EXPLORNG PARTICIPATORY PARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Glynnis Z. Dykes

This study uses the principle of participatory parity (PP) espoused by Fraser (2008, 2009) for exploring social work students' experiences of enabling and constraining factors in advancing their engagement with and involvement in a specific university. This study therefore explores factors related to this phenomenon using Fraser's framework. Eight participants volunteered to form part of this qualitative study using three methods of participatory learning action (PLA) data collection, namely, the river of life, community maps and focus group discussions. Findings explore whether the economic, cultural and political dimensions of PP limit or facilitate student engagement and involvement.

EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY PARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Glynnis Z. Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Education can mean different things to different people, depending on the context and the value people ascribe to the educational processes in which they engage. Msila (2007) and Bramming (2007) exemplify context and meaning by equating education to identity formation and transformation respectively. Msila (2007:146) asserts that education is not an impartial and apolitical endeavour, pointing out that in apartheid South Africa education had been used as a tool to purposefully "construct" particular identities among learners.

In South Africa the stark divisions separating the rich and the poor are ever present, and post-apartheid policies and strategies have had very little impact on the lifestyles and upward mobility of the majority of people. Poverty has therefore retained its racial structure (Cilliers, 2015; Van der Berg, Burger, Burger, De Vos, Du Rand, Gustafsson, Moses, Shepherd, Spaull, Taylor & Van Broekhuizen, 2011). The persistence of apartheid structural income patterns has been based squarely on the intersections of cultural and ethnic characteristics such as race, language, and culture within macro infrastructures such as education and communities (Van der Berg *et al*., 2011; Van Rensburg, 2014). The research by Van der Berg *et al*. (2011) underscored the perception that the educational system in South Africa has exacerbated present income and privilege structures rather than dismantling them.

It is therefore not surprising that learners in South Africa are severely hampered in their attempts to complete high school and tertiary education (less than 10% of learners complete 15 years of education inclusive of high school and three years' post-school qualifications (Higher Education South Africa, 2014; Republic of South Africa, 2013). Participation rates in higher education for 18-24 year olds languish at 18% and throughput at 17%, with 59% of black students dropping out before completion (Fisher & Scott, 2011; Higher Education South Africa, 2014; Republic of South Africa, 2013; Van der Berg *et al*., 2011).

Bozalek and Carolissen (2012) contend that when students do not achieve academic success, the constraints that should be associated with social context – which hamper the majority of students in South Africa – are instead personalised as if having emanated from within the learner, equating to a lack of hard work, discipline, motivation and responsibility. This stance is further exacerbated by the assimilation of such discourses as neoliberalism, which now underpins higher education policies internationally and nationally. Universities are hard pressed not to follow, as fiscal constraints tighten at the expense of goals such as the continued broadening of access and resource provisioning. Neoliberalism is a unique socio-political philosophy focused on the broadening of management and rationalisation agendas in the political, economic and cultural areas of life (Connell, 2013; Peck & Tickell, 2007).

Academic staff have had to become acculturated to an increasingly hegemonic culture of neoliberalism (Bozalek & Carolissen, 2012; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Connell (2013) argues that academic staff are compelled to familiarise themselves with the discourse of neoliberalism and its impact on the nature of higher education. Neoliberalism brings a market-led approach to universities that entails a regulating of education and the establishment of domains and controls that foster competition for resources and promotion possibilities (Connell, 2013; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). The focus on 'performativity' through measured outputs such as performance indicators, strategic planning, quality assurance and audits underscores this competition (Connell, 2013; Hummel, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Students, too, are viewed as consumers, associated with institutional over-attentiveness to curricula content in accordance with market costs which, Molesworth *et al*. (2009) warn, may lead to a waning in intellectual, critical and reflective thinking. These measures have brought overall

technicisation and commodification to higher education, particularly to universities and professional disciplines which were conventionally viewed as the foremost institutions of higher learning and knowledge-building sites (Connell, 2013; Stech, 2011).

What does this mean for professions such as social work? Featherstone, White and Morris (2014, cited by Hyslop, 2016) have advocated that participants in the field of social work should examine its stance of objectivity (being distant), arguing that this misrepresents the lecturer's role, especially in an increasingly divided and unequal world as framed within an individualised neoliberal focus (also see Stark, 2008). Hyslop (2016) argues that social workers have a unique vantage point on the human consequences of structural barriers. In this vein, Wallace and Pease (2011) assert that lecturers must interrogate how social workers have become neoliberal accomplices. We have become subjugated by managerialism – the institutional governance mode associated with neoliberalism – which has impacted on social work's professionalism and independence (Lymbery, 2001; Wehbi & Turcotte, 2007). If not mindful of such subjugations, social work academics cannot be sufficiently attentive to the impact of neoliberalism on social work education (Wehbi & Turcotte, 2007).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Fraser (2009), the most basic understanding of justice is parity of participation (PP). By this, the author means that justice necessitates social structures that allow all to participate equally and as peers in society. PP is first an outcome perspective where the existing social structures are assessed in terms of the levels to which they allow people to participate. PP is also a process perspective which denotes a procedural benchmark from which we can assess fair and democratic processes which allow us all to participate as equals. PP therefore has an innate reflexivity that exposes the social structures that allow or prohibit the use of PP. It involves a strong participatory-democratic agency of diverse stakeholders in deciding what should be the valued outcomes. Policies and practices might enable more equivalence in achieving outcomes, but these outcomes would be determined by those with greater power who would influence such policies and practices.

Justice has three dimensions that advance PP. The political dimension focuses on issues of political representation; the economic dimension focuses on issues of distribution; and the cultural dimension on recognition (Fraser, 2009). Fraser viewed the political dimension as an influencing force that largely determined the extent of PP in the other dimensions. Its influence lay in the domains of determining who is included/excluded, setting the rules and procedures for resolving conflict in all three dimensions, and setting the power and authority for decision-making. Addressing injustice would necessitate breaking down established structures and social arrangements that constrain people from PP. It could be economic resources that limit people's interaction, engagement and involvement (the economic dimension). This is known as distributive injustice or maldistribution. People can also be restricted by the traditional social order of cultural beliefs that negate their social position (the cultural dimension). This is known as status inequality or misrecognition. The political dimension sets the standard of social belonging and arranges the premise upon which the conflict over distribution and recognition is contested. Misrepresentation occurs when people are excluded from political participation.

Social justice pedagogy

Social justice pedagogy is viewed as the construction of learning environments that are just and fair to enable academic outcomes; in other words, it refers to the teaching and learning context that contributes to PP (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2015; Moje, 2007). PP is a crucial vehicle for pedagogies that are socially just, because such an equality of engagement and connection includes participatory-democratic agency to transform the very framing within which meaning and value are determined (Fraser, 2008, 2009). This is an important premise in South Africa in that apartheid policies eroded and derided the sense of self of black people because of their race and culture, leading to enduring feelings of inferiority. The three dimensions of justice are illustrated in the context of higher education (Bozalek & Carolissen 2012), as discussed below.

- Social justice in the economic dimension, pertaining to higher education, entails the material resources required for advancing participatory citizenship in higher education, informed by critical analysis of the effects if the student does not have access to the resources needed for academic success. PP would be adversely affected if, for example, the student does not have access to computers or an internet connection, especially if modules are online, which can restrict the participation of and engagement of the student with the learning task and with other students. This example illustrates issues of maldistribution of resources, which reflect unequal socio-economic contexts.

- Social justice in the cultural dimension reflects the ways in which students' attributes and beliefs are respected/disrespected, or recognised/misrecognised, by lecturers and institutions in relation to the dominant cultural frame of expectations. Being disrespected or misrecognised affects students' sense of belonging and affects capacities to adapt to institutional processes and to crack the code for epistemological access. The majority of students entering universities have therefore experienced universities as more constraining than enabling, in the light of their profiles and particular needs. Cloete (2016) therefore wonders why lecturers are surprised when students rebel.

- Social justice in the political dimension in higher education refers to the extent of representation and voice needed for students to have access, opportunity and capacity to influence university processes and decision-making in matters that affect them, such as through membership of the Student Representative Council (SRC). It is also important to acknowledge that SRCs can tend to be dominated by a hegemonic frame, which can be assimilative rather than enable transformation. So the crucial question is whether students from 'subaltern' social positions can acquire agency within SRCs to transform the frame. There may also be a disconnect, inertia or lack of opportunity to be involved in *transformative* ways – resulting in *misrepresentation.* Students are then captured within framing assumptions, generalisations and presumptions which are determined by other, more powerful, social-structural positions regarding their learning, their needs and their futures. In 2015 South African students from relatively poor backgrounds, and even some from more advantaged backgrounds, resorted to violent protests in their realisation that higher education continues to favour the economically and culturally advantaged, and that inequalities are becoming more entrenched – helped along by the high cost of university fees which serve as an exclusionary mechanism (Cloete, 2016).

In what follows these three dimensions will be applied as a theoretical framework for my analytical discussion of findings. The extent of participants' experiences of PP will be considered in relation to the need for socially just pedagogies, leading to relevant recommendations for teaching and learning.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In South Africa Bozalek, Carolissen and Leibowitz (2013) initiated a research project that involved three institutions and different professional programmes (including social work) called the "Community, Self and Identity" project, which used the participatory learning action (PLA) method of data collection. Their project used what it called the "pedagogy of discomfort" and the "critical hope discourse" as theoretical frameworks that espoused continuous engagement, analysis and reflexivity with participants within these disciplines. The aim was to elucidate socio-historical explanations for continued social inequalities and injustices (Bozalek *et al.*, 2013). Another South African study similar to this used Fraser's social justice framework and was focused on teacher training (Perumal, 2015). The personal and professional experiences of participants were elicited on the basis of their living and working lives, and how this affected their social relationships with colleagues and students (Perumal, 2015). Both studies were qualitative in nature and shared a similar focus. The present article contributes to the topic and is attentive to the kinds of circumstances that hamper equal participation in higher education, and that restrict participatory-democratic agency. This article focuses on PP at an institutional level, elucidating experiences and perspectives of social work student participants. From these perspectives, the article focuses on the question of how to address current socio-cultural

inequalities which are institutional remnants from the apartheid era. These inhibit increased participation and engagement for future higher education students. It is therefore a topic needing attention.

The study's objectives were to explore and describe students' perceptions and their general experiences of learning that relate to past and present enablements and constraints, and future possibilities for PP in an institution of higher learning. Emerging from the objectives, the main empirical question is: What are students' perceptions and experiences related to their general experiences of learning and PP in higher education?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address the research problematic and question, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate, in the interpretivist tradition that seeks to explore and comprehend experiences within context, providing insight into complexities (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) affirm that qualitative research is a contextual endeavour that positions the study in society – in this case within the context of higher education institutions and in relation to broader social structures. Qualitative research focuses on clarifying the elements of social traditions and interactions as well as those of belief systems. Qualitative research was therefore relevant for the focus of this study on participants' life and learning experiences, related to contexts. The study used an exploratory design to explore a lesser known topic using open, adaptable and inductive approaches (Durrheim, 2006).

The PLA data-collection method has been proffered as a solution to the quest for more participatory, ethical and democratic research methods (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Pain, 2004). In this study the PLA data-collection tools used were the following:

- *The river of life*: Participants consider their personal and social experiences in important phases in their lives using the course of a river as a symbol (Moussa, 2009);

- *Community maps*: An interactive and pictorial tool allowing participants to plot the social, political, cultural and infra-structural information in their environment (Amsden & VanWynsberghe, 2005);

- *Focus group discussions*: A group discussion technique based on the above data-gathering exercises.

These methods were used to elicit students' life trajectories and experiences of enablements and constraints regarding PP in a specific university. The research setting was a specific university identified as a disadvantaged institution during the apartheid period that historically accommodated Coloured (people of mixed heritage) students. The research population was all students in a third-year social work class doing a particular module on family wellbeing. Non-probability, volunteer sampling was used as the research population was small and contained, and thus each student was a potential participant. Eight students participated in the study.

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through member checking, triangulation, rich thick descriptions and researcher reflexivity (Creswell, 2013). Ethical clearance was obtained for this study from the specific university, ensuring the rights of the participants to confidentiality and withdrawal, and privacy through anonymity and securing of information, as well as protection from harm through debriefing opportunities. Consent for the use of participants' verbal and written contributions was obtained in order for the researcher to be able to use them for publication.

KEY THEMES RELATING TO PARTICIPATORY PARITY (PP)

Thematic analysis of each PLA method produced three main themes in accordance with codes that were predefined (stemming from the literature) and emergent (materialising from the data) (Gibbs, 2008). The themes therefore correlated with the three dimensions in the framework of the social arrangements identified by Fraser (2008, 2009) (Table 1).

TABLE 1
MAIN THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Sub-themes	THEME 1 ECONOMIC DIMENSION	THEME 2 CULTURAL DIMENSION	THEME 3 POLITICAL DIMENSION
1.	Resources accessible in family/environment	Cultural histories, practices and beliefs	The aftermath of apartheid
2.	Institutional resources	Family roles and structure	Social (dis)engagement
3.		Epistemological access and throughput	

The table provides an overview of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the PLA exercises (river of life, community mapping, focus group discussions). These will be further explicated.

THEME 1: ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Internationally, higher education is an expensive commodity (Smith, 2000; Wangenge-Ouma, 2012; Williams, 2016). In South Africa the *#feesmustfall* student protests have shed dramatic light on the escalating cost of university education and the funding anomalies within this sector. Participants' PLA exercises also show the significance of family/community resources as a key indicator of whether their studies can be sustained in the long term.

Access to resources in family/community environment: This sub-theme reflected participants' challenging circumstances with consequences for them at university: namely unemployment, parental illness and loss, and poorly resourced homes and social networks.

> *"In that year my dad also left his job so financially we were under a lot of pressure ..."*

> *"I finish my matric but I couldn't work, I couldn't school, I couldn't get money."*

> *"Again this squatter camp where I was staying, I was staying under the line of Eskom which is dangerous, because we don't have electricity, we make fire where we squat."*

> *"Ok my key learning is that you have to – you mustn't depend on your parents."*

> *"I grew up in a community that has a high rate of poverty, where people had to ask for food, for everything."*

Participants' narratives show how parental unemployment with the loss of income (initially) stifled and constrained the opportunities for the participants. The narratives also show the adverse and traumatic conditions under which they were forced to live. A strong sentiment expressed by one participant was that parents aren't always reliable that underscore insecurity and aloneness.

- In an example of a river of life drawing a participant showed the significance of the impact of their father's illness and subsequent death by depicting the financial and personal struggles during and after the death of the participant's father.

Wilson-Strydom (2015) contends that there is a need to understand that students' social environments (especially their homes) can facilitate and/or inhibit university success. In a qualitative study by Fakude (2012), student participants cited financial difficulties as a significant constraint in the pursuance and completion of their studies (see also Jones, Coetzee, Bailey & Wickham, 2008). An Australian study with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders also identified financial constraints in the completion and throughput in terms of financial outlay for childcare, public transport and accommodation costs (Australian Government n.d.; see also Khurshid, 2014 for Pakistan context). In the United States the American Federation of Teachers, 2011 (AFT) pronounced that policy pays insufficient attention to financial constraints and that at-risk and first-generation students feel the effects of the relationship between success and resources (AFT Higher Education, 2011; also Crosby, 2011). The cited authors argue that students struggle without financial (and other) support, and their multiple family obligations

impact severely on their attention to their academic tasks. Therefore these students are prone to frequent breaks from their studies.

Institutional resources as facilitative and constraining: This sub-theme reflected the distribution of university resources that participants found to be facilitative and constraining. Participants' positive comments included their appreciation of the university's existing resources such as computer labs, library, free wi-fi and campus bookshop, as well as the social work bursary and travel allowance for participants' fieldwork placements. However, they also complained about slow, inefficient administration and processes, inadequate resource provision for the number of students, and the maintenance of such resources. Participants also admitted that they were sometimes unaware of existing resources.

> *"Computer labs all over campus."*
>
> *"The library has many resources. Everything is there – but people just don't go there."*
>
> *" [Institution's] admin is really slow. Really, really slow ..."*
>
> *"Then there are only two printers available on campus – there are a lot of computers here but way too little printers."*

The participants quoted above reflect conditions of relative structural disadvantage as compared with universities more significantly populated by those from relatively privileged social-structural positions. Ironically, students from difficult personal circumstances are mostly accommodated at universities which themselves suffer from financial and structural constraints through their socio-historical positioning.

- In an example of a community map a participant showed the positive and enabling resources in the institution the participant chose to positively view his/her selection for the Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP), the lecturers, and the basic university resources as well as bursaries. These positive depictions are also relative to the social circumstances (levels of social disadvantage) hitherto experienced.

- In a community map showing institutional constraints the participant reiterated that sluggish administration and inadequate resource provisioning were barriers to optimal learning experiences – but vitally, they also exposed the critical matter of students' personal security on campus and the presence of a bar and dancing venue that brought particular social challenges to the participant's environment. In addition, the social work department and the academic programme were cited as constraining, with a heavy workload and unhelpful lecturers being identified as examples of such constraints.

In order for higher education to provide 'service quality assurance' that is meaningful to 'customers' (students), it must focus on provision of material resources that substantively enable, not constrain, the meeting of needs and aspirations – especially among students who come to universities from less advantaged social conditions (Douglas, McClelland & Davies, 2008; Larasati, Chisbiyah & Hibayati, 2013). Dissatisfaction with the standard of services may impact on student motivation levels, increasing the likelihood of dropping out and incompletion, which would ultimately affect the overall reputation of the institution (Larasati *et al.*, 2013). A consequence of neoliberalism and the massification of access has been fewer resources to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Crosling, Heagney & Thomas, 2009), particularly those who come from materially impoverished contexts. In South Africa the dissatisfaction arising from inadequate resourcing, along with increasing tuition fees, has led to violent student protests (*#feesmustfall* campaign). The South African political context in itself has added to the discontent in not meeting the high expectations for delivery in the new South Africa, shackled by insufficient post-school opportunities, high youth unemployment and the associated precariousness of the outlook for the future (Langa, Wangenge-Ouma, Jungblut & Cloete, 2016).

THEME 2: CULTURAL DIMENSION

Institutional culture has long been understood as encoding dominant values, beliefs, norms and processes, selective for the success of those in relatively powerful social-structural positions that shape the way the university functions and in which we interpret decisions made (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Key here is to understand the interplay between the codes of institutional culture, and the student's cultural beliefs and habits which are associated with social-structural indicators of relative power such as gender, race/ethnicity, family wealth, and first generation at university (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008). Two sub-themes echo data motifs in the cultural dimension.

Cultural histories, practices and beliefs: Culture and language and the role of church and religion were commonly indicated as being significant factors in the lives of participants.

> *"I only knew one race, the Xhosa race. We spoke one language, IsiXhosa."*

> *"I remember in this picture I've drawn a picture of a hut. Those are the kinds of houses that we used to live in."*

> *"I know farm style and self-farming. To milk the cows, to look after the cows after school. Some of the days like Wednesday you don't go to school because we make turns to take the cattle to the dip to take off the ticks."*

> *"The reason why I brought church in this is it is the strong point in my life."*

The mostly agrarian lifestyles of participants show the restrictive social boundaries reminiscent of apartheid social engineering of separateness and exclusion based on ethnicity, culture and language.

- A participant's river of life showed the rural and agrarian lifestyle of the participant where he/she drew the school in a series of huts, animals in a kraal (animal enclosure), the fields surrounding the homestead, and the large structure of the church, which illustrates the significant role of the church in their lives. The agrarian lifestyle would appear to be at odds with the urban, concrete and congested conditions of the social context of the university.

In terms of their social position in the South African context, participants' descriptions of their family life reflected their strong cultural, religious and agrarian lifestyles. REAP (Rural Education Access Programme) cites students' geographical positioning (referring to rural lifestyles) and the distance from resources as the primary element of their disadvantage (Jones *et al*., 2008). Participants demonstrated the strong connection between their culture and language, which resulted in their unfamiliarity with a different language of instruction. Guild (2001) finds that educators are well aware that students' culture, family circumstances and socio-economic status affect learning. This awareness does not necessarily provide educators with insights about cultural differences or how to incorporate these into the curriculum or pedagogically, especially given the institutional constraints within which they and the students work.

Students are therefore compelled to inhabit a deficient and disparate space so that they can endure their first year (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). Participants also indicate that church and religion matter significantly, which means their sense of belonging is connected to a sense of spirituality combined with routines of worship that they do not find, nor are they recognised, in educational institutions.

Family roles and structure: Participants described their family structures which had contributed to their socio-cultural experiences and beliefs.

> *"I went to stay in the villages in the Eastern Cape with my grandmother. My grandmother played a key role in instilling different values and basically my grandmother shaped me in the person that I am."*

> *"My dad he was a poor guidance in the sense that he was not active in our lives. He's almost like – he is a phone call dad, because if there were trouble at home, my mother would call him and he would call us, for example, to scold us etc."*

These narratives underscore contemporary configurations of family and the significant role of grandparents as primary caregivers in the context of the social reality of absentee fathers and overburdened mothers.

- An example of a river of life of a participant typified the notion of absentee fathers, reflected in the reality of growing up without a father and the poignant first meeting with him that took place during her early teens.

Petersen (2012) contends that there are certain ways of nurturing family attachments that are universal, but the differences lie in particular customs that direct, for example, gender roles, authority, rules, relationships and sexuality. In South Africa apartheid policies eroded the tightly-knit attachments and socio-cultural arrangements that characterised black African family life in particular, achieved specifically through far-flung working opportunities for men that disrupted the family structure (Nkosi & Daniels, 2012). These authors argue that black families thus became exposed to extreme socio-economic vulnerability. African families are characterised by a sense of collectivity and interdependence, but these qualities were jeopardised by the job-seeking activities of male members together with the effects of large-scale poverty, ill health and early death (particularly through HIV/AIDS), isolation, absent carers (especially fathers), and aging caregivers (Nkosi & Daniels, 2012). It is no wonder that, within the normative expectations of higher education institutions, students who inherit such historical conditions and their effects continue to be constrained by the aftermath of apartheid policies, given a lack of institutional recognition of their socio-cultural histories.

Epistemological access and throughput: Epistemological access refers to the student who learns to become knowledgeable and a participant in the institutional culture and practices – especially the tacit norms and assumptions that are encoded in the institutions processes – and can thus be viewed as gaining access to these practices and their underpinning codes (Morrow, 1994). This sub-theme was underscored by constraining factors, such as feeling disconnected from the university, unsatisfactory peer and staff support, gatekeeping and stringent access criteria, and their negative perceptions of their workload and lecturer communication.

> *"I decided to quit, because I was not fitting in this [naming the university] environment."*
>
> *"Considering the kind of background that I'm coming from, I would have perhaps dropped out (of university)."*
>
> *"I was not used to resources such as computers and I wasn't able to type my assignments. So it was challenging for me ..."*
>
> *"My life came to a pause, because I applied to [another university]. I got in but I didn't pass the benchmark test."*

These experiences reflect the participants' struggles to adapt and fit in, the imminent threat of dropping out, and feeling unprepared – which are constant reminders of social barriers and constraints.

- A river of life of a participant depicted the importance that the participant gave to the first year of immense adjustment to the university by writing the words " a hard year" in the time line.

These instances of exclusionary epistemological factors continue to operate at hidden levels, unseen and unchecked, as noted by participants. Jones *et al*. (2008) argue that universities themselves are unprepared for students from backgrounds such as those of the participants in this study and refer to a "clash of cultures" between the institution and such students. Jansen (2004 cited by Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006:4) claims that institutional cultures – what he calls the institution's "racial birthmark" – have largely been unaffected by the general transformation in the higher education sector. Language and cultural differences between institution and students, and the epistemologies they encode, are sources of further division and affect students' readiness for undertaking academic tasks (Steyn, Harris & Hartell, 2014; Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006). Students require learning spaces that recognise their

cultural orientations, and learning institutions need to value these orientations inclusively (Prinsloo, 2009) in order to increase students' sense of belonging and fit (Devlin, 2013).

THEME 3: POLITICAL DIMENSION

Geographic, political and social boundary-setting in apartheid was wholly based on racial groupings. Fraser (2009) argues that political boundary-setting is misrepresentation in that it unjustly excludes specific people from opportunities to participate. A calamitous form of misrepresentation is "misframing", which occurs when boundary-setting prevents poor people, in particular, from challenging their social position in the political space – reducing them to non-citizens (Fraser, 2009).

The aftermath of apartheid: Participants' narratives and PLA artefacts highlighted the structural characteristics of the remnants of apartheid.

> *"When I came to [naming the city] I experienced the after-effects of apartheid. Diversity – it was not only one race now – that I would meet different people, different races, people who spoke different languages."*

> *"I was staying here in these quarters. There was no running water, there were no clean toilets – I stayed there for eight years."*

> *"When I started school there was no school building."*

> *"Because of this major life event that took place in my life, I came to a decision that it's not me alone who experience this and we need people with personal experiences, so that they can help others and then I took that responsibility to be that person [to study social work]."*

These comments demonstrate the novelty of cultural diversity, the horror of dense city living, infrastructural deficits and the compelling reasons for studying social work.

- An example of a river of life showed how the participant experienced the move to a city and the associated socio-cultural shock. The participant first illustrated an exciting journey full of first-time experiences and then juxtaposed this with the actual traumatic reality of modern city living.

The new South Africa inherited a public service system that was unequal, discriminatory and degenerative as a result of the ravages of apartheid policy (Swartz, 2006). These policies authorised methodical and racial violence and discrimination, with massive forced removals and displacement of vast numbers of people, which caused large-scale impoverishment and socio-cultural erosion (Swartz, 2006; Worden, 2012). Swartz (2006) concludes that the main challenge in post-apartheid South Africa was to address socio-economic injustices in relation to the paramount importance of constructing new processes of citizenship.

Social (dis)engagement: Student engagement is a strong indicator of retention and throughput, and is a critical strategy for facilitating students' senses of belonging within the institution (Crosling *et al*., 2009). Student engagement is not only defined in terms of academic accountability, but also in the ways that they participate in university life. Participants' descriptions rendered two frameworks reflecting their disconnection: first in terms of their race and ethnicity, and then in terms of university political life such as lack of interest in student issues. However, participants also mentioned ways of forging new connections. Establishing ways of nurturing and forging participation in higher education is therefore a critical issue.

> *"However racism was also prevalent at [naming another institution], because the rich and the black and the coloured were divided. This side were whites only and this side were blacks and coloureds only. We were like that on our own – we felt comfortable like this."*

> *"I know some of social work students rally for [naming the student body], so I know it has a positive impact on their lives, because they are part of [the student body]. But I am not part."*

> *"During orientation weekend is when you meet a lot of people, meet friends, meet people from diverse backgrounds, meet Indians, Hindus, people that you never had a conversation with, you meet here on campus."*

These assertions show the enduring socio-economic impact of apartheid segregation; they also show the opportunities for these participants to push beyond barriers towards forging new connections. Political apathy and lack of interest are also apartheid remnants which reflect enduring disempowerment and subjugation.

In a community map a participant illustrated the importance of meeting different and new friends, which fostered a sense of belonging and adaptation for the participant.

While some participants had negative experiences relating to the institution's administration, social work department and its academic programme (in Theme 1), other participants felt positive about the supportive networks of the institution.

Engle and Tinto (2008) suggest that a key strategy for increasing completion and throughput in this context is to facilitate campus-wide student involvement. In South Africa race and racism are major barriers for student engagement especially in previously (or current) predominantly white dominant institutions (PWIs) (Moraka, 2014; Wawrzynski, Heck & Remley, 2012). In the United States Kuh *et al*. (2008) identify race and ethnicity as key in differentiating the experiences of students from each other. The notion of recognising student heritages refers to the myriad ways in which academic processes coalesce with the ways in which students are located in terms of their discipline, peer group, the institution and the student's own socio-cultural status, namely in terms of class, gender, age and ethnicity (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have been delineated in relation to Fraser's three dimensions of social justice. The findings are discussed using the concepts advanced by Fraser, namely maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation, to explore appropriate solutions pertaining to social work and higher education.

Maldistribution: In South Africa apartheid segregation has seeped dangerously into the new South Africa, where gross inequalities still characterise the lives and livelihoods of the majority of people. The effects of unemployment and underemployment on family wellbeing and the developmental needs of children are stark reflections of this. The majority of children still attend schools hopelessly under-resourced, which underprepares them for further education. Higher education remains key in advocating for sufficient resources to meet the needs of students. Maldistribution therefore exacerbates inequality and a sense of unworthiness among students who come into higher education from less advantaged socio-economic circumstances.

Misrecognition: Socio-economic and political structures, university and family are all decisive in advancing citizenship in terms of preserving and facilitating the potential of young people. Cultural practices and traditional roles provide pivotal early learning experiences which are not sufficiently valued. Institutions run the risk of devaluing and therefore disrespecting the inherent value of traditions and culture. This has far-reaching consequences for cultural value in the long term, but also for the sense of self-worth and dignity of the student. Misrecognition therefore occurs in terms of students' unique or different qualities, learning experiences and learning needs. Misrecognition also occurs through epistemological access (or lack of access), because students struggle to crack the codes of the dominant culture and processes in the institution, and so cannot bridge the social distance between the two, let alone change the terms of recognition. Gatekeeping and stringent admission criteria can further restrict entry for students from particular social circumstances and schools. A consequence is low participation and completion rates of those who are profiled as being first-generation university students from previously disadvantaged circumstances.

For real transformation to take hold we have to start by decolonising the academy through critically reviewing and negating those Western beliefs that preserve the social hierarchy and social structures that perpetuate the inequality and hence the socio-economic conditions of the majority of people. In professional programmes like social work, decoloniality entails reviewing both our underlying beliefs and philosophy (the dictates of our Western origins and Eurocentric values and cultural norms) and our modes of operation, processes and intervention. These we now acknowledge have been based on racial prejudice and ideologies of cultural superiority assumed to be transferable to non-Western settings. Presently in South Africa this period represents opportunities to reclaim identities, unlearn internalised oppression, and shed the outlived dominance of Western ideals.

Misrepresentation: In South Africa particularly, all the aforementioned factors can also be viewed within a political frame. In terms of (mis)representation students' social circumstances and experiences are political. These have underprepared participants for the rigours of higher education. The profound effect on their self-esteem and confidence can also be seen in these students not participating in the political processes in the institution, preferring to watch events from the periphery. This tendency constricts social engagement and the opportunity for self (standing up for yourself) and/or case (standing up for others) advocacy.

These findings show the relevance of PP in academia in an inherently unequal society. The implications of these findings are that the roles of the institution (and staff) in PP are vital for student success, not only for academic engagement and success, but also for effective citizenship in their post-qualification social circumstances.

Regarding maldistribution, specific recommendations would promote governmental and institutional policies more in sync with the structural obstacles in South Africa and the subsequent learning profile of students, with the realisation that, in terms of maldistribution, this is not a quick-fix endeavour. However, a rational approach is needed for the creation of an inclusive (and financially viable) plan in terms of what can be enacted to benefit those who need resources the most, both institutionally and governmentally. Misrecognition could be addressed through policies, systems and processes that should link the institution more strongly with its student base. Curricula, mentoring, inductions and orientations may need to be more aligned with students' particular needs on an ongoing basis, especially in the first year. These initiatives could at present be viewed as piecemeal. Although participants acknowledged what this specific university already had in place, more could be done. Fraser is emphatic that redistribution and recognition are not possible without representation (Fraser, 2009). Representation is thus an important means through which we can achieve redistribution and recognition outcomes. It is also important because it means that these outcomes cannot occur without participation in decision-making processes. Though the structural forces obstructing participatory parity are immense, and demand that all participate, we can start with those we are in contact with daily – in other words, in our own context. We can start by facilitating opportunities to address students "feeling inferiorised" (Bozalek, 2017).

Dumbrill and Green (2008) provided four ways in which social work education can develop a multi-centric focus on decolonising the curriculum. These four methods encompass the following:

- *Engage in critical historical analysis*: This means incorporating learning opportunities focusing on where we all come from and contribute to new transformed beginnings;

- *Explore differences and expand ways of knowing*: This would mean entering into courageous conversations with our students that may be uncomfortable to begin with about our individual social positioning and engage and includes different kinds of knowledges;

- *Take action and establish new academic standards for all contexts*: Providing learning opportunities in and out of class unlearning conventional knowledge and incorporating indigenous knowledges into the mainstream;

- *Evaluate and renew vision through reflection*: Providing learning opportunities for all students to learn to be proud of all aspects of who they are and their cultural upbringing.

These suggested recommendations relate to two approaches advocated by Fraser (Bozalek, 2017). The affirmative approach means addressing PP on the individual and subjective level, for example, dealing with the strategies that enable personal/individual growth of students, but which do not impact on the underlying root problem at all (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012). The transformative approach means addressing PP on the social and structural level, for example, advocating changes in governmental and institutional policies, processes and systems. Advocating for change could be seen in the *#feesmustfall* movement, which has culminated in a different funding model for financially struggling students from 2018; the start of conversations in the Africanisation of curricula especially in social work as can be seen in the discussions, workshops and conferences on this topic; the continuous debate on widening participation through the purposeful dismantling of 'cultural and symbolic barriers' such as inclusive language use (Morrison, 2015). But as both Bozalek and Boughey (2012) and Morrison (2015) assert, these initiatives do not impact significantly on the deep-rooted injustices in the educational system that students attend before coming to university. Bozalek and Boughey (2012) therefore argue that misrecognition and misdistribution must occur alongside the struggle against misframing in that the actual socio-political roots of the struggles in higher education will thus be rightfully acknowledged and addressed. Although both levels referred to earlier are necessary for long-term and meaningful outcomes, this will require significant political will, engagement and participation from all role-players. Future research can thus focus on informing policy (higher education) and practice (teaching and learning, professional learning) regarding PP in higher education and professional programmes such as social work.

REFERENCES

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS HIGHER EDUCATION, 2011. **Student success in higher education**. Washington, DC: AFT.

AMSDEN, J. & VANWYNSBERGHE, R. 2005. Community mapping as a research tool with youth. **Action Research**, 3(4):357-381.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT: OFFICE FOR LEARNING & TEACHING, n.d. **'Can't be what you can't see'. The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education.** [Online] Available: www.nd.edu.au. [Accessed: 29/11/2016].

BADENHORST, E. & KAPP, R. 2013. Negotiation of learning and identity among first-year medical students. **Teaching in Higher Education**, 18(5):465-476.

WILSON-STRYDOM, M. (eds) **Social justice pedagogies, capabilities and quality in higher education**. doi.10.1057/978-1-1137.55786-5_5

BOZALEK, V. 2017. Participatory parity and emerging technologies. In: WALKER, M. & WILSON-STRYDOM, M. (eds) **Social justice pedagogies, capabilities and quality in higher education**. doi.10.1057/978-1-1137.55786-5_5

BOZALEK, V. & CAROLISSEN, R. 2012. The potential of critical feminist citizenship frameworks for citizenship and social justice in higher education. **Perspectives in Education**, 30(4):9-18.

BOZALEK, V., CAROLISSEN, R., & LEIBOWITZ, B. 2013. A pedagogy of critical hope in South African higher education. **In**: Bozalek, V., Leibowitz, B., Carolissen, R. & Boler, M. (eds) **Discerning critical hope in educational practices**. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

BOZALEK, V. & BOUGHEY, C. 2012. Mis(framing) higher education in South Africa. **Social Policy & Administration**, 46(6):688-703.

BRAMMING, P. 2007. An argument for strong learning in higher education. **Quality in Higher Education**, 13(1):45-56.

CHEVALIER, J. & BUCKLES, D. 2013. **Participatory action research: Theory and methods for engaged inquiry**. London and New York: Routledge.

CILLIERS, J. 2015. **South African Futures 2035. Can Bafana Bafana still score**? ISS (Institute for Security Studies), ISS paper 282.

CLOETE, N. 2016. For sustainable funding and fees, the undergraduate system in South African must be restructured [on line]. **South African Journal of Science**, 112(3/4). [Online] Available: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2016/a0146 [Accessed: 7/12/2016].

CONNELL, R. 2013. The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. **Critical Studies in Education**, 54(2):99-112.

CRESWELL, J. 2013. **Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches** (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

CROSBY, H. 2011. **Exploring achievement: Factors affecting native American college student success**. USA: Texas State University. (Master's thesis)

CROSLING, G., HEAGNEY, M. & THOMAS, L. 2009. Improving student retention in higher education. Improving teaching in higher learning. **Australian Universities' Review**, 51(2):9-18.

DENZIN, N. & LINCOLN, Y. 2005. **The SAGE handbook of qualitative research**. Thousand Oaks. California: Sage Publications.

DEVLIN, M. 2013. Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education. **Studies in Higher Education**, 38(6):939-949.

DOUGLAS, J., MCCLELLAND, R. & DAVIES, J. 2008. The development of a conceptual model of student satisfaction with their experience in higher education. **Quality Assurance in Education**, 16(1):19-35.

DUMBRILL, G. & GREEN, J. 2008. Indigenous knowledge in the social work academy. **Social Work Education: The International Journal**. 27, 489-503.

DURRHEIM, K. 2006. Research design. In: TERRE BLANCHE, M., DURRHEIM, K. & PAINTER, D. (eds) **Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences** (2nd ed). Cape Town: UCT Press.

ENGLE, J. & TINTO, V. 2008. **Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students** [Online] Available: Available: www.files.eric.ed.gov [Accessed: 19/11/2016].

FAKUDE, X. 2012. **Some factors that contribute to academic achievement among undergraduate students at a tertiary institution**. South Africa: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. (Master's thesis)

FISHER, G. & SCOTT, I. 2011. **Closing the skills and technology gap in South Africa. Background Paper 3: The role of higher education in closing the skills gap in South Africa**. The World Bank. Human Development Group, Africa Region.

FRASER, N. 2008. Reframing justice in a globalizing world. In: OLSON, K. (ed.) **Adding insult to injury: Nancy Fraser debates her critics**. London and New York: Verso.

FRASER, N. 2009. **Scales of Justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world**. New York: Columbia University Press.

GIBBS, G. 2008. **Analyzing qualitative data**. London: Sage Publications.

GUILD, P. 2001. **Diversity, learning style and culture** [Online] Available: www.education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/ strategies [Accessed: 13/12/2016].

HIGHER EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA. 2014. **South African Higher Education in the 20th year of democracy: Context, achievements and key challenges**. HESA presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training. Cape Town, March 5.

HUMMEL, F. 2009. The Neoliberal Language of Higher Education in the EU: An Analysis of the Bologna Process. **Journal of the World Universities Forum**, 2(5):53-64.

HYSLOP, I. 2016. Where to social work in a brave new neoliberal Aotearoa? **Aotearoa New Zealand and Social Work**, 28(1):5-12.

JONES, B., COETZEE, G., BAILEY, T. & WICKHAM, S. 2008. **Factors that facilitate success for disadvantaged higher education students. An investigation into approaches used by REAP, NFAS and selected higher educational institutions**. Athlone, Cape Town: REAP (Rural Education Access Programme).

KHURSHID, F. 2014. Factors affecting higher education students' success. **Asia Pacific Journal of Education**, 1(5):39-47.

KUH, G., CRUCE, T., SHOUP, R., KINZIE, J. & GONYEA, R. 2008. Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. **The Journal of Higher Education**, 79(5):540-563.

KUH, G. & WHITT, E. 1988. The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities. **Ashe-Eric Higher Education Report No. 1**. Washington, DC: Association for the study of higher education (Ashe).

LANGA, P., WANGENGE-OUMA, G., JUNGBLUT, J. & CLOETE, N. 2016. South Africa and the illusion of free higher education. **University World News**, Issue No:402.

LARASATI, A., CHISBIYAH, L. & HIBAYATI, L. 2013. **Evaluating service quality in higher vocational education**. A paper presented at the International Conference on Entrepreneurship and Business Management (ICEBM 2013), Sanur, Bali, November 21-22.

LEIBOWITZ, B. & BOZALEK, V. 2015. **The scholarship of teaching and learning from a social justice perspective** [Online] Available: http://doi.org/ 10.1080/13562517.2015.11115971 [Accessed: 7/12/2016].

LIETZ, C. & ZAYAS. L. 2010. Evaluating qualitative research for social work practitioners. Advances in Social Work, 11(2):188-202.

LYMBERY, M. 2001. Social work at the crossroads. **The British Journal of Social Work**, 31(3):369-384.

MOJE, E. 2007. Developing socially just subject-matter instruction. A review of the literature on disciplinary literacy teaching. **Review of Research in Education**, 31(1):1-44.

MOLESWORTH, M., NIXON, E. & SCULLION, R. 2009. Having, being and higher education: The marketisation of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer. **Teaching in higher Education**, 14:277-287.

MORAKA, A. 2014. Reflections of the Mabille saga and the anti-racist forum at the University of Pretoria. In: **Pulp fictions: Race, ideology and the university**, 5-15. Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press (PULP).

MORRISON, A. 2015. Theorising inequality: Two-dimensional participatory justice and higher education research. In Husman, J & Tight, M (eds). **Theory and method in higher education.** [Online] Available: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6700-6875 [Accessed: 7/12/2016]

MORROW, W. 1994. Entitlement and achievement in education. **Studies in Philosophy and Education**, 13:33-47.

MOUSSA, Z. 2009. Rivers of Life. **Participatory learning and action 60: Community-based adaptation to climate**. IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), London, December 2009.

MSILA, V. 2007. From Apartheid education to the Revised National Curriculum Statement: pedagogy for identity formation and nation building in South Africa. **Nordic Journal of African Studies**, 16(2):146-160.

NKOSI, B. & DANIELS, P. 2012. Family strengths: South Africa. **In**: DEFRAIN, J. & ASAY, S. (eds) **Strong families around the world: Strengths-based research and perspectives**. New York: Routledge.

OLSSEN, M. & PETERS. M. 2005. Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. **Journal of Education Policy**, 20(3):313-345.

PAIN, R. 2004. Social geography: Participatory research. **Progress in Human Geography**, 28(5):652-663.

PECK, J. & TICKELL. A. 2007. Conceptualizing neoliberalism, thinking Thatcherism. **In**: LEITNER, H. PECK, J. & SHEPPARD, E. (eds) **Contesting neoliberalism urban frontiers**. New York: Guilford Press.

PERUMAL, J. 2015. Critical pedagogies of place: Educators' personal and professional experiences of social (in) justice. **Teaching and Teacher Education**, 45:25-32.

PETERSEN, G. 2012. Preface. **In**: DEFRAIN, J. & ASAY, S. (eds) **Strong families around the world: Strengths-based research and perspectives**. New York: Routledge.

PRINSLOO, P. 2009. **Modelling throughput at Unisa: The key to the successful implementation of ODL. Discussion document**. Pretoria: Unisa – Directorate for curriculum and learning development.

REAY, D., CROZIER, G. & CLAYTON, J. 2010. 'Fitting in' or 'Standing out': Working-class student in UK higher education. **British Educational Research Journal**, 36(1):107-124.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 2013. **Statistics on Post-school Education and Training in South Africa: 2011**. Pretoria: Higher Education and Training.

STARK, C. 2008. **Neoliberalism and the consequences for social work**. [Online] Available: www.bemidjistate.edu/adacemics [Accessed: 13/12/2016].

SMITH, C. 2000. **Market values in American higher education: The pitfalls and promises**. Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

STECH*, S.* 2011. The Bologna Process as a New Public Management Tool. *Higher Education* **Journal of Pedagogy/Pedagogický Časopis**, 2(2):263–280.

STEYN, M., HARRIS, T. & HARTELL. C. 2014. Institutional factors that affect black South African students' perceptions of early childhood teacher education. **South African Journal of Education**, 34(3):1-7.

SWARTZ, S. 2006. A long walk to citizenship: Morality, justice and faith in the aftermath of apartheid. Journal of Moral Education, 35(4):551-570.

THESEN, L. & VAN PLETZEN, E. 2006. Introduction: The politics of place in academic literacy work. **In**: THESEN, L. & VAN PLETZEN, E. (eds) **Academic literacy and the languages of change**. London: Continuum.

VAN DER BERG, S., BURGER, C., BURGER, R., DE VOS, M., DU RAND, G., GUSTAFSSON, M., MOSES, E., SHEPHERD, D., SPAULL, N., TAYLOR, S. & VAN BROEKHUIZEN, H. 2011. **Low quality education as a poverty trap. A working paper of the Department of Economics and**

the Bureau for Economic Research at the University of Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

VAN RENSBURG, H. 2014. South Africa's protracted struggle for equal distribution and equitable access – still not there. **Human Resources for Health**. doi: 10.1186/1478-4491-12-26

WALLACE, J. & PEASE. B. 2011. Neoliberalism and Australian Social Work: Accommodation or resistance? **Journal of Social Work**, 11(2):132-142.

WANGENGE-OUMA, G. 2012. Tuition fees and the challenge of making higher education a popular commodity in South Africa. **Higher Education**, 64(6):831-844.

WAWRYNSKI, M., HECK, A. & REMLEY, C. 2012. Student engagement in South African Higher Education. **Journal of College Student Development**, 53(1):106-123.

WEHBI, S. & TURCOTTE, P. 2007. Social work education: Neoliberalism's willing victim? **Critical Social Work**, 8(1):1-5.

WILLIAMS, G. 2016. Higher education: Public good or private commodity? London **Review of Education**, 14(1):131-142.

WILSON-STRYDOM, M. 2015. Access and success: Transitions into and through higher education. **A briefing paper at the 2nd National Higher Education Summit**. International Convention Centre, Durban, South Africa, October 15-17.

WORDEN, N. 2012. **The making of modern South Africa: Conquest, apartheid, democracy** (5th ed). Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dr Glynnis Dykes, Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.