



Research Article

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Transformative Pedagogy as a Decolonised Teaching Philosophy

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Abstract

Observations and experiences confirm that most university instructors and lecturers have migrated from traditional teaching, but many teaching styles are not transformative. That is, university classrooms are still within "teach and go" without concerted consideration to the future products of classroom stakeholders. This study examined transformative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy that increases critical epistemology towards students' transformation. This theoretical paper adopted the theory of decoloniality, located within transformative world view and designed with conceptual analysis as a means to interpret the assumptions of transformation in the university classroom. The study argued that collaborative knowledge construction enhances professional trust between the lecturer and the students, encouraging freedom that could be regarded as social and academic support for students towards transformation. Therefore, the study concludes that transformative pedagogy laced with humanity, collectivism, grouping, and unity of purpose in generating knowledge is a decolonised teaching philosophy. The study, therefore, recommends that collaborative knowledge construction, professional trust and relationships, freedom within the classroom, social and academic support for students are dimensions of transformative pedagogy, therefore, should be practised by university lecturers and/or instructors.

Keywords: Transformative pedagogy, teaching philosophy, conceptual analysis, transformative paradigm

1. Introduction

The university classroom is a sensitive knowledge laboratory that forms part of the cardinal reasons for establishing university education. Though, university education retains its purpose to pursue teaching, researching and community relation engagement towards producing active citizens via classroom activities that challenge students' criticalness (Mtawa et al., 2016; Zepke & Leach, 2010). However, to produce an active and productive citizen using the instrumentality of university education, the place of teaching and learning as a classroom activity cannot be under-estimated. This is to argue that the kind of products (graduates) produced into society depends on who and how the classroom activities were structured and tailored. This is in consonance with the argument that the teaching styles and or approaches adopted by an instructor go a long way in determining students' achievement (Ahmed et al., 2021; Chetty et al., 2019), even the kind of personality such a student will carry to the society after graduation is dependent on the kind of philosophy that underpinned their pedagogical process while in the university (Espey, 2010; Bateiha et al., 2020). This further enhances

my argument that university lecturers and or instructors are saddled with being mindful of the philosophical prowess that guides their teaching world views. This is because the attitude and character of students is a reflection of the university learning engagements. According to Dekhane et al. (2013), this learning engagement determines their creativity in solving societal and personal problems in their world of work or life endeavours, which further confirms that lectures and/or instructs' teaching philosophy is quintessential in the university system. This study will use instructor and lecturer interchangeably to mean university teachers.

One would wonder what teaching philosophy is and why it is very important for lecturers to locate their teaching activity within a particular worldview. Teaching philosophy is a concept that some practitioners have embraced, yet most are unaware of it as an educational term or practice. A clear definition of the concept of teaching philosophy is required for this study to make sense to those with little or no knowledge of teaching philosophy. Therefore, teaching philosophy is defined as the philosophy of teaching, learning and assessment, embedded in the teaching practice of a teacher, instructor, or lecturer, with particular attention given to the theoretical foundations of teaching, learning and assessment (Coppola, 2002; Schonell, 2016). Teaching philosophy forms part of university course design by committing lecturers to consider their philosophical stance on teaching and learning through reflection upon theory, research evidence and educational experience (Lea, 2004). Teaching philosophy helps faculty members gather knowledge about academic literacies, which are essential for higher levels of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Donnelly, 2007). This is also reflected in Korstanje (2010) argument that teaching philosophy requires academics to recognise the epistemological assumptions they make concerning what it means for students to learn in their classrooms.

Based on these conceptions, one could argue that teaching philosophy enables instructors to take the pedagogical process beyond their discipline to establish academics' core beliefs about teaching, learning, and assessment to ensure that students are equipped with a productive and beneficial teaching process. This is perhaps why Biggs and Tang (2011) concluded that teaching philosophy helps faculty members critically examine what they do in teaching practice by considering alternative teaching, learning, and assessment approaches. Furthermore, teaching philosophy also assists lecturers in research teaching, inquiring into questions such as what should be taught how it should be taught and assessed (Kurki-Suonio, 2011). Teaching philosophy provides academics with a coherent approach to their teaching and enables them to reflect on what they do, how they do it, to which it was done, and what it was meant to achieve. From the above literature, there are three recognised goals of teaching philosophy: Firstly, the idea of teaching philosophy is to promote intellectual development of the student, secondly is to advance knowledge and thirdly, teach students how to think outside the box while learning particular subject content. However, promoting these goals varies between academics because learning and teaching contexts are still connected to the teaching objectives, which are considered paramount to both the teachers and the students (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Moore et al., 2009).

As good and important teaching philosophy is for academics and students who are the beneficiaries, observations and literature show that some teaching philosophies are traditional, none participatory and too domineering, and could still be regarded as colonial teaching philosophies. Such a bad teaching philosophy does not stimulate the students' creativity and makes it impossible for the students to develop their own point of view on any problem (Rapaport, 2011; Ackerman, 2019). This phenomenon happens when teachers preach their views without allowing or encouraging free thought (Hadzimehmedagic & Akbarov, 2013; Dumford & Miller, 2018). This could also be regarded as a colonial classroom practice requiring a transformative process towards decolonising such philosophies in university classrooms. Furthermore, such unpleasant teaching methods encourage bad relationships between teachers and students (Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2017)). Perhaps this is why students contested unproductive habits exhibited by instructors in making their classes boring (Macklem, 2015). To address this issue, this study presents a transformative teaching philosophy as a decolonial philosophy capable of ensuring productive teaching that will affect students' lives both in

the university and when they graduate to the world of work. Decoloniality as a theoretical framework is presented below.

1.1 *Decoloniality: The Underpinning Approach*

The consequence of colonialism and coloniality currently constitutes the call to decolonise university and its epistemological landscapes. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that coloniality is synonymous with the domination of the mind. Seroto (2018) argues that decolonial theorists are mostly worried about the significance of subjugation on the colonised and its impact on the lives and their epistemological beliefs, which justified the argument of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) that colleges, universities, churches and schools in Africa are the platforms for the reproduction of coloniality. One can join the argument of Dunlap (2021) that decoloniality as a concept and theory emerged to challenge Eurocentrism and/or neocolonialism in knowledge production and dissemination. Decoloniality's main questions are: Who produces knowledge? Why is this kind of knowledge valued over another? Who consumes it? To answer these questions, one can argue that decolonisation in the education system, most especially in universities, is a practical movement to produce scholarship that resists such colonialist legacy, which stands out by questioning the idea of "a neutral" or "universal" education vis-à-vis what Paulo Freire has termed the "banking concept of education" (Freire, 2018). That is, decoloniality is a concept that stands to dismantle every dominant power structure that stands in the way of implementing transformation in the school system. This may be the reason why Behari-Leak (2019) conclude that decoloniality places emphasis on the structural and institutional aspects and processes of exclusion and marginalisation in knowledge production.

Decolonising higher education, including universities and their teaching paces, is critical because it reflects on concrete practices within institutions such as curriculum, pedagogy, administration, management, hiring policies (of academics), to unleash the transformative potentialities of knowledge by shifting from Eurocentrism to indigenous knowledge (McDermott et al., 2021) where the emphasis is placed on the locally and unanimously constructed knowledge. This agrees with the recommendation that education should be a site for empowering subaltern groups, thus recovering their history and struggles (Van der Berg, 2011). Thus, decoloniality is an antidote to post-colonialism, which sees academic institutions as mere products of colonialism by dismantling power relations between the classroom stakeholders such as lecturers and students (Bishop, Vass & Thompson, 2021). In order to ensure that the potential of power relations in the classroom is dismantled from the traditionally dominant classroom structures, one could argue that there is a need for a decolonised teaching philosophy tailored towards students and their life-long hachement. Such philosophy is argued to be productive and consequently transform students and make them useful to themselves, the community they find themselves and the nation at large. This is where the idea of transformative pedagogy, according to this study, emanated from, which is in line with the argument that decoloniality presents a new way of knowing about oneself, one's place and the word of being.

1.2 *Research Question*

Before I present transformative pedagogy as a better teaching philosophy, the following research question is raised to guide the study:

- How can transformative pedagogy be presented as a productive teaching philosophy towards ensuring that students are made critical to their future?

1.3 *Research Objective*

In order to answer the above research question, the following objective was formulated to pilot the study:

- This study examined transformative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy that increases critical epistemology by making students critical, productive and aware of themselves and their future.

2. **Methodology**

This theoretical paper adopted the transformative paradigm because it focuses on transforming classroom activities via reorientation of teaching philosophy in the university classroom. Being one of the paradigms that can be used to address social and educational issues (Mertens, 2007), it assists me to understand the problem of the study from the decolonial perspective, which seeks liberation for the marginalised (Romm, 2015). This paradigm is relevant because the study aims to dismantle legitimate power that may be exercised by the lecturer (the powerful) to displace the knowledge of the powerless (the students) (Mertens & Wilson, 2012) to give way to classroom freedom. It also projects to emancipate students from the traditional and systematic coloniality that have bedevilled university classrooms (Omodan & Tsoetsi, 2020). According to Omodan (2020), the transformative paradigm is suitable for the research that is aiming at social transformation. This is not far from the reason why Omodan and Dube (2020) agitate for a decolonised and Africanised classroom where freedom of knowledge construction is guaranteed. From an epistemological point of view, the paradigm forces researchers to understand the relationships that exist among the researched by establishing spaces for conducive collaboration towards generating new knowledge (Cram & Mertens, 2016). This study intends to achieve this by presenting a teaching philosophy that ensures productive and professional relationships in classrooms. In order to be able to present the integrity of transformative pedagogy, I adopted conceptual analysis to design and make sense of the argument. Conceptual analysis is a process of breaking down and analysing a particular context to understand or gain a clear knowledge of a philosophical issue. (Beaney, 2003). The main idea in the conceptual analysis is to answer questions like what knowledge is and/or what is true? This could be unravelled by exploring indebted knowledge and interpreting concepts (Phan et al., 2021). Therefore, the predominant for this design is to enable me to understand the meaning inherent in transformative pedagogy and determine how transformative pedagogy can be interpreted to mean a better teaching philosophy. Below is the analysis of the argument.

3. **Presentation and Discussion**

This section discusses transformative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy that is productive and anti-subjectivism. This was presented by analysing the conceptual instruments that constitute the concept of transformation in the process of teaching and learning. In addition, the relational and methodological models as a theoretical model to further explain the concept are presented as well.

3.1 *Analysis of Transformative Pedagogy as a Teaching Philosophy*

Undoubtedly, teaching and learning is an exercise of the power differential between lecturers and receivers of knowledge (students). This is so because humanity runs in both the lecturers (the powerful) and the students (the less powerful), which necessitate mutual and humane synergy to navigate. Teaching and learning is a social amalgamation of teachers/lecturers and the students. In such sociality, there is a need for understanding professionalism, humanity, and readiness to ensure that students (the powerless) are empowered. In contrast, the students must be ready to receive,

peruse and internalise new knowledge. As a teacher and lecturer with over six years of classroom experience, I believe that classrooms' success depends on mutual collaboration and professional relationships among the classroom stakeholders, namely, students, lecturer, curriculum, and implementation process. These characteristics could only be synthesised using the instrumentalities of collaborative knowledge construction, professional trust and relationships, freedom within the classroom, social and academic support for students. They are connected, and one leads to the actualisation of the other.

That is, the content of this approach was derived from the following four cardinal points: collaborative knowledge construction, professional trust and relationships, social and academic support for students and freedom within the classroom:

- **Collaborative knowledge construction:** Collaborative knowledge construction is a classroom engagement that brings the students into the realm of self-knowing, participatory knowledge, and critical thinking skills (Wang & Liu, 2020). This, in my belief, does not only develop skills in the students but also inculcate in them the knowledge and skill to navigate many challenges in their future endeavours. It also opens much new knowledge to the lecturers by helping the lecturers understand the students' level and thinking faculty.
- **Professional trust and relationships:** In-classroom activities, when there is plain ground for students to collaborate together, it enhances two-way relationships, which have been proven to be influential and significant to the students' academic performance in all levels of education (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). This may not be unconnected with students' quest to gain unhindered access to their lecturers. In this light, when lecturers are easy to access, approachable and reachable, the students develop some sense of belonging and see the lecturer as his mentor, guidance, and father. Deducing from my active classroom experiences, I believe that accommodating students and their diversities helps achieve a lot in the classrooms. When this is achieved, students feel free to participate in classroom activities.
- **Freedom within the classroom:** Classroom freedom does not mean that the students must be given free opportunity to misbehave or do anything without moderation. Rather, it means that the process of knowledge generation allows freedom of expression, critiquing, questioning and clarification. This is in consonance what classroom decoloniality preaches (Iseke-Barnes, 2008). These further ensure that the knowledge generation process is not colonised and restricted to the knowledge of lecturers alone. Hence, students are allowed to bring in their opinions, suggestions and criticism. When this is achieved, it makes students feel supported academically, which constitutes the next point.
- **Social and academic support for students:** In the classroom activities, when students have established trust and professional relationships with their lecturers, motivate students to listen, respect and attend a session with the lecturer because they know that such lecturer is willing to support and assist them in succeeding. Since the students' success, in no measure, is the primary focus of the lecturer (Tinto, 2005), it also enhances lecturers to achieve this aim. Socially, this cardinal point requires the lecturer to identify backwards and discriminated-against students and rebuild their social skills. Secondly, I believe that all students are not learning and performing in the same space; therefore, academically backwards students will feel fulfilled when socially supported. This boils down to the fact that there are individual differences among students, which must be understood as such (Kim, Petscher & Foorman, 2015). This actualisation opens students to classroom freedom where they feel a sense of belonging and are recognised as co-producer of knowledge.

These cardinal points of transformative pedagogy are explained in Figure 1, ranging from collaborative classroom, the establishment of trust and relationships leading to classroom freedom, social and academic support for students towards classroom transformation.

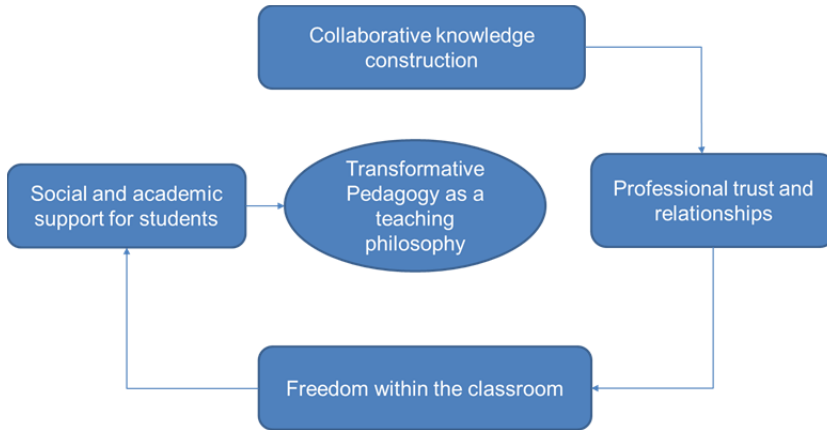


Figure 1: Relational Model of Transformative Pedagogy

Since I have explained the four cardinal points of transformative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy, it is also expedient to expatiate how it joins the decolonial movement. That is, it tries to fulfil agitation for a decolonial classroom where freedom of knowledge construction is guaranteed (Omodan & Dube, 2020). This can also be said to revolve around the classroom process laced with humanity, collectivism, grouping, and unity of purpose in generating knowledge. The decolonial process that is laced with participatory world view is presented in Figure 2 and speaks well about how the decolonial process got into the four-cardinal point towards students' transformation.

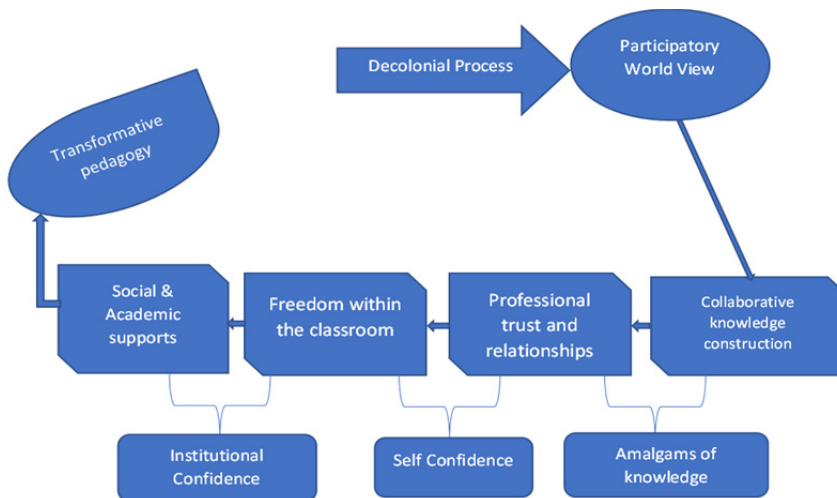


Figure 2: Decolonial Process of Transformative Pedagogy

Figure 2 explains how the relational model was interpreted as a decolonial process towards transformative pedagogy. As indicated in the figure, the participatory word view complements the fact that students need to be actively involved in the process that provides a solution to any classroom process. This perhaps is what is called a participatory classroom which was found as a productive teaching style that creates a sense of belonging to the students (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018).

The idea here is that when the classroom is adequately participatory, it encourages the generation of robust knowledge via people's contributions. This is how collaborative knowledge construction forms one of the major cardinal points of transformative pedagogy. Hence, generating collaborative knowledge enhances student-teacher relationships that are in consonance with Mayordomo and Onrubia's (2015) argument that collaborative knowledge construction promotes good relationships and recognition of diversities among students. However, cognisance must be taken about the transition that takes place between "collaborative knowledge construction" and "professional trust and relationships". The transition is called an "amalgam of knowledge" where new knowledge is generated due to relationships that recognise diversity among students. This also confirms the finding of Kamens and Casale-Giannola (2004) that a collaborative classroom positively promotes student-teacher relationships.

After exploring "professional trust and relationships," the next stage is "classroom freedom". When students have established trust and good relationships with the instructors, it gives them some sense of free mind to interact with their teachers. At this stage, they do not feel shy, oppressed, or inferior to engage their instructors in the process or quest for knowledge. However, the transition that takes place between the "professional trust and relationships" and "freedom within the classroom" is self-confidence. The argument here is that when students develop a sense of freedom that enables them to freely request knowledge without any iota of inferiority complex, it leads to "self-confidence". This agrees with Chesser-Smyth and Long's (2013) finding that students gain confidence when the school environment is friendly and protective.

When "freedom within the classroom" has been established, students can feel supported and secure socially and academically. At this stage, students no longer have negative feelings regarding their instructors and the school at large. They will confidently be proud of their university and talk more about their good classroom activities from the positive perspectives rather than the negative. However, the transition between "freedom within the classroom" and "social and academic support" is what I call institutional confidence. That is, they will believe in the mode of operation of the university, its curriculum and policy procedure. This is perhaps why the recommendation is made that students must be motivated to enable them to work freely towards university productivity and progress (Green, Rautenbach & Coetzee, 2019). Hence, employees love for organisational productivity is synonymous with organisational success (Verhoef & Terblanche, 2015). That is, when students think productively about their universities, it will also promote university productivity. Also, the students would have been availed lifelong learning that will make them active in their world work or any society they found themselves. This is because the transformative process, as discussed above, is laced with humanity, collectivism, grouping, and unity of purpose in the process of generating knowledge. This is otherwise referred to as "transformative pedagogy" as a decolonial teaching philosophy.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This establishes the need for a decolonial teaching philosophy that could enable the university lecturers to effectively discharge their teaching duties by transforming the classroom activities and the students for an active world of work. This was explored within the principles of the transformative paradigm and interpreted with conceptual analysis to make meaning out of various concepts. The study argued that a decolonial teaching philosophy chained collaborative knowledge construction that enhances professional trust between the lecturer and students, encouraging freedom that could be regarded as social and academic support for students towards transformation. Therefore, the study concludes that transformative pedagogy laced with humanity via classroom collaboration, collectivism, grouping, unity of purpose via trust and relationships, freedom to participate in social and academic activities in generating knowledge is a decolonised teaching philosophy that university instructors and lecturers could adopt. As a lecturer with over five years of teaching experience, I have tested and implemented this philosophy. It has helped me navigate all my

teaching responsibilities without a deficit in my performance and students' performance. Therefore, it is expedient for lecturers to adopt transformative pedagogy as their teaching philosophy to significantly impact university students' lives both in the classroom and outside the classroom. By this:

- The lecturer and/or the instructor should initiate collaborative classrooms that actively involve all the classroom stakeholders to generate new knowledge. However, such collaborative action should be tailored towards making students create professional relationships among themselves and their lecturers.
- The lecturer and or the instructor should initiate professional trust and relationships between the students and their lecturer as a result of the level of collaboration in the process of knowledge construction is also imminent. This could be done by using an open-door system where lecturers allow students to consult and ask for anything they need to know.
- The lecturer and or the instructor should initiate a classroom system that promotes freedom among students and between students and the lecturers. According to Figure 2, this will be achieved when students feel the sense of belonging created due to the trust and relationships with their lecturers.
- Lastly, the lecturer and or the instructor should make their teaching activities stand as a support system for students. That is, the students should be supported at all times, and that makes them have confidence in themselves and the institutions. The idea here is that when all collaborative knowledge construction, professional trust and relationships, freedom within the classroom are adequately practised, students feel socially and academically supported.

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