



CHAPTER 12:

Exploring tutor engagement in responding to students' needs through Care-full, Online, Formative Feedback

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Abstract

The COVID-19 disruption in higher education (HE) necessitated a rapid migration to emergency remote teaching. The transition to online learning and its dependence on technological resources and connectivity posed a challenge to equitable opportunities for student access, engagement and support. Blended learning courses, based on sound pedagogical principles were in a stronger position to make this transition to online learning as students were used to the technology and had been inducted into processes of providing online feedback. This chapter is based on research which explores tutors' involvement in providing online formative feedback to enhance student academic literacies and epistemological access within a remote context. The study approaches issues of social justice and equity through a political ethics of care lens. Furthermore, the study highlights the relevance of care-full and attentive formative feedback and pedagogy within an unstable, remote teaching and learning (T&L) context. It draws on research conducted between 2018 and 2019, supplemented by recent collaborative reflections on tutor practices of engaging students in feedback. The chapters explores the following: development of student academic literacies through online tutor feedback on formative

assessment tasks. It focuses on tutor capacity to provide online feedback; the building of tutor and student feedback literacy and developing the social and emotional environment for feedback. It was found that the structured support which was embedded in the course, using a blended learning approach, enabled continuity of support and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Insights from this research can inform policy and practice which enhance social justice through the development of students' academic literacies in an integrated way within remote and blended learning contexts.

Keywords: COVID-19, online feedback, tutors, political ethics of care, writing centres, emergency remote learning

Introduction and background

Within the context of the disruption brought on by COVID-19 and the rapid transition to remote online learning, this chapter explores how the development of student academic literacies were enhanced through supportive online feedback on formative assessment tasks. Drawing on Tronto's (2013) political ethics of care, tutors' involvement in providing online, formative feedback to students in a B.Ed Honours course at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) is explored.

The authors' approach to formative feedback within the context of a carefully designed assessment strategy draws on a tradition which values dialogical feedback and focuses on enhancing students' agency and capacity to take up and apply feedback in subsequent tasks (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Bozalek, Mitchell, Dison & Alperstein, 2016; van Den Berg, Collett, Verster, 2019). The course assessment consisted of a series of nested tasks, on which writing centre tutors provided regular feedback, which built up to a more complex summative task. Providing opportunities for students to respond to feedback enabled a dialogical engagement between students and tutors. This was informed by Tronto's political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013) which has been drawn on as a normative framework for informing dialogical feedback (Bozalek et al., 2016; Dison, 2018).

While much has been written about feedback in the South African writing centre literature (Deyi, 2011), there is limited research on the role that writing centre

tutors can play in providing feedback in disciplinary courses (Collett & Dison, 2019). Furthermore, the role of technology in supporting formative feedback has received limited attention in the South African context (Collett & Dison, 2019; van Den Berg et al., 2018;).

The university lockdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic required that the B.Ed Honours course rapidly migrate to remote online teaching in order to provide a continuity of support and care for teaching and learning. Using Tronto's (1993, 2013) phases of care and corresponding moral elements, this chapter reflects on tutors' engagement with the students within the context of the course curriculum. It is argued that tutors can play a valuable role in providing care for students and facilitating their development of academic literacies. Furthermore, Tronto's political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013) is drawn on to conceptualise the moral and pedagogical practices which can support the social, emotional and cognitive dimensions that enable giving and receiving of feedback.

This chapter contributes to higher education (HE) and teacher education research through its exploration of care-full and attentive (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) online formative feedback by tutors. Care-full and attentive feedback embraces the principles of an ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013). Insights from this research can inform policy and practice which enhances social justice pedagogy within remote and blended learning contexts.

The study arises from an ongoing collaborative process initiated by an Education lecturer, and staff from the Writing Centre, in relation to Honours courses in Leadership and Management in Education. This started in the pre-COVID era in 2017 and was sustained during the COVID lockdown through the use of technology.

Problem Statement

There is consensus in the literature (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless and Boud, 2017; Clarence, Quinn and Vorster, 2015;) that systems of student feedback and

assessment in Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) are inadequate and require improvement.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown the lecturer noted that there was a gap in academic literacy support to honours level part-time students. This gap in support was related to inadequate curriculum strategies focusing on embedding the development of the academic literacies in the course design (Clarence, 2010; Dison & Moore, 2019). In addition, the students were unable to gain physical access to tutors at the Writing Centre during working hours. In order to address this, a collaborative strategy was developed for the provision of support to the lecturer to embed the development of academic literacies in her course design and assessment strategies (Carless & Boud, 2017; Dison & Moore, 2019). Furthermore, a focus was placed on the provision of online feedback by Writing Centre tutors. There was a need for a process of ongoing collaborative reflection and research in order to learn from the design and implementation of the intervention.

Research aims and objectives

The research aimed to explore a collaborative intervention between an Education Faculty lecturer and Writing Centre staff to embed the development of academic literacies including formative online feedback into a course curriculum.

The objectives were to:

- Explore practices and processes of embedding the development of students' academic literacies in a course curriculum;
- Investigate the role of Writing Centre tutors in providing formative feedback to students through online platforms;
- Track the development of tutor capacity to provide online formative feedback;
- Research the building of tutor and student feedback literacy
- Strengthen the development of a social and affective environment for supporting students during the COVID lockdown.

Key research question:

In what ways can collaborative intervention between an Education Faculty lecturer and Writing Centre staff support embedding of the development of academic literacies into a course curriculum?

Sub-questions:

- How can processes to enhance the development of feedback and feedback literacy be enhanced through the curriculum and assessment design?
- What is the role of the Writing Centre and tutors in supporting feedback and feedback literacy development?

Background to the intervention

The collaborative intervention involved the explicit integration of academic literacies development within the course curriculum content. Students were required to do in-depth reading and writing as part of an integrated strategy in order to engage with the disciplinary knowledge. The course curriculum content included explicit teaching about aspects of writing through ongoing opportunities for online feedback by peers and tutors on four nested tasks which built towards a final online summative assessment task. A nested task is a task that is built up from a number of related submissions. This gave students the opportunity to improve on feedback in an ongoing way. As Rasheeqa, one of the tutors, wrote “with each task students were required to draw from their knowledge and engage more deeply with the content. With each subsequent essay, the lecturer added more layers to the assignment question”.

The Writing Centre tutors were carefully selected and their capacity was developed in order to ensure they could provide appropriate support to students in the face-to-face and online environments. Training of tutors included orientation to the aims and objectives of the course, pedagogical dimensions of providing written and online feedback, and ICT skills training in Turnitin and Google Drive. The training

and orientation sessions between students and tutors focused on clarifying support and feedback expectations, allocating students to tutors, and building the relationship prior to online engagement. Students were asked to identify the type of feedback that they needed, which is valued by Boud and Molloy (2013) as a way of facilitating students' agency and improving the uptake of feedback.

Students were provided with multiple levels of feedback from tutors, the lecturer and from peers. This feedback included identifying strengths in current writing and thinking as well as suggestions for improvement. As well as promoting an agentic role on the part of the students (Boud & Molloy, 2013), the way in which feedback was given encouraged solidarity and reciprocity in the learning process. Furthermore, the psycho-social support identified as an important but often overlooked aspect of the feedback context by Carless (2013) was provided through the ongoing relational engagement which helped to ensure that students remained in the course despite the isolation and technological challenges of the lockdown context.

This intervention helped to create a web of support and engagement between the students, Writing Centre tutors and the lecturer within the context of the module and the instability of the COVID-19 context. In this way it enabled more equitable access to and continuity of academic literacy support which facilitated sustained engagement with knowledge in the module.

Literature review and conceptual framework

This section reviews literature pertaining to the most salient concepts in the research and then goes on to discuss the conceptual framework informing the study.

Academic literacies and epistemological access

An academic literacies approach views literacies as social practices embedded in socially- and culturally- situated contexts (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1984, as cited

in Collett & Dison, 2019). Within a higher education setting, theorists argue for a consideration of the complexity of writing practices required at university and a shift away from de-contextualised approaches to developing students' academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea, 2016). Learning in higher education is deeply embedded within disciplinary traditions and literacies (Jacobs, 2005). This means that instead of one generic form of academic literacy, multiple literacies exist in different social or disciplinary contexts (Lea & Street, 1998, cited in Collett & Dison, 2019). Furthermore, there are implicit disciplinary writing conventions which students need to learn. The term "academic conventions" refers to "generally accepted discipline-specific rules of writing, such as use of first person, structure, validity and use of evidence and rules of referencing" (Rai, 2004, p. 151, as cited in Collett & Dison, 2019). Students are required to "switch practices between one setting and another" and "to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159).

Academic literacies development is closely linked to attaining epistemological access within the university (Morrow, 1994, 2007). Morrow distinguished between students gaining formal access to an institution, on the one hand, and epistemological access to academic knowledge and practice, which is facilitated by systematic teaching and curriculum design (Morrow, 1994, 2007). Attaining epistemological access involves learning how to become a participant in academic practices and gaining membership of an academic community. It requires epistemological labour from the student and takes place over time (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020; Morrow, 2007).

The dominant model that informs the work of Writing Centres in South Africa is that of a de-contextualised writing support service where students come for assistance outside of their disciplinary Teaching and Learning (T&L) context (Dison, 2018). In contrast to this, an academic literacies approach implies that literacies are "best taught by 'insiders' who have 'mastered the discourse' of that particular academic community" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 477). Jacobs (2005) recommends a collaborative approach in which the academic literacy specialist plays the role of an "outsider"

who collaborates with the lecturer (the disciplinary specialist) to provide scaffolding for the students' acquisition of literacies within the disciplinary site of learning. Collett and Dison (2019) argue that one of the most powerful ways of providing scaffolding for students' learning is through formative feedback on writing. According to Jacobs (2005), it is critical that tacit knowledge of academic and disciplinary literacies are made explicit to students. Students learn through opportunities to practise these literacies and engage with formative feedback, which guides them towards mastering the literacies.

Feedback and feedback literacy

There is consensus in the literature about a need for improved systems of student feedback and assessment in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Deyi, 2011). David Boud and Elizabeth Molloy define feedback as “a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for a given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work” (2013, p. 205). They contend that the giving of feedback is only justified if it has a positive impact on what learners can do. Furthermore, feedback needs to be conceptualised within the overall design of a course, assessment tasks and learning outcomes. Boud and Molloy (2013) argue that feedback on assessment activities is the key “mechanism through which students discover whether they are successful in their work and if they are on track to meet expectations” (p. 206).

Research on assessment in HEIs highlights an excessive focus on summative assessment activities while there should be a greater balance between formative and summative assessment practices (Carless & Boud, 2018; Collett & Dison, 2019; David, Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Gibbs, 1990). In addition, it has been found that poor feedback processes increase levels of student dissatisfaction and poor uptake of feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018).

To enhance student learning in assessment activities, Boud and Molloy (2013, p. 20) propose the “nesting of tasks” so that students have the opportunity to apply feedback in subsequent tasks. They recommend that this can assist students to engage with the material at higher levels of complexity, with the support of the scaffolding provided by formative feedback. This requires careful consideration in the design of course curricula assessment activities to develop student academic literacies and competencies in an integrated way.

Boud and Molloy (2013) assert that feedback and the effort put into feedback processes can only be justified if students engage in the uptake of feedback and the responsibility of feedback is shifted from the teacher to the student. However, the development of student capacity to engage with feedback in an agentic or proactive way requires a range of levels of scaffolding and support to enhance the uptake of feedback. Building this capacity for feedback and engagement with feedback should take place throughout the various stages of the assessment process (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Furthermore, feedback needs to inform students’ ability in later life to “trust their self-evaluative capacity” (Boud & Molloy 2013, p. 3).

Engagement with feedback requires the development of feedback literacy. This includes developing self-reflective and judgmental competencies to increase students’ receptivity to feedback, and their ability to respond to it (Sutton, 2012). Feedback literacy is defined by Sutton (2012) as the ability to read, interpret, and use written feedback. Carless and Boud (2018) extend this definition of “student feedback literacy” to include an “understanding of what feedback is and how it can be managed effectively; capacities and dispositions to make productive use of feedback; and appreciation of the roles of teachers and themselves in these processes” (p. 2).

Current research by Carless and Boud (2018), Xu and Carless (2017) and Yang and Carless (2013) have shed light on the importance of addressing the social and affective dimensions of feedback in order to enhance student engagement and uptake of feedback. Formative feedback should build the self-esteem and agency

of students to engage with feedback. It should not be judgmental and needs to encourage interaction (Clarence, 2011).

The use of technology in online feedback

Online learning refers to the use of educational technologies to enable access to learning and teaching online (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). It is capable of making course content available online, due to the widespread use of modern technologies both hardware resources, such as laptops and mobile phones, and software resources, such as learning management systems (Amory, 2010, Khoza, 2015; 2019, Mpungose, 2020). Thus, students can access course material through synchronous and asynchronous means from anywhere, provided that they have access to hardware, software, internet connectivity and data (Mpungose, 2020).

Advancement of educational technology and the availability and capacity of online connectivity have enabled a wide range of learning activities to take place. However, the COVID-19 context has exacerbated the pre-existing digital inequalities in T&L (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020; Zheng & Walsham, 2021). There is unequal access and use of ICTs among students from different social groups (Hamburg & Lütgen, 2019). Zheng and Walsham, (2021, p. 3) argue that “digital inequality intersects and exacerbates existing structural inequalities”. Many students from poor socio-economic backgrounds with limited internet connectivity who traditionally accessed technology from campus have struggled to connect to online teaching programmes from their homes. In response, some universities have tried to solve this problem by providing devices and data to students. However, the success of such programmes has depended on the level of resources commanded by individual institutions. Zheng and Walsham (2021, p. 5) assert that bridging digital inequality requires not only technologies and skills training. Equally important are “associative interventions and supportive networks” which could address some of the underlying vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups”.

Du Preez and Le Grange (2020, p. 90) argue that “having access to technology does not guarantee that one gains epistemological access. The latter depends on pedagogical/epistemological labour being performed by both lecturer and student.” The lecturer needs to design the curriculum in such a way that ensures continuity and progression in learning, which gives rise to knowledge acquisition (Morrow, 1994, 2007). There is a need for curriculum responsiveness which “entails accommodating diversity of socio-cultural realities of students, by developing a wider variety of instructional strategies and learning pathways” (Moll, 2004, p. 4, cited in du Preez and Le Grange, p. 99).

The use of technology has the potential to enhance the provision of feedback and support to students. Computer-assisted feedback in higher education has been shown to support learner achievement and reduce workload in large classes (Hattie & Timperley 2007; Du Preez & Le Grange 2020). The use of technology in an online environment can provide students with increased levels of feedback from peers and facilitators (Khoza, 2015; Ryan, Henderson, & Phillips, 2019; van Den Berg, Collett, & Verster, 2018). In addition, ICTs maintain a record of student engagement (van Den Berg et al., 2018) which can support further reflections and learning among students. However, it is essential that online feedback is conceptualised within the broader aims of the assessment task and the overall design of the course (Boud & Molloy 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018; Ryan, Henderson, & Phillips, 2019).

Turnitin, a similarity detection software platform is commonly used for detecting plagiarism. However, Turnitin’s affordances for peer review and lecturer feedback are less commonly known about and used (Khoza, 2015, Collett & Dison, 2019). Platforms such as Google Drive and Turnitin have powerful affordances for providing online, formative feedback on students’ writing, which are increasingly being explored. During the COVID-19 pandemic these online platforms were increasingly used to facilitate feedback and online learning (Turnbull, Chugh & Luck, 2021).

Political ethics of care

Tronto's (1993, 2013) political ethics of care is used as a normative framework to interpret tutors' engagement in providing formative feedback to students in a blended learning environment. The conscious use of the political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013) was used to frame the giving and receiving of feedback on this course and in the assessment practices. The ethics of care refers to the compelling moral obligation to attend to and meet the "needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held, 2006, p. 10, cited in Tronto, 2013, p. 20). Ethics of care is based on a relational ontology and is premised on both the moral and practical dimensions of care of others (Tronto, 2013). The inclusion of the societal and political contexts of care is what shifts the conceptual frame to a political ethics of care (Tronto 1993, 2013). Engagement with the dimensions and moral elements of this framework highlighted issues of social justice and equity in relation both to the outcomes and processes of engagement toward strengthened processes of student support and academic achievement. Fisher and Tronto (1990, cited in Dison 2018) identified four interconnected dimensions of care. These dimensions include *caring about*, which is related to the recognition of caring needs, *caring for* associated with taking responsibility to provide care; *care-giving* which is the act of providing care, and *care receiving* which is linked to the care receiver responding to the care given. In 2013 Tronto (2013) included a fifth dimension of care, namely *caring with* that is associated with trust and solidarity. The table below illustrates these dimensions and their related moral elements.

Table 1: Dimensions of care and their associated moral elements

Dimension of care	Explanation of Dimension	Moral element associated with dimension
Caring about	Recognising people's needs for care	Attentiveness
Caring for	Once the need is recognised, taking responsibility to see that the need is met	Responsibility
Care-giving	The actual hands-on work of caring for people	Competence

Care-receiving	Responding to the care that is given by the care-giver	Responsiveness
Caring with	Reiteration of the process of care, where habits and patterns of care emerge over time	Trust and solidarity

Adapted from Bozalek, Mitchell, Dison and Alperstein (2016, p.829, cited in Dison 2018, p.68))

Tronto (1993) asserts that *caring about* involves the caregiver in noticing and recognising that care is necessary. This type of caring requires the moral element of attentiveness.

In context of the study, it involves the lecturer recognising the differentiated needs of students to develop the required academic literacies as an integral part of the process of learning within the university and disciplinary context. Furthermore, they need sustained scaffolding for this. In the emergency remote T&L context it requires an additional attentiveness to the challenges that students may experience in connecting and adjusting to online learning and support platforms. There was a need for attentiveness to the experiences of isolation and anxieties of students, who feared being left behind. Caring about required a heightened attentiveness to the need to establish social and emotional bonds and foster a supportive climate for learning.

Caring for requires the caregiver to take responsibility for formulating a response. This corresponds to the moral element of responsibility. Tronto (1993) asserts that responsibility is informed by cultural norms and practices rather than rules or obligations. This phase requires the caregiver to recognise that they have the agency to act and meet the need, and that the need can be met.

In the context of the study, *caring for* related to the responsibility for developing and implementing a curriculum and assessment design which involved the provision of sustained formative feedback. This included taking responsibility for setting up systems of online tutor, peer and lecturer feedback in an ongoing and integrated way. *Caring for* included planning for processes to build social and

emotional webs of care between Writing Centre tutors, students and the lecturer. It involved monitoring student access and online engagement to ensure support could be provided or improved.

Care-giving is the act of giving care. Tronto (1993) describes this as the act of contact between the care-giver and the care-receiver. The moral element of competence informs this engagement.

In order to meet the needs of students to develop their academic literacies, the care-giving capacity of tutors and the lecturer needed to be built developed. This included both building developing their technical ability to use the affordances of various technologies and developing their competence in giving written feedback in blended learning environments. The lockdown context demanded that lecturer and tutors extend their competence in engaging in learning-centred teaching in an emergency remote T&L context.

Care-receiving refers to the way in which receivers of care respond to care given by care-giver/s. This phase corresponds to the moral element of responsiveness.

Responsiveness in the context of the study is related to the capacity of students to engage with feedback and also to elicit feedback. The eliciting of feedback and the uptake of feedback are regarded by Boud and Molloy (2013) as critical to student learning. Carless and Boud (2018) stress the importance of facilitating the social and emotional context within which this reciprocal relationship can occur.

The fifth phase of care - *caring with* corresponds to the moral elements of trust and solidarity. This refers to a collective approach to care (circles of care where “solidarity as a social value, creates the conditions for caring” (Tronto, 2013, p. 156). According to Tronto (2013) solidarity creates a “virtuous circle”, where people are more attuned to others’ needs, and are therefore likely to be better at caring for them (pp. 156 to 157). The moral qualities of trust and solidarity are developed through “reiteration of the process of care, where habits and patterns of care emerge” over time (Bozalek, 2016). In the intervention, *caring with* was

demonstrated through empathising and engaging with students in an ongoing way, while assisting them to build their academic literacies. Building and sustaining the relationships between students and tutors in a blended learning context provided continuity in support in a programme and during the COVID-19 context.

Tronto (2010) argues that good care only takes place when all phases of care are engaged within a holistic and integrated way. A holistic and integrated conception of care is needed to enact socially just higher education (HE) pedagogical practices (Zembylas, Bozalek & Schafer, 2017). The COVID-19 related lockdown foregrounded inequalities in access to connectivity and devices and the need for social responsibility in relation to enhanced access and support to students. The move to remote online learning exposed systemic and multi-layered inequalities which are not possible for individual lecturers to address.

If universities view online learning as the answer to dealing with remote learning under COVID-19 and only address inequalities through providing more access to technology, they would be taking an instrumentalist approach. This, according to du Toit and Verhoef (2018, cited in Du Preez & Le Grange, 2021, p. 94) “denies the embodied and socially embedded nature of the individual”. Instrumentalist approaches neglect the complexity and inter-relatedness of the embodied person. In the B.Ed Honours course, digital technology was used as a means of facilitating a supportive network between lecturer, students and tutors. The pedagogical design, which embraced both the moral elements and practices of an ethic of care enabled a care-full consideration towards a more embodied, and responsive intra-personal approach. Integrated, care-full tutor feedback, follow-up of individual students and a relational approach to students’ learning in the course all contributed to a more just pedagogical process, particularly within the isolating and challenging COVID-19 context.

Methodology

The initial study between 2016 and 2018 was informed by a qualitative approach and Design Based Research (DBR) approach. Between 2019 and 2020 the inquiry continued using a participatory action research design (Chambers, 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) where monthly critical collaborative reflections (Fook, 2011) would be engaged in between the tutors, lecturer and the Writing Centre Coordinator. This approach builds upon the collaborative ownership and understanding for change and improved action by participants (Whitehead, 2012). This chapter draws mainly on the data generated by reflections by the participants on the role of tutors and the development of students' academic literacies within the COVID-19 context.

Research Ethics approval was obtained through University of Western Cape's (UWC) Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (No. HS/16/6/26). During 2018 data was collected using anonymous online pre- and post-course student surveys to two B.Ed honours classes. In addition, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with five students in the first iteration, and a focus-group interview of three students took place in the second iteration. Two groups of tutors and the Writing Centre Coordinator participated in monthly collaborative reflection sessions through a community of practice in 2018 and 2019. All the above were supplemented with the lecturer's field notes especially since the migration to online teaching during lockdown.

Data collection and analysis took place iteratively throughout the study in accordance with the processes and procedures of participatory action research. Data was collected from reflective meetings with tutors during the implementation process and subsequent reflective meetings of the researchers. This data was sorted, cleaned and analysed using the steps of thematic analysis identified by (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The analysis of data included identifying themes or patterned responses of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes that were identified were then related to Tronto's (2013)

dimensions and corresponding moral element of a political ethics of care. Engagement with the initial analysis of the themes took place jointly among the researchers in order to triangulate the analysis of these findings and to establish a level of internal validity.

Discussion of findings

A political ethics of care lens (Tronto, 2013) was used as a normative framework to illuminate the role of tutors in supporting the development of student academic literacies within a blended learning environment. In the analysis, under each of the phases of care identified by Tronto (2013) a short definition of the phase and related moral dimension are provided. This is followed by reflection on how care was enacted by tutors and the lecturer to address issues of equity and social justice in HE assessment and academic literacy practices. Both the strengths and shortcomings of the care provided are identified. Each phase presents a discussion of key findings in relation to the literature and challenges within the COVID-19 context.

Caring about - attentiveness

Caring about involves recognising that care is necessary (Tronto 1993). This phase relates to the moral element of attentiveness.

Initially the process began with the lecturer recognising the differentiated needs of postgraduate students to develop academic literacies as an integral part of their learning process. This led her to build in online tutor support within the curriculum design to attend to student needs, and their equitable access to learning and support.

Caring about acknowledged the complexity and developmental nature of support which needed to be considered in the curriculum planning process. This required attentiveness to increasing the academic literacy support students received from tutors as a strategy for sustained scaffolding to develop a range of academic

literacies. The tutors' core function was to provide written online formative feedback to students. The practical task of giving feedback required the building of a relational environment for learning, which was achieved through a substantial orientation. The lecturer also ensured that tutors and students interfaced in a physical space at the start of the course where students articulated their support needs. During the lockdown period this engagement continued on an online meeting platform which emulated a face-to-face environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic required a care-full attentiveness to the challenges that students experienced in connecting to learning and support platforms. In one of the processes of collaborative reflection it was noted that "students have a need for the content to be conveyed to them. However, there is also a need to support their development of academic literacies and students need this level of attentive support as well." There was a requirement for attentiveness to students' experiences of isolation and feelings of anxiety about being "left behind" due to either lack of access or connectivity to online learning platforms. Caring about required a heightened attentiveness to the need for social and emotional bonds of support in order to foster a climate for learning and trust between tutors and students. It also required attention to the need for data and devices for tutors as well as students to enable learning under lockdown conditions.

Caring about required careful consideration of the relationship between the affordances of different e-tools to support the development of academic literacies and their ability to support the development of these literacies. Timalizge, a tutor, commented that Turnitin helped to ensure a record of the attentive engagement between tutors and students. Turnitin and Google drive afforded tutors and students the opportunity to highlight support needs and keep an attentive memory of the engagement between parties.

For the tutors, the act of giving written online feedback required a high level of attentiveness. Tutors needed to pay attention to what the students were trying to communicate in their writing. Irene, a tutor, commented "It's about seeing it from

the student's point of view, rather than coming from a position of knowing how it should be and imposing it on the students". This emphasises the need to facilitate students' agency both in the writing process and in their engagement with feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013, Carless & Boud, 2018).

Creating opportunities to encourage open communication between students and tutors enabled attentiveness to students' needs. Irene noted that "two students were often late in submitting their work online". She said, "it was only after reaching out to them that we realised one of them had serious connectivity challenges. I was able to discuss with [one of them] possible ways to overcome the problem so that he could stay on the course". Tutors felt that it was reassuring when students knew that somebody understood their personal support needs especially with the added isolation caused by lockdown, even though ultimately, they have to take full responsibility for their learning.

Caring for - responsibility

Caring for involves taking responsibility for the identified need and formulating a response. It corresponds to the moral element of responsibility (Tronto, 1993). Tronto (1993) argues that responsibility is embedded in a set of implicit, cultural practices rather than in a set of formal rules or obligations.

Caring for in the context of the study involved developing and implementing a curriculum and assessment design that integrated sustained formative feedback from tutors and the lecturer. Incorporating nested formative assessment tasks which fed into each other and the final paper provided multiple opportunities to identify and address support students' needs. Feedback took a dialogical form as tutors and students responded to each other through multiple iterations of connected tasks (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Bozalek, et al., 2016).

This phase of caring involves recognition that one can act to address the need, agency to do so and a belief that the need can be met (Tronto, 1993). Tutors took on responsibility for the giving of feedback and facilitating students' development

of academic literacies. A recurring theme in discussions with tutors was a deeply felt concern about how the students received the feedback that they (tutors) were providing. During debriefing sessions with the lecturer, tutors expressed their questions and anxieties about how their feedback came across. They were concerned that written feedback in an online environment did not elicit an immediate response from students, for example, questions and body language which would indicate how students were receiving the feedback. As Timalizge pointed out, “You can’t really follow up on nonverbal cues from a student. You don’t know whether they are getting what you are saying”. She wanted to find out whether students were “able to interpret the suggestions and the comments”. In an online environment tutors needed to be “hyper aware” of how the student may be receiving their feedback. Timalizge worried about how students felt in terms of her language. “Was it soft, was it harsh, was it something they felt like... they were being commanded to do?” Thus, tutors needed to be mindful of their language and use of tone in written language. (Debriefing meeting, 2018).

In order for students to engage with feedback effectively, tutors needed to be attuned to students’ needs. This required tutors to be reflexive about the way in which they were giving and receiving feedback. Giving online, written feedback was more time consuming in that it involved more detailed attention to a range of students’ needs. Kenny, a tutor, described himself as “spending a lot of time typing and re-typing sentences to be clearer, not offensive and to give as much positive feedback as possible” (Debriefing meeting, 2018). Although Kenny speaks from a tutor perspective, the point about time investment is true for all those involved in the T&L process. Carless and Winstone (2020) agree that the deliberate process of embedding feedback literacy learning for students is demanding on teachers’ time and requires collaboration from colleagues. Decisions about how time is spent are shaped by underlying values (Daly, 1996, cited in Tronto, 2013, p. 166). In taking responsibility for building formative feedback into the course, the lecturer and Writing Centre Coordinator recognised the value of students receiving formative feedback from tutors, thus providing resources to allow for the time taken.

Both Turnitin and Google Drive provided the affordance of a retentive record of feedback and uptake of feedback. With the use of Turnitin, students' progress can easily be monitored as there is consistent feedback on assignments. As Timalizge stated "it is easy to monitor the progress of the student's writing in that you are able to compare the current draft with the previous submission. In this way you can tell if the student is making improvements". Since previous assignments are automatically saved, tutors can also compare the students' previous and current work to gain insight into how students utilise feedback. Having immediate access to past work of students allowed tutors to act responsively to meet student needs.

In the context of COVID-19, tutors became more aware of the even greater responsibility they now carried towards caring for students. Irene said "I found that it required sensitivity on my part and more care in how I communicated back to the students about their work". Tutors found that students showed a higher level of anxiety and a need to be affirmed once they interacted with the tutor's feedback especially in a technical area. Irene made a comment, that "in a sense there is a different approach in terms of time demands, the tutor's effort and also the intensity with which the students make use of the feedback". Care is only sustainable if the carers attend to their own self-care (Tronto, 2013). Faced with heightened demands from students in a challenging context, tutors needed to establish boundaries as part of self-care as they worked in the online space.

Care-giving - competence

Care-giving refers to the act of giving of care. This is the point where care-givers come into contact with the receivers of care (Tronto 1993). It corresponds to the moral element of competence.

The online environment enabled a deepening of care-full feedback and engagement. Irene commented on this interaction, "Since the feedback is written down and is detailed, students have more time to engage with the feedback and also to reflect on what they are doing. They feel that because it's online, they can

always contact you for more details, or further checks on the feedback they received". Carless and Winstone (2020) argue that acquisition of feedback literacy can be greatly bolstered by technology due to the convenience it affords students in terms of timeliness and access to retrievable feedback. This can encourage students to make good use of the feedback they receive. Providing multiple and sustained opportunities for feedback and also feedback in asynchronistic mode, enabled tutors and students to provide more considered responses in their own time. Tutors felt that the 24/7 nature of access made it possible for them to give more detailed attention to students when they felt "fresh" and were able to concentrate. This observation is consistent with arguments made by Carless and Winstone (2020) that technology can bolster acquisition of feedback literacy due to the convenience it affords students in terms of timeliness and access to retrievable feedback. Referring back can encourage students to make better use of feedback.

In order to meet the needs of students to develop their academic literacies, the care-giving capacity of tutors and the lecturer needed to be built. For example, tutors' needed to develop a dialogical rather than didactic mode of engaging with students.

Although Writing Centre tutors have varied disciplinary backgrounds, they are trained to work with students from different disciplines. It is crucial that they understand that different disciplines have their own associated literacy practices. These practices include disciplinary conventions of writing but go deeper than this as they arise from particular types of engaging with knowledge and meaning-making in the field (Lea & Street 1998). In discussions, the lecturer, tutors and Writing Centre Coordinator unpacked what literacy practices were required in the complex long paper which the students were writing. These included reading and understanding theory and policy texts. In addition, they were required to conduct their own small-scale inquiries in their workplace, apply different types of knowledge and reflect on their own and institutional practices.

Tutors needed to understand and utilise the affordances of both Turnitin and Google Drive. Turnitin was particularly useful both as a plagiarism detector and a tool for giving feedback and this combination made it a powerful teaching tool. Lovemore, one of the tutors made the comment:

I interchanged between the Turnitin reports and where I need to give feedback to try and see where there were high levels of plagiarism for students, because for some you would see that this is good writing, but when you turn over to the Turnitin you see that it's all in red.

This can be taken further where the tutor uses identified similarities to assist the students to improve their ability to use sources appropriately in their own writing.

For the tutors, becoming competent as care-givers and providers of online formative feedback, went hand-in-hand with developing a high level of feedback literacy. The feedback literacy which they developed as students was intensified as they became more conscious and knowledgeable about uptake of feedback through their experience of giving feedback as a tutor. Tutors' questions and reflection on how students received their feedback was a central part of developing tutor feedback literacy. Explicit discussions about the concept of feedback literacy enhanced this capability.

Arona, the Writing Centre Coordinator, and Irene reflected on care-giving and how to show care that emphasises a common humanity, despite social distancing, which can reshape the human experience of needing others. They wrote:

We need to find alternative ways of showing care and empathy without using the body language that is no longer appropriate or safe, such as coming close, patting on the shoulder etc (affirming actions which are important in human interactions but also in the T&L processes). In a remote T&L context, the challenge is to find ways to still demonstrate mindfulness and care-full consideration of the needs of others, to still communicate friendliness and warmth toward others in writing despite the lack of face-to-face interactions.

Care-receiving - responsiveness

Care-receiving refers to the way in which receivers of care respond to care provided. This phase corresponds to the moral element of responsiveness. In the study, the concept is used to reflect on how students receive feedback as a care-giving process. Boud and Molloy (2013) identify the eliciting and uptake of feedback as central to student learning. In order to engage with feedback, students need to develop the attribute of feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2017). Boud and Molloy (2013) also emphasise the importance of students reflecting on what types of feedback they need and communicating this to the givers of feedback, which affirms students' agency.

When they were explicitly asked about what type of feedback they found most useful, one student requested that tutors be more specific when they suggested rephrasing or making changes to the student's work. Another said that he did not receive sufficient "in-depth feedback". A third student requested that examples be given, saying, "I understand it better if an example is made to show what has been done incorrectly and where I need to improve" (Students' feedback session April 2018).

Students had multiple opportunities for tutor, peer and lecturer feedback on their assessment tasks throughout the course. On a weekly basis, students were asked how they felt about giving and receiving feedback. This process helped to sensitise students and tutors to the social and affective dimensions of giving feedback and the need to create an environment of care and trust, which has been identified by Carless and Boud (2017) as necessary in supporting the uptake of feedback.

Building in processes where students were invited to reflect on their writing and take responsibility to elicit focused support from tutors in formative assessment encouraged students' responsiveness to care. This also helped tutors maintain a clear focus area for providing guidance when giving online feedback. One of the tutors, Kenny, noted that students were able to reflect and identify the areas they

needed help with. “What worked was when students reflected and they... gave me a cue where they needed feedback.” (Debriefing session, 2018).

Students' uptake of feedback needed to be predicated on a clear understanding of the role of the tutors, which was to give feedback on students' writing while the lecturer gave feedback on content. However, tutors commented that some students expected the tutors to, on the one hand, give feedback on content, or on the other hand, edit their work. It was communicated to them that the tutors' role was to give them guidance about how to improve the work within the context of the particular writing task, as well as help them to develop their academic literacies beyond the task, thereby facilitating epistemological access.

Introducing the tutors to the class was an important attempt to create a non-threatening environment within which students could freely elicit feedback and comment on the care given. Caring by its nature is a challenge to the notion that “individuals are entirely autonomous and self-supporting” (Tronto 1993, p. 134) and being in need of care means that one is in a position of vulnerability. Post-graduate, part-time students are likely to have established professional identities in their work environment. However, as students returning to university, many felt both dependent and vulnerable at having to engage with a range of academic literacies, as well as remote learning. From a perspective of care ethics, one needs to recognise the vulnerability of students and adopt a relational approach rather than treating them as autonomous agents working on their individual studies. The emergency online learning caused by the COVID-19 epidemic deepened some of these anxieties. The adverse connectivity challenges as well as the lack of access to ongoing support heightened anxiety levels. Student's ability to be responsive to care and for tutors to provide care were strained. During lockdown the online platforms and ongoing support provided a level of cognitive and well as psycho-social and emotional support for students.

The tutors found that as students felt more vulnerable during the lockdown period they tended to make additional contact online. Irene, took particular care to

ascertain how her students were receiving the feedback. Concerned that “the feedback might overwhelm or not be well understood, [she] wrote an email or sent the student a WhatsApp text to reassure them”. She said that “another way to ascertain if feedback was helpful was to look at how the student applied the advice in subsequent assignments”.

Even though there was no face-to-face engagement between tutors and students during the lockdown period, prior face-to-face contact at the introductory session helped to progressively forge a stronger sense of trust and rapport between tutors and students in lock-down. The researchers observed that online feedback can work more effectively over a period of time, related to the curriculum and assessment processes in the module. The verbal, interactive feedback sessions, in combination with the written feedback, supported the relational nature of the interactions and strengthened the dialogical dimension of the feedback process (Collett & Dison, 2018).

Online meeting platforms were used during the lockdown to emulate face-to-face sessions. Early observations support the findings of recent research that video feedback contributes to creating a social presence in online environments, can reduce students’ feelings of isolation, and promote interaction and closeness (Espasa, Mayordomo, Guasch & Martinez-Melo, 2019, cited in Carless & Winstone, 2020). Furthermore Mahoney, Macfarlane and Ajjawiet (2019) found that video feedback conveys a “richness of ... relational cues, imbuing it with a conversational feel” (Carless & Winstone, 2020, p. 8).

Caring with - trust and solidarity

Caring with refers to a collective approach to care (circles of care where “solidarity as a social value, creates the conditions for caring” (Tronto, 2013, pp. 156). *Caring with* corresponds to the moral elements of trust and solidarity. These elements were built incrementally in multiple ways between the tutors and students and between the tutors and the lecturer.

The strengthening of students' academic literacies and epistemological access was observed when they started a subsequent Honours module in the second semester. Trust and solidarity were built between tutors, students and the lecturer. The structured support which was embedded in the course, using a blended learning approach, enabled continuity of support and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Through providing students with scaffolded formative assessment tasks and then challenging them to work independently on authentic summative tasks, students' agency was strengthened. These activities which included both the giving and receiving of feedback provided students with opportunities to build their confidence and trust in themselves and in others. Students' experiences of peer feedback, the modelling of blended learning and online learning practices of formative assessment had potential to inform their practices as teachers.

The researchers' collaborative processes of reflection and writing about practice in enhancing students' academic literacies has deepened their understanding and built trust and solidarity during the COVID-19 period of social distancing and isolation. These processes were conducted through an online meeting platform. Thus, online technology enabled the researchers to connect and provide each other with psycho-social and cognitive nourishment and care.

Key findings

This study has shown that tutors can play an important mediating role in the development of students' academic literacies by providing students with formative feedback through online platforms. During disruptions such as the COVID lockdown, this can contribute to enabling a continuity of learning and support in the learning process.

The development of student academic literacies and specifically feedback literacy were promoted through using technology and the specific affordances of Turnitin and Google Drive. Tutors found that both Turnitin and Google Drive offered unique

and complementary features to enhance formative feedback. Google Drive enabled students and tutors to provide feedback synchronously with multiple participants being able to engage in providing and eliciting feedback.

In order to provide good care, it is essential that tutors' capacity to provide online feedback is developed. This includes the capacity to provide appropriate feedback that students can understand and act on, as well as skills in using the technological tools.

The giving and receiving of feedback facilitates learning only if students develop feedback literacy in order to take up and apply feedback. Feedback literacy of students needs to be explicitly developed and tutors in turn need to heighten their own feedback literacy to facilitate students' learning.

Tutors can also play a much-needed role in providing psycho-social and emotional support to students. This too can be facilitated through technology, as part of a process informed by a political ethics of care.

Limitations of the study

The practice of embedding academic literacies development of students in curricula and the role of tutors in giving online formative feedback has much potential for enhancing student learning and success. There were limitations to this study as it was small-scale and involved relatively small numbers of students.

Recommendations for further research

It would be valuable to do research on these practices in a wider range of settings, for example in classes of undergraduates, a larger number of students and different disciplinary areas. These factors would influence how practices of this type would need to be adapted for different contexts.

The potential role of tutors in providing psycho-social and emotional support in the giving and receiving of feedback under blended learning conditions needs to be researched.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how Tronto's political ethics of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013) can inform practices which enhance equity and social justice through the development of students' academic literacies in an integrated way within remote and blended learning contexts. It has explored how the moral and pedagogical practices of giving and receiving of feedback, informed by an ethics of care, enhanced the social, emotional and cognitive dimensions of support students received.

The model of this intervention where tutors from the Writing Centre played the role of giving feedback is not necessarily sustainable or replicable in this form since writing centres are notoriously under-resourced. In spite of this, the research demonstrates the potential for a powerful role that can be played by tutors in giving formative feedback within the context of a care-fully designed course.

Embedding academic literacies development in course curricula requires the commitment of both lecturers and tutors, as well as support from university management in order to forge lasting partnerships. Generative partnerships such as the one between the Faculty of Education and the UWC Writing Centre demonstrates one way in which a department or faculty can embed academic literacies into their programmes. Such interventions provide capacity development opportunities for disciplinary staff and tutors. This could contribute to sustainable embedding of academic literacies development which enhances epistemological access in degree programmes both within contact and remote T&L contexts.

As higher education inevitably moves in a direction of increasing online and blended modes of instruction, it needs to be recognised that addressing inequalities cannot be attained through the provision of material elements of technology alone. It is

argued here that greater attention needs to be paid to the multi-faceted, relational and embodied aspects of learning in order to enable students' attainment of epistemological access. Furthermore, strengthening pedagogical processes which enhance the development of students' academic literacies in course design are integral to enabling epistemological access and enhancing equity and social justice.

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