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COMMON GROUND

Teaching in Higher Education: Using Reflexivity to Construct a Comparative Analysis of Tutor Biographies between South Africa and the UK

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Abstract: It was Taylor (1981) who emphasised that "in order to have a sense of who we are, we want to have a notion of who we have become and of where we are going." In the higher education setting of a teaching community, being self-referential enables lecturers who are new to the profession to make judgements derived from their own interpretations of past experiences. (Soros, 1994) This paper reports upon a collaborative study between the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa the NottinghamTrent University within the UK, that has considered the extent to which cultures, ethnicity and background contribute to the reflexive-self, as individuals respond to experiences within their first years of teaching. Focusing upon four case studies, the research attempts to illustrate the influence of the reflexive-self in different contexts. In doing so the research attempts to show that reflexivity has become, as Leydesdorff (1994) emphasises, "the operationalisation of reflection as a recursive phenomenon." Through identifying the stories of individuals as they recount the processes before and during their time in higher education, this research attempts to analyse processes of reflexivity and its impact upon their professional practice.

Keywords: Reflexive-Self, Reflexivity, Reflection, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Introduction

LIFETIME IMAGES, PERCEPTIONS and experiences located within individual stories influence the way in which tutors behave within a social situation such as teaching. As this occurs they become reflexive (Giddens, 1991, McAdams, 1985, 1990, 1993, Harter, 1983, Taylor, 1981). This paper explores some of the challenges faced by lecturers and tutors who have recently taken up the challenge of teaching in higher education within two very different environments. This is a collaborative study, so there are comparative elements. Focused upon two widely different contexts, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) within the UK and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in South Africa, this comparative study explores cultural, ethnicity and background issues affecting individuals within two widely different contexts. The term, tutors, refers to the post-graduate students tutoring at Wits; while the term, teachers, refers to the respondents at NTU who work as full-time lecturers. The paper explores the experiences and issues of tutors and teachers new to higher education encounter and relates these to their own sense of reflexivity. In doing so it attempts to consider the extent to which their culture, ethnicity, background and other issues within their first year of teaching contribute to the formation of their reflexive-self.

Rationale and Research Issues

The rationale for this paper arose in conversations and feedback from lecturers and tutors new to teaching within higher education. Teaching within higher education institutions can be extremely challenging. Individuals may face many difficulties and issues which, in some instances, may be better understood through insights into their reflexive-selves. Focusing upon a university in South Africa and one within the UK, this study targeted individuals as respondents with very distinct cultural backgrounds. In getting these individuals to recount their story it attempts to explore the influence of reflexivity upon individuals from very different backgrounds as they prepare for and start teaching within higher education. The stories help to identify some of the challenges faced by beginning teachers and also identify some of the key turning points that they encountered. The paper identifies instances that lead to the operationalisation of the reflexive-self and identifies the complex inter-relationships in which individuals are placed in a professional role in widely different circumstances. As it develops it explores the challenges that exist for lecturers and tutors within two diverse environments.

Contexts

As mentioned above, the contexts of the research reported in this paper span universities in the United Kingdom and South Africa. Within both universities there is an ethos of continuing improvement and a willingness to support the training requirements of individuals. In other words the universities require processes that allow the organisations to become institutionally reflexive and to be moving forward through the revision of knowledge and experiences within a changing environment (Giddens 1991; Needham, D. and Sanders, N. 2000).

In the United Kingdom universities, in the same way as schools, are monitored and driven towards improvement and achievement in quality and standards. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) set standards for universities and, within each institution, there are teaching and learning mechanisms for ensuring that standards are met, such as peer observation. New lecturers are also expected to engage in a process of study for a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (HE) that legitimises their role as higher education teachers within the first few years of working within a university. It is, therefore, not easy for individuals to enter an environment in which such rigorous expectations are measured by extensive paperwork, procedures and expectations. This aspect of the research took place in the Schools of Education and Languages at the Nottingham Trent University within the East-Midlands area of the United Kingdom. Emphasis within each School is upon good practice within classroom teaching rather than in lectures and seminars. This provides new lecturers and teachers considerable autonomy, although they are allocated a mentor and work within structured course teams. New lecturers would usually have post-graduate qualifications as well as professional experience.

In the East Midlands, there are four thriving cities of Nottingham, Leicester, Derby and Lincoln, serving a range of different communities (4.2 million). The East Midlands region has a number of diverse minority communities, many of whom are in the larger cities of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham. Many within these communities suffer disproportionate levels of disadvantage. Participation rates in higher education, in Nottingham particularly, are low in proportion to the national average.

South Africa is known for the disparities inherited from notorious discriminatory political policies. Since the relatively new democracy of 1994, it has become a haven for immigrants, both legal and illegal, from other African states (thus the population quoted as 8 million, may in fact be many more). Johannesburg, in particular, being relatively close to the northern borders, as well as being recognised as the economic hub of the country, attracts a vast range of diverse people. Its universities arguably have the greatest diversity of any in the country.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) controls the route of the majority of teachers who qualify through university degrees and higher diplomas in education. However, for the purposes of this paper, we are focusing on the micro-context of the University of the Witwatersrand and the tutors of the Business Communication under-graduate course in the School of Accountancy. Some of these tutors have experienced teaching at schools in other parts of Africa, being mature post-graduate students. The tutoring done in Business Communication has a rigorous process of checks and balances with weekly meetings to keep the team of tutors on track. Strenuous processes of quality control and fairness include marking standardisation, moderation and external examination scrutiny (Lowe, N, Werimo, C and Lloyd, C 2007). Record keeping, such as attendance registers and marking schedules, is centrally managed with an on-line teaching tool, WebCT, and Excel spreadsheets (Sanders, N. and Kaplan, R. 2005; Lowe, N. and Kaplan, R. 2007). However, aside from the bureaucratic paperwork, there is a potentially alienating aspect of cultural diversity and perceptions within the classroom environment. Some of our findings illustrate this in a personally reflective way. Cultural assumptions tend to be made by South African youth when they encounter tutors from other African states, which reveal an ethnocentrism that tutors find challenging – because while they may be brilliant post-graduate students in their own right, they need to prove themselves and win the respect of their under-graduate Accountancy students.

Within the context for this study and for the purpose of this research, respondents within Nottingham Trent University were newly appointed lecturers from ethnically diverse backgrounds in a full time role within the university. Although the respondents from the University of the Witwatersrand were also from ethnically diverse backgrounds, respondents were part-time tutors appointed to support the Business Communication course.

Reflexivity

This paper attempts to show how lecturers and tutors new to the higher education environment become aware of their own reflexivity. In a profession where there is a constant inter-relationship between the self and the environment in which they work, this paper tries to identify a link between the reflexive-self and the evolving development of an individual's professional identity.

It is not unusual for the statements that individuals make to be the source of analysis within the social sciences (McAdams, 1997, Giddens, 1991,

Baumeister, 1986, Ellenberger, 1970, Polkinghorne, 1988). McAdams (1985) in particular emphasises that: *"Identity is a problem of unity and purpose in human life…*(that) *identity is a psycho-social issue."* Furthermore, Taylor (1981) emphasises that "*in order to have a sense of who we are we have to have a notion of who we have become and of where we are going*." It was Soros (1994) in his lecture delivered to MIT who, in his interpretation of reflexivity, emphasised the active relationship between thinking and reality in which "*reality helps shape the participants' thinking and the participants' thinking helps to shape reality.*" So, by our definition, a reflexive relationship comes from both directions with the cause and effect acting upon each other in a professional situation that prompts other causes and effects.

For many years the need to develop reflective practitioners for the classroom has been widely discussed within educational research (Hopkins, 1993, 2001, Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, Rudduck, 1995, Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The same emphasis has not been given to reflexivity and yet, according to Leydesdorff (1994), in epistemological terms, reflexivity is the operationalisation of reflection as a recursive phenomenon, which develops and uses knowledge obtained through processes of reason and argument rather than through intuition.

In the area of social sciences, the word 'reflexivity' has been widely used across a range of disciplines including sociology, psychology, anthropology and linguistics. In each of these areas there are a variety of interpretations about what it actually means or how it could be used. It was McAdams (1997) who raised the question about the problem of modern identity. He viewed the self as a reflexive project that an individual can work upon so, like a work of art, an identity is a product or a project. Thus the self is something that an individual works upon in everyday life and develops over time, with many layers and the potential for possessing inner depth. In particular, Giddens (1991) sees the 'self' as a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible; in other words tutors are not simply what they are but, in a professional setting, are what they make themselves to be through constantly and reflexively building and re-building their identities. Giddens (1997) emphasises that the reflexivity of the self is continuous as well as pervasive, within the context of the reflexive historicity of modernity, as it is thoroughly modern in the way in which it links the relationship between the individual and the new society into which they have been placed (Lash 1994).

The social issue is emphasised by Dewey (1934) who viewed educational institutions as mini-societies which have their own codes of behaviour, rules and ways of doing things and a significant amount of recent research has focused upon culture and cultures within schools (Hopkins et. al, 1994, Hopkins 2001, Fullen 2001, Hargreaves 1994, Needham and Flint 2006). This research links the ongoing process of tutor reflexivity with the equally ongoing social and cultural circumstances in which they are placed and challenged. For our purposes, we regard culture as the visible and practised social aspects of the respondents' lives that form their identity within a collective group with which they identify. Their culture is shaped by their mother-tongue, ethnicity and geographic location, as much as the customs and traditions practised by their home and family communities.

Giddens (1991) points out that the "*self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future.*" He emphasises that individuals have a cognitive awareness of various phases during their lifetime and that understanding themselves may help individuals to overcome barriers to development or sources of uncertainty. As it is happening all the time he views this process as continuous and all-pervasive. Giddens draws out a process of self-actualisation in which he implies a balance between opportunity and risk. In teaching, where individuals take a risk and let go of the past, they may develop opportunities for their own self-development that leads to self-actualisation.

Self-actualisation … involves becoming free from oppressive emotional habits, generates a multiplicity of opportunities for self-development. The world becomes full of potential ways of being and acting, in terms of experimental involvements which the individual is now able to initiate. (Giddens, 1997)

Thus all tutors are likely to have varying degrees of reflexivity as they relate past experiences to everyday circumstances and grow as individuals within their teaching environments. The reflexive process is something that they tacitly take control of and undergo. The teaching role provides the tutors with a range of experiences to which they respond in a particular way. This study attempts to explore professional reflexivity of teachers and tutors and identifies many of the issues that individuals face both within their classrooms as well as within the university context. It considers how they develop themselves as part of what McAdams (1997) terms their own 'reflexive project'. The study raises a number of questions about how lecturers and tutors tacitly use their reflexive self as they adapt to a higher education setting and culture. In those cases where their backgrounds and cultures differ greatly from that of their campus environment, the strategies that they use to adapt or cope with the ensuing challenges are explored.

Recording Life Stories

Trying to elicit the stories that lead up to and include the early events for tutors within higher education was not always easy, for example, individuals may have felt pressured within their working environment and not been comfortable about revealing their true feelings. This paper drew upon the research, "Mapping Change in Schools' (Ainscow, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Balshaw, Black-Hawkins 1994). Their research technique used a series of prompt cards that encouraged tutors to talk about the stories leading up to working in higher education as well as about their work within higher education. The prompt cards were used to highlight a range of issues at key points covering a longitudinal framework. They were designed to link past events and thoughts with their evolving experiences within the workplace of lecturers and tutors. There were four stages, as follows:

- 'Stage One' begins with recollections from the time before the respondent first considered the possibility that they were going to become a teacher in a university.
- 'Stage Two' provides a basis for the recollections of their preparations before taking up a post within a university.
- 'Stage Three' opens up the possibility for them to recollect and tell their own story of their life in university teaching, having taken up their post.
- 'Stage Four' is a final optional stage. It encourages them to reflect on their story and to explore any turning points in their work as a university teacher. (adapted from Ainscow, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Balshaw, Black-Hawkins 1994).

Two lecturers from Nottingham Trent University were interviewed as well as five tutors from the University of the Witwatersrand. The researchers wanted a broad base from which to select the most appropriate cases to focus on. There was one researcher who was able to be present at all the interviews, to ensure consistency. Although initially seven respondents were interviewed, for the sake of simplicity and synchronicity, and for the purpose of this paper, the experience of only four respondents, two from each university, are discussed.

There are some areas of overlap between the respondents. For instance, most of them have moved around the world. Of the four cases focused upon here, none of them are native to the two countries hosting their post-graduate teaching and learning experiences (ie, the UK and SA). Significantly, one candidate interviewed who is not focused upon in this paper, is from Ireland. He, perhaps of all the respondents, took the biggest risk, by coming to South Africa, as a mature student and then teaching History in a secondary school in Johannesburg. He left a good income and secure background for a life-changing new start, where he even started studying at the basic first year level. His risk paid off, because he believed that his post-graduate studies were in a meaningful and interesting field in the History discipline. The journey in reflexivity has helped the respondents recognise and value the motivating factors in their career and study trajectories.

For the purpose of this research interviews used prompt cards at various stages to find out the stories of individuals. Interviews were documented and the feedback was then used to construct case studies, which have been précised below. Case studies were chosen as they are of 'real life', are holistic and enable investigation of the relationships between the component parts of the case. In his classic book on case study, Yin (1994) points out that a case study is an empirical enquiry which:

> *allows investigation into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.*

The investigation can be explanatory. As Robson (1993) remarks, the case study answers 'why' and 'how' questions. Sturman (1994) broadly agrees:

> *Human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose collection of traits. ... to generalise or predict from a single example requires an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of the parts and of the patterns that emerge.*

So does Stake (1995), who describes doing case study as 'coming to understand the activity of a single case'.

Suzanne's Life Story (NTU)

Suzanne's father originated from Pakistan and her mother from Ireland. She was raised in the UK and then spent four years studying in New Zealand, before returning to the UK. She has always been excited by research, particularly when she took her masters degree. She feels that her creative side comes out when she teaches team building and improvisation through drama to commercial audiences off campus as a hobby. Her natural inclination was as a performer so she felt suited to teach in higher education and was interested in the diversity of work in different areas of psychology as a process of discovery. Since childhood she has read about crime which she has linked with her interest in psychology. This is profoundly reflexive. It is interesting to note that Coulthard (1985: 183) also sees the link, that, "being a teacher is constituted by performing the appropriate acts and this is exactly how drama works."

When Suzanne got the job at NTU, she had mixed feelings. Her main influences were two of her university lecturers who inspired her as great role models. She wanted to see peoples' faces when sharing knowledge. As an ambitious person she felt that being in university would provide her with autonomy and responsibility, with feelings of connection, privilege and achievement. She felt that she was doing something that was grounded in her interests , But then there was a mini-panic as she realised that it was "REAL". Facing the daunting responsibility of becoming a lecturer she, constantly asked herself, "Can I do it?" and, "When will I be found out?"

She remembered the anxiety and fatigue when she started work. She had a large number of assignments to mark, for a course she had not actually taught and she had no marking experience. She was concerned about her work-life balance and felt it would be difficult to develop the new lifestyle, particularly as she thought that she was thrown in at the deep end with the extra marking. Suzanne felt that this was a steep learning curve and for a short time she went through a period of trial and error with experimentation. Getting the marking completed was not easy. She felt that she had been taken advantage of and should have put her foot down and asserted herself to create clear boundaries. Early in her career she had complaints from students about her marking and this was challenging. It made her think about the boundary that you have to create between being a lecturer and being a friend.

Along with the boundary setting, Suzanne had a few turning points, most notably being made year-tutor, when she supervised students over a year. She liked being challenged and loved the responsibility.

Yu Lin's Life Story (NTU)

Yu Lin is from mainland China and teaches Mandarin Chinese at NTU. She came to the UK to gain a post-graduate qualification and has been working full-time at the university for one year. When Yu was in China she worked in the media as a journalist for the Chinese Broadcasting Bureau. She had to travel as part of the job, but felt that it was for very young people and she wanted a more stable position, lecturing in a university. She felt that academics were independent and she enjoyed the novelty of living in another country and felt that it provided stability for her daughter, with the UK education system being far more creative and empowering for her daughter. In China, education is considered to be important and a teaching career carries high status. Her father was a teacher and she was used to his commitment to his students He, and a former teacher, helped her to become a successful student and she wanted to stay in an academic environment. She was confident deep down that she could cope with the challenges and wanted to work with young people. Significantly, for her, teaching was not like any other job, as it was holistic and inclusive, affecting her whole life. Her next step was to get something published.

Yu views her full-time role as an adventure. As a full-time lecturer she has meaningful contact with colleagues as a peer and is undertaking her PGCE (HE) which she enjoys as it links her role to educational theory. She enjoys the fact that learning provides her with the opportunity to experiment with her teaching, which she can now relate to theory. The trajectory of her academic career is positive as she has just taken over a course leadership and is in the process of going through a validation Yu enjoys the pleasure of contact with young people, particularly in helping them to solve problems. She likes the different elements of creativity associated with her role, whether it is using multi-media, lectures, seminars or the teaching of small groups. She feels that many of her teaching skills she has inherited from her father. She understands the need to balance the needs of her family with work.

There have been many turning points. She has learnt so much, which she views in terms of her own development. Taking on the course leadership and preparing the validation documentation was a huge step as was finding out about the more detailed requirements within a large university in terms of quality and standards.

Wanjiku 's Life Story (Wits)

Wanjiku came to South Africa to take a Masters degree in International Relations from Kenya, where she got her first BA degree. She then taught at the Kiriri Women's University in Nairobi. After this she returned to the University of the Witwatersrand where she is currently busy with another Masters degree, in Adult Education. She acknowledged the powerful influence of her father, who was a lecturer at Nairobi University Medical School for 32 years, and to a lesser extent her mother, who was a pri-Wanjiku school teacher for 30 years. Conversely, her parents would have influenced her away from a teaching career. She has an open mind to a career, but was and is not too keen upon working as a university lecturer as it is not well paid, especially in Kenya. She would prefer to offer training in the corporate sector where there is "half the work for double the pay". She sees her work within the university as a 'twist of fate', but feels that this role helps to enhance and develop her Curriculum Vitae. Previously she has worked as an assistant communications manager and this experience provided her with an encounter with corporate training; so her educational

research relates to adults as she intends to do work-place training with adults.

When first approached to tutor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Wanjiku felt that working in higher education would be a big adventure, person-ally challenging, with something new to learn and become committed to. Her desire was to make use of her knowledge, share it and see how she could use it in the process of giving. She felt that she had the confidence to teach and that this would be chal-lenging and rewarding. Before starting she was a little concerned that there was not a big enough age gap between her students and herself. She also felt that she would have to earn respect. One hurdle that she identified was that students would have their own perceptions about the nature of her background in Kenya and she felt that she had to prove to them that the education system that she had come from "works". She was worried about any negative percep-tions that would undermine her authority in the classroom. Wanjiku felt that teaching changes people and that she needed to learn how to respond to change. She was genuinely concerned about prob-lems that she might have with individuals, particu-larly in terms of discipline. As an opportunity, she felt that this meant that she was using her qualifica-tions.

As the pay for working as a tutor was poor in rela-tion to the workload, Wanjiku felt that she was not becoming a tutor for the money. In Kenya, this would not be a good career move. In fact, in order to retain university lecturers in Kenya, incentives have in-cluded duty-free car purchasing of imports. However, Wanjiku felt that this opened up the prospect of a second career in training in the private sector. Wanjiku enjoys working with young people but re-flected that, "It is not an 8.00 am until 5.00 pm role. The job continues in your mind and it is difficult to break away from it." On the one hand this is a motiv-ator, but against the bursts of energy there is also fatigue and anxiety. She feels empowered and likes the creativity she experiences when teaching stu-dents. According to Wanjiku , "it is always a chal-lenge to remain relevant."

The whole experience has been a turning point. She understood from the outset that students had perceptions of her and she had to work hard to change them.

Agebola's Life Story (Wits)

Agebola obtained his first and second degrees in Nigeria before coming to South Africa to study for his PhD in African literature within the context of drama. Agebola, initially, did not want to become an academic. He felt the pay was poor but was influ-enced by his sponsor (his uncle) and one of his lec-turers who felt he should be an academic. Agebola felt that the lecturer had seen something that "he could not see," that he was going to be the best stu-dent in his set. It was a good move and Agebola has so far enjoyed his teaching.

When Agebola first knew that he was to take up a teaching post, he wondered how he would confid-ently stand before a class and teach for two or three hours, particularly considering that he felt that he was "naturally bashful." He felt that "confidence and assertiveness" would come by developing his re-sourcefulness. Knowing that he was going to teach he felt that it was "a privileged opportunity to have contacts with youth and the possibility of impacting on them as social beings." He hoped to use some of the attributes and skills of former teachers within his own teaching, and that this would provide him with a strong presence in the classroom.

Teaching was initially greeted by a mixture of hope, dissatisfaction and frustration. Agebola felt that he was treated with little respect by senior aca-demics. He felt that he was doing very well, but that this was not recognised by colleagues. For him re-spect is a big issue. Agebola's background in drama enabled him to engage students through metaphors, "illustrations and productive digressions, thereby instilling in them psycho-social transparency that would make them responsible individuals within a peaceful and rewarding cohabitation." This indicates that he had deep seated values and beliefs. He was anxious about coping with the demands of taking a research degree while teaching. For him, teaching has enabled him to use creative ingenuity to illustrate concepts which he can link to familiar circumstances, particularly when such areas "within the discourse are foreign and strange."

If Nigeria had the materials and the opportunities available in South Africa, Agebola would have stayed there, but as he admitted, "the universality of the global village does not include Nigeria."

Discussion

The reflexive practices described above mean that new teachers and tutors have been able to gain insight into their own practices, both in the classroom and in regard to their professional relationships with colleagues. The process of engaging with this re-search has clarified issues experienced by lecturers thinking and working in HE, allowing for a meta-cognitive narrative to develop into a dialogue during interviews. Moreover, the researchers themselves were launched into a series of discussions about the meaning of the insights gained, many of which led to heightened awareness of their own reflexive selves. For instance, on one occasion, while the re-searchers were driving to a conference venue, it

dawned upon the one driving that she always checked her passengers' to see that the seatbelts were fastened, as she had done her own seatbelt. In South Africa the wearing of seatbelts by all vehicle occupants is compulsory (unless in a public transport vehicle such as a mini-bus, which are, ironically involved in far more careless accidents). Having made this observation, the researchers discussed the reflexive practice of fastening a seatbelt, both as a driver and a passenger in a motor vehicle. Both researchers tended to fasten their seatbelts automatically, without consciously thinking about it or deciding to do it. After several weeks of travelling together the habit of checking the seatbelts was replaced by an awareness that the seatbelt had always been fastened when checked. Thus a different reflexive alertness developed. Similarly as the researchers dialogued, using email between their two countries, the meta-cognitive narratives as they engaged with the material and the process developed. Over the years, they continued to interact and share stories from their respective lecturing environments. Their growing awareness of their reflexivity had an impact on their continued academic activities.

It became imperative that the researchers make clear and foreground the self reflexive practices that each of the participants adopted to make meaning of their lives as 'new' lecturers and in this way address the focus of the paper. They attempted to show the links between ethnicity, culture and background to these self-reflexive practices and argue for how such practices, when supported, can sustain and develop agency and better working practices in HE.

Levels of Reflexivity

The researchers felt that they were viewing and experiencing different levels of reflexivity from each of the respondents, although in each instance this was difficult to measure (Davis, 2003). The teachers and tutors each had a sense of excitement on the one hand, while on the other hand, what Hartle (1997) describes as a false sense of consciousness where the intentions of each of the individuals did not in each instance seem to fully account for all of their actions. Suzanne drew upon her natural inclination as a performer when she wanted to see people's faces respond to her sharing knowledge. Agebola also had an awareness of the drama of an academic performance. Yu's previous work in journalism had been largely objective, but she wanted to build upon this through her research to develop something creative based upon her ideas. Wanjiku saw working in higher education as a big adventure, even though her upbringing by teaching parents had cautioned her against pedagogic pursuits. Agebola was clearly developing his dialogue language and rich form of expression through all that he was learning, using these

linguistic skills to explain his reflexive journey. According to Giddens (1997)

We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves. It would not be true to say that the self is regarded as entirely empty of content, for there are psychological processes of self-formation, and psychological needs, which provide the parameters for the reorganisation of the self.

There is meta-narrative that most of our respondents seemed to consciously or unconsciously thread through their discussions. It is one that discourse analysis may interpret as a need to express something potentially disparaging about themselves in an apologetic or defensive manner (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005). This may also be a reflection of the influence of post-graduate studies where highly critical dialogue is engaged in daily. Thus they may have tried to excuse something like a feeling of intimidation or victimisation, because they felt that it may have mitigated against themselves as professionals. This self-justification may arise in case a colleague might think less of them for revealing something that in a research context should have been protected. Some of the South African tutors were about to engage in a professional relationship with one of the two interviewers. This raises the question, "How did this relationship compromise the study and the findings and what forms of self reflexivity should be engaged with in terms of the methodological choices made in this study?" Firstly, the Wits researcher had not yet commenced the academic semester in which she worked closely with the tutors in her team. Thus there was a meta-awareness of the possibility of tutor respondents wanting to "put the best foot forward" and make a good impression on a prospective "employer". However, of the three respondents mentioned in this paper, only Agebola proceeded to work in the department of the researcher; while the others tutored in other faculties of the university. When quizzed, he sent an email reply: "The way I reacted to your questions was not influenced in any way by the fact that we work together. As a matter of fact, I was yet to be hired by you as a tutor by the time the interview was conducted." Given the question, however, the material from the interviews was reviewed critically.

Secondly, in order to eliminate the contamination factor of interviewer/interviewee bias, the researchers gave respondents a background introduction, then released them to a separate room where they were able to read and respond to the interview questions on their own, in writing. Considering Agebola, then, he wrote four fluent pages before the interview in an unself-conscious style. He indicated awareness of academic conventions in writing, thus tempering an

open frankness with a meta-cognitive awareness of his own narrative. For instance, his use of verbal signposting differentiates the influences of his uncle sponsor and the lecturer mentioned above:

> *The second encouragement I got was from one of my lecturers who thought I should come to the academics having emerged as the best graduating student in my set. My reluctance at this stage was based on the assumption/fact that academics are poorly remunerated (in Nigeria). I went into teaching and now enjoy it.*

From this statement, it is apparent that he did not mind admitting to strangers that he was initially driven by fiscal constraints. He acknowledged, much like Wanjiku had done, that their home countries along with South Africa, did not reward teachers by paying high salaries. He admits in a later written response:

> *I had serious anxieties about coping with the acquisition of more degrees (MA, PhD), because of the absolute dependence on self-sponsorship and the meagre amount being earned. This insecure financial state and paucity of relevant materials (in Nigeria) were highly frustrating. ... However, with the realisation that physical, academic, and social, as well as financial stability come with time, I have renewed my commitment to being focused and purposeful – this explains why I have come over to South Africa to have my horizon expanded, even at great personal cost.*

The Role and Status of Work within Universities

As can be seen from the above excerpts of Agebola's written submissions, the role and status of academic work is linked to the value of tutor and lecturer salaries. The African academic has to find other motivators to consider such a position. Post-graduate students and tutors coming from African states enter the academy with the perception that teaching and even lecturing is a poorly paid last resort, partly because it is a public sector occupation (Ramaphosa, R 1996). These African examples are in contrast to Yu-Lin's indication of how highly regarded the teaching profession was in China. There is a prevailing sense coming through from UK lecturers that working in a university is a position of autonomy, independence and high status, and that it is attractive and worthwhile. The two UK lecturers in this study viewed the university as a place where they could develop and succeed with their ambitions. They were quick to take on their responsibilities and view their position as long term. Both African respondents saw

their situation as short term and there were uncertainties about where they might be and what they might be doing in the future. As a word, 'status' derives the Latin *statum* meaning 'standing'. De Botton (2004) argues that this can be understood in a 'narrow sense the word refers to a legal or professional standing within a group' or more broadly - and here in a more relevant sense - 'to one's value and importance in the eyes of the world'. It was clear that there was an element of concern about the status of working within a university by the South African subjects, particularly in the longer term and that this might contribute to some element of status anxiety which De Botton defines as:

> *A worry, so pernicious as to be capable of ruining extended stretches of our lives, that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society and that we may as a result be stripped of dignity and respect; a worry that we are currently occupying too modest a rung or are about to fall to a lower one.*

Teamwork

When individuals start teaching, they do not want to expose their weaknesses, and seem to want to be a member of a team, the membership and acceptance within which is particularly important for them (Tarricone, P, Luca, J 2002). Tutors had different reactions to how well they were accepted. For example, Agebola felt that he was not taken seriously and treated with little respect by senior academics at a time when he felt the need to communicate with them about all that was happening within his classroom.

> *My entrance to the academia was greeted by an admixture of hope, dissatisfaction and frustration. Seeing myself being treated with little respect from the senior academics, I felt I should switch to another career where, to my mind, people with less success in academic evaluation were doing much better and respected. This particularly, was achieved by the juxtaposition I made with the academic and administrative settings.*

Since joining the team of tutors in the one researcher's course, Agebola has enjoyed the high regard of his peers. The tutoring team is a close-knit group of post-graduate students who study together in their own faculty and bring their expertise to the Commerce faculty to tutor groups of diverse students. The hierarchies of status mentioned above can be undermining to new tutors, so their community of practice within the tutoring team becomes a key

source of ongoing motivation. Similarly, Yu at NTU felt that colleagues were treating her completely differently when she became full-time, having previously been part-time.

Relationship to Personal Interests

Both Suzanne and Agebola link their role within the university to their interests in drama. Suzanne has drama as an interest outside the university where she uses improvisation through drama to deliver courses to a commercial audience. In contrast, Agebola's research interest is in African Literature and drama, where, describing the influence of his uncle-sponsor, he writes, "This, I believe, was sequel to the creative ability he saw in the pieces of poem I wrote for his scrutiny." According to Agebola, he is motivated by "the realisation of the place of effective communication in human relationship, most especially the business of economic growth and advancement, and my preparedness to collaborate in achieving this." At this early stage of their academic careers many of the respondents indicated close links between their personal interests and what they were studying, for instance, Suzanne's fascination with criminal psychology, and Wanjiku 's focus on adult education.

Exploring Boundaries

Suzanne quickly established good working relationships with her students, but once there was marking to complain about, she had to re-consider the professional boundaries between being a lecturer and/or a friend. Moreover, an overload of marking caused her anxiety and fatigue, so she wished with hindsight that she had felt empowered enough to set boundaries in terms of her department's initial expectations of her. Yu soon realised that she had to balance the needs of her family with her work. Wanjiku was concerned at the limited age gap between herself and her students, as well as the need to earn their respect, particularly as she is Kenyan. Both Yu and Wanjiku felt that their role was always in their mind – pervasive – so that they could not lock it in an office and leave it behind when they went home (Giddens 1997). Agebola felt that his teaching was a mixture

of hope, dissatisfaction and frustration as a result of the wide divide between junior tutors and senior academics.

Duration of Commitment to Teaching Roles

In looking for the differences between the UK and South Africa, the UK respondents clearly saw their lecturing role as long term, in stark contrast to the African respondents. They had a sense of excitement and fulfilment in their academic careers, alongside a realisation that they were on a pathway to achieving their ambitions. The African respondents still felt that they were balancing opportunity and risk, but generating opportunities for self-development that involved experimental engagements that might not be long term (Giddens 1997). However, all of the individuals were clearly going through a process of self-actualisation based upon being true to oneself. For Suzanne she could not believe that what she was doing was so real. Yu saw her role as an adventure, as did Wanjiku , while Agebola employed his "creative ingenuity" to engage with the tutoring discourse. In each instance and with each respondent there was an ostensible 'buzz' and excitement factor associated with their role, with clear links between their reflexivity and their ongoing sense of identity.

Links between Ethnicity, Culture and Background to these Self-Reflexive Practices

Both universities in this study have British European origins and influences. In South Africa with the Apartheid legacy, the University of the Witwatersrand would fall under the category of "Historically White Institution", even though it has a proud tradition and policy of never having excluded any applicants on racial grounds. Nevertheless the academy is dominated by white English speaking Western cultural practices, in spite of the wide diversity of the student and staff bodies. Thus it is notable that all of the respondents in this study enjoy a range of personal diversity. The following table summarises the demographics of the respondents:

Table 1: Demographics of the Respondents

Respondent	Suzanne	Yu Lin	Wanjiku	Agebola
Gender	female	female	female	Male
Race/ethnicity	Anglo-Asian	Chinese	Black	Black
Nationality	Pakistani-Irish	Chinese	Kenyan	Nigerian
Languages	English	Mandarin, English	English, Swahili, Kikuyu	English, Yoruba
Age			28	36
Countries lived/studied in	UK, New Zealand	China, UK	Kenya, SA	Nigeria, SA
Educational background and influences	Two university lecturers as role models	Father was a dedicated teacher, with high status	Father a U lecturer and mother a pri-Wanjiku school teacher	Uncle a teacher
Educational qualifications			BA, Hons, MA currently 2 nd MA	BA, Hons, MA, currently PhD African Literature

I was significantly taught by teachers from the same ethnic background as mine at the elementary school until I was exposed to people from other ethnic groups/races at the high school (secondary school). Most significant was the contact I had with expatriates from Ghana and Canada when in High School. Talking of influence, I can not remember any vivid thing I have taken from my teachers at the elementary and High School levels. I was more conscious of those I got from my teachers at the university in Nigeria.

My experience as a tutor at Wits has afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to certain things that border on student/teacher (tutor) relationship. The relationship here appears to be more relaxed and indulging than the one I was used to at home. Although it is difficult and frustrating to cope initially, I had to learn to accommodate this for the effective performance of my duties. Another point to note is the 'rainbow' nature of members of my classes. Drawing illustrations from social situations in classes could only be achieved based on the knowledge of existing nuances on the subject matter. This might be extremely difficult if such can not be guaranteed.

There exist some remarkable differences between my culture and that of South Africa, most especially the city fashion found at Wits and Johannesburg. However, the cosmopolitan nature of the South African experience is highly rewarding. I believe my identity is still intact as I live and proclaim it. However, just like other migrants, the space I occupy at the mo-ment allows me a negotiation that could culminate in the absorption of certain tropes, the most popular being gastronomic influences.

These quoted passages are so eloquently put in the respondent's own words, that they contribute directly to the discussion. His identity is held on a true course, even though he is in a host-country with a diversity in population groups and customs. The City of Johannesburg is indeed a world-class hub of economic and social activity. *How self-reflexive practices, when supported, can sustain and develop agency and better working practices in HE*

Our respondents appreciated the opportunity to tell their stories – it is not often that one has an impartial listener to sit and dialogue with on issues at the core of teacher motivation and identity. It seemed that if more such interventions were to occur, then new teachers and tutors would develop relationships with mentors who could help them to keep going. Significantly if one is given a voice, such as the interviews encouraged, then one is able to work through personal issues and come to some sort of realistic resolution, becoming resourceful in oneself. The ongoing dialogue between the researchers gives them a voice in a context that is professionally neutral – neither has power or authority over the other, but meet as academic equals, with mutual respect and regard. They are able to correspond about aspects of their teaching that are heart-breaking as well as heart-warming, free to voice their comments and observations without risk of exposure or censure, and sure to win supportive feedback that is encouraging and motivating. More than anything, this conversation between the two researchers and their diverse worlds, mediates their professional experiences,

affording each the recognition that they may seek, but may not get from their institutional contexts, given various constraints, challenges and changes.

Conclusion

What started out as a reflexive study based upon narratives from two lecturers in the UK and two tutors in SA highlighted issues that they faced within their teaching environments such as in the areas of reflexivity, the role and status of work within universities, teamwork, and their personal interests. The research also uncovered some boundary issues. Providing the respondents with the opportunity to talk about their experiences as part of a process of research gave them a voice through which they identified their concerns. Hargreaves (1994) considered that the 'voice' of teachers, providing them with the opportunity to discuss educational issues related to their own environment, had tended to be undervalued. By contributing to this study the respondents were not just adding to epistemology but they also genuinely felt a firm commitment to a series of ongoing reflexively developing beliefs and values of their own. The researchers themselves walked alongside the respondents on the path of self-discovery, growing in their own insights into their reflexive selves. As this paper closes, still the journey continues, as do the dialogues between the respondents and researchers.

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David's evolving research interests have focused upon and related to how young people learn within the business classroom. He has analysed the use of case study techniques for developing an understanding of how business studies students learn, and has also look at a range of classroom pedagogies and technique for improving learning within the classroom. Such work has included a focus upon inpreting the work of Vygotsky beyond the notion of cognitive apprenticeship to analyse the 'art' of teaching. His recent work has focused upon notions of art or science within education. Using the work of Martin Heidegger, David's has a developed a variety of methods to look at whether business education within the UK in the late modern context has been straitjacketed through processes of technological enframing.

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Nicky Lowe has extensive experience in the higher education sector in South Africa and lectured in Business Communication within 2 universities. She joined Wits School of Accounting in January 2003 and has re-written the Business Communication Course for second year Bachelor of Accounting and Commerce students. She has engaged in various forms of research and is interested in Outcomes Based Education, Critical Literacy and the International Multi-Literacy's pedagogy. She has made numerous conference presentations and has a developing publications portfolio.

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