appeals to 'decolonise the curriculum' and better address Indigenous rights. This article responds to these demands by reflecting on our experiences of designing and teaching an online course, *Indigenous Peoples of the Contemporary World*. We argue that decolonising the pedagogy and the curriculum can, and must, occur across modes of teaching as part of a justice-centred educational practice. Decolonisation is a network, solidarity-based political practice, which may seem to run counter to the demands of online teaching. As such, we suggest that any attempt to decolonise online pedagogies requires additional pedagogical practices that break with traditional online teaching formats in order to challenge accepted approaches to online learning. In what follows, we reflect on our own positionality in the design of the course content and our ongoing learning as we strive to create lateral online learning spaces that centre justice. We seek to examine how we might best work within the constraints of the neoliberal university to uphold our commitment to provide a justice-centred curriculum in an online-based classroom format.

Keywords: decoloniality; justice-centred curriculum; pedagogy; online learning

Introduction

This paper analyses our efforts to transform a third-year anthropology course from its traditional face-to-face mode to a fully online course. The course, *Indigenous Peoples in the Contemporary World*, had been rested for a few years due to low enrolment numbers, and its viability was questioned from a market-oriented framework. For us, the course was, however, central to the anthropological curriculum and an essential course from the perspective of advocacy, equity and justice. The idea of cutting the university's only sociology/anthropology third-year course that focusses specifically on the conditions of Indigenous peoples within post-colonial contexts seemed an outrage. The political implications of the course and the importance of making it attractive to potential students were made evident when confronted by statements from colleagues that 'our students don't care about these issues' or (in relation to future employability) 'students don't see the value of such a course.' For us, as a starting point, such statements illuminate the problem we face within the contemporary neoliberal university: if this is right (something that counters our experience) students must be made aware of the importance of the issues that Indigenous peoples face and they must be given the opportunity to learn and understand with the aims of empowering them to translate this knowledge into advocacy towards justice-centred outcomes that are led by and for Indigenous communities. Furthermore, these statements call for a reckoning with the disciplinary history of anthropology and the need to respond to the demands from First Peoples and scholars to do better. This requires attention to decolonial pedagogies and calls for caution around theoretical approaches that have extracted Indigenous epistemologies and mobilised them as detached theoretical concepts, exacerbating practices of dispossession (see Todd 2016).

In this article, we will outline how we came to grapple with the tensions and challenges we faced in digitalising the course and reframing it as a decolonial course. Each of the authors engaged with the course in different stages of its transformation: Askland was first challenged to transform the course in its face-to-face iteration when it became part of her teaching portfolio at the onset of her employment as Lecturer of Anthropology at the University of Newcastle in 2014; Kilmister, a learning designer, was brought in on the course design and development as Askland grappled with its transferral to its new online medium in 2020; and Irwin came on board as the instructor of the online module when it first went live in 2021.The transformation of the course has, thus, been an incremental journey during which we have reflected on the philosophy and ethics of decolonial pedagogies and Indigenous storywork – meaning the study of traditional story-telling practises and their incorporation into modern-day education (Archibald 2008). In what follows, we explore the contradictions, possibilities and limitations within our attempt to offer a justice-centred course that seeks to decolonise both the curriculum and the pedagogical practices in the online teaching and learning space.

We want to first acknowledge the limitations of this approach. As Tuck and Yang (2012) rightly point out, there is no decolonising of educational systems in the context of ongoing struggles for land and sovereignty; decolonisation requires the return of land. Our personal attempts to decolonise will always fall short of achieving this within the classroom; however, we firmly believe that by operating within this framework we can collectively work with students to build better analytical frames for recognising and countering injustice. As a result, we work *with* students to build a complex and contemporary understanding of the complexities of Indigenous struggles in the contemporary world and highlight the ways in which these struggles remain tightly bound within systems of violence, inequity and ongoing colonial dispossession. We implore them to critically examine the (im)possibilities for justice-centred change while actively amplifying demands from Indigenous communities with a specific attention to battles over Indigenous sovereignty and land rights in the context of the ongoing violence of settler and

colonial state refusal (see Tuck & Yang 2012). Thus, it is important that students not leave the course with the sense that the job is 'finished'; the same holds for us as three white authors who must recognise our own complicity as settlers in Australia, particularly as two of us have reasserted that violence in our own decisions to immigrate and settle in Australia as adults.

While we seek to rage collectively with our students and dismantle the hierarchies at the core of university pedagogies in order to create lateral learning spaces, we must also recognise our limits and the structural realities within which we work. This is perhaps best evidenced in Askland's call to action – to 'rage against the machine' – in week one of the course. In a welcome video that seeks to frame the course's attention to justice, Askland sets out the terms by which the online classroom will work against hierarchies, but at the same time, the call to rage is accompanied with the language of educational hierarchies that instruct, introduce and tell students about injustice and Indigenous struggles – particularly in the context of this course which included Aboriginal students and Māori students. While in practice the course creates spaces that prioritise non-hierarchical dialogue and lateral learning, the language of instruction remains haunted by the very power, privilege and expertise we seek to disrupt. In the introductory video to the course Askland says:

> In this course I offer you a challenge: I want you to become an activist. I want you to go beyond being a citizen and become a fighter, an agent of change, a rebel, a reformer. I want you to adopt all the learning and critical theory you have encountered so far in your degree and that I will introduce you to in this course, and translate it into practice [...] Over the next weeks, I will tell you about power and injustice, resistance and resilience as these themes relate to Indigenous peoples. I will offer multiple examples of past and current failures of our social and political system in recognising Indigenous peoples' rights; I will tell you stories of violence and injustice; I will tell you about people who have fought against this violence and injustice, and who have rallied for the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights. Through this, I will encourage you, without apology, to become an activist; to become someone who sees and recognises social injustice, someone who speaks out about inequity and for the rights of those who suffer, someone who challenges the power of the privileged and rages against the machine that produces systematic inequity and violence.

The online platform and the danger of the white intermediaries

In 2019, we were tasked to set the course for the digital educational platform FutureLearn. Through this platform our university hoped to connect with a potential market beyond its normal reach. FutureLearn's pedagogical model is centred on the values of social, flexible, experiential and purposeful learning. Through the platform, learners can study hundreds of courses across a range of disciplines. FutureLearn's research and development is outwardly pedagogy-led, with universities and other partners encouraged to embrace the platform's learning philosophy, which is underpinned by a social constructivist approach that recognises learning as a collaborative practice, involving peer interactions, discussions and investigations guided by the educator (Swinnerton, Morris, Hotchkiss & Pickering 2017).

FutureLearn was the chosen platform for the aspirational project, the 'BA Online', which seeks to boost enrolment numbers in an era that has seen a significant decline in funding, cuts to the sector and reduced perception of the economic and societal value of a humanities education (Doidge, Doyle & Hogan 2019; O'Mahony, Garga, Thomas & Kimber 2019; Turner & Brass

2014). Initially, we embraced the opportunity to be involved in the BA Online project and were excited about the opportunities the platform and the provision of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) provided for our course. A key goal of the BA Online is to transform the Bachelor of Arts into a contemporary learning space premised on a multidisciplinary degree that expands opportunities for non-traditional students to participate in higher education. Opening up access to students around the world, FutureLearn offered something of an answer to the need for the humanities to spread the message about the significance of the arts in the contemporary world. At the same time, it addressed the university's need for enrolments and, as a result, the shift from a physical to virtual classroom can also be placed within the capitalist framework of students as consumers (Connell 2019).

In what follows, we take seriously Todd's (2016, p. 7) concern with the 'filtering (of) ideas through white intermediaries', which subsequently functions to both mediate and usurp Indigenous epistemologies. In the context of our task, we had to grapple with our own whiteness, the whiteness of our disciplines, the whiteness of the university as an institution, and the whiteness of the online platform on which the course was set. Our collective goal in building, designing, and delivering this course has not been to speak for – or on behalf of – Indigenous peoples. Instead, we have sought to utilise the very opportunities afforded by the nature of online learning to include Indigenous voices, media, art and scholarship throughout the course through guest visits and studio interviews and reading lists. Pedagogically, we have sought to design and deliver the course in a way that reflects our commitment to stand alongside and with Indigenous peoples.

This move remains part of a larger concern and unease with the 'extraction' of Indigenous stories. Along these lines we have sought to respond to Spice's critique of anthropology's disciplinary history of extraction. Spice outlines what such a practice might look like, noting:

> a decolonizing anthropology of course needs to reform the way in which others are represented, built it also needs to detail its entanglements with the structures of settler colonialism in the past and present [...] The ivory tower, after all, was also built on stolen Indigenous land – as well as chattel slavery. (Spice 2016, n.p.)

As we outline below, our course design and content sought to introduce students to these complex and troubling disciplinary histories in order to interrogate the production of Western, colonial epistemologies while also emphasising the rich intellectual histories of Indigenous knowledge through direct engagement with materials from Indigenous scholars and activists. Despite this, we must recognise our ongoing position within the nexus of the university's neoliberal agenda to build the reputation and profit of the university through its focus on 'work ready graduates' and 'employability,' and our own agenda to educate and advocate, to make a call for action, and to highlight schools of thought that are too often muted, erased, or stolen in the writings of white scholars that overwhelmingly subsume higher education and act as gatekeepers in the metrics of higher education (see also Moreton-Robinson 2002).

It should be noted that the course's academic predecessors had aspired to work to raise Indigenous voices and advance the students' understanding of the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. For better or worse, the initial trigger for our revisions and transformation of the course came from internal pressures within our institutions to better speak to the sectors' call to produce 'work ready graduates' and advance the humanities and social sciences from their emphasis on critical inquiry and expansion of knowledge to professional and engaged degrees

with set marketable skills. Yet again, this approach coincides with an increasingly market-oriented, neoliberal university (e.g. Connell 2019). Within this context, the opportunity to be creative and embrace new learning and assessment designs that could unsettle the conventional power relationships between students and academic staff, along with the possibility to centre Indigenous knowledge via interviews, texts, lectures, film, music and art emerged.

In what follows, we will first seek to establish our approach to decolonial, justice-centred pedagogy. The literature on decolonial pedagogy in online educational spaces is scant and, given the paucity of scholarship in this area, we will seek to offer some practical advice and inspiration for how to decolonise online teaching. While there is a large and diverse body of literature on decolonising the curriculum and other critical pedagogies, like feminist pedagogy (e.g. De Jong, Rosalba & Rutazibwa 2018), this paper joins a limited and still emerging scholarship focussed on online teaching specifically. Studies about experiences of decolonising online classrooms are less common in the decolonial pedagogy literature than those that focus on face-to-face teaching. It is perhaps not surprising that online teaching has not received much attention as the movement to decolonise the curriculum has, to date, centred on how decolonisation of the university entails decolonising its physical presence, as well as course syllabi (Chigudu 2020). Yet, other factors can explain the neglect of the digital in the scholarship. Fully online teaching, particularly the asynchronous teaching mode, usually demands educators prepare course materials well in advance, which creates tension with the notion that university curricula cannot be decolonised according to formula or 'recipes' (Behari-Leak et al. 2017). Online courses have been criticised within the academy for being driven by technological determinism, undermining educator agency, and making higher education impersonal and mechanical (Watermeyer, Crick, Knight & Goodall 2020), qualities that run counter to the aims of decolonial pedagogy and decolonising the curriculum initiatives. MOOCs are especially seen as suspect as they are predominantly created by universities in the Global North on centralised, for-profit platforms, and pushed out to learners in the Global South with little regard to local infrastructure, values and learning needs (Adam 2019). However, as online and distance teaching are increasingly husbanded by universities in their effort to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (2015), scholarship in this area is slowly growing (e.g. Spiegel et al. 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and emergency remote teaching also appears to be factors that are contributing to the emergence of the virtual classroom and its relations and dynamics as a distinct strand of the broader decolonial pedagogy literature (e.g. Ripero-Muñiz, Senabe, Maseko & Reigadas 2021).

We argue that a decolonial pedagogy – for both virtual and physical classrooms – requires an embrace of the political work of teaching and that a decolonial approach to teaching necessitates humbleness and reflection, as well as a recognition of such a pedagogy as an ongoing journey. In this sense, we draw on our training as anthropologists and humanists to inform our approaches to this pedagogical practice; one that is premised on learning with students through continuous collaboration and dialogue in order to disrupt, perhaps even dismantle, hierarchies. It is against the backdrop of this core argument that our aim is stated: to contribute to a conversation that can advance a journey towards an increasingly decolonial pedagogy as a networked, solidarity-based political practice centred on the core principles of justice, equity, respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility.

Representing Indigenous Knowledge: A pedagogy of and at the border

Decolonisation is messy and has multiple, contested meanings, making a compact definition or prescriptive guide an arguably elusive goal (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt 2015). Online asynchronous teaching – with its carefully constructed content produced months before semester begins – is, however, less elastic than live teaching contexts like tutorials, so a coherent set of substantive principles needed to be decided upon to ensure consistency across the course design.

While we recognised decolonisation is a contested and complex terrain (Gopal 2021), as a starting point, we landed on a selection of decolonial pedagogical principles we sought to implement: reframing education as a tool for empowerment and resistance of injustice; decentring dominant groups to make space for marginalised voices and experiences; engaging specifically with Indigenous and diverse voices; being deliberately political; and, recognising decolonisation is a long-term, iterative process (Silva & The Students for Diversity Now 2018; Wane & Todd 2018). We further acknowledged the roots of decolonial pedagogy in the broader school of critical pedagogies, which interrogate seemingly settled, hegemonic bodies of knowledge and question how that knowledge is created and maintained via gatekeeping practices (Freire 1970; hooks 1994).

In our experience, the debate about Indigenisation and decolonial pedagogy easily gets stuck on 'alternative knowledge models'. This continues to centre the hegemony of white knowledge within higher education and the fact that this hegemonic way of knowing was produced through the exploitation and oppression of the Global South, as well as Indigenous and marginalised peoples within the peripheries and the imperial centres alike. In this context, approaches to decolonial pedagogy become a matter of decolonising the curriculum, the hierarchies of higher education and its staffing. For example, the Rhodes Must Fall student-led protests in 2015 sought to challenge the institutional and epistemic violence that Black students faced at the University of Cape Town by calling for university-wide transformations that would centre Black students.

Following from the Rhodes Must Fall protest in South Africa – which was linked to the Fees Must Fall movement – calls from university students and staff have continued to grow for a more accessible university system and a dismantling of the current forms of exclusivity that limit access for non-white students, while policing the hierarchies of prestige upon which higher education is built (see Mbembe 2016). Alongside issues of access, movements to decolonise the university have demanded an overhaul of the forms of knowledge and the canons through which Western, colonial knowledge maintains it liveliness. As Mbembe (2016, p. 32) has argued:

> A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth to only the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

We have taken this point from Mbembe and student activists seriously to reflect on the use of canonical literature throughout the course design. These calls push beyond the approach that has nominally gained widespread acceptance within academia, namely to simply diversify the curriculum to include more racialised writers, and instead contribute to the debate about what it means to decolonise the canon (e.g. Arshad 2021; Muldoon 2019). However, despite a seemingly broader acceptance of the need to diversify the academic canon, course outlines, academic journals and university retention systems (like tenure) have not always matched these calls to action at the same speed and commitment that might truly amount to decolonising the university. Furthermore, as sociologist Raewyn Connell contends, to decolonise the curriculum is more than simply adding more diverse and racialised authors to the list of readings. Indeed, the structures of the university itself must not be exempt from interrogation and critique.

The issues at the heart of the Rhodes Must Fall protests featured within disciplinary debates and the higher education sector well before the direct actions for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes and the subsequent occupation and civil disobedience in 2015. Almost two decades

before, Kirkness and Bernhardt (1991) published a paper about First Nations and higher education in an edited volume about knowledge across cultures. In this paper they address the historical underrepresentation of First Nations people in the ranks of college and university graduates in North America. They argue that:

> If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of First Nations students and communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of indigenous [*sic*] knowledge and skills, or as Goody has put it, to foster "a re-evaluation of forms of knowledge that are not derived from books" (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 8).

This, they continue, is 'a responsibility that requires an institutional respect for indigenous [*sic*] knowledge', and an aptitude 'to help students to appreciate and build upon their customary forms of consciousness and representation as they expand their understanding of the world in which they live in' (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 8). Kirkness and Bernhardt, as well as Archibald (1990) and other scholars of the time, emphasise the relevance of First Nations' perspectives and experiences being incorporated into higher education knowledge constructions, and speak specifically to efforts of constructing Indigenous theories of education, as well as establishing reciprocal relationships that can break down the structural and cultural constraints facing Indigenous students. Although this is somewhat different to the debate about decolonising the curriculum, at its core is the shared recognition that 'higher education is not a neutral enterprise' (Kirkness & Bernhardt 1991, p. 11).

The call to decolonise the curriculum has motivated academics to include readings by non-white scholars from non-European localities, and to acknowledge the colonial history of the literature and data. There have been discussions and debate about potential for change and curriculum for reform, with recognition of how the call to decolonise or Indigenise the curriculum speaks to the relationship between democracy and education. This brings us back to Connell's assertion that a decolonised curriculum must be more than a diversification of the reading list. Such a point is similarly made by anthropologists Rosa and Bonilla (2017) who draw attention to the distinction between diverse authors and diverse epistemologies in their suggestion that 'although there is room for native *voices,* there is rarely room for native *theory*'. As Daswani (in O'Sullivan 2019) notes, the system of academic publishing perpetuates and reproduces its power and prestige at the core of the university system.

These critiques run deeper than academic publishing practices. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that the very conditions of Western knowledge production and research are premised on – and perpetuate – imperial categories and pathways for control. As such Smith suggests, *Western* knowledge production is inherently, at its core, *imperial*. As Moreton-Robinson (2015 p. 191) argues, 'the possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty require the constructions of Indigeneity to be validated and measured through different regulatory mechanisms and disciplinary knowledges within modernity'. She suggests that this both maintains and perpetuates categories that serve to dispossess and disempower as they regulate how Indigenous peoples participate in the production of disciplinary knowledge. This demands attention to how the issue of decolonising the curriculum in response to the coloniality of knowledge is not simply a matter of a clash of cultures but, rather, a concern about the operation of social, political and institutional power. Moreton-Robinson writes (2015 p. 131, emphasis added):

> What would be useful is to consider the representation of power within the law-rights-sovereignty paradigm by approaching the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and state sovereignty as relations of force located within a matrix of biopower. This is to identify and explicate the coexistence and mutual imbrications of a universal discourse of individual human rights and the prerogative of collective white possession that underpins the Australian national project. […] (W)hite possession manifests as a mode of rationality in a variety of disciplines, such as law, history, Australian studies, *anthropology,* Aboriginal studies, and political science, from the rights activism of the 1970s to the present.

Yet, discussions of retracting the lens to consider pedagogy (as distinct from content) are more limited in scope, and many seem to be missing the mark that to decolonise the curriculum is – as we see from Moreton-Robinson – not just about questioning where our knowledge comes from and offering diverse content, but it also requires teaching in reflexive and inclusive ways that ask the students for their views on the teaching itself. To deliver a justice-centred pedagogy that amplifies demands to decolonise the university and our pedagogy, we must also flip the pedagogical lens and challenge the power relationships embedded within the teaching and learning context in and of itself. It is a matter of empowering learners to recognise, analyse and *do* something about the injustice they are hearing, reading and learning about. It becomes a matter of harnessing the classroom's potential as a source from which they 'rage against the machine' or become a 'smasher of hegemonies'.

The political activism underpinning this approach to a decolonial pedagogy intersect with what Giroux classifies as 'border pedagogy' (2005). Kazanjian (2011, p. 372) summarises border pedagogy as follows:

> Border pedagogy is political in the process of rehabilitating the historical and ideological institutions that have excluded and/or benefited from exclusions of peoples/identities/cultures. In this respect, educators become cultural workers where they become involved beyond erudite knowledge.

Border pedagogy works across three categories: (1) building students' and educators' understanding of the boundaries of knowledge and privilege from which they speak; (2) encouraging students to redefine the borders and become 'border crossers' who create 'borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power' (Giroux 2005, p. 20); and, (3) creating a new lens for examining language and institutions of power and their effect on social relations, and for making visible the historical and social apparatuses of and at the border, their strengths and limitations (Giroux 2005). This type of pedagogy requires a heightened level of reflexivity and, to actualise its potential, 'educators should be training students to understand their own voice in the complexities of their history' (Kazanjian 2011, p. 373). When applied successfully, border pedagogy will support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, serving two parallel purposes. First, the establishment of a more respectful, responsible and reciprocal learning environment in which Indigenous students' lives, cultures and knowledges are celebrated, affirmed and amplified, while subsequently supporting these students as they navigate the hegemonic, neoliberal university that so often demands that Indigenous students engage through assimilation instead of through a positionality centred on justice and empowerment. Secondly, it may facilitate the advancement of commitments and partnerships for Indigenous people's rights, reclamation and reaffirmation of traditions within post-colonial and settler colonial

settings. This approach brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous students together by turning the lens of cultural assimilation away from Indigenous students and onto their non-Indigenous peers who are challenged to question the hegemonic knowledge domain and their privilege. As Giroux (2005, p. 22) explains, border pedagogy 'offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages'. It gives them the tools with which to interrogate and understand the principles that define their experience, to develop an emic (insider) appreciation of cultural difference, and understand other identities, narratives and histories as they have understood their own (Kazanjian 2011, p. 373–4).

Ultimately, a decolonial pedagogy – to which border pedagogy offers some strategies – seeks to move beyond 'enlightenment', to go further than replicating the teleology of modernity and progress. Just like decoloniality in itself, a decolonial pedagogy seeks to 'make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought' (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17). It seeks to evoke a 'decolonial attitude', which, as Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 262) explains, 'demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as indispensable and insignificant'. Such an attitude – which is a recall of the decolonial approach advanced by WEB Du Bois in the early twentieth century in his efforts to look 'at the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and in some way non-human' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 262) – requires attention to 'relational ways of seeing the world, including the relation between privilege and oppression' (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17). It is, in the words of Mignolo and Walsh (2018, p. 17), a way of seeing that 'challenges the reader to think *with* (and not simply *about*) the peoples, subjects, struggles, knowledges, and thought present here. In doing so, it urges the reader to give attention to her or his own *inner eyes*'. A decolonial pedagogy, in other words, seeks to advance a particular type of *praxis* through which 'affirmative and prospective thought-action-reflections-actions' are nurtured and 'give shape, movement, meaning, and form to decoloniality' and a decolonial subject who 'walks decoloniality' (Mignolo & Walsh 2017, pp. 17–18).

The challenge: In practice

As mentioned above, the course that we were tasked to move online is a third-year anthropology offering that explores the theme of *Indigenous Peoples in the Contemporary World.* The course offers a critical social account of the contemporary social, cultural, economic and political situations of Indigenous peoples across the world. It seeks to build the students' understanding of what 'Indigenous' means in the contemporary, how this overlaps with 'ethnic minorities' and the concept of the 'fourth world'. Whilst definitional clarity is important, central to the course is to bring the students into the political contestation embedded within these terms and the ways in which these categories of identification remain linked to imperial formations (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Accordingly, an important tenet of the course is to give students an alternative story to the national narratives that celebrate exploration and frontier conquest, the rise of capitalism and so-called progress, and the myths and legends celebrating modern nations' (settler) colonial history. Students are introduced to various case studies that seek to bring their critical understanding of the legacies of colonisation and the ongoing processes of domination and inequity that shape Indigenous peoples' lives, including contemporary battles over land/marine rights, co-existence with – and resistance to – settler/migrant communities, independence and nationhood, and reclamation of pre-colonial political boundaries and entities. By investigating examples of twenty-first century land use struggles (e.g. Standing Rock, Adani Carmichael Mine, the Brazilian 'war of survival'), it places distinct emphasis on how

contemporary challenges facing Indigenous peoples continue to relate to questions of land, land use and dispossession. Furthermore, all the students are invited to offer counter-hegemonic stories from their perspectives through the discussion that unfolds in relation to the various activities and steps in each week, as well as through their own advocacy, as this forms part of the course's assignment portfolio (see below).

Moving online

> *No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning*
> Native American Proverb

The first task, to move online, was framed by the strategic teaching and learning framework of the University and the technical setup of FutureLearn. FutureLearn is an asynchronous learning platform; students undertake the learning at their own pace rather than needing to be present for scheduled online classes and, as such, the flexibility of online learning is retained to allow a global audience and an adaptation to students' multiple needs and circumstances. Course content is released week-by-week and students work on the same content in the same seven-day period to maintain critical mass in the discussions and other activities, thus retaining an emphasis on social learning. The structure of the course is modularised/'chunked' in a linear manner: twelve weeks became four modules of three weeks each, and each week separated into between 3–6 'activities' (or sections), which consisted of three to six 'steps' (or pages). Accordingly, the students complete about approximately twenty learning steps each week (equivalent to the time students devoted to lectures and tutorials in the face-to-face version of the course), which were crafted to scaffold learning and offer a variation of exercises and forms of engagement, including articles, videos, discussions, quizzes and polls. These steps related to different learning types according to Laurillard's conversational framework (2002): acquisition, enquiry, production, discussion, practice and collaboration.

To link together the steps, we developed a whole-course narrative, which, importantly, centred on the principles of Indigenous ways of learning – respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility – set out by Kirkness and Bernhard (1991). With the course encapsulating multiple Indigenous peoples and struggles from across the world, this required a form of storywork (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019) on our behalf, which prioritised Indigenous knowledge, thought and heritage. Our role in this process became that of facilitators for Indigenous storywork in order to present a different narrative with the aim of furthering the necessary work to 'rectify the damage and reclaim [Indigenous] ability to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach' through a diligent engagement with Indigenous-led content and discussions made possible by the online platform (Archibald, Lee-Morgan, & De Santolo 2019, p. 7). We sought to create what Battiste (2000, cited in Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019, p. 8) refers to as 'a cooperative and dignified strategy'; a task that required mindfulness of how the very story our research in the establishment of the course ran the risk of reifying hegemonic power structures and creating further marginality (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo 2019; Swadener & Mutua 2008). Yet, we think it is worth highlighting that due to the hiring practices of the neoliberal university, it still positioned three white scholars as the gatekeepers to this storyline, tasked with determining the narrative structure and inclusions, which highlights the structural limitations to our ambition to decolonise the curriculum.

At the very starting point of our storywork, we encountered our white framing and the limitations of our storytelling within the online platform. The narrative we established was set in a classic Western narrative style of a linear story, starting 'at the beginning' and moving through to the imagined, dreamed-of future. The beginning is here shaped in itself by colonisation, but rather

than framing a 'people without history' (Wolf 1997), our beginning is this very myth and its delegitimisation. Through the various steps, with associated readings by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers, we crafted a storyline that centres Indigenous cultures and a deep respect for Indigenous ways of living and knowing. Furthermore, it is a storyline that highlights the injustice and hegemonic oppression of Indigenous peoples while also aiming to promote examples of Indigenous-led transformative action in pursuit of social justice across the globe.

Building a decolonial framework

> *Jođi lea buoret go oru – Time is a ship that never casts anchor*
>
> Sami proverb

With our storyline crafted, the task of putting together the modules, weeks, activities and steps began. A first effort was to consider the curriculum and the voices the students would hear and change the list of reading to forward relevant case studies, making Indigenous and Global South scholars the starting point. This is not to say we removed all classical readings or white scholarship; conversely, we sought to set up a conversation between such pieces and those emphasising Indigenous knowledges, alternative universalisms and Global South theory.

Decolonial and post-colonial scholarship as heralded by writers from the Global South are now set as important theoretical framings for the course. In previous iterations of the course, theory had been light, and the theoretical framework of decolonisation had been underplayed, leaving the critique and discussion somewhat superficial because deep structural constraints and alternative pathways require rigorous theoretical framing. As the course was intensified theoretically, a central part of our job was to find ways to bring the theory to life and make it accessible for students at an undergraduate level. Through the incorporation of learning tasks and assessments where the students explore empirical case studies, we developed a canvas onto which the students can, metaphorically, paint with the theory. These activities challenge the students to work with empathy and respect, to seek an emic understanding of the battles and struggles conveyed, and, through this, get to see the theory as it is lived. Through a joint focus on theory and Indigenous-led activism, students build a complex understanding of the histories of the dispossession of land and knowledge. Furthermore, by centring Indigenous voices and activism, the students gain a better understanding of the structures of exploitation as well as the agency, resistance and actions of Indigenous communities around the world who have – for decades – worked to amplify their claims and build the power necessary to resist subjugation. Building and expanding knowledge about the shared stories of resistance and struggle by attending to diverse Indigenous lives and cultures is, thus, central to the course. But, equally as important, and in line with the principles of border pedagogy, is the need to translate this knowledge and learning into practicable, justice-centred action.

Becoming activists

> *Gnatola ma no kpon sia, eyenable adelan to kpo mi sena – Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story*
>
> Ewe proverb

A cornerstone of the course and our decolonial approach is the student assignments. This is also one of the most challenging elements of the course design and the translation of theory to practice. Ultimately, the university requires us to assess students' learning and give that learning a quantitative value that places them within a hierarchy of achievers. We are required to use rubrics and measures that break the students' learning into categories and parts. This approach

to guiding and recognising learning seem far removed from the emphasis on holistic learning and alternative pathways to knowledge, which forms part of a decolonial pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies. The emphasis on grading is highly inequitable, disproportionately challenging students who come into a course with little prior exposure to academic discourse and little knowledge about the course (often theory) content, including Indigenous students, students of colour and students from working-class backgrounds (Gruner 2022; Threadgold, Burke & Bunn 2018). Further, grades are recognised to impede learning, working against reflection on (and dialogue about) feedback. Here, we were faced with a distinct pedagogical logic shaped by the neoliberal university's requirements for ranking (of graduates, courses, degrees, and, ultimately, the university itself) that worked *against* our desire to build an inclusive pedagogy that centres on holistic learning.

In this context, we had to choose which fight to fight and our desire to 'ungrade' (Kohn 2011) had to be put aside (for now). Working to the expectations of a summative grading schedule, we established a scaffolded assignment regime that emphasises accumulated learning and that seeks to strengthen interest in what is taught, encourage critical and reflexive thinking, and build respect, recognition, reverence and sense of responsibility. Perhaps somewhat contradictory, we created an approach to assignments that, during the process of approval, was deemed 'assessment heavy' and questioned for its viability: there are a total of five assignments that the students must complete during the 12 weeks of semester, which each adopt KWLS as a means to build reflexive learning practices, dialogue, feedback and engagement.[1]

Drawing on TallBear's feminist-Indigenous approach to inquiry (2014), the students are challenged to find a way of researching, talking about and amplifying the voices of an Indigenous group with a focus on applying the principles of 'giving back' and 'standing with'. The students choose an Indigenous group or issue, which is to be at the centre of their semester's work, and they are challenged to build an assessment portfolio guided by a justice-centred concern with the lived realities of Indigenous-led struggles. They are tasked with challenging the standard notions of objectivity and to begin their inquiry 'from the lives, experiences, and interpretations of marginalised subjects' (TallBear 2014, p. 3). Activism is embedded in the portfolio and students are told that they are not requested to present an 'objective' or 'neutral' position but, rather, to embrace a voice that can sing 'in concert with' the people whom they research and with whom they work; they are challenged to find a way to 'stand with' an Indigenous group and inquire, not at a distance, but 'based on the lives and knowledge priorities of subjects' (TallBear 2014, p. 6). Central to this approach is also the notion of peer learning, and the students first point of advocacy is with their own peer group who learn about the richness of Indigenous cultures and struggles through the various case studies that are presented through both formative and summative activities. In the process of peer engagement, students learn to recognise shared patterns of injustice and dispossession as they build specific knowledge about their case study and connect it to larger structural processes made evident by the diverse work of their peers.

Inspiring activists

> *Those who lose Dreaming are lost*
>
> Australian Aboriginal Proverb

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[1] KWLS is an approach to assignments that strives to raise student's engagement with their own learning and build reflexive practice. For each assignment, students are asked to identify what they **K**now already about the topic and what they **W**ant to know. After they have completed their research, they are asked to reflect on what they have **L**earned (including why this is important and the resources they have found), and what they **S**till want/need to learn. The last reflection seeks to make the students think about the next part of the assignment portfolio.

Our aim is that, by the end of semester, a fire has. been lit in the students and that the course will become the beginning of an ongoing journey marked by respect and recognition of Indigenous peoples' lives, the richness of Indigenous cultures, and the multiple and ongoing struggles that Indigenous peoples face across the globe. One of the last readings the students do is Krenak's small, yet deeply inspiring and poetic book, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World* (2020). With this reading, we call for the students' recognition of how we, as a species or as global people, must look to Indigenous peoples and embrace our shared humanity if we are to have a chance at surviving the challenges of the Anthropocene and the ecocide driven by the very practices that also dispossessed Indigenous people. Krenak (2020, p. 69) writes in the final paragraph of his book:

> For those visited by these wayfarers [European adventurers and colonists], the world ended in the sixteenth century. I'm not exonerating anyone from blame, or relativizing the gravity and brutality of the machine that drove the European conquest. I'm merely pointing out that the events that ensued were the great disaster of that time, much as the conjuncture of factors labelled the Anthropocene by a selected few is the disaster of ours. For most of us, however, that abyss goes by other names – social chaos, generalized misgovernment, loss of quality of life, degraded relationships – and it's swallowing us whole.

Drawing on the popularity of Rudyard Kipling's 'Lest we forget' – today, an Australian trope used as a symbol of commemoration of the service and sacrifice of those who served the modern nation in wars and conflicts – we ask the students to scale their memory of dispossession, disruption, death and disaster away from the soldiers of the world wars and to the earlier wars and the wars that are still going in the name of 'progress' and 'modernity'. We encourage them to retain at the forefront of their practice a commitment to diversity, recognition, respect and equity, to never forget the blood on which our nations were built, to call out injustice and the legacies of colonialism; to recognise the power and resilience of Indigenous peoples across the world and remember, as Krenak suggests, the powers of dreaming. Dreaming, Krenak (2020, p. 52) explains, is 'a practice that is perceived in so many different cultures, by so many different peoples, not merely as part of the daily experience of sleeping and dreaming, but as the disciplined exercise of deriving guidance for our actions in the waking world from the dreams that visit us in our slumber'. Dreaming is more than an oneiric experience, it is 'a discipline related to our formation, to our cosmovision, to the traditions of different peoples who approach dreams as a path toward learning, self-knowledge, and awareness of life, and the application of that knowledge in our interaction with the world and other people' (Krenak 2020, p. 53).

Limitations and constraints

The FutureLearn platform offers a number of challenges and opportunities for facilitating the sort of decolonial pedagogical approach we outlined above. Each week students are taken through approximately twenty steps or screens that comprise the week's curriculum. These steps usually include some combination of an introduction, short lecture videos, interviews with guests, and case studies of Indigenous-led activism. Each step provides an opportunity for students to reflect and respond to prompts that guide the focus of each step's comment thread. In addition to the pre-designed steps, the course instructor adds further commentary to prompt discussion and build links to current events.

A first challenge in implementing the approach outlined above emerged when setting up the layout of the course in the online environment. Finding public domain imagery to support the learning proved challenging as images of Indigeneity were often stereotypical, speaking to tropes of authenticity and not representative of Indigenous peoples today. Even beyond person-focussed photography there were myriad ethical challenges to navigate. Objects and artwork hosted on the web were typically not accompanied by contextual descriptors, so we were unsure if we would be (mis)appropriating objects of spiritual significance if they were used to support the learning content. Furthermore, while archival institutions such as the British Museum collect vast visual material relating and belonging to Indigenous peoples, which are published on their websites, these images can present multiple problems: in the main, these items were taken from their traditional owners without permission and shipped outside their places of origin to be displayed without context in the metropole. While we recognise museum exhibitions and displays are increasingly moving towards critical representations of empire and the role of the museum in upholding the imperial project (Giblin, Ramos & Grout 2019), we must be careful not to uncritically reproduce de-historicised and de-contextualised objects. These issues point to a first critique or limitation of what one is actually possible to do within the neoliberal university when seeking to decolonise the curriculum: whereas the search for images could have been replaced by a collaboration with Indigenous peoples around how to represent Indigeneity as a global theme, as well as particular Indigenous groups, time constraints and a limited development budget discouraged such collaboration and practice.

Another limitation is evident in the continuing reliance on written culture and modes of communication. Whilst we embed multiple modes of storytelling in the course material, including a strong emphasis on oral communication through video and audio files, written language remains at the core of the learning material and pedagogy. The reliance on the multiple comment threads for the course's primary mode of communication and engagement with students leads to a particular focus on language and representation. Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent with tone and measure when engaging in online discussion and disagreement, there is an added opportunity to slowly and carefully attend to the way students utilise language in order to analyse presumptions and discourse. While conversations in the traditional classroom tend to move quickly with student contributions unevenly taken up and segues leading to new territory, the multi-step process which features separate commentary spaces allows for students to focus on concepts, ideas and practices as discreet entities before analysing them in concert towards the end of the unit. As a result, students can slow the pace of their learning to ask questions, but also to share and reflect on their understanding and lived experiences of these concepts.

Additionally, by creating a conversation between the prepared content and the live, but delayed, conversation in the comments it is possible to build a second narrative that runs throughout the comments section and that drives critical engagement with the more static sections of each unit. For example, in the first week's course content students are introduced to a lesson on language and terms which directs students to the Australian Human Rights Commission as the framework for best practices. As the course is offered through an Australian public university, Askland and Kilmister decided to use the Commission's guidelines to inform the design of the course, illustrating how, despite our emphasis on decolonial pedagogy, the Australian state remains centralised. The guideline led to the decision *not* to capitalise 'Indigenous' throughout all the course material (though distinct Indigenous ethno-linguistic groups – such as, for example, Māori, Maasai, San, Sami, Inui, Tikúna, Krenak, Ainu – are capitalised). However, one student quickly inquired in the comments as to why the word Indigenous had not been capitalised as they believed it should be. This created a broader conversation about course formalities and

limitations, and our ability to simultaneously subvert them. In response to the student's question, Irwin explained that while the content offered in each step would follow the Commission's guidance, the comments would operate differently as she would capitalise Indigenous in the comments. This offered the broader opportunity to talk with students about the limitations of deferring to the guidance from the Australian state as a settler colonial authority and instead encouraged students to reflect on how they too might seek out practices that centre Indigenous peoples, instead. As we see in this exchange the online platform established a necessary and reflexive transparency between instructor and student that opened up the pathway for critical engagement with the legacies of knowledge production within the academe and the broader institutions of the colonial and post-colonial state. However, this interaction demands a larger set of reflections and returns us to the very critiques levelled by scholars and activists who have sought to call out state-based rights frameworks for perpetuating imperial forms of dispossession in the name of protection and provisioning (see, for example: Moreton-Robinson 2015; Irwin 2020).

The challenges described above emerged at the stage of design and it was when we first came into a dialogue with the students that we were able to settle with our 'resolution' around representation and language. A third issue of this kind is linked to the assessment portfolio. When developing the assessment regime, a key challenge was to ensure the task remained true to decolonial values. As outlined above, the students are challenged to develop an advocacy campaign as part of their semester-long case study of an Indigenous group or struggle. Here, we quickly identified an easy slippage that sees the reference of the Indigenous groups as the 'student's people', or 'your people' and 'my people'. This short-hand reference to the case studies is deeply problematic and is an example of how colonial violence is reproduced through everyday linguistic terms, seemingly benevolent but filled with connotations to past and present trauma linked to colonial structures of violence and power. Linked to this, is the case studies' potential to move into a modernist development discourse that perpetuates imperialist ideals of progress and 'rescue' (from underdevelopment or from structures of domination and control). An important part of the instructions that the students receive about the assessment portfolio is that they are not to 'talk for' the Indigenous group. Rather, it is emphasised that the advocacy campaign is situated within the idea of social justice; it is within the space of social justice that the students are to be active and their task is to identify and activate the significant social justice issue embedded in the case they focus on. The students are to research issues that are lived realities of Indigenous people and, through this, stand with these communities. Thus, the key question becomes: what are the key justice issues that the Indigenous groups are articulating claims for and how do they organise around it. The students' task is to amplify what is already done and to, as TallBear (2014) states, 'speak in concert' with them and find pathways to channel the already articulated demands for justice.

An ongoing process of learning: Creating iterative, lateral learning spaces

For us, these examples are at the same time indicative of the limitations for decolonialisation when driven by those of us representing dominant culture and working within institutions such as the university, and a guide for what decolonisation may look like in the context of a predominantly white university and implemented by white scholars.

First, it indicates that decolonisation is, as decoloniality (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 17), not a static condition: it is iterative and ongoing, evolving with and through the voices of the classroom. We have to succinctly recognise our own positionality, engage with our whiteness and our privilege, and recognise the limitations of our practice and the constraints of our actions. We must speak to the limitations of what we can do; by exposing the limitations, we can give

space for Indigenous voices and experiences. For this, the curriculum and the learning platform must be open and flexible so as to enable an ever-expanding field of voices, which broadens who we speak with and who we listen to. We have to work with parallel timeframes where the short-term deadlines of the university are countered by an expansive timeframe driven by a long-term objective to advance collaboration guided by Indigenous people.

Second, it emphasises the political work of our teaching and the need for us to show through our pedagogical practice the theory of decoloniality: we must practice what we preach. We must highlight to the students how the state seeps into our daily practice, in the classroom, in how we got to work, in how we find housing, and in all the components that set up measures and rules for societal participation and belonging. We must adopt the tools by which to make visible the invisible injustices hiding in the Western narrative of progress and advancement, and we have to give the students the tools to recognise what is marginalised and omitted.

Third, it exposes a particular approach – or definition of – decolonisation: decolonisation is a networked, solidarity based political practice. No-one can decolonise in isolation; decolonisation requires solidarity and relationships. These relationships are both within and beyond the classroom. Central for curriculum are the relationships that take us beyond the university's traditional epistemological and ontological homes; central to the pedagogy are the relationships with students. A decolonial classroom is a lateral space filled with multiple voices; it is a classroom centred on respect, recognition, reverence and collaborative learning. This also removes our position as knowledge holders and emphasises how we, as educators, are engaged in a process that goes beyond teaching – we are engaged in a space learning *with* those whose stories emerge through the curricula and, not least, with the students.

In the end, we have arrived at a conclusion of our own decolonial practice as being a matter of creating a lateral learning environment that engages with a justice-centred curriculum. Our call for action, for activism, for activation is a call for justice through a decolonial framework in which we face our own agency and our own culpability.

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Developing a decolonial gaze: Articulating research/er positionality and relationship to colonial power

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This article details some of the tensions and complexities of doing research on decolonising higher education. It argues for feminist-informed, reflexive-methodological approaches that are sensitive to power, in particular to the power relations existing in/of settler-colonial social terrains (Tuck & Yang 2012). By reflecting on the methodology of a research project designed to provide insights into an ethical praxis of decolonising higher education, I explore how reflexive approaches engage with questions of research/er and participant epistemological and ontological positioning in relation to colonial power and discourse (Ahmed 2007; Alcoff 2007). My approach resists positivist discourses that uphold Western patriarchal rationalities of an objective, controllable world (Lather 1991). I pay attention to the social construction of knowledge and knowing practices aiming to be perceptive of the social situatedness of both the researcher and the researched. This includes considering the contentions raised by decolonial feminists who have argued that the limitation of 'White feminism' (Lazreg 1994) – particularly in the way Whiteness remains unmarked – 'works to avoid an engagement with [an] Indigenous critical gaze on the white racial subject who constructs and represents the "Other"' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 181).

Keywords: feminist-social epistemology; coloniality; Whiteness; reflexive methodology

Introduction

This article explores some of the philosophical questions and principles of my methodological approach as I researched efforts to decolonise pedagogical practices in higher education. By reflecting on methodological complexities as a non-Indigenous White woman my purpose is to contribute to discussions of epistemic responsibility in relation to decolonisation/Indigenisation discourses in Australia (Bunda, Zipin & Brennan 2012; Butler & Young 2009; Jakobi 2019; Rigney 2011). In particular I address questions of research/er positionality in the context of ongoing coloniality and the implications for making knowledge claims.

In this discussion I position Australian higher education as an institution constructed through (un)settler-colonial social relations (Hokowhitu 2020a). Accordingly, socio-epistemic relations are formed through dominant Eurocentric and androcentric worldviews (Dudgeon & Walker 2015; Kuokkanen 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2011). This is the legacy of an imperialist past that shapes the contemporary educational landscape (Hokowhitu 2020a). A discussion of research and decolonial thinking takes as a starting point institutional responsibilities to disrupt patriarchal colonial constructions of knowing and knowledge (Battiste 2013; Hayes, Luckett & Misiaszek 2021). I suggest practices of feminist-informed reflexivity and 'responsible agency' (Medina, 2013) as appropriate methodologies to counter partiality and problematise knowledge constructions of privileged groups (Crenshaw 1989; Haraway 1988; Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins 1986, 2009; Mohanty 1988; Smith 1987).

My awareness of the importance of reflexivity grew from addressing how I research decolonising the institution from a non-Indigenous perspective. 'Non-Indigenous' positionality, as referred to in this article, represents perspectives or categories of experience that do not derive from, identify as, nor claim, a privileged Indigenous standpoint (Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 1998). Non-Indigenous positionality may draw on Indigenous standpoints to better understand Indigeneity but cannot claim Indigenous epistemological and/or ontological authority. In my study I collected data and constructed interpretative analyses with non-Indigenous participants to examine dominant subjectivities intersecting with Whiteness and approaches to Indigenisation. I explored how the White institution both accepts and refuses engagement with Indigenous knowledges and ontologies. This is something I needed to consider in the way I developed a reflexive methodological approach in order to avoid reproducing dualistic thinking and essentialising identities and positionality.

Harding argues for 'strong reflexivity' (2004, p. 136) in which there is no subject/object split. In other words, the subject is critically examined in the same way as the object of inquiry in order to locate beliefs and values that play a central role in research and the production of knowledge. Without strong objectivity, certain values (and subjectivities) can be 'vetoed' by academic or scientific communities if they do not resemble the dominant or 'qualified' profile. The nature of racialised and gendered 'vetoes' or exclusions that occur in academia, has been the subject of debate (for discussions and debates on race, gender and situated knowledge see: hooks 1982, 2004; Brah & Phoenix 2004; Mirza 1997). The following account is my attempt to show how I made use of reflexivity as a critical methodological tool to unpack some of the political/social contexts, implications and tensions of doing research (Lather 1991) on decolonising the institution.

The research context

The underpinning study explores how academics and students articulate and take up the responsibility of decolonising/'Indigenising' pedagogy and the curricula[1]. This work was motivated by my desire to shift the gaze to the institution of higher education and explore how Whiteness and coloniality operate to exclude Indigenous peoples and their knowledges, and the resulting struggles for epistemic justice.

A qualitative approach consisted of two case studies focussing on the degree programs of Psychology and Development Studies at a regional university in Australia. Over a period of two teaching semesters I conducted observations, focus groups and interviews with 30 participants including academics and students in their final years of study. Participants were selected from Psychology and Development Studies because there was a level of engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives 'across the curriculum' (Rigney 2011, p. 6) in both programs of study. They offered the opportunity to examine interdisciplinary subjects and access to 'a wide range of curricular discourses' (Quinn 2003, p. 9). I targeted the science faculty because related studies show that more work is needed on responsibilities and (re)positioning of Indigenous knowledges (and equity) in science degree programs (Phillips, 2011).

Indicating a nexus between Indigenous and discipline knowledges, the cases were an opportunity to explore in depth 'what was going on'. Case study research is suited to capturing 'processes and relationships' (Denscombe 2007, p. 38) and 'activities being evaluated' (Cousin 2009, p. 132) through consideration of multiple variables that shape complex environments and practices in specific settings. Ethnographic data captured in the study included accounts by students and staff from heterogeneous disciplinary communities in the faculty, showing some of the subtleties and complexities that exist in the processes and effects of curricula and pedagogy at the cultural interface (Nakata et al., 2012). A multi-sited approach attempted to capture daily practices in discipline areas that are at different levels of engagement. This approach was important to the study so as 'not to overlook the differences, compromises, and negotiations' (O'Hern & Nozaki, 2015, p. 7) that may be apparent in the faculty of science as well as the broader university environment regarding commitments to 'Indigenous reconciliation'.

Through a decolonial lens, I investigated discourses that influence students and academic staff as they engage with questions of curricula, pedagogy and knowledge, including opportunities to engage with knowledges of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. I focussed on the pedagogical and curricula issues they considered important and whether these were related to policy, social justice and/or student experiences. The idea for this work emerged through my experiences of teaching and researching in higher education access and equity-based contexts. I observed through my practices, and from my engagement with critical education literature, that widening participation policies often frame equity in remedial terms as 'reforming the student', without exploring the implications of dominant knowledge and pedagogy within the institution (Burke 2012). This led me to reflect on my own positionality and complicity in reproducing hegemonic knowledge.

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[1] 'Indigenisation' of curricula is a contested and complex area of higher education policy and discourse which is beyond the scope of this article. Broadly I refer to it here as a suite of practices and discipline specific approaches towards cultural and academic engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students that also include proposals for universities to 'develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teaching and Learning Frameworks that reflect the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge within curriculums, graduate attributes and teaching practices' (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly 2012, p.14).

Developing reflexivity through a decolonial gaze

One of the methodological concerns I faced was determining how to satisfy the requirements of orthodox Western systems of scholarship in ways that avoid reinscribing White privilege (Alcoff 2017). I attempted to engage with this tension by situating my methodological framework within the field of feminist-social epistemology. The project is therefore shaped by a combination of qualitative and ideology-critical theoretical paradigms (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). I drew on foundational work that challenges the epistemological hierarchies of dominant patriarchal, Western-based systems of research (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Lather 1991). Feminist epistemologies enable the researcher to engage with formations of gender, race and power around research, questioning whose research and in whose interests the research is being conducted (Skeggs 2004; Usher 1996). They make explicit that notions of neutrality – the idea that research can be 'value-free' – needs critical attention (Haraway 1988; Harding & Norburg 2005). This includes considering the contentions raised by decolonial scholars who have argued that the limitation of 'White feminism' (Lazreg 1994) – particularly in the way Whiteness remains unmarked – 'works to avoid an engagement with [an] Indigenous critical gaze on the white racial subject who constructs and represents the "Other"' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 181).

Opening up questions of epistemic authority my methodology was informed by literature foregrounding structures of colonial power, voicing and silencing (Battiste 2013; Kuokkanen 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). This literature examines

> the after-effects, or continuation, of ideologies and discourses of imperialism, domination and repression, value systems (e.g., the domination of western values and the delegitimization of non-western values), their effects on the daily lived experiences of participants, i.e. their materiality, and the regard in which peoples in post-colonial societies are held (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013, p. 45).

I drew on decolonial theory to examine notions of inclusive curricula and pedagogy, 'Indigenisation', social justice, and transformative education and discourses on reconciliation policies in Australian higher education institutions. This theory speaks to the challenges of deconstructing research and methodological practices that have historically positioned Indigenous peoples and their knowledges as colonised subjects: 'explored and exploited, researched and examined, assessed and investigated' (Kim Elston et al. 2013, p. 6) which are then 'coded into the Western system of knowledge' (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, p.45). A decolonial gaze was vital to the project through which I developed my analyses of the 'institutionality of Whiteness' (Ahmed 2012) and pedagogical engagement at the cultural interface (Nakata 2007a).

Decolonial thinking pays attention to the processes of 'Othering' and encourages methodologies that disrupt binary (for example traditional/contemporary) constructions of culture and knowledge systems (O'Hern & Nozaki 2015). It also takes seriously pedagogic strategies that acknowledge, challenge and relinquish White privilege in order to disrupt the race order and redistribute power (Moreton-Robinson 2000). It means identifying racial domination as not 'extrinsic' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 183) to 'critical White anti-racist' subjectivities, but a fundamental element that needs to be reflexively critiqued. I tried to address these tensions and contradictions by establishing practices of reflexivity in my research.

Reflexivity as an integral element of methodology is tied to the epistemological questions and concerns of the research itself. How do students come to know? How can knowing practices be

shaped in more socially-just ways through pedagogical (and philosophical) orientations? Practising reflexivity is a way of apprehending the dilemmas of doing research in a White normative environment. It enabled me to work from a critical 'non-innocent' position (Lather 2007). By this I mean focusing on the situatedness of knowing and knowledge and the discursive practices of speaking with/listening to others (Alcoff 1991). Lather elaborates:

> 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 noninnocent space, a "within/against" location […] Butler's (1993b) work on iteration or subversive repetition is of use as a way to keep moving within the recognition of the noninnocence of any practice of knowledge production. Within/against, then, is about both "doing it" and "troubling it" simultaneously (Lather 2007, p. 38).

I felt the tension of being both 'within/against' in terms of my research/er context and participants' accounts. I attempted to engage with this tension and recognise it as an important point of discussion on the irreconcilable nature of epistemological dilemmas. I also saw the possibilities of shifting subjectivities as Lather alludes to, by working in, but also critiquing the research process. I am located by/in multiple formations of power that allow me to challenge constitutions of knowledge, but also determine my 'legitimacy' as a researcher.

Shifting towards reflexive decolonial knowledge-making may include research practices that resist the 'natural identity' of 'double privilege': 'both white and leaders of research' (Puch-Bouwman 2014, p. 414). I therefore offer an account of Whiteness (as a legacy of colonialism) and the regulation of subjectivity to better understand the research process. I engaged with principles of feminist-social research by locating myself – and indicating the autobiographical aspect (Miller 1997) – in relation to the sociological questions of the inquiry. If I do not understand my own situatedness to the research context and my relationship to power, then I undermine the notions of feminist objectivity and partiality (Haraway 1988) and decolonising methodologies that call for self-reflexivity (Battiste 2013; Dudgeon & Walker 2015; Medina 2013). Medina's account of epistemic responsibility argues that 'responsible agency' requires taking responsibility for self-knowledge as well as social knowledge of the world. But in order to provide a realistic account of responsible agency Medina qualifies self-knowledge as contextual because knowing practices take place in social environments or pedagogical spaces, meaning they are 'lived, relational and embodied practices' (Burke & Crozier 2012, p. 6) embedded in systems of power. In Medina's 'thesis of cognitive minimums' (2013, p. 12) he states: 'Responsible agency requires that one be minimally knowledgeable about one's mind and one's life, about the social world and the particular others with whom one interacts, and about the empirical realities one encounters' (2013, pp. 12–13).

I also offer the following account in response to critical Indigenous studies (Kovach et al. 2014), acknowledging the epistemic responsibilities attached to the social production of knowledge. Positioning statements are important culturally to Indigenist-informed research (Kovach et al. 2014) and socio-politically to sociologists. They help to elucidate the social position subjects occupy and hence which bodies of knowledge and epistemic distortions subjects may (or may not) be able to identify, challenge and resist or fight against. Self-positioning enables better

understanding of how one contributes to and produces knowledge in relation to others (Medina 2013).

Positioning statement

My 'whys' as in 'why this research?' are rooted in the imperial White imaginary, the context that shaped me. This imaginary constituted the 'thick webs', 'the frameworks' that are 'proximate' (Freire, P & Freire, AMA 1994, p. 103) to the creation of my subjective experiences and to my subsequent (re)thinking towards decolonial theory. As part of my reflexive practice it is important to locate 'visible whys' this way, when Whiteness is so often invisibilised by hegemonic socio-epistemic spaces (Bunda et al. 2012). This is a crucial part of the methodology, for understanding how I and participants are located in systems of power (in terms of race, gender and class) and how this has a bearing on the questions I ask and the way I interpret and analyse the data. It means taking on 'the messy terrain the history of colonization left behind that we are all embedded in. I find *me* in the story, in the present manifestations of colonization (institutionally, culturally, socially and spiritually)' (Cary 2004, p. 70).

I provide a brief narrative account to locate myself in relation to the research, not so much to reveal 'me', but to show how we may arrive into a story that has been going on for a long time. So, this narrative is 'a version' because it 'will be disoriented by what is not mine, or what is not mine alone' (Butler 2001, p. 26). As I am not the only White woman who has tried to think and write within/about the discursive field of the postcolonial university my experiences are representative of a particular position.

Born to an Irish/Scottish/Anglo heritage I grew up on the homelands of the Awabakal People, a place 'we', the inheritors of colonial naming systems, call Newcastle. The dominant social structures of Newcastle, New South Wales, were formed through the working-class ethos of mining and steel making. Like most local communities built around extractive-industries dependent on extraction of land resources and diminishment of Country, the bulk of generated economic wealth went elsewhere. I have strong affective memories of teenage attempts at bravado as I moved within and between hyper-masculine White spaces of potential violence and threat that dominated my hometown. Those years are marked by adapting and surviving in a particular patriarchal, misogynistic social landscape with accompanying White supremacist logics, not of my making though I was part of its maintenance, an environment I had to equip myself to survive, through careful self-governance. The work and research I am drawn to is an attempt to make a counter-move against the social, embodied and material dimensions of gendered and racialised violence, the epistemic and ontological violence of 'the trouble' (Taylor 2020) that was constant in the lives of the city around me when growing up, and is still here today.

A 'natural' environment – embedded with colonial legacies of androcentric Whiteness – is maintained in part through formal education. In school, like many of the participants in my research, I received a generalised education 'about' Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. I watched films in primary school in which Aboriginal peoples were anthropologically constructed as subject/object of the colonial gaze (see Nakata 2007b). On classroom walls the world map displayed a pink Australia, the colour of the British Empire. My undergraduate years further entrenched an imperial imaginary. The university I attended in Sydney was named after the early colonial autocratic administrator, Lachlan Macquarie, and my college accommodation named in tribute to Australia's longest serving pro-British social conservative, Robert Menzies. Throughout my arts degree I do not recall encountering any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander scholars teaching courses or included on any of my reading lists. These acts of erasure

resonate with my research, as I now undertake studies exploring how pedagogies reinforce (and also resist) subjugation of marginalised epistemes and racialisations in epistemic practices.

In my working life I have been a teacher in adult education for over twenty years in an increasingly neoliberalised environment. Neoliberalism privileges settler-state performative demands over the critical transformative work of decolonisation (Jakobi 2019). Through my teaching experiences in equity and access settings I grew aware of multiple discourses associated with 'equity' students and students who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples: discourses of reconciliation, self-determination and resurgence, and discourses of deficit. I have felt deficit framings and the shame of misrecognition (Burke 2017) too, having taken an alternative pathway into university – similar to some of the students I now teach in university access programs. I am aware of the damage of deficit framings and the challenges of working to transform pathologising discourses (Burke & McManus 2009). In making these observations I am applying a particular form of feminist re/presentation that draws on critiques of hegemonic patriarchal discourse (Leathwood & Read 2008). Masculinist traits such as 'the independent learner' position 'shame' as 'lack of confidence' and are 'seen as detached from histories of gendered, classed and racialized misrecognitions' (Burke 2017, p. 436).

Relationship to Indigenous Knowledges

Indigenist research paradigms (Battiste 2013; Blair 2015; Martin 2008) and critical feminist approaches in the field of higher education studies (Ahmed 2012; Burke 2012; Leathwood 2006) emphasise relationality as a core concept of ethical practice. Drawing on this, I aimed for ethical research as constructed in shared/dialogic processes (Freire 1972), in relationship with and to the social (and ontological) environments from which the data is drawn (Wilson 2008). My research approach, then, is a process of entering into a set of relationships with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, ideas, histories and experiences. My work is also a relationship of people and their thoughts, experiences and knowledge of Indigenous systems. It is a relationship of country – created on Country – the land of the Awabakal people (Lloyd et al. 2012; Wright et al. 2012). It is a relationship of history, how education in Australian universities has been shaped by colonisation. Relationality is a key principle to how I theorise subjectivity and discursive spaces and understand my methodological approach.

When I write about Indigenous knowledges, I have an epistemic responsibility (Medina 2013) to educate myself about Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. My purpose (and position) is not to 'explain' but to provide a discussion of Indigenous (and discipline) knowledges, as 'part of an ecology of knowledges' (de Sousa Santos 2014, p. 193). I am mindful of providing informed critiques and to avoid slipping into dichotomies of Indigenous/Western contrast, where the contrast might become valorisation/demonisation. In my work I try to develop a dialectical understanding of the relationship between bodies of knowledge, whereby different knowledge traditions are formed and positioned in complex relations to each other. Sullivan (2006) writes about the contradiction of the conscious intent to honour Indigenous knowledges and cultures as reasserting White habits of ownership. Habits of ownership are a legacy of an imperial gaze that essentialises and diminishes the complexity and contemporaneousness of Indigenous knowledge systems (Connell 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Sullivan (2006) is not saying that non-Indigenous peoples should not learn about other knowledges and traditions, but it is important to maintain an ethical criticality to avoid reinscribing asymmetric relations of domination and control. I try to counter the asymmetries of colonising structures by producing work in which Indigenous knowledges and standpoints are recognised as 'distinct form[s] of analysis' (Nakata 2007a, p. 11) – the way other knowledges are distinct and central to knowledge creation in the academy.

In my project I aimed to keep these principles at the forefront of my research questions and analyses. I considered how my methods of engaging with student and academic participants could encompass discussion of Indigenous knowledges. Through dialogue and observation I tried to draw out participant perceptions of policies of Indigenisation and dominant pedagogies in order to situate the discussion in relation to epistemic power. For example I was interested in gaining more insight into the learning spaces of the participants. As I conduced observations I asked, what are the symbols of knowledge and power in these spaces? Are Indigenous symbols of knowledge and power represented? Is acknowledgement of Country visible? I examined teaching materials in terms of positionality wondering who created them, what kind of resources and epistemological perspectives informed them. I considered how students were encouraged to interact and think about these materials. Overall, I was examining whether 'the paradigms of valid knowledge [are] shifting' (Quinn 2000, p. 5). Observations helped me to understand the discursive elements that construct White normative higher education and shifts towards ethical spaces of decolonising.

Holding pedagogical spaces of discomfort

As I developed my methodology I reflected on the implications of epistemic power for the non-Indigenous researcher. If 'new knowledge' is produced through all the benefits of White privilege, what really changes? How can White subjectivity be negotiated in ways that resist colonialism's legacies? Cary addresses these questions as an Australian academic working at a Canadian university:

> I do recall my discomfort on numerous occasions when talking with first nation people in the university setting how they generally saw me as an outsider and therefore not as dominant as a white Canadian. Yet, I am white and I always already carry colonial/colonising power. That was one of my first realisations that as a foreigner I had different spaces to 'talk about race' but it also meant that the history of genocide and racism I carried with me as a white Australian was erased. This was dangerous stuff – I could be a radical and not have to carry my own subjectivity around with me! (Cary 2004, p. 73)

I realised I needed to engage with critiques of White allyship (Aveling 2013) and reflect on uncomfortable questions and meanings of White subjectivity.

As part of the research experience I attended a number of conferences related to the field. I found the quality of discussion and argument to be valuable and academically rewarding. But I also resisted some of the notions of Whiteness/Blackness put forward that subscribe to a type of homogenisation (all White people are privileged) and essentialised constructions of Indigeneity (connected to culture and 'purity' discourses). These notions seem to set up rigid categories of experience that post-structuralist feminist theorising challenges (Burke 2012, 2002; Skeggs 2004; Weedon 1997). I was interested in how racialised positions were stated and enacted. Many presenters who self-identified as White, introduced themselves as 'White settler invader' or 'oppressor'. I was confronted by the 'ethical violence' (Butler 2001) of these categories. To me this approach limits the transformative possibilities (and responsibilities) of dominant positions. I use the concept of '(un)settler' (Hokowhitu 2020a, 2000b) to broadly contextualise Australian society and political landscape and to locate structural/power relations upholding institutions. But I do not apply the term 'settler' or 'invader' to individual subject positions as I feel it misses the nuances of intersectional subjectivity and diminishes the critical value of the argument. I argue that theorising 'settler-colonialism' needs to explore emerging and alternative subjectivities to dichotomies of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' in order to be useful to and

productive of significant meaningful reconciliation (Carey 2015). In terms of higher education, the various locations in intersectionality must be acknowledged and form the basis of 'sound pedagogy' (Nakata et al. 2012) otherwise (neo)colonial, essentialising subject positions are reinforced (Carey & Prince 2015).

I deliberated on how I could resist deterministic thinking yet also acknowledge the reproduction of subjugated knowledges and the deep histories of anger, pain and shame. Distress and discomfort indicate the complexities of the politics of the field. I realised that reflexivity is an important practice but can be deeply painful. Even acknowledging these emotions was fraught: 'I feel guilty for being "upset" … I feel indulgent … yet I can't ignore the "upsetting" side of this research' (from my field notes, 9 October, 2017). I was aware of the politics of taking ownership of trauma thus recentring Whiteness and discourses of 'White fragility' (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). However, feminist epistemologists have long recognised emotion as an important ontological element of knowledge-making (Jaggar 1989). Discomfort was ever present in my fieldwork. Academic participants mirrored some of my own uncertainties about doing this research. They expressed exasperation, frustration: 'How do we do this?' (psychology lecturer). Students also expressed frustration sometimes with me and the research process: 'I kind of wish you were a psychology student so that you would understand. We're educated into that environment' (Evelyn, third-year psychology student). I found myself implicated through the way participants interpreted my position. Sometimes I was a confidant, a threat, a nuisance, an ally, a student, a peer/colleague. Perceptions of positionality opened up challenging moments. Some participants perceived an affinity with my 'Whiteness' and expressed racist views, perhaps feeling that because I am White that then I too held those views. This is another layer to the methodological story that speaks to experiences of research subjectivity. Researcher and research participants are co-created:

> We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I
> take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in
> many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also
> (Alcoff 1991, p. 21).

I considered emotionality as a necessary element for humanising decolonising processes (Battiste 2013). If I sidelined distress and discomfort, whether in relation to myself or participants, then I would limit feminist interpretations of qualitative research that refuse the mind/body divide of masculinist objectivity. Making visible and acknowledging the affective aspect allows discussion of the politics of shame and processes of misrecognition (Burke 2015). It opens a space for reflexivity, moving away from invader/invaded binaries and the possibility of re-making postcolonial subjectivities.

I understand that feelings of guilt and shame, in the context of this study, reveal complicities with structures and histories of epistemic and ontological violence (Ahmed 2005). As a White woman committed to social justice, I feel that very painfully. When I discuss the (re)production of Whiteness and race privilege in pedagogical spaces in my analysis there is a layer of emotionality embedded in the text. Alongside the distress however, there needs to be a 'non-violent ethics' (Zembylas 2015, p. 174) that propels the research/er towards a position of empathy and understanding of how subjectivity carries 'troubled knowledge' (Zembylas 2015, p. 172). So, when engaging with participants in my study and writing my analyses I tried to critically engage with 'the trouble' (Taylor 2020) that emotionality points to, as a way to both acknowledge and value the difficulties of transformative practice/thinking.

Closing comment

I found feminist-informed decolonial scholarship useful for discussing and recognising the ways difference is necessarily built into the work. Decolonial theory counters some of the limitations of postcolonial critical theory for homogenising non-Western experiences. It helped me to understand that this work is not just about subjugation of the Global South, it also informed my thinking and questioning about the nature of oppression and liberatory education. It prompted me to ask: what are the aims of decolonial work and who does it serve? Decolonial thought informed my methodology and my reading of the literature and data and how I positioned my arguments and discussion of 'the Other'. For example, I was reflexive about finding tools to unpack the strands of the argument to avoid oppositional polarities. I did not want to reproduce polarised thinking by always looking for examples of oppression and not resistance or agency. I needed theoretical resources to encourage reflexivity and learning to 'see' racialisations and epistemic injustice in knowing practices, but to also recognise spaces of reordering and remaking. For this I drew on analytical frames advanced through feminist, Indigenous and Black scholarship in the fields of critical Black, Indigenous Studies and feminist-social epistemology (such as the works of hooks, Battiste and Dotson). These theoretical positionings address struggle in terms of race but also intersect with multiple systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1991). They represent resistance to reproductions of (un)settler-colonial dehumanisation of Indigenous (and other marginalised) peoples, but also offer 'expanded' understandings of anti-racist, anti-patriarchal struggle.

Conclusion

This article focuses on my own identity as White researcher and the privileges this gives me in reproducing/challenging colonial power in higher education and beyond. By considering the methodology of an underlying study on Indigenisation practices in a specific location (two degree programs at a regional Australian university) I attempt to open up a space of critical reflexivity to consider some of the tensions and dilemmas of doing research as a non-Indigenous scholar in the field of decolonising education. In doing so I hope to bring attention to researcher situatedness within/against post-colonising systems of knowledge and power (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) and address directly the 'intrinsic' racial domination and politics of 'critical White anti-racist' subjectivities (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 183).

I approached this research with a need to find critical purchase in a field with histories of subjugation through White (un)settler epistemic and ontological violence. I saw myself – as researcher – in this theoretical journey through multiple subjectivities: implicated in but also resisting of 'always already colonizer/colonized' (Cary 2004, p. 69) qualitative differentiation. I needed a way to negotiate the politics of location. I therefore tried to craft a methodological approach drawing on post-structuralist intersectional feminism that speaks to 'subjects formed 'in-between' or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference' (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). Understanding subjectivity as always in a state of change, as discursively produced and relational, underpinned my analyses of self and participants and the multiplicity of my/their positioning.

The theoretical and methodological approach outlined here helped me to negotiate questions of how to do research on decolonising higher education without shutting down difference, but also coming to some sense of solidarity and understanding. I learned the importance of being clear about my own social location as researcher, which by extension makes clear I am not making knowledge claims for 'bodies of knowledge' or 'groups'. This again opens up possibilities of

difference in perspective and epistemic orientation which can be usefully applied to further studies on decolonising/Indigenising the institution.

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The Paradox of student support policies: The experiences of students who care for children while studying

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In United Kingdom (UK) higher education, different groups of students have moved into and out of the focus of policy and practice, under the headings of widening participation (WP) and the *Equality Act 2010*. This often-changing focus has the potential to lead to inequitable experiences for those students who do not fit into any of the traditional student typologies, and the policies designed and alleged to support them. This can mean that policies focussed on 'support' can have a paradoxical effect on some groups in their implementation, I suggest in this article that Students who Care for Children while Studying (CCS students), are an example of such a group.

In this article I present the stories of two CCS students, trying to engage in student support policies, from an institutional ethnographic study (Smith 2006) over two academic years, at a research-intensive UK University, with 16 CCS student participants in total. Here I look specifically that their accounts of 'activating' (Smith 2002) institutional policies to support them, and observing the fractures between policy intent, appearance and experience which start to emerge. I discuss how these stories suggests the experiences of CCS students can be complex, variable and related to individual personal circumstances. Yet three recurrent themes are presented across my study epitomised in the activation of policy. Firstly, CCS students experience 'othering', whereby their difference from other students is made clear through a range of behaviours toward their needs as carers. Secondly, CCS students experience 'individualisation', which frames these students as being in deficit and personally responsible for the barriers they face due to their 'choice' to be both students and carer. Thirdly this 'othering' and 'individualisation' leads to 'passing' behaviours, whereby students seek to or are actively encouraged to hide their caring status, conforming to a more institutionally-accepted homogeneous conception of 'students and their needs.

Concluding the analysis of these themes through a Fraserian lens of 'recognition' (1997, 2001, 2003), I suggest that the principal cause of inequity in the CCS student experience, at this institution, is a cultural misrecognition of their right to be students because of their caring status, which is captured in this article through the accounts of the 'activation' of policies which are paradoxically meant to enable and support their success in higher education.

Keywords: higher education; care; students who care for children; policy

Introduction

This article presents a small excerpt of data collected as part of a wider study into the experiences of CCS students (Dent 2020). The history, or autobiography (Miller 1995), of the need for this research came from very early in my career in higher education, working as a manager in a faculty student support office at a research-intensive UK University. I have written elsewhere (Dent 2020, p. 1–5) of my reflections on this work, but the specific theme relevant to this article is the notion that appeared of 'who' was considered entitled to support within the academy. At the time, and in part spurred on by my own experiences, I had considered higher education in the UK to be an inclusive space, inducted as I was into higher education, a dyslexic student, from a low-income household and during a political period where widening participation (henceforth WP) policy embraced me. But my direct experience of working in student support suggested that some students were considered more 'worthy' of support than others, and that policy could be mobilised to support *or* hinder students based on staff and their personal interpretations of complex concepts such as what 'widening participation' meant. This is a pattern which others have also identified in literature (Stevenson, Clegg & Lefever 2010).

This article therefore focuses on this issue of appearance and reality between written policy and the lived experience of putting this into practice. First, I set the context by considering how students have been framed as the beneficiaries of policies in WP in the UK, suggesting that the focal point of WP policy has contracted and expanded over time to create conditions which lack clarity and consistency. I suggest this can lead to paradoxes in terms of the extent to which support for students is realised by all. Following this I go on to discuss the specific methodological approach I took to studying this phenomena, institutional ethnography (Smith 2002, 2005, 2006) and the role 'texts' (Smith, 2002, p. 45), and their 'activation' (Smith 2005, p. 108; Smith & Turner 2014, pp. 6, 9), can play in exploring these potential paradoxes. As an example of this I then go on to share two stories from my study, Claire's and Rebecca's stories, who utilise the texts of a mitigating circumstances form and a student parent policy, respectively.

Concluding this paper I analyse these stories through a Fraserian lens of 'recognition' (1997, 2001, 2003) to suggest that the principal cause of inequity in the CCS student experience, at this institution, is a cultural misrecognition of their right to be students because of their caring status.

Students as policy beneficiaries

A significant challenge to the successful achievement of widening participation policy in higher education has been the lack of clarity sometimes present around who the beneficiaries of a particular policy are, and, accordingly, what a particular policy is thus seeking to achieve. I consciously use the term beneficiaries here because, as I will go on to explore, the pejorative terminology such as 'non-traditional' or 'target groups' can be just as problematic as the lack of clarity around what a particular policy is seeking to achieve.

Burke has also highlighted this point with her reflection on the etymology of the term 'widening', which encompasses expanding and deepening participation rather than 'simply increasing access to, and participation in, higher education' (Burke 2013, p. 35). Burke's interpretation of the social injustices that widening participation seeks to rectify are complex, deeply ingrained and multifaceted, leading her to suggest 'it is not enough to identify patterns of under-representation or to develop "quick-fix" solutions to "lift barriers"' (Burke 2013, p. 35). Burke's interpretation of widening participation assumes a shared understanding of WP as a project of social justice (Burke 2013, p. 35), when, in fact, in some policy justice is foregone in favour of terms such as fairness, which itself is subjective and evolves across the policy.

In the UK, while some sense of 'widening' existed previously, such as through expansion of places and night schools, the term was explicitly coined in the Dearing Report in 1997, which in some ways, represents the genesis of an issue in implementation and policy which continues today. While Dearing did discuss 'widening' participation, the focus was on a limited number of named beneficiaries around issues of access for these core groups of: first in family to go to university, women, mature/part-time students, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities (NCIHE 1997, pp. 102–107). This implies a focussed approach which could be resolved by developing '"quick-fix" solutions to "lift barriers"' (Burke 2013, p. 35).

The lack of coherence around who WP policy was actually seeking to reach would be further compounded by the inability for the implementation activities to have a consistent consensus around who their beneficiaries were. For instance, Aimhigher would be the immediate national policy intervention that evolved in the later 1990s and early 2000s and sought to put the outcome of the Dearing report into practice. Yet Aimhigher led to more diversity in terms of WP beneficiaries (McCaig & Bowers-Brown 2007; McCaig, Stevens & Bowers-Brown 2008). In a review of the project, McCaig et al. (2008) identified the groups considered as under-represented to include:

> young people from neighbourhoods with lower than average HE participation; people from lower socio-economic groups; people living in deprived geographical areas, including deprived rural and coastal areas; people whose family have no previous experience of HE; young people in care; minority ethnic groups or sub-groups that are under-represented in HE generally or in certain types of institution or subject; other groups currently under-represented in certain subject areas or institutions; people with disabilities. (McCaig et al. 2008 p. 2)

While this list marked an expansion of the previous target groups and demonstrated an explicit strategic move to increase and diversify participation, Aimhigher also entailed a contraction in some ways by focusing more on more on school-leavers and moving away from the mature and part-time students, advocated by Dearing (McCaig et al. 2008).

When introducing variable fees for England, the government was keen to ensure that they did not deter applicants in 'under represented groups' from entering higher education for financial reasons (Office for Fair Access [OFFA] 2016a). As a result OFFA was established to monitor, and universities would be required to write annual Access Agreements, which would need approval by OFFA's Director of Fair Access if they sought to charge higher than the baseline fee (at the time, £1,250 per annum), capped to a maximum £3,000. OFFA expanded again the focus of 'who' the beneficiaries of policy would be by introducing new groups such as 'care leavers; carers; people estranged from their families; people from gypsy and traveller communities; refugees; students with mental health problems, Specific Learning Difficulties and/or who are on the autism spectrum' (OFFA 2016b). This in some ways broadened the list outside of the smaller homogeneous beneficiaries of WP initially introduced in Dearing, but contracted the Aimhigher list. Access Agreements appeared to reinforce institutions 'market positionality' (McCaig 2010, pp. 8–9) through the kinds of students (school-leaver age, 'young' applicants) they admitted rather than invoking real change.

The previous decade up to the present day would also see an expansion and contraction of 'who' is meant to benefit from UK WP policy. In 2010 the incoming coalition government decided to close Aimhigher the following year as part of the government's rapid austerity measures (BBC

News 2010). This would be framed by a narrative that universities were now better placed to 'make much faster progress on social mobility' (BBC News 2010). The advent of the Office for Students (OFS), which absorbed OFFA, has also further compounded this, as WP work became focused on a smaller group of beneficiaries, such as underrepresented groups in terms of POLAR (the participation of local areas), low Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), degree outcome gaps between white and black students, and disabled students (OFS 2018a, OFS 2018b, p. 4).

The contractions within WP policy of activity and beneficiaries is beset by two fundamental issues evidenced in existing research, which further show the absence of a shared understanding of 'who' the beneficiaries of WP policy are or should be. The first issue is an increasingly small and homogenised understanding of 'who' the beneficiaries of WP are, positioning these students as 'new' or 'non-traditional' in a way which inherently marked their difference and problematised these students, surrounding them with a deficit discourse compared to their more accepted 'traditional student' peers (Trowler 2015). The second issue is inherently linked to the first and to the absence of intersectionality, as, by contracting the scope of WP interventions and the target beneficiaries, while returning control of such activity to universities through Access Agreements assumes that universities are guardians of diversity and not deeply classed and racialised spaces.

Research consistently proves that universities are not beacons of diversity, for instance Burke highlights how groups of WP students become problematised, as applicants are compared to an 'ideal (imaginary) student-subject of policy discourse' which 'is constructed in relation to middle-class and white racialized norms and values' (Burke 2013, p. 57). WP groups, therefore, become relocated as the problem 'in terms of the ways those individuals or groups are seen to be "lacking"' (e.g. the right kind of attitudes, values and/or aspirations)' (Burke 2013, p. 37). Furthermore, Archer and Leathwood highlight the way in which students, particularly women and ethnic minorities, experience 'underlying feelings of deficit' which can come from the negotiation of academic cultures which construct the norm in terms which are male, white, and middle class (Archer & Leathwood 2003, p. 190–1). Thus, these non-traditional students become disadvantaged by 'institutional cultures which position them as "other"' (Archer & Leathwood 2003, p. 191). The direct impact of this on students is seen also in research by Bowl (2001), who shows that the barriers 'non-traditional' students face mean they become '"frustrated participants": who have battled, often with little support, to find an educational and career direction' (Bowl 2001, p.152).

It is within this context then that I posit that appearance and reality in policy can be allowed to form paradoxes; on the one hand a policy or narrative can be presented of a positive supportive environment for 'all' students, protected, or reinforced, by the naming of some specific beneficiaries. However, the absence of a shared conception of widening participation, or its beneficiaries make it difficult to know if progress has been made and creates ambiguity at a local level around what should be done, with whom and why. As Stevenson, Clegg & Lefever (2010) observe in their institutional case study, ambiguity around the meaning of WP left staff to 'fall back on their own repertoires of values and meaning-making' in their work with students (Stevenson et al. 2010, p. 112). In this context, staff continued or defended practices which might lack evidence of effectiveness in WP by drawing on their own interpretation of ambiguous institutional terminology like diversity, inclusion or equality – equating all of those with WP. Staff in universities have also been seen to view WP as a pre-entry activity and assume that students can be 'left to it' once at university (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead 2008, p. 176; Stevenson et al. 2010, p. 112). Both of these scenarios have the potential to explain how gaps may emerge in the appearance and reality of policy but require up-close methodologies

which consider the potential paradoxes which emerge as specific groups of students are seen, or not, as beneficiaries of policies designed to support students.

Policy vs lived experience: Methodological considerations

In exploring the questions of 'who' WP policies seek to reach as beneficiaries I focused on Students who Care for Children (CCS students) while studying. In this article I present the stories of two CCS students, Claire and Rebecca, trying to engage in student support polices, from an institutional ethnographic study (Smith 2006) over two academic years at a research-intensive UK University, which has 16 CCS student participants in total. I chose this group because of my direct lived experience of working with them and seeing members of this group struggle to fit into the policy definitions created for them, due to barriers unique to them and their individual circumstances.

Apart from the brief period mentioned above when OFFA introduced 'carers' in the broader sense there was little or no explicit recognition of CCS students as a benefactor of WP policy. CCS students' ability to benefit from the WP policy would therefore be contingent on how they 'fitted' into the one of the other categories of 'beneficiary', which may in some ways also exclude them, such as the growing focus on 'young' 'full-time' 'school leavers' as discussed above. Yet while some CCS students may benefit from WP policy, there are several unique barriers to themselves as carers which such a policy may not address. This has been researched and discussed by myself (Dent, 2020) and others (Brooks 2012; Moreau 2016), but include issues such as: 'time and space to study', 'financial issues' and the 'inaccessibility of institutional norms and practices' (Dent 2020, p. 61).

While the first part of this article focused on a macro policy perspective to understand how some groups may fall between the gaps of these policies, it is important to consider the localised lived experience. I suggest therefore that looking at the up-close experiences of a group who do not neatly fit into a particular beneficiary group is a useful way of understanding and making visible these gaps so they can be remedied in an informed way, and that institutional ethnography is a useful approach with which to do this.

For the institutional ethnographer, people are at the centre of how knowledge about an institution is brought to life. An institution such as a university does not exist without people going about their 'everyday/everynight' lives (Smith 2002, p. 18) and bringing the institution to life through social interaction. Many individual institutional ethnography studies differ from each other in terms of methods and the variety of issues they engage with, including: immigration policy (Nichols 2008), elementary schools (Smith 2006) and management accountant practices in universities (McCoy 2014). In fact, many institutional ethnography studies feature methods and techniques which may not typically be found in other forms of ethnography; these include interviews (Smith 2002, p. 26), which form a core part of the methods used in many institutional ethnography studies.

Institutional ethnographers, thus, value the adoption of a standpoint in data collection in the case of my research CCS Students, and use this standpoint perspective to document and understand the creation of social exchanges within an institution. This concept of standpoint as 'the design of a subject position in institutional ethnography creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge' (Smith 2005, p. 10).

Through this standpoint, I am seeking to capture 'the language in which people speak of what they know how to do, of their experience, and of how they get things done' (Smith 2002, p. 22). To achieve this, institutional ethnography introduces the concept of work. Here, work is understood as the standpoint participants' experience of living their 'everyday/night' lives. The institutional ethnography concept of work is conceptually deeper than merely the tasks that the participant goes about in their employment. By conceiving of work as the standpoint participants' experience of how they go about their lives, I am, as an institutional ethnographer, seeking to understand how the institutional setting shapes this work.

Concepts that inform the institutional ethnography approach is the role of texts and their activation in the standpoint participants' accounts of their work, in order to understand the extra-local decision-making. The institution in institutional ethnography is a mechanism for coordinating and constructing people's activities by developing 'forms of consciousness – knowledge, information, facts, administrative and legal rules […] that override individuals' perspectives' (Smith 2002, pp. 22–23), which are borne out in the institution through texts. Texts include any material 'in a form that enables replication (paper/print, film, electronic, and so on) of what is written, drawn or otherwise reproduced' (Smith 2002, p. 45).

In my study, five texts appeared in CCS students' accounts of their work: applications forms and admissions; email mailing lists; websites; mitigation forms; and student parent policy. The first three were peppered across participants' accounts in greater frequency of mentions but these texts did not serve as a core part of a critical event for these participants. The latter two texts – mitigation forms and student parent policy – are only the subject of three participants' accounts, but these texts form a cornerstone of their experience discussed in rich detail, and hence I have focussed on these in this article.

Interviews and focus groups were a primary form of data collection in my study, conducted in a conversational style, which sought to gain rich data about these students' experiences. I focused on understanding texts from the standpoint participants when they appeared in their interview narratives and became activated in their accounts of their experience of the work of being a CCS student. I discussed the texts which appeared in the students' accounts with them, focusing on the principle that texts which are activated in the standpoint participants' experiences are those which carry power and influence over these experiences. I consciously did not seek to find texts within the institution, separate from the students accounts of activated texts, which could influence these students' experiences but were not present within them.

In this context, the text is subject to activation (Smith 2005, p. 108; Smith & Turner 2014, pp. 6, 9), this is characteristic of the belief that texts are not significant on their own but are brought to life by the standpoint participants and other actors in their work (Smith 2006, p. 67; Smith & Turner 2014, pp. 5–7). Accordingly, the text should be understood and incorporated by the researcher as part of people's experiences, as 'they enter into and play their part in the ongoing sequences of action coordinating them with action going on at other places or at other times' (Smith & Turner 2014, p. 5). It is here then that texts are seen as a site of power; their introduction into one setting from another demonstrates the potential 'extra-local decision making' (Smith 2006, p. 3), as power is attempted to be exerted from a different time and space through the contents of the text. For example, this could be considered when trying to understand and link how a Vice-Chancellor's power and work, could or does manifest via policy written by them in a different time and place to the events of the students day-to-day lived experience.

A critique could be levelled at the role and value institutional ethnography places on texts and their activation, by the suggestion that policy could exist which influences students' experiences in ways that are not directly present in the standpoint. However, I would counter this interpretation from two angles. Firstly, Burke and McManus' accounts of Arts admissions policies provide rich empirical evidence that equality policies which may not be in direct sight of students, embodied in consistent applicant interview forms, can be activated in deeply subjective ways counter-intuitive to the principles the policies seek to establish (Burke & McManus 2011). Secondly, this way of understanding policy aligns with other interpretations such as those of Ball, who suggests that policy is the subject of 'ad hocery' and is constantly 'contested and changing, always in a state of 'becoming', of 'was' and 'never was' and 'not quite' (Ball 1993, p. 11), and he, therefore, claims that policies and the discourses around them cannot be separated.

To give credence in research to a policy which is not activated by analysing it can, at best, over-emphasize the significance of the policy and, at worst, lead to victim-blaming by suggesting that it is the victim's fault for not activating the policy in their experiences. It is these complex and problematic distributions of power and policy within institutions which institutional ethnography seeks to make visible. While existing research establishes the nature of some of the support for CCS students (Moreau 2016; Smith & Wayman 2009), it is through the exploration of activation that we can seek to comprehend the effects of these identified policies in the daily lives of these students – which can be missing in existing research.

The standpoint stories I share below were collected from Claire and Rebecca (pseudonyms) during the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years at one institution, a traditional research university based in the North of England – called in this study the North University. While the North University had held a traditional faculty and schools structure, possessing a degree of federal autonomy, there had been greater centralisation in the university in recent years, and the prominence of centrally run and controlled 'student support' services had grown. The structures at this university allowed support to be both centrally and locally coordinated. Claire's story includes a text which is an example of local coordination – a form from within a school to seek support, while Rebecca's focusses around a centrally produced policy document.

Claire's story: Mitigating circumstances forms

Claire was a medical student coming to the end of her studies, but her journey had not always been a smooth one, having entered university unsure of her suitability as a student because of her demographic background: a BME student and first in family to go to university.

On entering the first year of study, Claire needed to pay her own fees because she was re-entering undergraduate study, having previously studied for a year elsewhere and, on top of her caring responsibilities, worked part-time as a locum nurse at weekends. While Claire looks back on this and reflects that she should have asked for help sooner, suggesting she did not having remembered her anxiety at applying for university, and being keen not to be 'linked to the ideas that I might be a difficult student' (Claire, Health PhD, one child). Being perceived as a difficult student was a motif which permeated Claire's account, and she frequently referred to how she had been vindicated in not disclosing her caring status earlier because, even once admitted, her position still felt precarious. As Claire reflected:

> One thing I've learnt over the five years, is that you kind of just tolerate
> this kind of stuff, and keep your mouth shut, because it's not necessarily
> particularly easy but I don't think it would be particularly difficult to get

> rid of a difficult student, so I think if you have problems it's not worth the adverse publicity. (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

These views, however, were shaped by her experience in navigating the formal processes of support.

Claire's formal request for placement mitigation came at the prompting of her department, who sent out an email to all students. Claire perceived this task as simple, and one she did quickly: 'Just fill in your form express your preferences and let us know. You will be given priority if you've got a valid reason and can give us evidence…' (Claire, Health PhD, one child). Despite her caring responsibilities being known to the department via her personal tutor, she completed the application in some detail, including evidence such as birth certificates and school registration letters, and was confident in her suitability for the support offered when submitting the application.

After submitting the application, Claire received no formal acknowledgement until her placement allocations were confirmed weeks later, and she found out that she had not received adaptions to her placements or any justification. As Claire recalls:

> I didn't get an email back, but I just assumed that I'd filled the form in, sent it back and done what was expected, or needed from me. But then when I got my placements they were actually the most far away regions possible, so obviously I started panicking, and I contacted the lady who had received all these forms and had started to do all the allocations, didn't get a reply… (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

When Claire did receive her placement allocations, each one of them was more than 30 miles from the main campus. Claire panicked and tried to explain to the administrator that: 'I can't even travel there, because they were expecting me to be in [Another Northern City] for one placement, for 9.00 o'clock, and so I'd be battling the rush hour traffic' (Claire, Health PhD, one child).

Having only received short emails saying that the matter would be investigated, Claire followed these up with further emails which got no response, until Claire then received a referral to a formal disciplinary process for her attitude. As Claire recalls:

> [The administrator responsible] actually reported me to the university for bullying and harassment […] but the reality was that she refused to answer my emails. (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

For Claire this was a distortion of the panic she felt about her concerns, as she became framed as a 'difficult' student, reinforcing her earlier concerns. Claire recounts:

> I didn't send lots of bullying and harassing emails, I sent about three emails, but she sent me back like a one-word reply, or one sentence saying I'll look into it, without actually addressing the distress in my emails. And I was like I've got these placements, I'm really worried. (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

As Claire's case moved to the Head of School as a formal disciplinary matter, she is further framed as in deficit in a complex way, symptomatic of shifting the blame for any difficulties on to the individual student and away from the institution. In entering this disciplinary process, the HoS acknowledged Claire's point of view on events, agreeing with her that she had followed the process as laid out in the documents and providing recognition to her claim for consideration. However, in reaching a decision about the best way forward, the issue became framed not as one for the institution to resolve (such as through providing the placement adjustment) but for Claire to resolve as an individual. As Claire recounts, the Head of School 'said to me that they can't be seen to support students at the expense of the support for their administrative staff' (Claire, Health PhD, one child).

Following this, the Head of School sought to mentor Claire into understanding how she could take responsibility and apologise for the issues and inconvenience caused. As Claire recounts:

> he basically said there's ways of apologising in the NHS, as a doctor, there's ways of apologising without accepting any responsibility or liability. And he said you need to apologise, even when you're not in the wrong, and to me that was basically saying to me that I believe you and support you, but you need to be quite diplomatic about this. (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

What is more troubling is the way Claire internalises the Head of School's advice, accepting it as supportive – 'I'm glad I learnt that lesson then, rather than in the future' (Claire, Health PhD, one child) – and, in so doing, accepting institutional inequalities as personal failures, as Brooks (2012, p. 242) has seen in other CCS students' experiences.

A complex sense of injustice emerges at the end of Claire's story, as she reveals how students who did not have caring responsibilities did receive adjustments to their placements through this mitigation process. Claire recounted how Steve, a friend who did not have any caring responsibilities, submitted mitigation on this basis:

> I found out that one student, Steve, who doesn't have any children, or caring responsibilities, but he thought he'd try his luck and fill out one of the forms anyway […] and so lo and behold he was actually given a [City where North University is based] placement. (Claire, Health PhD, one child)

Her reaction to this is frustration, both with the institution – 'I'm glad he did […] but if his form was listened to, why wasn't somebody else's, especially when they fit the criteria to be considered' (Claire, Health PhD, one child) – and with herself. Claire's 'caring status' intersects her timescape and prevents her from seeking support with her case: 'I haven't spent any time on campus, other than what's required of me. So, in terms of making appointments in the student's union and so on' (Claire, Health PhD, one child). This creates a potent dichotomy where Claire attributes fault both with the institution but only, and perhaps primarily, with herself, for the inequity she experiences.

Rebecca's story: The student support policy

Rebecca, a student in a health department with one child, had specifically selected the North University because of its Student Parent Policy, despite the difficulty she had in finding it – in the end, through informal online forums. The desire to find the policy had been informed by her experience of being pregnant while an undergraduate at a university in the south of England. At that university, policy had been positively and proactively mobilised:

> They met me right at the beginning, and showed me the courses and the modules and how timetables worked, and they had given me e-learning support, once he was ill for a couple of weeks, and they would give me extensions […] They were open and let me finish the course tailored to my needs. (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child)

Once Rebecca had started at the North University, her experience had been markedly different for over a year and had only recently started to change, as 'they didn't even know about the Student Parent Policy until I mentioned it, so now they've updated their policies, and only now are they saying to me, 'OK what do you need?'' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child).

The first experience of staff being unaware of the policy came when Rebecca needed to unexpectedly pick her son up from school because he was sick, which swiftly became a disciplinary matter at the university, as practical exercises in this lesson were an assessed part of the programme. As Rebecca recalls:

> I had to pick my son up from pre-school because he was ill and there was no one who could pick him up. And so I […] ended up getting an official school level warning, and I had a meeting with this professor, and she yelled at me about it and I said this was the situation, and I didn't know it was progression and I can give you evidence to show that I had to pick him up because he was not well, and they weren't having it at all. (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child)

The speed with which this escalated surprised Rebecca and echoes Claire's story. Unlike Claire, however, Rebecca was not even given any superficial acknowledgement of the correctness of her actions due to her caring responsibilities. There was no retraction at this point from the disciplinary process, and, despite Rebecca's provision of evidence and citation of the Student Parent Policy, she was threatened by being reminded: '"We have the power to get you kicked out" that's what one of them told me' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child). While Rebecca had objectively deviated from the academic requirements of the programme by missing a progression component, the flexible approach, promoted in the policy, was not taken. Instead, a cluster of 'resit' exams were put in place in August, where Rebecca's marks would be capped at a pass, in a fashion which, to Rebecca, betrayed the spirit of the policy and penalised her for her caring status, thereby informing Rebecca's sense of 'otherness' and approach to future requests for support.

This incident made Rebecca hyper-aware of her precarious position. The consequences were that Rebecca was keen to follow processes laid out for all students quite strictly in any subsequent case of needing support. However, she grew frustrated when this did not seem to make a difference in terms of gaining support or credit for her conformity. Rebecca describes these feelings, using an example orientated around her own health needs:

> if you miss anything you have to put it online, in advance, so I'd put a description up of I'm going to an operation, and I submitted evidence from the Hospital, so they should have been aware of it […] they just ignored it basically. (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child)

This lack of support, which Rebecca associated as being connected to her status as a difficult student because of her caring status, meant that Rebecca's sense of entitlement to support and recognition as a carer became eroded, despite the basis of this entitlement coming in the form of the Student Parent Policy. As Rebecca explained: 'I just thought they'd been so unsupportive then what's the point of even submitting [requests for support] it if they are going to turn it down anyway, and I'd just be in more trouble than I'm already in' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child). Rebecca's circumstances worsened during this academic year, when she became pregnant and experienced severe medical complications. Her actions and decisions became informed by the previous approach staff in the institution had taken toward her, which meant she framed her options as being a conflict between continuing her studies or having a second child. This choice was fundamentally life-changing for Rebecca, but the response it received within the institution only served to provide further evidence of the lack of support or acknowledgment of Rebecca as a carer for children, as she recalls:

> at the same time, I found out I was pregnant, again, and they wouldn't let me sit my exams as a first attempt in August. And so, based on my experience I ended up having an abortion. Which had an awful lot of complications as well, like a molar pregnancy scare, and they just weren't supportive of me at all, the whole time I had the operations. And they said that when I mentioned that I'm you know going through all this, they said that's your own fault, that's your own problem. (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child)

While Rebecca did start to receive more support at the point of participating in the research, this support was informal and not driven directly by the Student Parent Policy, making it precarious and not actually marking a change by the department to recognise Rebecca's caring status or CCS students more widely. As a result of the turbulent and distressing circumstances around Rebecca's abortion, she started a supportive friendship with one of the professor's personal assistants while trying to navigate requests for support. This support was in no way formal, and this member of staff had no formal role in the university to provide student support and did not work in a student support office. However, she became a vital personal advocate for Rebecca. For instance, not only was she 'warm and so supportive' to Rebecca but 'as soon as I started talking to her she kind of spoke to that professor and told her to back off, and handled that situation for me, and I go and see her regularly now as sort of like a course councillor' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child). This became a consistent role which Rebecca drew on constantly at the time of being interviewed, explaining how this member of staff talked on Rebecca's behalf: 'she has been there to resolve the issue without me having to really get involved' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child).

If the personal assistant, who supports Rebecca was not there to support her or if there was a change in staff, it is unlikely that this support would remain in place. Rebecca highlights she is aware her 'course councillor' is in a minority and is the only one preventing Rebecca from being in 'trouble' because of the complexity of juggling her studies with caring responsibilities:

> She's the only one I think who is on the student's side, and I only go to
> her if I have a problem, she'll kind of sort things out for me without
> having to get into trouble. (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child)

While Rebecca did talk of a development of the Student Parent Policy becoming a more visible entity within the department at the end of her studies, she remained clear that the department was 'so very closed minded' and 'not willing to change' (Rebecca, Health PhD, one child), meaning it is unclear whether these developments will significantly improve the experiences of CCS students in this department.

Conclusion: The paradoxes of student support policy

The stories of Claire and Rebecca are complex but shed light on the relationship students can have with the policies which are designed to support them, principally focused around how the texts are brought to life in their lived experience. It can be helpful to seek to understand how this comes about utilising Fraser's (1997, 2001, 2003), theories of recognition. For Fraser social injustices are constructed in terms which are not morally or ethically defined but conceived in terms of status and resolving the status subordination through 'the status model' (Fraser 2001). For Fraser, status 'represents an order of intersubjective subordination derived from institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute some members of society as less than full members of society' (Fraser 2003, p. 49). In understanding CCS students' status, Fraser would suggest the need to establish if the patterns of 'intersubjective subordination [are] is derived from institutionalised patterns of cultural value' (Fraser 2003, p. 49).

Evidence of such subordination and cultural value can be seen in activation of texts in the accounts of Claire and Rebecca. For instance, these accounts of students' textually-mediated experiences reflect on both their experiences and the institutional culture, as these experiences are mediated and shaped by extra-local decision making within the institution as a text is written and disseminated from elsewhere within the wider institution. Within the analysis of the critical incidents in Claire and Rebecca's stories, the activation of mitigation forms and the Student Parent Policy, these accounts bring together the earlier presentations in this thesis of 'othering' (Archer & Leathwood 2005; Burke 2013; Reay 2001) and 'individualisation' (Burke 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts & Harwood 2016; Smit 2012) but more prominently demonstrate the active encouragement within the institution of CCS students by staff to 'pass' (Leary 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg 2001). While 'passing' can be a positive affirmative experience and some CCS students may seek to 'pass', the extent to which this is the case depends on the political and social context and impetus to 'pass'. When the conditions require 'passing', this becomes evidence of status subordination, which I would suggest is the case to varying degrees in these two students' stories.

For instance, both Claire and Rebecca become subject to formal disciplinary procedures because of their inability to 'pass' and fit in with the homogeneous rules and processes around placements and absence, respectively. These stories are compounded with open aggression from the placement administrator for Claire, who accuses her of bullying, and from the Head of School in Rebecca's case, who screams at her. While in both cases the outcomes are shaped by finding ways in which the students can more easily 'fit' within the homogeneous processes and operations of the university – in Claire's case, through apologising and, in Rebecca's case, by finding a 'lone wolf' advocate who sorts out any subsequent issues for her. These stories are peppered by the recurrent patterns of 'othering' and 'individualisation' which lead up to these most extreme demonstrations of encouraging CCS students to 'pass'. These patterns are present across the student data in my wider study, and the most troubling thing about them is their

pervasiveness, which suggests a culture permeating the institution, and, under the right set of circumstances, could potentially see any of the CCS students subjected to the same treatment as Claire and Rebecca.

To avoid philosophical schizophrenia, Fraser adds to the status model by suggesting that judgements in this model apply the principle of participatory parity. Fraser argues that:

> To redress the injustice, requires a politics of recognition, to be sure, but this no longer means identity politics […] rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognised party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members (Fraser 2001, p. 24)

The idea of participatory parity does not support the promotion of traits from a culturally subordinate group, as an ethical judgement might suggest, or the extension of rights to a culturally subordinate group, as a moral judgement might. Instead, the question of judgement becomes about what is needed, through either material 'redistribution', or cultural recognition – which Fraser refers to as 'perspectival dualism', to support a subordinated group to participate fully in society, through de-institutionalising 'patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it' (Fraser 2001, p. 25).

While there are indications that some students would benefit from interventions which would redistribute resources toward them, the cultural misrecognition and status subordination through 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing' are key to the inequity these CCS students experience, seen in the accounts of Claire and Rebecca. There are, for example, policies and facilities available to them, 'distributed to them', yet what the activation of texts highlights is the paradox that exists from the cultural values of staff within the institution, which do not recognise them as suitable benefactors. This makes one of the principal causes of inequity in the CCS student experience at this institution a cultural misrecognition of their right to be students because of their caring status, and the mechanism with which their full participatory status can be restored should be focused around achieving cultural recognition.

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Advanced neoliberal governance and Australian rural higher education

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This paper adopts the concept of governmentality to understand a form of power at play within recent policymaking practices relating to rural higher education in Australia. While commonly constructed in terms of equity and the basic rights and opportunities of the Australian population, equity of access to higher education for regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities is one designed from its outset in relation to a broader set of national governance issues. In this work we argue that rural higher education is constructed as part of the solution to a broader problem – that of economic governance. We show how particular forms of reason built into modern approaches to governing work to obliterate difference, and we argue that RRR provision of higher education has become mired within the tensions and contradictions of competing problems of governance and economic interests. The final sections of the paper look to recent moments in Australian higher education policymaking whereby statistical indicators are gathered by consultants to identify 'need' and 'readiness', and we make the case that these sorts of processes, divorced as they are from local knowledges, can help to re-embed the ongoing creation of marginalisation in RRR communities. We close the paper arguing that a genuinely rural higher education requires different imaginations than those in train now, built instead through ethical recognition and inclusion of marginalised rural people within their own modes of governance, and with greater autonomy over the conditions by which rural higher education is constructed and enacted.

Keywords: rural; neoliberal; policy; governmentality; higher education

Introduction

There is a rapidly increasing volume of scholarship exploring rural, regional and remote (RRR) higher education policy and practice in Australia. This is not surprising given the recent attention and funding on offer through state and federal governments. In adding to this growing field, we (the authors) want to explicitly consider the role played by academic researchers in the processes of knowledge production in relation to governing, including the relationship between researchers and policymakers. We do so in the interests of producing 'research that is aware of and alert to the circumstances of its own production and committed to analysis of the effects of those conditions on the development of perspectives and conceptualisations of policy' (Ozga 2021, p. 292). We worry about research in and on education that simply follows policy agendas rather than interrogating them. The tangled web of practitioners, policymakers, institutional leaders, scholars and politicians produces a set of relations between the field and the ever-shifting problems that it seeks to understand. For us, this offers an opportunity to contribute to the field while examining it and 'the interaction between the production of knowledge and the changing society with which it is concerned, and which it reflects (Ozga 2021, p. 300). We are troubled by a paradigm that positions social scientists as simply delivering evidence on questions and priorities set by governments because this arrangement can structure in a complicitous contribution to the creation of hegemonic representations. This is the 'lemming effect' to which Wacquant (2022) refers, whereby the structure of research funding, debate, discourse and imperative work together to make an arbitrary discursive or conceptual tool into an assumed or taken-for-granted reality. This has the effect of dressing up folk categories as scientific ones, leading into an epistemological or conceptual cul de sac, but one nevertheless made powerful through its reassertion of the same dominant logics structuring of social inequality. Rather, we argue that these representations must be made the subject of scrutiny (Bacchi 2009; Bunn 2021).

As researchers and practitioners enmeshed in fields of research and practice related to equity in higher education in Australia, and with our own ready access to policymaking conversations in this context, we want to acknowledge the somewhat treacherous terrain we inhabit. We therefore want not to present neat findings but to question the development of problems as they have come to be represented in contexts of policymaking, research and practice. These concerns align with the development of Critical Policy Sociology (CPS) in which questions of 'marketisation, corporatisation, new modes of accountability, audit culture, school choice, devolution and other phenomena typically associated with neoliberal forms of governance in education have been ripe areas of critique' (Savage et al. 2021, p. 310). This is not a field of scholarship that seeks to generate solutions, because, as Thomson reminds us, a problem-solving attitude is 'circumscribed by its bounded relation to pre-defined problems, whereas problematisation "forces us into an encounter where something new emerges, new thinking, new possibilities, new understanding"' (Thomson in Savage et al. 2021, p. 46). Our interest here in CPS is specifically tracing the development of 'the contemporary interdependency of governing and knowledge' (Ozga 2021, p. 302) as it pertains to higher education in RRR areas, and in looking to different approaches in which we do not shy away from the political relations at play in the development and navigation of policy problems.

To interrogate some of the effects of this work commissioned and deployed by the federal government, we use the concept of governmentality to understand a form of power at play within recent policymaking practices. We explore aspects of these policymaking practices that we see as sitting uncomfortably with claims to equity of access, participation and success for community members in RRR contexts. While often seen in terms of equity and the basic rights and opportunities of the Australian population, equity of access to higher education for RRR communities is nevertheless one designed from its outset in relation to a broader set of national

governance issues. In particular, rural higher education itself is constructed as part of the solution to a broader problem – that of economic governance. Building on this, we show how particular forms of reason built into modern approaches to governing can help to obliterate difference, and, in this case, we argue that RRR provision of higher education has become mired within the tensions and contradictions of competing problems of governance and economic interests. The final sections of the paper look to specific recent moments in Australian higher education policymaking whereby statistical indicators are gathered by consultants to identify 'need' and 'readiness', and we make the case that these sorts of processes, divorced as they are from local knowledges, can help to re-embed the ongoing creation of marginalisation in RRR communities.

Governmentality

The focus on RRR access and participation within Australian higher education policy has been present in different forms for many decades (Dawkins & Kerin 1989; James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis & Stephanou 1999; Halsey 2017, 2018). Recent attention to RRR concerns has tended quite starkly at times towards a modern governance practice whereby parts of a population are made visible to bureaucracy only through their construction as a problem demanding a solution. This requires a narrow group of parameters – permissible or sanctioned definitions, measurements and so on, that provide a means for specific forms of intervention. RRR access and participation is produced to appear as a singular governing issue, one which must extend across a series of asymmetric and contradictory policy initiatives. Through these practices, bodies within populations are rendered legible in new ways that enhance their alignment with contemporary governance arrangements. The relations of power we want to interrogate here are complex, messy and highly context-specific. In paying attention to who benefits and who might experience 'representational violence' (Bunn 2021), we aim to consider how framings of policy problems 'stigmatise some, exonerate others […] keeping change within limits' (Bacchi 2009, p. 42). Representational violence is invoked to refer to the construction of categories and representations that hide the asymmetric and unequal relations, both within a category and across categories, denying access to the structure and form of the representation to all but the most privileged. The category of RRR, for example, is concerned with producing a particular *evenness* that masks the origins of forms of stratification in spaces beyond the metropole and to maintain governance through urban-orientated logics and solutions.

Governmentality is a concept that we work with here to consider how the art of governing is practiced in the modern era by advanced liberal states. Detailed and different explications on the concept of governmentality are available (for example: Foucault 1991; Rose & Miller 1992; Rabinow & Rose 2003) and are beyond the scope of this paper. We draw briefly on the concept however to explain aspects of how modern state governance involves the representation of a population as citizens who need assistance to experience a particular legitimated form of productive and enjoyable life, and how, in a justification of the state, policymaking is understood as working to facilitate this outcome. Yet, to do this policymaking, new forms of knowing the population become necessary. Commonly, statistical indicators become essential in the construction of the citizenry, making the population 'legible' in ways now available via these forms of statistical visibility previously unavailable. Arbitrary boundaries are constructed which help to categorise and represent. Difference is then made across these arbitrary lines as new identities enter discourse to become normalised and naturalised. Statistical representations are brought into a process of understanding the problems of 'the population', and bodies are constructed in particular ways by the bureaucratic gaze. This form of surveillance helps to render the population 'docile' and 'productive' in Foucault's explanation (Foucault 1991), in that to be legible to the state, people are guided towards conducting themselves in ways that are readable by the bureaucracy. While Foucault was interested in manifold processes of governing (for

example, that of the self, that of others, that by the state) we draw here specifically on the concept of governmentality as a way of understanding the connections between advanced neoliberal state governance practices and how this relates to the construction of, and subsequent orientation to, social problems taken up by members of a population that come under the gaze of the state.

This form of modern disciplinary power was famously expressed via the metaphor of the *panopticon*, a conceptual model for a prison designed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham to solve the challenge of efficient surveillance of prisoners and taken up by Foucault in his studies of the treatment of deviance in capitalist societies. Almost three decades ago, Shore and Roberts (1993) argued that one way to gain insight into the epistemologies by which higher education was increasingly being governed was through the lens of a *panopticism*. The conceptual model of the panopticon consisted of a tower at the centre of a courtyard surrounded by buildings divided into cells on numerous levels. The window in each cell fell under the direct gaze of the tower only. Importantly, this helps to construct people primarily as individuals and reinforce their individuation as important to modern society. Shore and Roberts (1993) suggested that the panopticon design is useful for understanding not only the processes by which higher education was being restructured and controlled, but also the rationalist epistemology upon which government notions of 'administrative efficiency' and 'good management' were increasingly founded. For our purposes in terms of working with the concept of governmentality, the panopticon metaphor helps to explain a mode of modern era governance whereby 'control at a distance' produces self-surveillance and how this can be achieved in an efficient, depersonalised, depoliticised manner. As this explanation of modern power goes, our bodies need not be disciplined if we have taken on the correct governable *mentalities*. We henceforth govern ourselves effectively via the imaginaries we carry forward and to which we have become disposed.

We are not suggesting here that this form of power is ever 'complete', or that it necessarily directly and neatly determines action. It must be acknowledged that degrees of awareness of and resistance to this dynamic continually disrupt its smooth operation. Nevertheless, modern governance is in part achieved via forms of collection of information and production of knowledge of populations (the primary form being statistics – the science of the state) to create new technologies of self-governance and obedience. Thus, a certain percentage of the population in areas designated to be RRR have undergraduate degrees must be first constructed as a problem of governance, particularly as the science of the state is immediately used to legitimate new interventions and infrastructure aimed at creating governance solutions. Yet, in doing so, this representation of RRR communities obliterates place, local interests, even the idea of community. Certainly, the continuing, if not growing, urgency of the problem of rural higher education governance has thrust non-metropolitan places firmly into the gaze of the state 'savoir' – the knowledge created by and through bureaucracy.

To produce a legible population, RRR issues of governance require a flattening and simplification. To understand this, we turn to the notion of 'metonymic reason' (Santos 2014, p. 165). While this is one of four forms of 'lazy reason' that Santos identifies perpetuating a Western epistemology, it best encapsulates some of the key issues associated with current rural higher education policy in Australia. Metonymic reason refers to the need to create monocultural forms of reason, in this case to produce coherent means for interpreting the wide range of contexts, difference and irregularities that exist across RRR places and populations. Metonymic reason 'asserts itself as a thorough, complete and exclusive reason' (Santos in Oliveira 2017, p. 45). However, there are differences, pluralities and alternatives to how things are known, what kind of thing they are and what kind of reason to which they adhere, if having reason at all. To

make the assertion of its exclusivity, metonymic reason is imposed through 'non-recognition, silencing' and making invisible forms of knowledge and being that do not fit to its reason. 'The idea of totality with which Boaventura says the metonymic is obsessed leads to the belief that there is one logic that alone governs the behaviours of the whole and all of its parts and leads to whole/part homogenisation' (Oliveira 2017, p. 45). This system of reason thus makes little space for idiosyncrasies, contradictions and erratic characteristics. As it structures knowledge to a singular totality, the 'parts', and/or the things that fall outside of its reason, are made absent. Metonymic reason displaces forms of knowledge and being that do not suit the internal structure of its logic, effectively producing 'non-existence'. This is because, despite something 'being', it cannot be known given that the representational forms used have excluded the possibility of it being known. This produces a dominant form of knowledge that displaces the very people ostensibly represented within it.

The emergence of rural higher education as an issue of governance

Liberal democracies including the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia have *produced* the idea of the rural through 'technologies such as the collation of agricultural, environmental and population statistics, and various forms of cartography' that allow for the idea of RRR to be understood 'as a single quantified national unit that could be viewed and understood by a small policy community' (Woods 2011, p. 240). 'The economic interests of farmers, foresters and miners' – primary industries and key Australian exports – 'have been seen as the interests of all rural people, while groups such as women and Indigenous peoples – together with issues such as rural inequality, economic diversification and environmental decline – have largely been ignored' (Lockie, Lawrence & Cheshire 2006, p. 29). This allows for RRR policy across numerous siloed policy areas to be viewed and organised homogenously according to broader national and economic terms.

The current iteration of rurality as a problem of higher education governance was established in the mid to late 1980s under the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Dr John Dawkins. In the process of establishing the currently used equity groups, several key strategy and policy documents were developed that constructed rural higher education as a particular kind of problem, one that was necessarily addressed at a time when Australia began the process of neoliberal reform. We turn to these times now as they demonstrate the reasoning used to construct 'the rural' as an education problem that seeks a distinctive, and subsequently binary, mode of policy and governance for the needs of people beyond major metropolitan cities. The document *A fair go: the federal government's strategy for rural education and training* (Dawkins & Kerin 1989) was co-delivered by the Minister of Education, Employment and Training and the Minister of Primary Industries and Energy, demonstrating the clear emphasis on national governance of the economy. In this document, the emphasis on rural education was starkly focussed on the need to increase the level of skills and training in rural areas as the Australian economy underwent substantial structural change:

> It is widely recognised that a skilled workforce is the cornerstone of a successful economy. It provides an environment which encourages increased investment in new technologies, as well as the adoption of more safe and efficient work practices. As the rural sector has a key role in the process of structural adjustment, it is important to ensure that rural Australians have adequate access to education and training. (Dawkins & Kerin 1989, p. 1)

It continues:

> These objectives recognise the role of education and training in providing all Australians with the skills they need for a rewarding, full and productive life. It is important for rural Australians to acquire these skills if rural industries are to maintain their efficiency and competitiveness in the world market. (Dawkins & Kerin 1989, p. 3).

Despite the acknowledgment of personal or civic growth, rural education is positioned as a priority of national economic governance. The aim to bring equity, equal educational opportunity, personal prosperity and general growth of industry (and primary industry in particular) demonstrates an ambivalence at the heart of the establishment of rural higher education policy and strategy. It at once seeks to appeal to social ideals (such as egalitarianism and equality) while maintaining economic interests as the foundational framing of the problem of rural higher education.

This ambivalence is perhaps most clearly articulated in defining the background for rural equity in *A Fair Chance For All* (DEET 1990):

> If rural areas are to prosper, their industries must be prosperous and efficient, so people from rural areas must have access to the opportunities offered by higher education.

> It is also important that young people living in rural areas should be encouraged to consider the whole range of careers, not just those related to rural industries. (DEET 1990, p. 44)

The pressure of competing interests enacts a metonymic reason of governance, establishing the rural as a legible problem across multiple siloed government departments. Yet, equity does not necessarily flow on from economic investment, as nearly four decades of neoliberalism attests. At the very least, there are contradictions between different values and purposes associated with education and higher education. While this policy ambivalence has been established as a problem more broadly for equity strategies (Gale & Tranter 2011), rurality is established as a blanket category for anyone outside of the cities, and predominantly for a much more specific relationship between industry and education. The aim might be to produce a seamless policy platform for rural governance. However, 'rural' space and its needs are asymmetric, and, at times, directly opposing fields of concern.

Metro vs. Rural

Rural participation in higher education as a particular kind of policy problem is commonly constructed using the persistent statistical discrepancy between metropolitan and rural participation. As the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy final report* (from here referred to as the 'Napthine review') indicates, 'the rate of increase has been faster in metropolitan areas than RRR areas, resulting in a widening of the disparity in attainment between metropolitan and RRR areas' (DESE 2019, p. 12). Yet these types of statements too often maintain that cultural and educational values remain evenly distributed across diverse rural and metropolitan contexts. As Corbett and Forsey (2017, p. 429) argue, 'educational thought and policy are shaped through lenses that naturalise and normalise

middle-class urban life, particularly through idealised aspirational values government leaders are keen to instil in young people'.

As a result of these predominant national interests, a primary orientation of higher education policy and the research and reporting that surround and inform its production, is the need for employment outcomes for rural students that align with the needs of the national economic interest. This is exemplified by the stated purpose of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* where it is suggested that drawing rural students into higher education is 'to improve the education of country students so they can reach their full potential and participate in Australia's economy' (DESE 2020). As has been discussed more fully above, higher education and the construction of employment in RRR areas comes down to decisions being made across other areas of employment and governance/regulation. The structuring of certain kinds of industries, including their ongoing regulation and support, play a significant role in the shaping of rural space and the subsequent possibilities and limitations open to RRR populations (see Woods 2011). RRR higher education is thus shaped instrumentally without recognition of the more substantive, contextual and experiential elements that lead to student choice-making processes. Higher education policy instead tends to focus more commonly on the simple equation of education = employment as the modus operandi of students. However, students' orientations to study do not fit this narrative. Little research, rural or otherwise, suggests that students make such stark 'choices', but rather attempt to draw together a connection between their interests and employment possibilities (Threadgold, Burke & Bunn 2018; Brynin 2012). These are not necessarily made as crude rational calculations, rather, they can be based on hope that opportunities will present themselves.

Employment and 'employability' discourses also rest within the restrictions of the business orientations (that is, the corporate university, see Marginson & Considine 2000) of higher education provision. The movement towards a corporate university and 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004) sits at odds with quality rural higher education provision, as it does not fit within the business interest of providers. For example, the Napthine review points out that 'RRR areas are often "thin markets" for education provision', where educational providers see operations as 'unsustainable' to 'provide a large suite of academic programs' (DESE 2019, p. 18). This has contributed to the rapid expansion, neglect and collapse of physical higher education campuses in RRR towns, and a growth in the reliance on distance education for those unable or unwilling to move into a town or city with physical higher education infrastructure. RRR provision is thus mired within the tensions and contradictions of competing governance and economic interests. Untangling these socio-economic dynamics is critical to differentiating how RRR can be imagined and adapted for respective RRR spaces, towns and cultures.

Getting 'the needy' 'ready' for higher education

To initiate the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, Emeritus Professor John Halsey presented a discussion paper and literature review alongside the review's terms of reference. The discussion paper (Halsey 2017) contains a compelling moment in which five 'convictions' framing the document are offered, as the work seeks to engage the field and invite submissions to the review. The opening two convictions we quote here below as we believe they give insight into the pressures of a federal government review, and an author attempting to welcome engagement that might move beyond some of the solution-obsessed policy orientations of the metropole:

> vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to Australia's
> sustainability and prosperity – socially, economically and

> environmentally [and] focussing on ideas and options for re-thinking and reframing education in regional, rural and remote areas is likely to be more productive than simply concentrating on "the problems" (Halsey 2017, p. 9).

Increasingly however, the Australian population in non-metropolitan places are being endlessly represented as deficient in a new way. The Napthine review was commissioned by federal Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, in response to the independent review conducted by Halsey. The Napthine review strategy document reminds us that 'individuals who grow up in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas are around 40 per cent less likely to gain a higher-level tertiary education qualification and less than half as likely to gain a bachelor and above qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared to individuals from metropolitan areas' (DESE 2019, p. 5). One way to read this statement is as a relatively benign identification of entrenched inequality in the Australian educational landscape. There are however other interpretations to be made. We would for example want to interrogate some of the assumptions at play and the generalisations that help to make the comparisons contained in the above statement between RRR and metropolitan areas. A more critical assessment would include consideration of how governments never simply respond to pre-existing problems that have popped into existence. They are always involved in *producing* problems. The language in this quoted statement above is however a somewhat glib imperative to widen access and participation in higher education, without considering the contexts, experiences and consequences of these processes.

The types of issues identified above can be seen throughout many of the reports and research used to inform rural higher education policy and governance. We offer below an illustrative example relating to what are known as Regional University Centres (RUC) – physical and social infrastructure established in RRR contexts that students can use to study tertiary courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian institution. As part of a recent process inviting applications for funding to establish new RUCs, the federal government commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to develop a report called *Informing future locations for Regional University Centres* (DAE 2021). The stated intent of the report is to deliver analysis of the 'need' for an RUC, and something described as 'community readiness' to then operate an RUC. It explains how the document works as a tool that 'provides a stronger empirical evidence base for systematically comparing the needs of communities across all of regional Australia. By providing this evidence base, it supports the capacity for the Department and others to focus efforts in examining the complexities and diversity of regional Australia' (DAE 2021, p. 7).

The idea of 'need' here is elaborated as the extent to which a region is numerically deviant in terms of their access to and achievement of tertiary education. This is shaped by ideas of 'relative need' (a measure of a region's relative disadvantage and relative achievement across three student dimensions: access and participation, retention and engagement, and transitions and outcomes), and a 'needs volume' (an aggregated scale of total disadvantaged and the potential serviceable demand that a region has for a future Centre). These feed into a 'needs ranking' (allocated to a region based on weighted relative needs and needs volume to identify a first-to-last ranking of regions, excluding regions that do not pass the readiness threshold). All up, twenty-five indicators are involved in the creation of a 'needs score'. In relation to the idea of 'readiness', the document speaks to an assessment of the extent to which a community is well-equipped to purse the long-term benefits of a Centre. To be considered 'ready' a region must first meet a threshold readiness (the minimum viable settings that are likely to be necessary for a region to succeed with a RUC (but not sufficient for determining success)). Once considered in scope for further assessment, 'relative readiness' is then constructed through a measure of

community readiness that is used to rank the 30 shortlisted regions whereby a ranking of 'higher', 'medium' or 'lower' is assigned. All up, twelve indicators of 'readiness' are used to assess how well-equipped a local community (left entirely undefined) is to host an RUC. The document does acknowledge some of its own limitations and recommends that 'real consultation and engagement with the community will be critical for decision-makers' (2022, p. 7) yet, with this framing device already lodged in place, we see here how places come to be known as both 'needy' and 'ready' via a metro-centric gaze constructing them as requiring intervention to fix a now 'known' policy problem.

The ongoing creation of marginalisation in RRR communities

Rural higher education policy continues to overlook aspects of Indigeneity and class in particular, a trend reflected in rural sociology more broadly (Rodriguez Castro & Pini 2022). As Pini, Rodriguez Castro and Mayes (2022) elaborate, Australian rural sociological research has been 'unproblematically' reproducing a discourse of an idyllic rural Australia in line with the policy imaginaries noted above. Yet the homogenising effect of this narrative hides from representation people who have very different experiences and trajectories. These dominant imaginings of the rural generally depict it as middle class (Pini, Mayes & Castro 2017) and white (Sierk 2017). As Pini and Mayes (2015) consider:

> The "rural student" who is constituted in such research is distinguished from their urban counterpart but not differentiated according to other aspects of their social location, such as in relation to gender, sexuality, class, disability, or ethnicity. Instead, the identity marker "rural" is given primacy and universalised. (Pini & Mayes 2015, p. 27)

Recognising rurality broadly as an equity group allows for these processes occurring internally in rural communities to escape careful analysis. Research is routinely locked into broad-scale categorisation of the rural, often because of the imperative to provide a general, if not indifferent, access for equity groups that have not 'traditionally' participated in higher education. Indeed, the Napthine review considers rural the first equity concern, with issues such as socioeconomic status (SES) and Indigeneity as secondary. For the Napthine review (DESE 2019) these are referred to as 'sub-populations' who 'experience additional challenges':

> RRR students from low SES backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disability and those from remote and very remote areas are of particular interest. These groups experience multiple types of inequity, which combine to exacerbate the challenges of aspiring to, accessing and succeeding in tertiary education. (2019, p. 34)

The extraordinarily loose designation of 'rural' or RRR (which comprises *any* form of SES/class/gender/race) must have other forms of inequalities bolted to it. The notion of rural equity is thus built up through the aforementioned governance architecture without an understanding of the *specific and historical construction* of marginality within RRR regions and places. These differences are crucial, as they speak to how regional inequalities are maintained, subsequently alienating marginalised groups from access. Research and policy too often focus on self-referential forms of evaluating the determinants of success, overlooking other social-structural factors that influence students' capabilities (see Corbett & Forsey 2017, p. 430).

However, there are also substantial efforts to have RRR and rurality remain framed in this way. This is because the current structures of 'rurality' and imagined rural communities work to privilege certain people and groups, enabling forms of power and domination to be retained in

regional formations. As Pini and Leach (2011, p. 1) demonstrate, this 'has been politically advantageous for particular groups to claim rural environments as classless so that they could position their interests and experiences as legitimate, imperative and, ultimately, shared by all'. This helps to explain why the rural is so consistently depicted as idyllic and orientated around petit-bourgeois agriculture despite the decline in family-run farms along with the diverse occupations, needs and identities that make up rural communities (Pini & Mayes 2015). Even the notion of community itself is only accessible to certain parts of a community – usually following classed and raced divisions (see Liepins 2000; Pomeroy 2022). Marginalised populations and transient workers (such as pickers, farmhands) are often framed as lacking an authentic rural identity, subsequently being framed outside of 'the community'.

Policymaking in the contexts in question tends to construct a specific classed, raced and gendered form of success that fits the narrow confines of liberal subject formation: all else – other ways meaning and success are brought into metonymic reason through marginalisation, invisibilisation and symbolic violence (Bunn, Threadgold & Burke 2020). Beyond leaning heavily on misrepresentation and/or 'misclassification', rural higher education policy is fraught with sterile representations of social misery, marginalisation, value and success. The social conditions of marginalised rural lives and their intersecting qualities are not easily counted, and subsequently not easily 'properly' recognised, because higher education providers can reach quotas and their economic and symbolic rewards without recruiting students beyond those most conveniently positioned to be adapted for participation. The simple classification of RRR without a coherent theory of marginalisation continues to allow categorisations to misappropriate resources. For example, classifications such as low-SES are extremely dubious in RRR areas, given the broad spatial categorisations used to identity socioeconomic status. The classification of RRR tends to misclassify because of this, and hence even notions such as 'low-SES' are not broadly applicable. As has been reported on in relation to the misclassification of low-SES more generally: 'the implication is that it is an inappropriate measure for programs delivered to low-SES individuals, because the majority of such individuals are, in fact, not low-SES' (Lim & Gemici 2011, p. 24).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to outline the way that rural higher education has become constituted as a problem of higher education governance, often to do with discrepancies of access, participation or attainment. However, even though this has commonly been couched as a problem of equity, a prior policy imperative built over many decades holds in place a contradictory set of problems to do with national governance, largely set in relation to 'the economy'. We argue that this has led to a simplistic, binarised notion of RRR, while also making absent the ways that marginalisation is itself created and perpetuated within RRR spaces. This is perhaps unsurprising given this same era has seen the rise of neoliberal commitments in Australian policymaking, a form of financial capitalism (Fraser 2013) that has become the dominant imaginary for policymaking beyond, but certainly including, higher education. In this paper, to interrogate the effects of these commitments, we adopted the concept of governmentality to analyse the power relations at play within policymaking practices that construct the problem of rural higher education in particular ways; ways that do not necessarily sit comfortably with claims to equity for community members in RRR contexts.

We have aimed to show how forms of reason built into modern governance work to obliterate difference, through the construction of the 'problem' of rural higher education as a complicated site of competing constructions between equity and economic interests. Recent efforts by consultants to Australian higher education bureaucracy are enlisted to enact the science of the

state (statistical indicators) to gather up and represent 'need' and 'readiness' of populations, in processes we argue are clearly divorced from local knowledges, risking a re-embedding of marginalisation in RRR communities. Certainly, the juxtaposition between the metropolitan and the rural requires ongoing challenges to demonstrate how contextualised conditions of space and place cannot be reduced so readily. If equity is to become a more earnest prospect in this arena, higher education for rural areas needs to be conceived *as rural higher education* that moves beyond an urban, or even national, basis for imagining what higher education is or could be.

The positioning of the rural as a decontextualised equity issue ensures that RRR experiences of marginality remain and are possibly even made more invisible through policy that ostensibly is raising it as an issue. Higher education equity policy requires a greater understanding of the historical and structural conditions by which marginalisation occurs within RRR spaces and places. This requires sustained and cooperative investigation of *specific conditions* to understand how marginalisation is generally produced across RRR contexts and how it is produced specifically in different regions, areas and towns. Each different place misrepresented through homogenisation in the smoothing out of policy categorisation has a history that must be respected and responded to. The possibility of a genuinely rural higher education in our view requires very different imaginations than those in train now, built instead through ethical recognition and inclusion of marginalised rural people within their own modes of governance, and with greater autonomy over the conditions by which rural higher education is constructed and enacted.

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Creative disclosures of difference: The crip body in the temporal space of higher education.

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The term 'crip' is a contestatory one, being both a fluid and ever-changing term which has been claimed by those people to whom it did not originally refer, for example, those who have mental illness and/or chronic pain, and for those with whom it can now be intertwined, for example, those who identify as queer and crip. Similarly to 'queer', 'crip', from the word 'cripple', is a term which begets change and political action. Critically claiming the term 'crip' is to recognise the ethical, epistemic and political responsibilities behind such claims. Crip deconstructs the binary between disabled and able bodies, and how such binaries are brought into existence. Understandings of the crip body are gained through reading queer and feminist theories about the body and understanding that disability is a political category rather than an individual pathology. Feminist theory has long been associated with bridging theory and practice and explorations of the intersections of crip, queer and feminist praxis will explore this further. Disability is experienced in an individual body and resonates through and from a medicalised discursive model. This individual experience of disability constructs disabled bodies as abject and aberrant. The crip body contests this construction, highlighting the systemic social and political statuses that would prefer to frame it this way. Thus, in both the physical and politico/social model, individual bodies are treated with an expectation that familial and medical support will be utilised, rather than increasing social supports or bringing about widespread social change. In contrast, a political/relational model has the 'problem' of disability not residing in individuals, but in the temporal and built environment of the university site and in the cultural and social models that require individuals and their friends and family to negotiate such spaces for them. The question is how are norms of embodiment allied with queered understandings of crip and disability? This paper will identify and explore the intersections of queer and crip status in an individual crip body, utilising an autobiographical narrative of disclosure allied with the creative production of poetry. While affirming personal affiliations and identifications with feminist, queer and crip, these terms will nevertheless be critiqued. The politico/medical model of disability theory will be contested by an unpacking of crip theory, with a narrativised, autobiographical focus.

Keywords: poetry; crip theory; temporal; autobiographical

Introduction

When I began thinking about writing this paper, I wanted to take the reader on a journey with me into the significance of my own crip body in the higher education space where I have worked and studied for more than twenty years. I wanted the reader to consider the potentiality of crip theories of embodiment and what they mean to a non-normative body such as mine. In realising the old feminist adage, that the personal is political, there are profound implications for the hegemonic social, political and cultural contexts of equity in and access to higher education through an understanding of crip and queer embodiment. What I intend to demonstrate is that the university space, which is profoundly ableist in structure and in its treatment of crip bodies, denies those very bodies the agency and ability to perform their embodiment in a way that reclaims them from a categorisation of 'dis'ability. The entry or access to institutions and the 'mattering' of crip bodies in those spaces is made more difficult – for example, being able to enrol into a course or degree, or to work as a teaching colleague where, due to ableism, difference is regulated and seen as problematic, and diversity, with its celebration in glossy pamphlets and advertisements, is embraced.

Crip embodiment leads to a lack of access, inclusion and true difference of these bodies that matter, which concerns both subjectivity and status, and literal embodiment, or the occupying of physical space in a higher education institution. Crip personhood or 'matter' is a difference to be regulated and controlled in that space. Temporality, the progression and 'experience' (Bennett & Burke 2018, p. 915) of normative and heteronormative, or 'straight' time and spatiality (the built, geographic landscape such as a higher education campus and the cultural and discursive spaces of Higher Education as well) are important to understandings of crip embodiment as they are exclusionary times and spaces for people who are queer and/or crip. Time is neither 'ahistorical, objective [nor] rational' and it does not contain the homogeneity of the ways that temporalities are 'lived, embodied and experienced' (2018, p. 915). Temporality or 'our being in time' (Clegg cited in Bennett & Burke 2018, p. 916) is reformed and performed by non-normative bodies.

As Burke (2015, p. 389) frames it, universities, while being 'reformed through globalisation and market-forces', remain institutions which bear an imprimatur through which 'violence, exclusion and misrecognition' can often occur (p. 389). This violence, is, of course, symbolic, but it is also enacted structurally through physical, geographic means which are largely ableist. According to Bourdieu (2000) the social order is, fundamentally, the ordering of bodies (2000, p. 168) and symbolic violence is coercion, or the assent that the dominated give to dominator(s) with their understanding of knowledge forms that the dominators have access to (2000, p. 170). In the higher education space, institutionalised misrecognition occurs in these bodies. This misrecognition helps us to see what is otherwise invisible: the regulation of difference and of different bodies in higher education spaces. With the misrecognition of the crip bodies that inhabit these spaces I will address how this becomes embodied and lived experience.

In discouraging and problematising difference, this symbolic misrepresentation and misrecognition leads to the Othering and disenfranchising of female and trans female bodies, of crip bodies and of queer bodies. Indeed, anybody that does not conform to the hegemonic order and requires people to transform themselves to being other than they actually are. Connell (2013) argues the irony of universities set up for the advancement of knowledge, and through knowledge the students and staff who are part of the university environment now seek to restrict that knowledge to attain a financial benefit from it (2013, p. 108). Crip theory draws on feminism and queer theory, and I will also be drawing on these in this paper. As a queer woman I note that being queer is concerned with more than just one's sexual orientation. Queerness refers to non-

normative sexuality, non-normative relationships and non-normative performance of gender and gender roles, such as in the diversity of LGBTIQA identities.

In this paper I will firstly begin by stating my methodology, a version of collage with creative and theoretical writing and then unpacking crip theory, explaining what it is, its history, and how it is useful as a theoretical tool to make sense of my non-normative, differently-abled female body. I draw on my personal experiences of the temporalities and spatialities of higher education to illuminate exclusions and inequalities more broadly. I will discuss higher education and the effect that being crip or queer has on this space, the difference between difference and diversity and the performative nature of crip embodiment. I identify crip identity as a state of non-normative embodiment through physical impairment or disability, chronic and long-term illness, pain disorders, conditions such as dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health issues, being on the Autism spectrum, and more profound chromosomal and physical impairment(s).

Collage: The creative and the theoretical

I will intersperse sections of theory about crip embodiment with what Cosenza calls 'collage' (2014, p. 158) which is a combination of creative and theoretical writing. I will be positioning my personal experience of crip embodiment with broader insights connected to crip theory. To do this, I will be including two of my poems and will also explore experiences I have had throughout my time of identifying as crip-bodied. By exploring the regulation of difference in Australian universities, I contend that there is a need for a reclamation of the power that exists in them. As Bennett and Burke (2018) so succinctly state it: '(e)veryone both exerts and is subject to power' (2018, p. 915). In this paper, part of this reclamatory work of power will be done through the inclusion of my poetry. In my poetry I do some of the theoretical work of this paper through creative praxis and I am able to assume ways of performing my 'Self' that has more to do with the experience of time, or temporality and the act of embodiment, or materiality.

Poetry is proposed as an alternative expression of embodied knowledge for my medicalised, crip body. As a poet I craft language that carries and generates crip, queer and feminist perspectives to consider how the body lives in ways that cannot be fully known in the terms of medical logic, science and crip theory. These perspectives encompass deeply personal and political facets of history, emotion, power, illness and sexuality. Drawing from the diverse and little-discussed experiences of living with an acquired disability that threads throughout my body of work, these two poems narrate the embodied experience of science and medicine, and crip embodiment. In the first poem, *Panic*, a painful crip body experience is explored. The literality, or *matter* of the crip body is also demonstrated. In the second poem, *At Fifty-two*, the failure of the material body assumes significance as the place it fails is disembarking and embarking on the train, instead of going to work at my university campus. Temporality or the normative experience of time works internally, with the travel between railway stations, along with the external passing of years with the actual ageing process.

How is this lived experience best articulated in creative production such as poetry? Eagleton's (2007) discussion of the ambiguity of poetry suggests that the 'distinction between the empirical and the moral is not the same as the difference between fact and fiction' (2007, p. 31). This ambiguity of the poem is produced, in part, by breaking sentences into lines on the page and applying specific rhythm or rhyme schemes (p. 32). Readers respond to these generic cues by reading a poem very differently from reading prose. 'To call something a poem is to detach it from its immediate, empirical context and put it to wider uses' (p. 31), Eagleton suggests, also asserting that 'simply by being arranged on the page as it is, [poetry] offers a meaning which is

potentially [and infinitely] shareable' (p. 32). The telling and sharing of my stories/poems is the way I give voice to my embodied, lived experience. And the difference and telling is best articulated by a combination of theory and creative praxis – in this case, as an exegetical framework of abjection and normativity, and exclusion and inclusion, in the higher education space. I write as an academic and as a poet. I am also both queer and crip, and write poetry and theory with the theories of both.

Cosenza (2014) contends that through collage there are temporal or time-based ways of becoming one's Self – a narrative of subjectivity that adheres to Butler's theory of performativity, where a person is 'hailed' into being in the same way that Althusser's police officer 'hails' a subject into her subjective identity by calling to her on the street (Salih & Butler 2004 p. 7). I will further discuss the mattering and the literal matter of the crip body. How little it matters, in a hegemonic cultural sense in the university space and the matter, or materiality that it occupies as a subject in this space. Burke states that 'subjectivity highlights the relational, discursive and embodied process of identity formation' (2012, p. 57). By this she means that people are constructed and 'made' as subjects as well as bodies within discourses such as education, medicine, gender and sexuality and the implication of these discourses affects their access and inclusion in hegemonic experiences of higher education.

Crip theory

Crip theory attends to the contemporary cultures of the intersections and overlaps of disability and queerness. Queer theory emphasises the fluid and the humanly performed nature of sexuality, gender, age and/or sexualities. Like 'queer,' 'crip' and 'cripple' are terms which 'forge a politics' (Clare 1999, p. 70) and beget change and political action (Kafer 2013, p. 15). Sandahl (2003) and McRuer (2006) use the term 'crip' as a more 'contestatory' term and Kafer (2013) notes that it is a 'fluid and ever-changing' term which has been claimed by those people to whom it did not originally refer and with whom it can now be intertwined, with feminist and queer methodologies and praxis (pp. 15–17). This twisting of queerness (as suggested by Butler) is also employed by Kafer, (2013) who aims to 'twist' (p. 16) queer and crip with feminism.

Crip (from the word cripple) is a term which Mairs suggests can cause people to 'wince' when they hear it (Mairs 1992, p. 9). However, I would add that this wincing is perhaps a part of the contestatory impact of what it is to be crip. Like 'queer,' 'crip' and 'cripple' are terms which have been reclaimed by the people to whom they previously referred as an epithet. I will argue that crip embodiment in its very materiality (or matter) is also performative, according to my interpretation of Butler's (1993, p. 12) theory of performativity. Performativity is not a single act, but rather, a 'reiteration of norms, or a set of norms' (p. 12). This 'mattering' paradoxically exposes how crip bodies do not come to matter within a higher education institution with crip theory bringing to light the imperative to critique dimensions of subjective formation that are naturalised and taken for granted in hegemonic discourses of equity in higher education.

I include in these subjectivities, for example, Whiteness, middle-class heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, and other such normative subjectivities that work to reproduce spaces of exclusion for crip bodies in higher education. Theorists such as McRuer (2006, 2018), Sandahl (2003) and Kafer (2013) use crip and queer theories to suggest that crip bodies are woven and shaped by their particular practices and behaviours, and that being crip is enacted through bodies, but these theorists use crip and queer theories to help to make sense of the world in which a crip body resides. Crip can refer to physical impairment or non-normativity, (my preferred term) but also takes into consideration such medicalised conditions as neuro-divergence, mental illness, and chronic and long-term pain. Unlike the medicalised model of disability, which sees

normative people stare, question or turn away from the non-normative body, the crip body shakes things up and jolts people out of their complacency and normative understandings of disabled and non-disabled people (Kafer 2013, p. 15). This is because the crip body blurs the binaries of disability and ability, embodiment and disembodiment. A wheelchair, a walker or a cane, for example, become objects of addition to the physical experience of these bodies.

Crip sees hegemonic culture as refusing to accede to the non-normative subject, which is hailed, like Althusser, via Butler (1993, p.122) into its non-normative subjectivity with the built environments of geography and physical landscape such as stairs, escalators and high rise buildings a major part of the problem, rather than the individual with crip status being the problem. It was not until I became a crip subject that I truly appreciated the difficulties of moving around an unforgiving campus that, in its ableist structure, was for able-bodies and not for people like me.

Chrononormativity

Queer is a broad term and by its very nature overlaps broadly with other minority and marginalised groups. This intersectionality is referred to throughout this paper with my understanding of the queering of my own body, sexuality and identity with its crip status. I am constantly in and on view now, and my 'coming out' narratives (as both queer and crip) and my claiming of non-normative, precarious temporality sees me reiterating a status of non-normative queer sexuality and embodiment. Cosenza (2014, p. 158) argues that this claiming of so-called normal [*sic*] time, or chrononormativity, masks the 'hidden rhythms of privilege', in heteronormative and able-bodied experience. Time is 'structured, constructed and experienced in contemporary higher education in relation to processes of rapid and continuous change' (Burke & Manathunga 2020, p. 663) meaning that privilege is performed as a form of discipline that relies on change being understood as part of the experience of temporality. 'Time frames daily habits, rituals and routines in the name of progress […] to repetitive (re)production […] to the arbitrary schedules of capitalism and heteronormative notions of family, of production and reproductivity' (Cosenza 2014, p. 156). Consequently, crip and homosexual bodies are seen as non-normative and non-productive. Crip theory becomes a framework for 'denaturalising able-bodiedness and heteronormativity' (Cosenza 2014, p. 157).

The disciplining of docile bodies also relies on chrononormativity, a term devised by Freeman (2010, p. 4) which refers to keeping the well-oiled machine of education and industry running 'on-time' (p. 4). Chrononormativity is the systematic naturalising of time and the practices that create a heteronormative and able-bodied regulation of time and its practices. Chrononormativity, as a regulation of time, relies on more than individual bodies, instead making a whole population through 'institutional restraints, whereby institutional systems, economic and educational systems function congruently to discipline all bodies', (Cosenza 2014, p. 158), whether normative or crip, heteronormative or queer. Queer, crip time exists as one of these non-normative, counter-hegemonic intersections with normative time and space.

In using some elements of queer theory and the focus on queer time, I take the following concepts into account: Queer theory shows us something important about embodiment, a teasing out that is useful for thinking about crip/queer intersectionality. Butler is the theorist to turn to when discussing this, in terms of reiterating subjectivity and embodiment and the reiteration of space and place, and time and bodies, in these times and spaces.

Crip status and higher education

Higher education pedagogy has been linked to the enhancement of globalised market forces, rather than contributing to the social, political, physical and emotional well-being of its student and staff populations. Coffey (2020) argues that this neoliberal emphasis on what is a body's value, becomes properly articulated with what a body can 'do' in a neoliberal institution (2020, p. 636) – such as a university. This focuses on choice and autonomy with the body being a 'source of value' (p. 636), a product to be 'made over', and to have a psyche and intellect that can be valued and appreciated. Perhaps even advertised in glossy brochures of invitation to a particular campus?

Kafer (2013) asks whether claiming crip status can be a method of claiming 'multiple futures', (p. 13) and whether claiming the term 'crip' critically is to recognise the 'ethical, epistemic and political responsibilities behind such claims' (p. 13). While the intent is to deconstruct the binary between disabled/able bodies and evaluate how such binaries are brought into existence in a hegemonic ableist culture, the reality can be bleak. Claiming crip status has been personally challenging for me, for the reality of it was that I found myself in exclusionary spaces. The hopefulness and expansiveness with which Kafer (2013) claims crip identity for herself and others, belies, I believe, the roadblocks for those who would claim it for themselves.

There are a number of incidents that I can refer to, which make the visible crip status and the accoutrements of disability (cane, mobility scooter, wheelchair) more apparent. It has become a wry realisation to me that there are 'advantages' for me and whomever I am with in having some of these accoutrements: an Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled (ACROD) pass for close parking at the university campus and other 'advantages' for having a visible disability. People put us to the front of queues, we get front row seats at lectures and concerts, and at a workshop I took part in with my friend we received one-on-one tuition on how to complete the activity. I reiterate, for no other reason that I could discern than my able-bodied friend accompanied me, her wheelchair-bound friend, to the workshop.

At my previous university campus I was able to understand the difference with which my crip body was now regarded. After eight weeks of medical treatment it was decided that I would trial a return to work. I arrived in my car, parked in the ACROD bay, and began the journey to where my office was, on the fourth floor of the library. I rolled into the library and made my way to the lift. Unfortunately, it was festooned with 'Out of Order' signs, and I was literally stuck in the library entrance with no access to my office. A fruitless day's activities ensued as I had no access to my computer or belongings and there was no one able to tell me when the lift would be fixed. This was my first and last day at work as a crip body.

The following poem, entitled *Panic* is about a panic attack, in the midst of a recitation. Anxiety is a crip phenomenon that occurs invisibly in the body, even if the markers of anxiety are made visible, through breathlessness, sweating and laboured speech. In this auto/biographical poem the difficulties of speech and breathlessness and wanting to claim a visible space of theory and embodiment are articulated and bring my poem to life. The difference and dissonance between normative, able-embodiment and crip materiality of the body are articulated:

Panic

Spaces of discontent.
Your crip heart
running
      like a mouse
at work on the wheel in your chest,
like a negative of the darkened, ruby cut air.
Breath *hurts.*
A banquet of pain at the back of your skull,
coloured green and blue and yellow
             sharpish echo of
                  bruises ascending
moth wings hammer
trapped
      in your throat.

What is the sound of chaos
      but words on the page
         creeping
            and crawling
beneath your skin?

Pebbles.
Beetles.
Scratching yourself raw.
Scars and tattoos alike. Gooseflesh.
Goose Steps

on a chest of
stone and wood.
Tumbling and creaking.

Everyone else normative
workmanlike
builds their walls with matched dry stone.
Filling the room with colour and air
while you are parched and punched.
Solar plexus folding
         in on itself,

Disappointment, with
your gentle lines butchered and ugly.

Alone
on the
Stage.

It would be easier, perhaps, to

      Pass out.

> To die.
>> All alone.

To cut out your traitorous heart
bloody and pulsing in your right fist.

Hold it
aloft.

A solitary offering.

A gift.

This poem illustrates how panic is experienced fundamentally as a non-normative, embodied experience, located centrally within a body that is 'traitorous' and a 'disappointment'. To experience that body, the body/subject must be prepared to engage with all the disparate sensations and feelings that attend to its crip status: severe headache, parched throat, tingling arms and chest, gooseflesh. A panic attack renders the body as useless and unable to be trusted (Orr, 2006). This is a clear definition of crip status – the body that betrays its occupant time after time. The body that is weakened and, by default, runs on empty. When I wrote this poem, I tried to explain each embodied, panicked moment as something that someone could understand even if they had never had a panic attack. Constructions of crip status that render crip bodies in the things that join us together, rather than by the things that separate us, are important as they take the locations of gender, class, sexuality and disability seriously.

As with Butler's theory of performability the reiteration of a thought or concept of embodiment is a way of it being reinforced. In crip creative works like the poem above, crip identity is reaffirmed and reasserted, in a Butlerian sense. This is similar to Frida Kahlo's art, where Kahlo continually reiterates her disabled status, even though she does not have to, as her disability is never in question.

Kafer (2013) critiques the notion that 'dis'ability leads to impairment and negative experiences of life, suggesting rather that 'we' (those who have crip bodies) desire the same sort of future as 'you' (those who have not). She argues that disability is disavowed in two ways. Firstly, the value of a future that contains disabled people goes unrecognised, while the value of a disability-free future is seen as self-evident. Also, its future as a contestable, critiqued and contentious entity is unacknowledged. The second failure of recognition makes possible the first: the 'monolithic' fact of disability being located in a body beyond the realm of the political and cultural. This perspective, according to Kafer, is coloured by 'histories of ableism and disability oppression' (2013, p. 3). She imagines a future of 'access and engagement', (2013, p. 3) based on queer, feminist and crip theorists such as herself.

Body 'work'

As a feminist and as an academic I am aware of the mutability of the female body. I have studied and restudied feminist body theory. I can almost quote passages of Elizabeth Grosz and Adrienne Rich by heart. Yet, it is the collision (itself a word that is imbued with a violent rhetoric) of queer/crip theory that speaks to me now – both in the theoretical and creative sense, and in the personal sense. Crip theory is violently originated because the pain that it suggests is often violently experienced. Violence in this instance is the result of ableist normativities and

continually gets reiterated in the experience of pain. Once again, Butler's exemplar of performed bodily matter is reaffirmed here.

The workshop I attended with my friend and to which I referred earlier was kintsugi (*kin* meaning gold and *tsugi* meaning brokenness) – the mending of pottery with gold mica paint powder and glue. I took my inexpensive, IKEA butter dish and placed it in a pillow case and carefully hit it with a hammer. It broke into three triangulated pieces, and I glued them together with epoxy resin and tapped the glue joins with gold mica powdered paint from a horsehair brush. The completed project was quite beautiful, and it gave me a sense of the wholeness and completion that can come out of brokenness.

The broken body can be understood as a 'horizon of value' to be controlled and cultivated. Body work practices can then be understood as the means by which neoliberal health and gender ideals are mobilised and lived (Coffey 2018). It is easy to forget how gendered the experience of higher education is to this notion of perfection and accumulating of privilege and status. It is only relatively recently since women as a group have been a part of, and had access to, higher education. It remains the fact that only certain ethnic and cultural groups of women (read white, middle-class, cisgendered) have had across-the-board access to it. Historically, it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that women were able to attend university, and this was a very classed experience and one for which they had to struggle mightily (Burke 2012, pp. 16–17). The absence of women of colour from higher education was a 'collective amnesia' (p. 17) and, was, as Spivak argued (cited in Burke 2012, p. 17) a form of 'epistemic violence' (p. 17), akin to the symbolic violence that diversity practices render in access to crip, queer and other minorities in contemporary accounts of higher education. There is also the narrative of extremely gifted and talented people who 'reside' in crip bodies, (consider, for example, Stephen Hawking) that produce a stereotypical notion of "broken" genius inhabiting disabled bodies.

The following poem, *At Fifty-two,* covers the terrain of age, gender, mutability and the ways that a crip body in higher education can let its inhabitant down, and be let down, that its very crip status can render us beholden to medicine and a medicalised discourse that we have to 'appreciate,' tolerate and even value. Foucault's work on medicalisation and discourse and the material body (cited in Grosz 1994, p. 146) is relevant here as an exemplar of reiterative practices. That the reiteration is necessary is a sign that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled in higher education. Indeed, it is the instabilities of embodiment and the potentialities for materialisation that mark one domain, such as higher education, in which the force of hegemonic, regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn repeated (performative) rearticulation.

At Fifty-Two

I: Then
Riding the train

10.30am: I should be at work.
10.30am: The mellow voice comes over the loud speaker.
On my own aboard this monstrous metal engine,
so many times I have taken this journey.
I watch as kilometres of anonymous sky flies by.
I buy, time after time: an all-day ticket.
No-one knows me here. No-one cares. I am

an automatic insatiable engine, counting down the minutes,

10.40am.
10.50am.

Stop. Start again. Stop, the hours of travel
broken up into five- and ten-minute intervals.

II
I have the diagnosis: menorrhagia:
a hot spatter, almost always unexpected,
a crimson stain spreading onto my white skirt,
or onto my dress. Blood-soaked knickers
at any time of the month.
I have the diagnosis: incontinence: shitting myself
because I can't make it to the toilet in time—a triptych of
PTSD, Irritable Bowel, and a loose sphincter
from too many kids, my doctor says.

III
I am wet and sticky. I smell like shit.
I try in vain to wipe myself clean
with handfuls of toilet wipes, then
scrub my belly and thighs
with water and stiff paper towel
from the dispenser, hiding, half-naked
in the stinking metal toilet stall
at whichever station I pressed the bell for.
I wrestle clean underwear
and flannels from plastic Ziplock bags
I keep in my handbag.

IV
Back on the train I close my eyes to the click and shutter
of these chattering strips of light,
a recluse on this anonymous afternoon's journey.
I've been here so often I've learnt all the stations off by heart:
Welshpool—Queen's Park—Cannington
Challis—Sherwood—Armadale,
the clackety clack of metal on metal the only noise that soothes me,
this carriage the only place that demands nothing of me, but time.
My head bumps rhythmically against the window,
my cheek invisibly chalked with the skin cells
of a thousand previous faces.

V
My mind is a revolving line of unspooling track, pebbles for words,
going forward and back, forward, and back, my teeth lightly chatter
in this hermetically sealed, air-conditioned tube.
Slicing through my invisible wounds like light through glass.

I have to get off the train again, my body barely
holding back the flood of diarrhoea, cramping, sweat dripping,
my body bends and sways as the train screeches to a halt.
Pulling my bag onto my shoulder,
my feet firmly planted,
hurrying, hurrying away.

VI
Despite all the preparation, despite
the specialists' visits and myriad procedures,
despite handfuls of different coloured pills,
swallowed with water that is blood warm and tastes like the metal
of this stall, it is here I have ended up,
scrubbing underwear in a restroom sink
until my knuckles are raw,
washing shit or blood clots down the plughole.

VII: Now
My landscape is an overworn garment, my body is

pressed and repressed, darts let out,

seams undone. Everything soft and loose,

with all my days collected and broken up, stacked like driftwood,

the passing decades riven and fragmented.

All my days picked at and scrutinised,
and at my back I always hear time's winged chariot,
(as co-passenger and confidante), hurrying near.
Alas, I think, alas, the years slip by; with so little notice taken.

Costa branca, I am blood and shit and water,
my body a mass of softened hills, as white as wool,
intercut with tattooed pathways,
tears streaming down my face like the hard, bright sea.
There, in that carriage, was my memory.

This poem is a crip recasting of age and normative embodiment in which age does weary, and
the years do condemn. Childbirth, followed by the onset of menopause and the intersections of
history and story-telling, combine with a crip sensibility to highlight the affirmation of the crip,
queer, female body. There are overarching similarities between this classed, gendered and
academic body and the body described by the second wave feminist, Adrienne Rich. I appreciate
the bodies I am reading and writing about, young women and older women like myself who
battled with these bodies as a matter of reality. When I bore my eight children I found resonance
in the theory and storytelling of the women who came before and after me. This poem is both
queer and crip because it articulates what Kafer (2013) called the twisting (violently iterated) of
crip into queer and queer into crip and how both highlight the risks of such a twisted inclusion
(Kafer 2013, p. 16). Indeed, Butler herself argues for queer to be seen as a site of collective
contestation, to be 'always and only redeployed' (1993, p. 223). The implications for an
indifferent higher education space which does not value (the reality of) difference, rather
endeavouring to elide it in its academic setting. Institutional racism and sexism that co-exist with

neoliberalist structural and political forces continue to deny agency to female and trans female crip and queer bodies. As Burke and Manathunga (2020) state, time is 'pedagogical and deeply entwined with culture' (2020, p. 667). However, it is not only time that is pedagogical and cultural, but embodiment, history and storytelling as well. To pretend that there are not racist, sexist and political undercurrents to women's existence, both temporally and spatially, is disingenuous and misleading.

The implications of and for higher education

Kafer (2013) argues that the 'problem' of disability does not reside in individuals, but in the built environment and in the cultural and social models that require individuals or their friends and family to negotiate such spaces for them. Since I am discussing crip status and its experience in the higher education university space, it is imperative to understand that the open spaces and physical landscape of a university campus – the distances to be travelled, the stairs to be negotiated, the hills, the roads and paths and the lack of wheelchair access, the lack of disabled toilets, as examples, are all problems that no number of friends, family or colleagues are able to negotiate on a disabled person's behalf.

Butler (1993) argues that 'the subject may appear to have "an identity" which is resolutely written on the body, but this is only because reiteration "conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition"' (1993, p. 12). The pun in *Bodies that Matter* is that matter refers to both the reiterated significance of the body (*it* matters) and the materiality of the body (*the* matter). That the reiteration is necessary, is a sign that materialisation is never completed. In this instance, bodies find it difficult to comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for re-materialisation, that mark one domain in which the forces of the regulatory law of normative embodiment can be turned against itself and then be recognised as a crip body. This normative body excels and is foregrounded in higher education, to the detriment of the non-normative body.

Butler's performativity theory and its relationship to the materiality of the crip, queer body is therefore a central argument in this paper. It is a little humorous to say 'matter matters', but the crip body in its very essence is the stuff of non-normative subjectivity. The right to higher education is about subjectivity and which subjects have the 'right' to it (Burke 2012, p. 50). In short, whose bodies matter, in the hegemonic culture of higher education. Samuels (2003) argues that crip and queer individuals often find themselves in a place where they need to 'come out' and tell people about their sexual practices/desires and/or their disability status. This is especially true for people with non-visible disabilities; however, even people with disability marked on the body are often forced to 'explain' their disability, in application forms, to tutors and lecturers and when seeking spaces that are inclusionary and welcoming, as well as its origins, and its impact on daily life.

Cosenza (2014, p. 158) argues that there are many ways to read the body-as-text and in this lies its queer and crip possibility. Fassett and Warren (2007, p. 65), explain that the disciplining of bodies through space and time is similar to the experience that occurs in higher education. Foucault (1995) calls this discipline in the likeness of the oppressor as the creation of 'docile bodies' (1995, p. 136). Furthermore, he argues that a docile body is one that may be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (p. 136). This body is the sort of diverse body that institutions in higher education welcome. Fassett and Warren (2007, p. 65) call this system of education as the education '"machine" containing normative representations of embodiment and sexuality', (p. 65) whereby a well-organised process reproduces itself through its own image by the control of the docile bodies that flow through the higher-education machine (p. 65).

The machine of higher education promotes the beliefs and values of the white, masculinist, middle-class hegemony as well as normative cultural, social and political beliefs. Coffey (2020) argues that what a body can 'do' in a neoliberal framework, thinking in this instance of a university space implicates the mattering for which the body will be determined. This focus on access, choice and autonomy sees these bodies being 'source[s] of value'(p. 636). Or for bodies of difference, of lesser value. The consequences of not being able to access one's value 'can trigger [feelings of] discomfort, embarrassment and shame' (Read & Leathwood 2020, p. 541). Burke (2017, p. 433) suggests that 'inclusion might also be seen as a discursive space in which the politics of shame play out in ways that are experienced as personal failure and simply not being the "right" kind of person' (2017, p. 433). A crip/queer body is one that is inculcated with shameful feelings of exclusion and difference.

This is highlighted with my position as a queer academic in an Australian university and a realisation that queerness, crip status *and* academia go together to form an inextricable link that both defines and unites me with my colleagues and the queer and/or crip students I have taught and with whom I have cohabited in the higher education space. Burke (2012, p. 61) states that bodies at university are 'formed as much through difference as they are through sameness'. This is because, she suggests, being too 'different' requires self-correction and self-regulation, whilst diversity is something that institutions continue to embrace (p. 62). The temporal and the spatial exist as an exclusionary space, for bodies of difference, working as they do against, rather than with, privilege.

Conclusion

'Non-traditional' students, and multiply diverse academics, such as me, are part of the new network that addresses widening participation in higher education. The fact of widening participation came about in Australian universities as a result of redressing the entrenched inequalities (Burke 2012, p. 53) that persist in universities, both sandstone and 'younger' institutions. Burke argues that universities must grapple with socio and political inequalities across differences of 'age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion and sexuality' (2012, p. 53) in order to encourage widening participation and access.

As I 'tap,' carefully, or not, on my body, with the kintsugi hammer of pain, and with my cane on the path before me, on a university campus, as well as in the open world, the more likely it is that I will experience the arbitrary nature of completion and brokenness that is attended to by cultures of disability and queerness, crip status and depression and anxiety, and the imperatives of feminist theory on these experiences. As McRuer (2018) attests, 'to crip', like 'to queer', 'gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange, or twisted' (p. 23). The physicality of this description (twisting) also mentioned by Kafer (2013), accentuates the epistemic and physical 'grappling' that crip bodies must necessarily perform, in order to unsettle. And in examining the queer, crip body I can then begin to explore what discourses of recovery 'do' in 'strange and twisted' (p. 23) women's lives and how the imperative to recover 'normativity' is realised and how this 'normativity' intersects with embodiment, queerness, crip status and its over-arching impact on my own experiences of higher education.

I have also explained the interconnections that my personal story (in poetry) has had with the theoretical research I have included in this paper. Foucault explains what he means by story writing about himself, and theory writing. He says:

> Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of my own experience, always in relation to processes I saw as taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognise around me […] a few fragments of autobiography. (Foucault cited in Burke 2012, p. 76).

Drawing on queer theory, and the central concerns of crip theory considers how such a critical perspective might impact cultural and historical inquiry. Crip theory attends to the contemporary cultures of disability and queerness.

In doing this research I have been imbricated in the act of self-story-telling in the form of poems that give depth and resonance to my theoretical understandings of what it is to be a body of difference, rather than part of the welcomed, population of diversity, lacking access to an acceptable higher-education temporal space. Fragments of research can be teased at, revealing their intricacies and subtle shifts. Poetry can be an accessible pathway through theory, for others, who may or may not identify as queer or crip, and who may be a colleague or a student with whom I have contact. The higher education space revels in expressions of diversity in its student and staff populations, but recoils from real difference and the reality of a crip, queer body in a higher education institution. As Butler (1993) states, what constitutes the fixity of the material body [I add my crip, queer body here], its contours, its movements, depends as much on performances of normativity as it does on reiterations of actual materiality (1993, p. 2). The higher education space denies, in a tangible sense, access to it in its elision of crip, queer and other forms of non-normative, marginalised bodies in higher education.

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VIEWPOINT
Sharing our research experience in higher education: Should doing it differently be the exception?

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As academics from the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health in regional Australia, we embraced our intersecting roles as health professionals and educators in a collaborative research project. Funding encouraged us to move beyond the dominant research paradigm traditionally associated with healthcare. Being unconstrained by our usual requirements for measurable outcomes, we used creative strategies to explore the complexities of our topic via a collaborative approach. Geographically separated, we met in an idyllic setting for two weekend retreats in our own time. Armed with literature, creative materials, food supplies, hiking boots, curiosity, goodwill and a sense of adventure, we questioned, shared, walked and created. We unpacked implications of cultures within and across disciplines; doing this through time, space and funding we do not usually have access to. Taken to the edge of our comfort zones, and sometimes beyond, there was safety in our established rapport and our trust in, and respect for, each other. Importantly, we embraced complexity and continued our conversations beyond the retreat. Through developing this article we have come to realise the exception of our research experience and the value of a praxis-oriented equity framework for understanding the richness and possibilities of self-authored time and space.

Keywords: interprofessional; collaborative; research paradigms; reflection; creativity

Locating ourselves in our article

As academics from the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health in regional Australia, we have intersecting roles as health professionals, educators and researchers. Given our background as health professionals, with socialised ways of researching and writing, the dialogical genre we used for this article was initially unfamiliar. While we began writing from a place of cognitive unease, as captured in our first 50-word story, we now value that being unsettled is part of working in this rich space of praxis. Importantly, we have had the opportunity of being able to embrace this space, learning in and about it through our collaborative authorship as the article developed, and with mentorship from equity practitioners. While academic writing often focuses on the outcomes associated with the research undertaken, our intention with this piece relates more to process, as we share our experiences of how we engaged with research.

A 50-word story: Sharing our initial reflections for this article

We sit. Distantly. Geographically removed from the daily machinations
of traditional academia. Do we fit here? Does our story?
Have we mastered the complex jargon?
We're moving into uncertain spaces!
Does our story have value here?
We move with tentative, yet emboldened steps,
and begin with a reflection on *us*!

(Authors' reflections)

What do we mean by praxis?

To some, being asked to write about the notion of a praxis-oriented equity framework may be familiar and inspiring. To others, like us, a group of people who work concurrently across healthcare, education and research, it may engender curiosity or even confusion. As clinicians, we think about engaging in practice as reflecting, learning and understanding more about what we do, why we do it, and how we can improve and do it differently next time. Here there is very much a sense of the practical aspects of practice. We thought we knew about educational praxis; something we had been engaging in for some time in order to develop our own practice as clinicians, educators and researchers. However, viewing praxis in relation to equity was (and still is) new to us. Despite our initial hesitancy around the topic, through the experience of researching and writing this article we have arrived at a conceptualisation of praxis as a transformative process. A process where possibilities are explored, and histories, processes and cultures of higher education can be interrogated. Within this space, there is a continuous movement between critical reflection and action, action and reflection (as informed by Burke 2018) where research and practice intersect; each challenging and informing the other in order to pursue new possibilities and understandings and achieve transformation.

How did our relationship with this framework unfold?

We share our evolving insights and ongoing grapplings arising from our experience of being implicitly *in* a praxis-oriented equity framework when doing our research. Through this iterative process and during the writing of this article, our understanding of praxis became more accessible to us. We realised that we were experienced in reflecting on our clinical and educational practice to develop deeper understandings of our pedagogical approaches in order to do things differently (within a praxis framework). Yet, praxis means different things to different people. We began to see how praxis could be viewed through an alternative lens as it related to equity, and the subsequent possibilities for shaping and evolving the structures and

contexts that surround and inform higher education practices. In exploring this topic, we had the space to explore and move beyond the confines of our socialised ways of academic writing where objective language, prescribed headings and topic expertise is preferenced. This opportunity enabled us to use our voices as researchers to share our reflections about uncertainties and insights around our ongoing journey of understanding. Yet such sharing is not without its own associated vulnerabilities, especially when the audience may be from disciplines beyond health. However, we accept this (growing more comfortable with it over time) in accordance with our view that we are in fact part of widening participation within a praxis-oriented equity framework, and being unsettled is part of transforming research and educational practice.

As part of this writing freedom, we would also like to begin with a photo of ourselves located in the topic and setting of our research (see Figure 1). What we like about this photo is that we are positioned beside an artwork that for us captured our intersecting roles, the messiness of our topic, and our willingness to untangle complex concepts. This headspace inspired us to be creative and we bring this sense of creativity into this article using 50-word stories. As a research group we have been inspired by these stories, originally used by others as a narrative technique (Sevenhuysen 2009). We used them as a creative way to succinctly capture our intentions, beginnings, insights and experiences of praxis as part of our ongoing collaborative engagement (Croker et al. in press). The only stipulation for a 50-word story is that they are 50 words long; no more, no less.

Figure 1: The artwork that captured our intersecting roles and intentions for research

A 50-word story: Our intentions for our research

We had arrived.
The artwork seemed to say to us "Grappling welcome here!"
Confirming our intention to embrace complexity; inviting us to look
deep into knotty problems and follow up tangled threads of
understanding.
The windows beside us promising respites of gentle engagement with
nature.
We felt at home.
Understood.

(Authors' reflections)

Explaining our research beginnings

To understand our research beginnings, we explain why the grant was important, and who we were in relation to the grant as a group who enjoy a shared curiosity and relationships established over many years and collaborative projects. We have intersecting roles as clinicians, educators and researchers, and the nature of our relationships, what we do and our rural geographic location places us on the periphery of traditional mainstream academia. Though, not so peripheral that traditional research expectations and outputs do not apply, so when an internal grant opportunity arose we jumped at the chance to explore our understanding and teaching of interprofessional clinical reasoning among health professional students. We explored a topic drawing on histories of silo-based education in relation to higher education's interest in developing collaborative interdisciplinary cultures. The grant's title, *'Knots to know?': Making visible, untangling, and exploring tensions associated with different pedagogical approaches to education for healthcare students,* captured our intentions to embrace complexity.

Upon reflection, each of us too (originally) were trained within these silo-based educational strategies; part of the socialisation process of 'becoming' our professions. Such socialisation also extended to how we were taught to understand and engage with research, and centred around the empirico-analytical research paradigm. This paradigm, which relates to objectivity, measurement and predetermined outcomes continues to dominate funding opportunities within healthcare and health professional education research (Cleland 2015). Given that individual research approaches suggest unique relationships with praxis, adopting an empirico-analytical approach to the research would have seen us view practice as an object of inquiry (Kemmis 2010) and something which could perhaps be directed or controlled. Alternatively, the very nature of the grant provided scope to undertake research that was not confined to these objective requirements. We were able to adopt a more practical, interpretive approach and view our practices, knowledge and reality more subjectively, deepening our understanding in order to educate ourselves and others (Kemmis 2010).

A 50-word story: Our socialised beginnings

Empirico-analytical research:
Evidence based medicine and development of *gold* practice standards.
Statistical significance, power, randomised control trials.
In learning to *be* our profession we are normalised to the process of
quantifying and measuring as underpinning quality research. It is where
we are comfortable.
Qualitative-what? Interpretive paradigms?
This is … different. Unsettling. Exciting.
(Authors' reflections)

Despite the challenges in accessing funding when researching in non-dominant paradigms, we had been afforded the opportunity and privilege to step outside of our usual physical and cognitive space and remove the comfortable objective cloak that was so integral to our health professional identities. We were able to explore a complex educational topic where it was possible to embrace multiple-constructed realities and seek synergies of understanding to inform our (and others') practice. We were finally able to move beyond chance conversations about topics we had been on the edge of for years, taking time and making space to take a deep dive into our topic and explore its complexity.

How did we come together?

As a group of health profession clinicians, educators and researchers we are in the unique position of being co-located within a shared, interdisciplinary office space. We sit, work, learn and teach together and share a common curiosity around our points of overlap as well as our differences. This structure is what we know, and interdisciplinarity is embedded in all that we do. This makes our individual educational praxis (in relation to practice development) *possible*, but not guaranteed. While many a conversation about our educational and clinical practice and an idea for how we might do or view it differently begins on a walk to the tea room, during a car trip or even mid-flight, the end of the physical journey similarly marks an end to the discussion and signals a return to our usual doings. Hence, the opportunity to further our discussions through dedicated time and space and engage in targeted reflection to enhance any subsequent action was welcomed as a way of potentially transforming our practice.

The research team was a natural formation of those who had been part of these earlier conversations, and while shared interests in relation to the topic were important in bringing the group together, other foundational elements were equally if not more crucial. Group members were able to draw on an existing strong rapport, a sense of trust, reciprocity and goodwill, and a willingness to explore and be open to something different. Combined, these elements enabled a group of six women, from five different health professions, located across two rural sites to come together and engage in a process of reflection on our educational practices. This was enacted with the hope of generating new and deeper understandings, and identifying possibilities for practice change. In hindsight, we now see an additional layer to this experience where other meanings of praxis come into view.

Our approach to the research

Midway between our locations of Tamworth and Taree, we met in an idyllic setting (see Figure 2) for two weekend retreats in our own time. Our accommodation was well suited to the inextricably entwined processes of reflection and action, even down to the artwork that serendipitously reflected the title of our grant "Knots to know" (see Figure 1). Here we embraced the privilege of stepping outside of our usual space, away from our usual tasks and distractions and being connected in our disconnect from the everyday.

Figure 2: The setting for our thinking

This was a different way of researching. We arrived armed with computers, literature, creative materials, stationery, food supplies, hiking boots, curiosity, goodwill and a sense of adventure, ready to think creatively, reflect, and transform our practice. We questioned, shared, walked and created through a range of activities including the use of plasticine to develop a representation of our understanding of clinical reasoning within our professions. The plasticine exercise involved 15 minutes of individual, quiet creativity, after which we shared our unfolding understandings. This tactile, creative task allowed us to engage with complex topics in a novel way.

While we had a clear purpose, we were not tied down to any pre-determined timetable governing our activities, which in itself was unconventional. Importantly, here we had time and space, and this afforded us the opportunity to engage in a process where we could acknowledge new thinking and ideas. Here, we could allow ourselves to be unsettled by, and grapple with, such ideas, and use these moments to generate directions for further inquiry.

A 50-word story: Our location

Packing up,
outside work and outside work time.
Outside expectation.
No reliable WiFi. No expectation.
A unique location allowed us time and space to interact …
but interact *differently* …
swapping desks, screens, white boards and fluorescent lights,
for a homely round table, wood fire, preparing meals and walks through
the paddocks.

(Authors' reflections)

We began to understand what it could be like to operate beyond the usual timescapes of higher education (see Bennett & Burke 2018) and traditional pursuits that dominate academia. Our range of activities and resources enabled us to be responsive to our reflections, energy levels and collaborative momentum. While in part they offered a safe space and somewhere to withdraw to, they also invoked a sense of adventure. Cooking for each other. Walking through paddocks with giant kangaroos. Coming across the recently-shed skin of a poisonous snake. These moments added an edge to the experience and to our conversations. As we were taken to the limit of our comfort zones, and sometimes beyond, we realised that there was safety in our trust in, and respect for, each other and our established rapport. Earlier research had identified the importance of rapport for helping students learn to work together (Croker et al. 2015). Interestingly, it was not just the students' rapport that was important. Educators' rapport was also important (Croker et al. 2016).

We recognised the value of being able to take time and make space for research to be conducted. Yet, it was much more than this. There was a sense of excitement, knowing we had an opportunity to think, create and explore, and importantly, to further develop the relationships between ourselves as researchers and educators. In stepping away from the usual, the familiar, we could be adventurous (in a safe and supported way) and unsettled together. Even the creative mediums we engaged in as research techniques, such as using plasticine to represent our thinking, created their own sort of unease, but at the same time enabled some to share their ideas and discuss their experiences more openly. These different modalities were important for exploring and unbundling our own and others' thinking. They offered a space to question hegemonic approaches to engaging in research and to problematise rather than problem solve the issues we were grappling with, such as the differences between professions in relation to clinical reasoning and how we accommodate and support such differences when teaching interprofessional groups of students. Central to these activities was time. In direct contrast to usual professional expectations of busyness, speed, and starting *and* finishing a task, these activities required a deliberate taking-of-time to connect with our thinking, and offered multiple and varied means of finding our way through topics and stretching our understanding so that we could be open to new insights and deeper curiosity.

As we engaged with each other's different perspectives, challenging and unsettling our own and others' thinking, we were reminded about the privilege of being supported to bring all of these different components together for higher education research. While we acknowledge the rich understandings of the term in social justice literature, we are keen to highlight that our use of the term privilege aligns with common usage definitions around how we viewed the opportunity we had been presented with as 'something regarded as a special honor [sic]', 'an unexpected good fortune or benefit' (Word Hippo 2022).

A 50-word story: Challenging expectations

Research.
Tradition, *norms*, expectations … of who, what, when, where and how.
Yet … can it be otherwise?
"Different" is not necessarily something we should shy away from.
There is advantage in letting go of professional expectations, being
open to "new".
Challenging ourselves individually and collectively. Difference.
Uncertainty. New horizons.
Yes … research can be otherwise.

(Authors' reflections)

Experiencing self-authoring

Our research helped develop our educational practice in relation to attending to the complexity of teaching collaborative clinical reasoning. However, this article does not describe findings from our research, rather, it centres around our reflections on engaging in research outside the usually expected research methods and methodologies. We were funded to research in the interpretive paradigm, and we were researching beyond the usual time and space constraints of higher education. We were *self-authoring* our own spaces; the value of which we could see more clearly having experienced it. From our 'new-found viewpoint' we share our reflections on developing our practice in a self-authored space.

The funding *authorised* the *self-authoring* of *our* exploration of *our* educational practice to be inclusive of different disciplinary approaches to learning and be open to 'how can it be otherwise?'. Here we had control over our time, over our space and over our approach to research. *Organic* was valued over our usual *ordered* spaces and timetables and allowed us to move beyond our customary daily patterns of thinking and problem solving. We were experiencing firsthand, the value of funding that recognises the importance of organic research processes and synergistic research outcomes and what can happen when we move into counter-hegemonic research spaces.

A 50-word story: Challenges with self-authorisation

KPIs. Policies and processes. Deadlines. Adherence.
A cycle so ingrained you sometimes forget
you're on someone else's treadmill.
Step off. Look up. Look out.
It's OK … take the reins. Embrace.
There's permission for this unfamiliarity.
There are possibilities too.

> Exciting opportunities await when you author
> the journey with the unknown destination.
> (Authors' reflections)

Despite its value, a self-authored research space is not straightforward. It is possible to experience, and it can generate possibilities, but it is not necessarily permanent. Thus, we identified a tension of participating in this space; that is, the tension between the newfound freedom of being in the self-authored space of our research weekend, and returning to the familiar constraints of the timetabled, predetermined spaces of regular work. In contrast to our regular work and hegemonic reliance on objective ways of knowing, we realised the opportunity to self-author was something special that could not be taken for granted. However, the ongoing energy from this space fuelled our continued engagement with our findings as well as the writing of this article.

As we wrote, our reflexivity helped us understand more about the flexibility that comes with the freedoms, complexities and possibilities our self-authored space provided. While the value was obvious, we reflected on the personal and collective vulnerability associated with each of these elements of operating in a self-authored space. Curiosity inspired questions as we wondered whether were doing it correctly, where we would end if we didn't know where we were going, how we would know when we got there, and how we would even start to explain any of this to others.

Our purpose, curiosity and rapport enabled us to view such vulnerability as an integral part of the opportunities self-authorship brings, and to see uncertainty as important for our collaboration. However, we realise that others may find such evolving, responsive approaches overwhelming. In effect, self-authored spaces can be precarious and may need to be carefully negotiated or managed. Interestingly, the concepts of self-authoring and self-authored spaces were not ones we had considered as we embarked on our research journey. Upon reflection, we realised the extent to which the funding had in fact authorised us to self-author. This realisation inspired further curiosity around the notion of authorising research in relation to who and where this authority comes from and how such authority is obtained. We reflected on the reach of this authority in its determination of who can engage in research and how research is to be conducted. We wondered how this authority can be made more explicit and visible, and how it can (and should) be challenged. As a curious bunch we continue to grapple with each of these questions.

Sharing our insights in relation to the present and the future

Whether generating practice-informed research, such as ours, or translating research into practice, it all takes time. In a busy academic world, time is costly; both in a financial sense as well as the potential (negative) impact it can have on other responsibilities when time is knowingly (and willingly) taken, and it is here that the issue of accessibility must also be considered. Time, like space, becomes about access. We were fortunate to pursue our research outside of the usual temporal and spatial conditions of academia. However, we *chose* to create suitable conditions, engaging in research in our own time and in a space geographically and aesthetically removed from our usual work environment. We researched in a space dominated by wide, open views, yet one where we were not able to be viewed by others or caught up in conversations about key performance indicators. We also engaged in this opportunity for praxis with interdisciplinarity. While the structure of our workplace enables this to be *our* default position, we recognise the uniqueness of our situation and that it brings a richness to research spaces that others may not be able to access and draw on so readily. It is encouraging that some university structures and processes emphasise and place value on researching in self-authored

times and spaces, as evidenced by the funding opportunity we were provided with. However, this is not widespread, and funding tends to favour research with linear timelines for predetermined outcomes. What we have done (and continue to do), seems to be the *exception* to traditional academic machinations.

While our experience reinforces the importance of taking time and making space for research, we recognise that you cannot simply replicate and transplant a process to a different group of people in a different setting and expect it to achieve the desired research outcomes or generate solutions to problems. We had an opportunity to research in a counter-hegemonic space through funding not normally available to us. Importantly, this was paired with many other factors like our shared interests, individual good will and rapport, and an interdisciplinarity that enabled us to come together and be comfortable in our collective reflection, learning and problematising. We were guided by individual contributions, different ways of conceptualising, and a willingness and openness to participate that created synergy and collaborative momentum. This experience was unique to us, and it had value. Yet, this non-traditional approach to research is very much the exception which prompts us to question whether it should be.

Valuing opportunities such as this can produce rich outcomes, and there is scope for higher education to consider how our experience could transition from exception to precedent (and eventually, taken-for-granted practice) for further opportunities for ourselves, our colleagues and others. But how do you generate goodwill and curiosity between members of different disciplines and create and normalise conditions that encourage openness to 'other ways of knowing'? While there is no simple answer, we have arrived at several important realisations that could be further explored in a broader community of praxis. The value of time, and specifically, unstructured time, cannot be underestimated and it should be prioritised and encouraged. Funding is also key in relation to its focus. If funding outcome-driven research continues to dominate research opportunities, then this rich, alternative space will never be funded or possible. Such opportunities enable the development of skills, knowledge and confidence in being able to research in different ways; experience that can then be shared with others to broaden the capacity for researching in this way. We also see value in the seeking and creation of opportunities that support educators and researchers to develop relationships across disciplines so that they may come together to explore different ways of doing, through both individual and collective educational praxis. Our experience shows this is possible.

Grappling with the notion of a praxis-oriented equity framework is enabling us to understand and do things differently, and to value and begin to access the academic literacies involved in equity practice. We have discovered and embraced new terminology, incorporating it into our vocabulary and our grappling, and expanding our understanding of previously taken-for-granted concepts such as critical thinking, viewing it not only as critique, but now considering it in relation to the interrogation of power structures. Our experience shows us, and hopefully others, that it is important to provide opportunities for people who are not part of hegemonic structures of grant success to be given opportunities to research their own practices and identities rather than be the subjects of other people's research. Our aspiration is that this becomes ordinary and accepted; legitimised. Such a change is important to ensure the presence and continuity of research that can change practice *by* and *with* those clinicians, educators and researchers whose practices are often the focus of the research. Importantly, we continue to see opportunities for transforming practices when released from the confines of objectivity, measurement and predetermined outcomes, as necessitated by more dominant ways of knowing and doing.

A final 50-word story: Have we arrived?

Practice, praxis, equity framework.
Coming together, self-authoring, collaborating.
Understanding our opportunity. Untangling.
The loose thread beautifully unravelling.
Educators, educating as a process, a pattern.
Participating, shaping, reflecting, acting.
Research "retreating" in order to advance. Praxis.
Embracing different. Being open to "how things could be otherwise".
The future challenge … challenge the future.

(Authors' reflections)

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Interview:
In conversation with Professor Debbie Epstein

Samson Maekele Tsegay*, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Debbie Epstein, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

This conversation with Professor Emerita Debbie Epstein explores her political activism in South Africa and academic works in the United Kingdom (UK). In particular, the interview focuses on her political involvement against the Apartheid system, which caused her to leave the country six months after starting her undergraduate study at the University of the Witwatersrand. Moreover, the interview discusses Epstein's transition to the UK and her work on gender and education, elite schools, anti-racist education and Southern theories. This interview contributes to understanding factors that affect access and equity in education.

Keywords: elite education; globalisation; southern theory; anti-racist education; gender

Introduction

Debbie Epstein was my doctoral supervisor at the University of Roehampton. When I started thinking about interviewing influential academic for the journal *Access: Critical explorations of equity in higher education*, she was the first one that came to my idea for two reasons. First, I knew about her political activism in against the apartheid system South Africa. I also found her to be vocal against any form of injustice. For example, when my visa was rejected to study in the United Kingdom (UK), Epstein's support (together with my second supervisor – Professor Marie-Pierre Moreau) was one of the main reasons that enabled me to defer my admission and scholarship and reapply for a visa after a year (which was successful) and finally complete my study. As she says, fighting injustice is in her blood.

Second, Epstein has rich academic experiences and extensively researched gender and education, elite schools, anti-racist education and Southern theories. She is Emerita Professor of Cultural Studies in Education. She gained her doctorate in Cultural Studies in 1991. Since then, she has worked at the University of Central England, the Institute of Education (now UCL Institute of Education), Goldsmiths College London, Cardiff University, University of Roehampton and Anglia Ruskin University. She has published eleven single or co-authored books (of which one has been translated into Spanish and six are in the Academic's Support Kit), more than forty papers in refereed journals (five of them translated and another eight

reprinted), twenty-seven chapters in edited collections (four of them reprints from earlier publications), six edited books (one of them also translated into Spanish) and eleven edited special issues of international refereed journals. She was co-editor of an international refereed journal (*Gender and Education*) from 2006 to 2012.

This interview with Epstein took place online via Zoom on 14 February 2022. It discusses her political activism in South Africa and academic works in the UK.

Interview – 14 February 2022 via Zoom

Samson Tsegay: You left South Africa in 1962, six months after starting a Bachelor of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, due to your political involvement against the Apartheid system in the country, and came to the UK. Could you describe the situation?

Debbie Epstein: It was not entirely my decision to leave South Africa. I was only 17 years old. I was scared, and my parents got scared too. I have an older brother, and he and my sister-in-law and their baby were returning to the UK via South Africa after living in the USA for a few years. So, they wanted me to leave. I also wanted to leave too. It was getting towards the height of the apartheid government's crackdown on anti-apartheid students, including white people, not just black people.

I have been involved in anti-apartheid stuff since I was 12 or 13 since my mother was involved. My father was involved too, but in a less political way. My mother was one of the groups of white women who were providing the Treason Trial (1958–61) prisoners with food because, in the beginning, they were not provided lunch by the state. My mum used to pick me up from school and take me on her days to visit the prisoners, as it was on a rota basis. There was a big saucepan to go and feed the prisoners and on the side of it was written 'Epstein'. Most of the famous people were there, including Nelson Mandela and a handful of white people. So we used to feed them, and that was one of my first introductions to politics.

Then there was the bus boycott (1957) and again my mother used to drive out to the township near Pretoria and give people a lift into town to their work to support the bus boycott. In another occasion, my mum and dad, at my mum's instigation, took me to a meeting which was a meeting of white people that was attended by Albert Luthuli, the head of ANC [African National Congress] at that time. This was when I was about 14 years old. As soon as Albert got up to speak, some Afrikaans tags jumped up on the stage and yelled in Afrikaans: 'We are not going to allow an African [black] to speak at this [white] gathering.' Then, they started throwing chairs. As chairs were flying everywhere, my mother grabbed hold of my hand and sat there saying: 'I am not going to allow a group of tags to make me move.' Then a young friend came up and said to my mum: 'You can stay here as you like, but let me take Debbie outside.' After the meeting, my dad said that I was spared the beat up because he was the doctor of one of the tag's family. My dad was a paediatrician.

Later, I went to a university and got involved in student anti-apartheid politics. Of course, with that background, who would not? There were some demonstrations, and the apartheid government was tightening its grip on students. The apartheid government started arresting students and other people and was putting them in prison for 90 days without being able to see their partners or families. They also killed Steve Biko and several other people. So, that got me frightened and my brother, who was an academic, had done his PhD in Cambridge. He also worked at Princeton University for two years and he was on his way back to Cambridge, the UK, with his wife and little child. So, I would have somebody older and wiser to keep an eye on

me. That was when I came to England. Overall, I grew up in a very political family. My grandparents from my mother's side were very political. My grandmother and two of her daughters (my mother and her younger daughter) were very strongly feminists. That is why I called one of my publications 'A Feminist DNA'[i], because it is in my blood.

You asked me if my privilege affected my political activism. Yes, I was very privileged. I had access to education and my family was quite well off. They had been a very poor immigrant family, but my father was a doctor. However, you cannot identify out of your privilege. I used to say to my students, even Bram Fischer [the anti-apartheid activist and lawyer who led Nelson Mandela's legal defence team in the Rivonia trial] and Ruth First [South African anti-apartheid activist and scholar] were all privileged white people. So, you can not pretend not to have the privilege. However, that did not hold me from opposing the evils of apartheid. The political struggle was a part of everyday lived family experience.

Tsegay: You joined the University of Sussex in the UK to complete/study your undergraduate studies. How did you find access to education and life in the UK?

Epstein: It was hard because I could not go to university straight away. I have been to a university, but I had to go back to school because the British universities would not accept my university's entrance qualifications from South Africa. After a short (and horrible) period back in school to do A levels, I went, in 1963, to the newly formed Sussex University. In its second year of existence, with about 155 students, Sussex was an extraordinary experience. In the first year, there were about 50 and, in the second year, they accepted about 105 students. I think they partly accepted me because of my politics.

I found life in the UK very difficult for a number of reasons. First, I was very miserable and guilty about leaving South Africa and seeing my student comrades being imprisoned for 90 days. Second, I was miserable as hell about the weather. That first winter was the coldest one in the country in living memory. The thick frost on the inside of my bedroom windows did not melt throughout the winter from November to March. So, we were freezing; I was living with my brother's family in a flat in Cambridge. The huge room with high ceilings also made the house impossible to heat. It was horrible and I hated it. But, equally, I made friends in Sussex. I was secretary of the Student Union; and there were other South African refugees there such as Thabo Mbeki (former South African President – 1999 to 2008), who was a year ahead of me. Doing a lot of politics affected my academic result. I did not get a great degree. I got 2.2 and I was very disappointed with that because I wanted to do a PhD. I was expected to get First Class. However, I had a wonderful education at the University of Sussex.

Tsegay: You have worked in several universities and conducted numerous research projects investigating the experiences of those in subordinated, marginalised and/or stigmatised groups, as well as those in more dominant groups. Could you describe your professional career, mainly how your research activities evolved?

Epstein: I was affected enormously by the University of Sussex education. After finishing my study, I got a research assistant job at the University College London; and started a PhD that I did not finish because I did not find the topic exciting and, partly, my supervisor became a Member of Parliament (MP). After he became MP, he did not supervise me. So, I focused on my job and worked for 20 years as a school teacher before doing my PhD.
My overall personal intellectual project was to understand what kept dominant groups in power, which comes directly from my experience in South Africa. So, my PhD project was

about anti-racist strategies in white schools. And that developed from my background in anti-apartheid and anti-racism, and also from my interest in how to change classroom cultures. I was really interested in trying to make a difference in how teachers see things. I always try to write accessibly for teachers. As I was coming to the end of that, I had the opportunity to go and work at the Open University summer school and teach some of their courses. At the summer school, I came out as a lesbian at this time. At that time, there was a huge campaign during the introduction of Section 28, a conservative government proposal that prohibited local authorities (councils) and schools from teaching about homosexuality as a 'normal family relationship'. So, I was not only very involved in the protests, but was also in the leadership organising campaigns against the clause as it was first a clause amendment and then became a section after.

When I was working at the Open University summer school, the staff used to give seminars about their work. One day, there was an event on gender and education with a theme on different forms or perspectives of feminism. I did my session on 'Whatever happened to lesbian and gay perspectives?' Afterwards, Gaby Weiner, one of the Gender and Education course leaders invited me to present a paper at the British Educational Research Association (BERA). She wanted me to give a paper about lesbian and gay sexuality in schools. And I said no because I wanted to do a presentation about my PhD topic, which she accepted. I said I had not done any research about lesbian and gay sexuality; what I did at the gender and education event was share my experience. She said, 'I understand, but it was life-changing'. Then, she challenged me, 'If you don't do that work, then who will?' She said, 'It took black people first to raise the issues for anti-racism or racism in schools'. I thought about that, and I decided I would do it. At that time, Richard Johnson was Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and he was a key presence in the Politics of Sexuality Group. I spoke to him, and he agreed. Then, we started talking about sexuality. The CCCS had a tradition of a group including staff and students looking at a specific issue. We started such a study group about sexuality. During that time, when I had my PhD, I edited a book on *Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education*[ii]. We also started doing research projects about it, which resulted in the book *Schooling Sexualities*[iii].

Tsegay: In your book *Where it really matters*[iv] in 1990, you argued for the development of anti-racist education in predominantly white schools. Why did you write the book? How much progress do you think we have made in 30 years?

Epstein: I did that book while I was doing my PhD. Alison Sealey and I both worked in Birmingham LEA Centre for Multicultural Studies. We were working in schools as advisors for race equality. Anti-racist education has been used in schools, but the challenge of racism has not been alleviated. Things have changed since the book's publication in 1990, but some still remain the same. I do not know if levels of panic about the arrival of migrants have decreased, but I would say probably not in the white schools. But there are many more schools with multi-ethnic students now. At the time, the number was not significant. One head of school said to me after a discussion with primary school heads in part of Birmingham, 'We have only got one multicultural child in our school, but she is so middle class we do not notice'. So, where do you start – I am afraid I laughed. At that time, the ethnic minority children in the predominantly white (working-class) schools were middle class because they lived in the area. So, it was the local doctors who could be someone like that. However, now, both middle-class and working-class schools in cities tend to be more culturally mixed. So, I would say almost all schools, at least in urban areas, are multicultural now.

The ethnic minority students were often from a migrant background. There was always the anti-migrant sentiment from way back 1905, the *Aliens Act 1905*, which was partly aimed at controlling Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. Brexit and the Conservatives have whipped up people's panic about migrants. The number of wars in the Middle East and North Africa, and the number of countries with difficult situations have increased the number of migrants in the world. However, numbers were not the reason for the hostile environment, but now things are even more vicious. It is unbelievable and very depressing.

Tsegay: As you have stated in many of your publications, issues of access and equity in education are racialised, gendered and class-based. Could you elaborate on these issues, including your view on the current condition of gender equality in education, beyond the numbers/figures?

Epstein: I think gender, race and class are significant for education, particularly class which has kind of been forgotten. However, a lot of it is down to class, mostly class interconnected with other variables such as class and race, class and sex and so on. These things do not operate on their own; they are articulated, working together. For example, in the *Elite Schools*[v] project, one thing that was clear is that while race was really important, class was more important. You can see that in a way the servants were treated because the kids were all privileged as they are from very privileged, very rich families. My recent paper about COVID-19[vi] also indicated that the effects of COVID-19 are strongly classed, raced and gendered, and they go by nation.

We have barely touched the surface of gender equality. Most of my work is all being UK-based. I always had a political awareness of these issues, but it was only in *Changing Classroom Cultures*[vii] and in the HIV projects in South Africa that I got into issues of gender equity, which I prefer to name it these days sex equality or equality of the sexes. In Africa, south of the Sahara in particular, I have been interested in these issues because, obviously, the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] epidemic was very gendered. Recently I noticed on social media that some people still say that it was mostly gay males who got HIV, but it was mostly women. In fact, I got into an argument with a scholar of gay sexuality for saying women are the most affected and impacted by HIV in South Africa and probably in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. This is partly because of the inequality between the sexes.

Tsegay: One of the topics you researched is elite schools. What is the role of elite schools in aggravating or alleviating access and equity in education?

Epstein: Our research on *Elite Schools* was on schools in Britain and the former British Empire in the model of the British 'public' private schools. We did it like that because we had to look at Britain somehow. We could not start looking at other European systems as well. We looked at elite schools as they affect the education system in two ways: 1) These elite schools are seen as the gold standard; 2) they educate and coproduce, with other aspects of the social system, the next ruling class through their privileges. For example, in Britain, the majority of cabinet ministers were from one of these schools. Until quite recently, in both Labour and Conservative governments, we have not had many who were not in these schools or classes. In that way, the elite schools produce the next generation of the ruling class. Even when all schools are public schools, strict rules exist regarding accepting a proportion of students from less privileged backgrounds in these elite schools. For instance, in India, they always get around them somehow to accept a small proportion of lower caste students in these elite schools. In South Africa, it is partly the legacy of apartheid because certain schools were white schools. However, the majority of black schools now retain worse conditions of resources. The elite schools are also expensive;

not all, particularly the poor, can afford them, and the situation is similar in many countries such as Australia and Hong Kong. So inequality is repeated in one way or another.

The elite schools do not arise from neoliberal policies. They have been there much longer than neoliberalism has. You could say they have a different way of working in this neoliberal and globalised age. They have vast and different networks with various features. Some are organised by specific values (such as religion), geographical area and so on. That is why we called our book on elite schools *Class Choreographies* because it is like a dance whose aim, consciously or unconsciously, is to maintain elite privilege. Now it is conducted globally in a much more overt way. With the British empire, it was global but it was differently so. Now elite schools are not only international, but many international organisations such as Microsoft are also very active in these schools.

Tsegay: Your work also highlighted the impact of colonialism, British Empire in particular, on education, such as elite schools and the education system of postcolonial states. On the other hand, you argued the importance of Southern theory in education in the Global South and in dethroning and enriching Northern, mainstream theory. How can we balance these two things?

Epstein: The education system of most postcolonial states is based on the education system of their colonisers, and this, in particular, is noticeable when we talk about the British Empire with regard to their former colonies. Change is really slow, and it is probably not in the interest of the ruling class. Moreover, I think it is difficult to remove the colonial education system entirely because there are things to be valued in the colonial or postcolonial education system. But there still are issues and we cannot unknow the history. So I think it is very difficult to completely remove the colonial education system, but we should seek balancing between the two. The problem is that the elite organisations do not necessarily listen until the masses revolt in anger. It is also difficult to know exactly what should be kept and what should be eliminated. It partly needs trial and error to identify which one needs to be kept or not.

We need to be clear about traditional and scientific knowledge, particularly regarding what does good and what does harm. This also involves the political leaders' will and awareness. In 2006, I wrote an article regarding *Democratising the Research Imagination*[viii]. It is not about education specifically, but it is sort of asking who comes to the table if you are having a party for research imagination. Who do you invite to this party? It is a political party, obviously. At that time, Thabo Mbeki was in denial about HIV and sexual transmission. He was saying something that had a grain of truth in them. He said that HIV was a disease of the poor. Of course, the infection spreads effectively if people are poor. However, in the West, it was not necessarily a disease of the poor. He also was saying that it was a Western conspiracy; it was not a virus; and all the usual kinds of conspiracy theories, including it was invented in a lab in the USA. There were also lots of mythologies in South Africa, including about how it could be cured. Nevertheless, we know that there is no cure for HIV/AIDs so far, but it is a disease you have to live with it with the help of antiretroviral medicines.

The point is that we need to be clear about what does good and what does harm. I am not saying that Western medicine does not harm. Sometimes it could cause great harm, but completely dismissing it is ridiculous. So, it is the same thing with education. There are some goods in Western education and some that need to be decolonised. It is not either or; it is both and. It is a matter of balancing by taking the good from both Western and indigenous education systems.

Endnotes

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[v] Kenway, J, Fahey, J, Epstein, D, Koh, A, McCarthy, C and Rizvi, F 2017, *Class choreographies: Elite schools and globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

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[viii] Epstein, D. & Boden, R 2006, Democratising the research imagination: Globalising knowledge about HIV/AIDS. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 249–260.