‘Living’ sacrifice and shame: Phenomenological insights into continuing, ‘distanced’ education student experience

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Abstract
This article is contextualised within the field of post-graduate, continuing teacher education in South Africa, through an essentially ‘distanced’, that is, part-time, mixed-mode teaching and learning model. It draws on a broader phenomenological research study into the experiences of students taking a one semester module, Reading and Writing Academic Texts, specifically designed to promote students’ academic literacy development in the Bachelor of Education Honours programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The article uses data related, however, only to the embedded experiences of sacrifice and shame as students ‘lived’ their experience of studying according to this model. It does this in order to argue three main points. The first is for greater cognizance of the ‘lived’ consequences for students of studying part-time through essentially ‘distanced’ models of delivery. The second is for recognition of the impact of student experience on the formal, ‘intended’ curriculum, and the third, by implication, is for recognition of the concomitant consequences for the wider political project of teacher education through these models, particularly in developing countries such as South Africa.

INTRODUCTION
The study on which this article draws is contextualised within the field of post-graduate, continuing teacher education in post-apartheid South Africa, through part-time, mixed-mode learning, i.e. that is student learning that is ‘distanced’. In summary, the study focused on the perceptions and lived experiences of six post-graduate, African, English second languages speakers taking a core, compulsory modules in the B.Ed. Honours programme offered by the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, namely, Reading and Writing Academic Texts. This module was specifically designed to develop students’ academic literacy proficiency. A phenomenological approach informed the conceptual and methodological framework of the larger study, and Discourse Theory was employed to assist at the final moment of interpretation. Although macro, socio-politically derived contextual factors were a key consideration in the original study, and played a critical role in
the lived experiences foregrounded in this article, I have chosen not to frame the discussion in this article from this perspective explicitly but rather to let it emerge through the data presented, as an embedded component of participants’ lives.

In order to engage with the central arguments of this article, however, it is crucial that the reader becomes quickly ‘at ease’ with the way in which phenomenology and Discourse Theory (Gee 1996, 1997, 2004) were used in the study reported on here as it is only through the interplay of the deep conceptual and theoretical resources inherent in both phenomenology and Discourse Theory, that the lived experiences of students were able to be revealed and interpreted. But both theoretical frameworks are complex, multilayered and infused with influences from other theoretical and disciplinary fields. So a tension emerges. To try and explain them both in depth will leave no space to address the key arguments. To simplify them is to run the danger of misrepresentation. As a disciplined compromise, therefore, I have extrapolated from both frameworks only what I consider absolutely central to the sense-making project of this article, but acknowledge that in doing so, I have done little justice to the full potency of either. As phenomenology provided the broad conceptual, theoretical and methodological framework of the larger study; it will constitute the first point of departure in this article.

TO THE THINGS THEMSELVES

‘Phenomenology’ eludes a single definition. With its roots in ‘pure philosophy’, it is now applied more commonly as a methodology, in a range of guises, in numerous disciplines within the human and social sciences. However, despite its many forms found nowadays – and no doubt because of its ‘broad, inviting context’ (Giorgi 2000), it can be broadly described as the study of ‘the essential features of experience taken as a whole ... an investigation into the structures of experience which precede connected expression in language’ (Ricouer 1978, 121 cited in Willis 2004). The rallying call for phenomenologists across time and orientations is, thus, ‘to the things’, a phrase originally coined by Heidegger in the 1930s but also closely referred to earlier by Edmund Husserl (the ‘father’ of philosophical phenomenology) where he asked for ‘not mere words but the things themselves’ (1900, 252). The importance of this ‘slogan’ was ‘the peculiar thrust ... to get away from the primacy of theories, of concepts and symbols, to immediate contact with the intuited data of experience’ (Spiegelberg 1975, 13).

Thus, when researchers in educational studies such as the one reported on in this article, make use of phenomenology, it is generally because they have a deeply felt interest in the ‘humanity of experience’ – rather than the experience of humanity – and thus, have adopted a philosophy and a methodology that lend themselves to existential considerations of Being on the one hand, and the possibilities and challenges of accessing unselfconscious, concretized, inadvertent revelations of experience on the other.
Unsurprisingly perhaps, interviews are the central element of the data collection process in phenomenological research. Working with the ‘ideal’ here, a phenomenological interview aims to evoke an unselfconscious, narrative style response to probes into the ‘lived experience’ of a particular phenomenon, and are, therefore, generally categorized as ‘open-ended, apparently unstructured ... almost friendly conversations’ (Seidman 1991, 9). Thus, and as with all qualitative interviews, the “‘social relationship”, that is the conscious awareness of the intersubjective nature of the interviewing context, and existent or emerging power relations, is of critical importance’ (Seidman 1991, 72). But the nature of the ‘response’ to a ‘lived’ experience one is seeking, is no ordinary one. Rich ‘phenomenological data’ should, as much as possible, reflect ‘an immediate contact with the intuited data of experience’, the ‘unedited lived-spoken’, and not just ‘mere opinion’. So, much relies on the skill of the interviewer – above all, to listen – with a particular kind of attention, and to probe for, and evoke concrete examples of reported experiences, for very often it is when we talk of what we do, that our beliefs and values are inadvertently revealed. But of course, in order to create a space in which the ‘language of thought’ comes anywhere near ‘bubbling up’ spontaneously, other issues immediately grab attention. What language? Whose language? And what is the nature of the context that will elicit honest sharings of deeply felt, spontaneously rendered experience? In short, the ‘phenomenological interview’ presents unique challenges to a researcher. Without sensitive and extensive engagement with the subtleties and potential sub-texts of interview contexts, and a sophisticated capacity for self-reflexivity and self-knowing, it is unlikely that the quality of data one seeks will emerge. And even with the very best of intentions and high levels of ‘skills’ in place, it sometimes happens that the data emerges disappointingly devoid of that which lies ‘behind’ the spoken word.

Though there is so much more about phenomenology that could be referenced here, the above brief outline should suffice for the purposes of this article. In the following section, a similarly succinct engagement with Discourse Theory is undertaken, with the sole purpose, as indicated earlier, of completing a theoretical framing for this article as a whole.

**GEE’S DISCOURSE THEORY**

A definition of ‘literacy’ as ‘social practice’ – and hence ‘multiple’ – informed the larger research study, and hence this article too. By this is meant that literacy practices are seen as embedded in the socio-cultural and hence only meaningful when analysed from this perspective. The value of Gee’s notion of Discourse Theory is that it helps to deepen this perspective, and as will become evident, is central to the core arguments being made in this article.

Gee defines Discourses (with an uppercase ‘D’) in this way:
Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise (1996, 127). [Emphasis added].

He made a critical distinction between what he called Primary Discourses and Secondary Discourses. Thus, Primary Discourses ‘are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings’ (Gee 1996, 137). Primary Discourses, therefore, ‘constitute our first social identity’ (Gee 1996, 137), and become the base from which we relate to all other Discourses thereafter. So they constitute the foundations of who we are, and who ‘people like us’ are, and the beliefs, values and so on, that ‘we’ stand for. They can then, also be understood to instantiate ‘culture’. ‘Cultures’ thus, reflect the “storylines” or “theories”, shared by people belonging to a particular social group, that “explain”, relative to the standards of the group (though often at a fairly taken-for-granted and unconscious level), the sorts of situated meanings that people tend to assemble for their words and phrases’ (Gee 2004, 20). And over time, these ‘situated meanings’ find expression in ‘situated practices’ which all members of a particular ‘culture’ recognise as being of that culture.

Secondary Discourses are essentially all those Discourses which are not a person’s Primary Discourse but to which they become apprenticed, and/or access as part of their ongoing socialisation in the social world beyond that of the ‘home’/‘home community’. It is important to remember, however, that both Primary and Secondary Discourses exhibit the attributes identified by Gee in the extract above, and are ‘intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological’ (Gee 2004, 132). Integral to all Discourses too, therefore, are ‘situated meanings’ and their instantiation in ‘situated practices’.

The point of drawing the reader’s attention to the way in which Discourses ‘work’ is to assist in the recognition that students’ experiences that might appear, at first glance, to lie beyond ‘institutional’ interest/ concern/ responsibility because they are so intimately personal experiences, are nevertheless always reflective of their membership of their Primary Discourse, and a range of Secondary Discourses. In other words, the argument is being made that because all Discourses are so much more than just the ‘language bits’, but are rather the combinations of ‘saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing’, we should be open to considering the nature and impact of often seemingly unrelated ‘lived’ factors in students’ experience, or facets of student experience that traditionally we have considered ‘not-our-business’, in equal measure. So when students do not attend a class (particularly a Saturday class), or repeatedly fail an assignment or module, for example, we should not simply explain these actions away in terms of disinterest and/or a lack of effort and/or an
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inadequate intellect, but rather situate them in a wider, more sensitive, nuanced understanding of how students ‘live’ the experience of ‘the Academy’ (as a whole), or a discipline, as a Secondary Discourse.

To illustrate the efficacy of such a position and to provide evidence for the three primary points of argument in this article, I now consider ‘shame’ in the light of assessment as a situated practice, and ‘sacrifice’ as one consequence of Secondary Discourse participation. Before doing so, however, I offer a brief biography of each participant in the study in order to sustain the centrality of individual realities to the pedagogical enterprise.

**PARTICIPANTS**

1. **Michelle**

Michelle is a married woman in her early 40s with five children, the youngest of whom are twins of 6 years of age. Her husband works in Pietermaritzburg (144km away) during the week and only comes home on weekends. By the end of 2004, Michelle had passed the RWAT module the first time round, together with her other three first year modules. In December 2007, she passed her final Honours module and graduated in April 2008. At present, Michelle is registered for isiZulu Honours through Stellenbosch University.

2. **Zola**

Zola is a vibrant, engaging, single woman in her late 30s who has never been married and has no children. She lives with her mother and sister, and teaches Grade 1 in a local urban primary school. Zola had passed RWAT successfully by the time I interviewed her in 2004, and all other first year modules by the end of that year. She also took up the Education Leadership, Management and Policy specialisation option in her second year and completed her Honours degree in the minimum time, graduating at the end of 2005. In 2008, she continues to teach at the school described above – with sustained passion.

3. **Dick**

Dick is a man in his mid-40s. At present he teaches the English first additional language syllabus to Grade 11 and 12 isiZulu mother tongue speakers in a high school not very far from the mission station on which he was born, and where he has primarily lived for the past 40 years. He is also a Head of Department (Languages) in his school, and the English Language Cluster Co-ordinator for the area, which means that he is responsible for co-ordinating the English language teaching programmes amongst approximately 5 local high schools. During the week he lives with his parents in the family home on the original mission station, but most weekends he returns to his wife and two children who live in Pietermaritzburg, approximately 80km away.
At the time of the first interview, Dick knew he had failed his first attempt at the RWAT module. By the final interview, he had failed the supplementary examination he had been granted as well, so the entire backdrop to Dick’s participation in the project was one characterised by a lack of conventionally designated indicators of success, a point worth bearing in mind when engaging with his experiences that follow shortly.

4. Nothembu

Nothembu is the principal of a primary school in a rural area 90km inland from Pietermaritzburg, but lives with her children in Pietermaritzburg. She thus makes a daily round trip of 180km in order to run her school. In her 50s, Nothembu embodied maturity, good humor, commitment to the project and an innate love of children and teaching. She completed her Honours degree in the minimum two year period in 2005, which means she passed all modules satisfactorily the first time round. Although she expressed an interest in registering for a Masters degree at the time of the interviews, she has not yet done so. She remains principal of the school in Impendhle where I first met her.

5. Folly

Folly is a forceful personality, with a high level of self awareness and motivation. In her early 40s, she is divorced with one child, and shares a home with her mother. At the time of the first interview, she had successfully completed her first year of the Honours programme, which included passing RWAT, and taken up the Education Leadership, Management and Policy specialisation. By the end of our interviewing period, she had left the education profession and become a marketing agent for mathematics textbooks for a national publishing company. Despite stepping out of the Honours programme four months before its conclusion, she nevertheless completed the programme, with admirable results, in tandem with beginning her new job, which also requires a lot of traveling away from home. She continues to do extremely well in this post.

6. Vusi

Vusi, also in his mid-40s, is the principal of a school in the same township in which Michelle’s school can be found, but he lives 19km outside of this township. He has been a teacher for 24 years and has been at his present school for 8 years. He is also a church minister in a local church and a committed family man with two young children. He makes a 224 km round trip in order to attend contact sessions in Pietermaritzburg, but has his own transport. Vusi successfully completed his B.Ed. Honours degree in the minimum two year part-time period, and in 2007 was accepted into the Education Masters programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. He remains principal of the school he headed when this study began in 2004.
‘LIVING’ SHAME

Assessment in the RWAT module takes the form of three formative assignments, each of which contributes to a major summative assignment, and an examination. Since students have no input into the assessment process, to be ‘successful’ in this module, essentially requires that students ‘do what they are told’. That is, the ‘situated rules of practice’ that govern assessment in the module (and this holds true for all modules in the Honours programme) reflect a critical aspect of the hierarchy of power inherent in the Discourse of the Academy. That is one very important point to make. The dominant form of assessment is a written ‘essay’ in the genre of the ‘academic argument’ (after Martin 1985). So, a second important point to make is that the primary form of assessment in the RWAT module can be said to reflect ‘the central action of higher education’ viz. ‘essayist literacy’ (Scollon and Scollon 1981).

Assignments, therefore, can be understood as ‘situated activities’, which are part of a wider set of situated assessment practices, all of which contribute to the instantiation of a Discourse (Academic) which, in the case of the participants discussed here, bore little resemblance to one they had experienced before.

Entering a new Discourse (as opposed to simply encountering an unfamiliar genre of writing), however, can be very grueling but the textured details of this experience are seldom seen or invited by lecturers/academics in charge of courses. Yet, it is these lived experiences that determine how students position themselves in relation to ‘being’ in this new Discourse they must attempt to enter. For each ‘situated practice’ in this new Discourse, there are a host of ‘situated meanings’ which those who own the Discourse control (academics), and who determined (over an extended period of time) the nature and ‘look’ of these situated practices and meanings. Students, however, do not own or control these practices and meanings, and neither were they ever party to their instantiation. They stand outside membership of this exclusive club. On entry to the Academic Club, with virtually no assistance, they are expected to immediately identify, internalize and imitate these practices and meanings. What the data below shows, however, is that when situated meanings are opaque and inaccessible to students, the result can be shame, fear, confusion, misinterpretation and potentially failure. In other words, when academics do not take responsibility for providing students with epistemological access to relevant Discourses, they fail students.

Thus, Michelle, Zola and Dick all shared experiences of anxiety and confusion in the face of their performance in assignments. When Michelle ‘got 40 something’ for Assignment 2, for example, she was ‘shocked’ and she asked herself, ‘How come? Am I dom [stupid]?’ She would always check the mark first, and if she had failed, ‘your heart beat’. She found ‘this assessment it’s so difficult for us’ because of the ‘new terms that they must use which are difficult ... they are confusing us’, confusion arising from the fact ‘they don’t use direct words’. When she got her assignments back, she would ‘leave it sometime’, maybe for a day, before she would look at it ‘nicely’. Always, though, she would do this ‘alone – with no-one’ [all emphasis in
original]. Tutor comments that simply identified a problem, or criticized without offering a constructive alternative, were of course, of no use to Michelle at all.

Zola too, would always look at her assignment results ‘alone’. And then she would check her marks. If she had definitely failed then ‘Ei, you become more confused’. She would then take the assignment home, read through all the comments again and ‘check where you made mistakes’. If an assignment looked anything like the exemplar assignment shown in the interviews (which had many, and mostly unhelpful tutor comments on it), and Zola had had an assignment that looked similar, she would feel ‘bad, if they are bad comments’.

Dick’s descriptions of his assessment experiences, while echoing those of Michelle and Zola above, also take us beyond them, into the truly shadowed areas of failure and shame. Bearing in mind that Dick had already failed the RWAT module twice by the time the final interview was held, his experiences were inevitably more acutely defined. What emerged from a careful exploration of these recounts was the complexity evoked by experiences of multiple failure in the context of a perceived ‘high stakes’ enterprise. So Dick’s anguish, shame and loneliness were rendered more and more visible. Not only did he ‘not know what is it that makes me to get low marks’, but he felt completely trapped and demoralized, having no idea whatever ‘how am I going to get out from this, because I’ve paid a lot of money ... because we attach everything to this’. Part of the ‘everything’ that was attached to Dick’s efforts to improve his qualifications lay in the culturally defined expectation that a ‘learned person’ does not learn only for themselves. ‘Learned people’ also ‘help others in the family, the extended family, and so forth’, so the pressure to succeed was enormous.

Thus, for Dick, the consequences of being exposed as a failure were extremely severe, fingering the very centre of his Being. And so he made the decision not to tell anyone in the community i.e. outside his immediate family, that he was studying, ‘being afraid to tell a person because you know some of the courses you have dropped them and so forth’, so he would excuse himself from church meetings, saying to his friends, ‘I have got something that I am doing’. He saw it as a threat to his standing as a teacher too – ‘you come to class and you ask yourself what if one of these kids knows that I’ve failed the module that I was doing at the university? And you see that it is contribute negatively to them, they won’t trust you, you see ... they won’t trust you’. And he saw it as a threat to his standing in his formal RWAT tutorial group – ‘you can’t show anybody your marks ... they’ll start to look down upon you, you see. So there is nobody who want to show’. Despite Dick not showing his fellow students his marks, however, ‘the guys’ did ‘compliment each other’ and encourage each other saying, ‘we are going to make it, it’s just that we haven’t got the key to go through’.

Having wrapped himself in a veil of secrecy, Dick faced his RWAT supplementary examination alone. He asked his principal ‘for two days not to go to school’ just prior to the exam and went through the module on those two days. Immediately after the exam, he said to himself, ‘well, I can say I did it’ and that he was ‘on the right track’, thus, discovering he had failed again was shocking news. The only reason he could
think of why he failed was that ‘maybe it’s that the points were not enough’, since he was so sure that he had done what was expected of him, that is, ‘write it in the manner that it says all about what I’m going to say on the next ... on the following paragraphs up to the conclusion... . So I had to look at these authors, what are they saying, and then know all ... I mean, know the points, how ... what it is they are arguing about and so forth’. What the experience of failure showed Dick is that failure is possible, ‘that it might happen that you understand something and you write about it, and you find out that no, you were not writing about what has been asked for’. In preparation for a third try at RWAT, Dick planned to study the assessment criteria given in the learning guides ‘which is stating what is it that they are looking for’. At the time of the interviews, Dick rationalized the attitude he had taken to his repeated failing of module by saying, ‘I just want to surprise them when I’m graduating and they come to me’.

An engagement with the experiences just described offer some insight into what it meant for these participants to ‘live assessment’ in the RWAT module. Shame, uncertainty, self-doubt, confusion, anxiety, fear, loneliness – all these penetrated efforts to ‘do’ assignments and ‘get’ marks. Assessment, the above data shows, was thus both a provocative and punitive element of the RWAT module, and a critical determiner of Discourse identity as a result.

LIVING ‘SACRIFICE’

In relation to studying part time and through the mixed-mode model, that is, in a context of self-directed, ‘distanced’ study, time was the central issue in all participants’ experiences. This is a common theme echoed by ‘distance’ students throughout the world (see Lillis 2001; Tait and Mills 2003; Hellman 2003). However, the fine-grained experiences of ‘time’, and its inherent bedfellow ‘sacrifice’, evident in the data in the following discussion, evoke the consequences of subscribing to a Secondary Discourse and sense of ‘displacement’ that come with it. Foregrounding ‘time’ in the way that emerges, also reinforces the way in which Discourses must be understood i.e. that they are ‘forms of life’, organic, interwoven, total ‘ways of being’. Thus, the way in which one engages in and with ‘time’ is critically reflective of one’s Discourse membership.

As the reader engages below with the experiences of ‘time’ by participants in the study, I believe it will become apparent that what is really at issue here is the tension evoked by the jostling for dominance of a very powerful Secondary Discourse, over Primary Discourses. As the intensity of the demands of the Secondary Discourse impact more and more on the fabric of participants’ lives, they eat into, and erode, critical opportunities for the type of participation in their Primary Discourses that ensure continued ‘recognition’ as a member of that Discourse, that ‘culture’, that ‘community’. Unavoidably, they also disrupt established ‘reality sets’ and force participants to interrogate ‘situated meanings’ in ways they had not done before.

Thus, for Michelle, time seeped consistently out of her control as she mothered five school-going children on her own, “during the weekends my husband is here
and I take care of him’, teaching full time, and all household chores. If one can imagine the 24 hour clock in Michelle’s life, only five were allocated to sleeping – from nine at night and ‘then I wake up at 2 o’clock’ – and 3 are allocated to studying – from 2.00am to 5.00am. Over a week, that added up to 35 hours of sleep, and 21 hours for studying, the latter meeting the suggested minimum for studying two modules concurrently (10 hours per week per module) on the Honours programme. However, if the recommended norm of 8–9 hours of sleep for adults is observed, Michelle was sacrificing approximately 50 per cent of the sleep she actually needed in order to function optimally. How this affected her mood, productivity and capacity to concentrate can only be imagined. What is significant here, however, is the way in which the demands of a new Discourse, perceived and acted upon as infinitely more powerful than her existing ‘ways of being’, forced Michelle into a state of exhaustion and self-deprivation.

Nothembu’s experience of time projected an equally split off picture, leading her to pronounce that ‘we don’t have time to study’. Yet she did study, she did submit assignments, write an examination and pass. So, from her 24 hour clock, where did she fit studying in? Like Michelle, ‘you have to sacrifice for the night, not to sleep or to sleep late’. She would also get up before everyone else and ‘do a bit of reading in the morning before I wash ... and get off’. Given that Nothembu caught her taxi at 5.45 a.m. every morning, we can surmise that she compromised severely on sleep too. Despite being a principal, she would also try ‘to push it ... maybe at school sometimes ... during break’ when she would ‘just stay alone and do my work’. But as a principal, ‘break time’ is not entirely hers to command and so this period was also often interrupted because she would ‘see the parent is waiting for me outside ... the teacher has a complaint’, which made it all very strenuous for her too.

As Dick did not live with his wife and children during the week but with his parents, who are fit and able, the distribution of his time was of necessity different from that of Michelle and Nothembu. He nevertheless described himself as being ‘pressed with time’, with numerous demands made on him. Thus he tried to ‘organise time for myself’, and then time ‘during the course of the week as a person who is teaching daily’. Bearing in mind that he was acting Head of Department for Languages in his school, and the English Language Cluster Co-ordinator for schools in his area, in addition to being a senior phase teacher, ‘teaching daily’ probably under-represented his lived reality in this area of his life. He also felt beholden to ‘organise time’ to see those people who ‘have been very good to me as teachers’, and visit his wife and children in Pietermaritzburg at the weekend. But when he did get home ‘the kids do not understand’ why he has to be so ‘absent’ and said, ‘you are just not coming to us in time’ and that ‘you are not so nice as you usually before’. His father (with whom he lived during the week) accused him of becoming ‘anti social’ and he found himself in a position where he increasingly missed church meetings and, as a result, got information second hand. What Dick came to understand was that studying in the way he was ‘needs a person who is disciplined’, who will ‘make use of your time’. To be self-disciplined in the manner
Dick was describing meant for him that ‘you don’t just do as you please’. And given that ‘we also take alcohol’, ‘you must know when to take that, and you mustn’t consume a lot... You stop you go and sleep in the evening you wake up ...’.

Dick did not give any explicit indication of how much time he allocated to studying his modules per day or per week, or when he did this, that is, whether his hours were routed or haphazard, but it was in there somewhere. What he sacrificed, however, through the forced redistribution of available time, were vital human connections that, prior to his studying, would appear to have played a central role in his life. And this changed him and his relationship to them. Thus, as seen above, his children found him ‘not so nice as you usually before’, his father found him ‘anti social’, he couldn’t answer questions raised at church meetings with any confidence any more because he had to rely on ‘second hand information’ where ‘you don’t get everything’. He had to circumscribe his drinking hours and leave his friends earlier than he had done previously. What emerges out of this is the image of an increasingly self-isolating and lonely man, oversubscribed in the school context and one who struggled with the RWAT module, all against the clock.

When making sense of Zola’s engagement with ‘time’ and ‘time as loss’, a different picture emerges from that of Dick’s. Zola confronted head-on the inevitability, once she began the Honours modules, of the re-organisation of her time and the sacrifices this might entail. She called a halt to the ‘busy person’ she was when she ‘used to make doilies, sew pinafores ... a lot of things ... cut pants for men and sew a lot of things ... even though it used to give me some money’. And the choice she made did not sit uncomfortably with her ‘because it is going to improve my job’. She even saw pragmatic value in being forced to be occupied with something else, saying that ‘if you are not doing anything, you tend to move around ... you go to the shops, you end up spending money’. At one level, therefore, studying was a money-saver.

Despite tackling her studying in a proactive frame of mind, however, Zola was just as vulnerable to the invasive fingers of time as were the other participants. More particularly, and similarly to Dick, changes in the way time had to be distributed for Zola brought changes in existing relationships, changes that appeared to erode rather than bolster them. Thus, Zola’s mother was angry with her, unable to fathom why she would study ‘because you are working’. One of her friends ‘even said I’m boring’, and others she just didn’t see anymore. As soon as school closed, Zola went to the town library to study. This would close at 5.00 p.m., then she would ‘go for the taxi’. So most week days she would arrive home between 6.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m., at which point ‘you find I’m tired’. She would sleep then which meant that she did not see her mother or sister until the next morning. To accommodate Zola’s hectic week and daily late arrival home, her mother and sister would do all the household chores and the cooking from Monday to Friday. On Friday, however, they would say, ‘the weekend is yours’, whereas as Zola pointed out, ‘I have to work very hard in the weekend’. Most Saturdays were taken up with contact sessions at the university, while on Sunday Zola would ‘wake up in the morning, I clean, I
wash, I do the ironing, I prepare the work for ... Monday, I cook ... I used to sleep at 11 on Sunday’, all of which gave Zola ‘a blue Monday’ to kick off each new week.

Vusi said of time to study that it was ‘really really really hard to secure’ which suggests that what Vusi experienced was no different from the four participants above viz. that a multitude of obligations and personally driven needs that had nothing to do with the intellectual endeavour related, in this case, to the RWAT module, appropriated the majority of hours in his 24 hour clock. Thus, being the principal of a school, a church minister and a committed family man with two young children meant that he had to ‘study late ... late at night’ and say to his children who wanted to spend more time with him, ‘just borrow me this time, let me just do this’. It also meant he could not attend all church meetings and had to ‘ask for an apology, please just do whatever and I will be with you next week’.

Folly’s explication of ‘time’ takes us ever more deeply into the lived consequences of studying in the way the participants in this study were obliged to do, and its effects on relationships. Aside from Folly sacrificing time with her daughter which she identified as the primary domestic loss she experienced, so many Saturdays spent at the university deprived her of the opportunity and cultural obligation to attend funerals of members of her community. And because of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic, the increased regularity of Saturday funerals made her non-attendance ever more obvious to her community, the consequences of which penetrated deeper than just a perception of a lack of care. Thus it was that ‘if you don’t attend funerals, they won’t attend to you as well ... if you’ve got a problem’. Built into African cultural practices surrounding funerals is the implicit understanding that one will go to the bereaved family’s home after the burial for a meal. But as Folly said, ‘if you don’t go to their homes after the funerals, they won’t come to your home as well. They go to the church, to the cemetery and they go to their homes. You cook them food and the food will rot in the ovens’. An additional tension is evoked when non-attendance is because someone is studying further. Then some people ‘think you are better now because you are being educated’. So when this is given as a reason for non-attendance, the comment is often ‘Oh, educated people’. It helps, therefore, if ‘you have got other family members who could attend’, and if that person is ‘educated’ so much the better for only then the situation is fully understood.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At the outset, this article indicated an intention to argue three points viz. 1) greater cognizance of the ‘lived’ consequences for students of studying part-time through essentially ‘distanced’ models of delivery; 2) recognition of the impact of student experience on the formal, ‘intended’ curriculum; and 3) by implication, recognition of the concomitant consequences for the wider political project of teacher education through these models, particularly in developing countries such as South Africa.

Through presenting the phenomenological explications of ‘shame’ and ‘sacrifice’ and the application of elements of Gee’s Discourse Theory in this regard, a subtle
and nuanced picture of the lived consequences of studying part-time through what is an essentially ‘distance’ model of delivery has been evoked. The power of Discourses and the impact of Discourse ‘crossing’ and Discourse conflict, on both the individual, and learning processes forcibly has been shown, and underscores the reality that it is not possible to recapture a moment, undo shame, or assume that regret or apology or compensation ‘recovers’ or heals that which was lost through sacrifice. Through ‘living’ Discourses, every individual is simultaneously caught up in the ‘saying (writing)-doing-valuing-believing’ combinations of that Discourse. When stepping into a new Discourse, as the participants in this study were doing, and as this article has illustrated, these combinations undergo an inexorable change process and begin to infiltrate previously established situated practices, activities and meanings. In doing so, they also begin a process whereby new Discourse identities are slowly configured. The data in this article shows, however, that this is never done without a high cost being incurred – again to the individual, but by implication, I argue here, also to the more immediate concerns of curriculum outcomes within programmes and qualifications, and additionally to the broader educational project of social transformation. While it is really very easy to ignore the personal struggles of students in any programme, I contend that to do so in the context of curriculum realisation and teacher education through ‘distanced’ teaching and learning models is especially dangerous and foolish.

Statistics cited by Dhanarajan 5 years ago (in Robinson and Latchem 2003, xv) show that there were approximately 60 million practising teachers worldwide, and that approximately a further 15 million will be needed by the year 2010. Dhanarajan draws attention to the fact that this latter figure does not even take into account the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the natural attrition of the teaching force through retirement and migration into other spheres of employment. Traditional paths to teacher training will, of course, need to be continued, but as Dhanarajan says ‘governments and all other parties interested in the health of global education need to explore other methods of teacher education and training. One option is the application of distance education in order to deliver teacher training much more aggressively’ (ibid).

So, and this is evident already, more and more teachers are going to be trained, and upgraded, and engage in continuing, post-graduate studies, through open and distance learning programmes – here in South Africa and across the globe. If the substance of this article has anything to offer, it is a serious word of caution on two counts. The first relates to the kinds of assumptions that can be made about the nature and quality of learning with which all these students/practising teachers are going to be able to engage simply on account of their lived realities. The second, related to the first, concerns the assumptions that can be made about the efficacy of the curricula that are designed for these students. When the weight of experiences such as those of shame and sacrifice presented here, invade an individual’s life, I believe it is naïve in the extreme, to imagine that a formal curriculum stands inviolate, and inherently transformative, achieving the ‘intended outcomes’ in this regard that it planned would be achieved. More realistically what happens, is that students ‘incarnate’ an existing
‘curriculum’ with the breath of their lives, and since there is such uniqueness in every life, there are potentially as many ‘new’ curricula as there are students. Thus, I would suggest that ‘unexamined’ teacher education programmes being offered through part-time, ‘distanced’ models, have all the potential to undermine transformation processes and reproduce social relations despite their probable commitment and intention to do otherwise.

REFERENCES


