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Advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries: the role of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving in the curriculum

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Abstract

The urgency to translate pedagogical ideals into actionable classroom practices is the focus of this chapter. Curriculum reform that translates ideals on pedagogies for critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills is the focus of this chapter. Grounded in African Critical Theory (ACT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT), the chapter argues for a view on curriculum as praxis, with an emphasis on a deliberate pedagogic focus on empowering students through enhancing their agency in the design of the learning experience. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) involving twelve postgraduate students and three academic staff members, the chapter uses empirical data to suggest the implications of the views on learning outcomes and engagement. To develop specific recommendations, the chapter uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to unpack the findings.

Keywords: African Critical Theory, Participatory Action Research, Critical Discourse Analysis, critical thinking.

3.1 Introduction

Despite the significant body of research on contemporary challenges in curriculum practices, several areas such as critical thinking, continue to present ongoing questions that have not yet been answered comprehensively. Grounded on African-Centred Critical Theory (ACT), this chapter critiques dominant Western perspectives on critical thinking, offering insights and frameworks rooted in the African experience and diaspora. ACT encompasses a wide range of concepts that address issues of race, culture, identity, power, and liberation (Shale, 2023). Several ideas from ACT relate directly to contemporary curriculum practices and the challenges identified in educational settings. ACT emphasises incorporating African ways of knowing, values, and perspectives into curriculum practices. This approach challenges the Eurocentric bias often found in education systems and supports the inclusion of diverse epistemologies that reflect the histories, cultures, and contributions of African peoples and the diaspora (Shewadeg, 2023). It addresses issues of equity and inclusion by validating and centring knowledge that has been marginalised, thereby tackling double consciousness.

Dickson (1992) points out, as initially coined by W.E.B. du Bois, the concept of 'double consciousness' describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society, particularly African Americans. In curriculum practices, this concept underscores the need for educational approaches that acknowledge and address the psychological and social tensions faced by students of African descent as a strategy to promote curricula that foster positive racial identities and resilience (Moore, 2005). Within the South African context, the concept of double consciousness is appropriate as it ensures the reconnection with African heritage and expands their influence artistically, intellectually, and socially, including the vast

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African knowledge to deal with all races in our understanding of the world, thereby democratising knowledge. This is the reason why Critical Race Theory is important in this chapter.

While Critical Race Theory (CRT) originates in legal studies; it shares common ground with ACT by examining the role of race and racism in perpetuating social inequity. In terms of education contexts, CRT informs approaches that critically assess how curricula, policies, and practices can perpetuate racial disparities (Teitelbaum, 2022). It advocates for curricular reforms that challenge racist practices and promote racial justice, advancement of knowledge growth proportionately, if not equally, and the sharing of its importance (whether Western or African descent). This focus of the chapter is intended to enable a critical assessment of the inequalities perpetuated by racial disparities.

This is why a concept from Southern Africa, *Ubuntu*, which translates to “I am because we are,” emphasises community, shared humanity, and interdependence. In educational settings, Ubuntu inspires curriculum practices that promote collaboration, empathy, and a sense of belonging (Hlatshwayo *et al.*, 2020). It challenges individualistic approaches to education, advocating for community engagement and learning that fosters mutual respect and solidarity. Harvesting a culture of togetherness within curriculum practices, giving rise to inspire support, the validation of “I can, you can, together we can.” This chapter seeks to demonstrate the value of these concepts in striving to promote racial collaboration to heighten Ubuntu and what it stands for in the curriculum practices spectrum, reiterating “no man is an island.”

ACT focuses on the themes of resistance against oppression and the pursuit of liberation. This perspective encourages curriculum practices that empower students to question dominant narratives, critically engage with social issues, and participate in transformative action for

social justice (Peters, 2018). It also relates to the need for curricula that educate and activate students' agency in challenging injustices. Hence the concept addresses the need for global citizenship education, including African perspectives and contributions (Oderinde & Obadiora, 2024).

Based on the concepts above, by incorporating ACT concepts into curriculum practices, educators and policymakers can address contemporary educational challenges by promoting equity, inclusion, and empowerment for all students, mainly of African descent. These concepts offer a framework for developing curriculum practices responsive to the students' diverse needs and experiences and commitment to social justice and transformation. It is for this reason that Kosnik and Beck (2009) are of the view that curriculum reformists need to explain to teachers the crucial act of applying practical and functional methods of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among learners in the landscape of contemporary education.

All the issues discussed thus far are of concern to contemporary scholars regarding curriculum practices. The ideas embedded in them are relevant to this chapter as they enable insights into the importance of the development of curriculum practices that promote knowledge leading to student emancipation for the 21st century. For instance, in integrating technology in classroom delivery, research indicates that technology can enhance learners' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes significantly when integrated into curriculum practices effectively. To illustrate this perspective, Pavlova (2013) argues that true transformation can only take place when profound emotions are present alongside the learner's initial involvement. Research has demonstrated that interactive and multimedia materials accommodate a wide range of learning styles and individual demands effectively.

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Nevertheless, they also emphasise the significance of providing teachers with proper training in utilising technology and the potential for widening the gap in access to digital resources among pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The presence of equity and inclusivity concerns highlights the ongoing existence of success gaps and the influence of structural biases in education. Furthermore, studies provide evidence for using culturally responsive teaching and inclusive curriculum designs to enhance equity.

Moreover, studies indicate that learners achieve higher academic and social outcomes when they encounter learning materials and experiences that portray their cultures and identities favourably. Mounting research indicates that education focused on sustainability and global citizenship fosters the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of accountability towards global issues. It is in this context that by incorporating these concepts across the educational programme it can motivate students to participate in intricate matters actively, cultivating a well-informed and proactive global community. The centrality of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning to achieve this cannot be over-emphasised. This is because when learning extends beyond the bounds of individual disciplines, it can boost creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills for complex issues that a single discipline may struggle to address. This chapter thus emphasises the advantages of multidisciplinary education in fostering adaptable thinking and using information from other fields to tackle real-world problems (Yang, 2024).

The crucial connection between learners and teachers' mental health, well-being, and academic achievement is another element that has been well acknowledged. For this reason, research in this area has demonstrated that implementing educational strategies that prioritise mental health, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes, can

lead to positive effects on academic performance, decreased levels of anxiety and depression, and improved social skills among students. The findings of Gucor et al. (2024), for example, suggest that personalised and differentiated learning approaches can address individual learners' specific needs, leading to enhanced engagement, motivation, and academic performance. Other studies consistently demonstrate the efficacy of adaptive learning technologies and differentiated instruction in effectively catering to a wide range of learning styles and abilities. However, Little et al. (2024) demonstrate an increasing agreement in studies that traditional, standardised examinations may not comprehensively measure the entire range of student learning and competencies.

Based on the above body of research, the complexity of contemporary educational challenges and the need for a multifaceted, evidence-based approaches in curriculum practices cannot be over-emphasised. It highlights the importance of continuous innovation, evaluation, and adaptation of educational strategies to meet the evolving needs of students and society. Gaps in knowledge can hinder the development of effective strategies and solutions that empower educational practices that enhance and forge healthier spaces for learning, which accommodate adaptive learning technologies and differentiated instruction in accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities.

3.2 Reflections on transforming curriculum practice

Although Kosnik and Beck (2009) emphasise the significance of contemporary instructional practices and the incorporation of technology for learner engagement and outcomes, it is vital to consider a nuanced critique from an African epistemological standpoint. This viewpoint raises doubts about whether these tactics sufficiently

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encompass the relational and communal learning features fundamental to African knowledge acquisition. The risk is the potential exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems and the failure to fully integrate these comprehensive educational practices deeply embedded in African environments. Furthermore, discussions on educational reform frequently highlight the broad suitability of teaching methods without considering African students' distinctive cultural, social, and economic circumstances. This lack of attention can result in the implementation of educational strategies that are not in line with most learners' real-life experiences and cultural backgrounds. It is such realities that tend to ultimately undermine the objective of promoting authentic comprehension and thoughtful involvement with knowledge.

In the realm of education, the concept of double consciousness enables us to analyse how current educational practices and reforms may unintentionally reinforce a state of educational double consciousness among African students. This occurs when educational content and teaching methods prioritise Western thinking and disregard the wide range of African perspectives and knowledge. Hence learners face the challenge of navigating a complicated environment where their cultural identities and knowledge systems are not given enough importance or recognition in educational settings. This affects not only their involvement and academic achievements, but also their feeling of identity and self-esteem. The purpose of this critique is not to disregard the importance of promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Instead, it is to advocate for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates and appreciates African ways of knowing and teaching. This method would enhance the capabilities of learners by validating their cultural identities and equipping them with the necessary resources to analyse and reshape their environment.

Essentially, the research discussed so far provides valuable insights into the current challenges and opportunities in education. However, a need still exists to critically reassess these findings by incorporating the importance of African epistemology and the concept of double consciousness. A more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to curriculum reform is thus needed. It is an approach which considers how learners from African backgrounds acquire knowledge, their experiences, and their aspirations. This critique emphasises the significance of adjusting educational methods to meet the requirements of the contemporary world and ensuring that these methods are based on a profound appreciation for, and incorporation of, the diverse range of knowledge systems that students bring to the learning environment.

3.3 Pedagogies for critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving

Addressing the knowledge gaps in advancing pedagogical transformational voices from marginalised groups is essential to promote a fair and inclusive education system. This can be achieved by incorporating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills into curriculum practices. Although progress is being made in acknowledging the significance of these skills in education, there are still certain areas where our understanding is restricted. This is particularly the case when it comes to disadvantaged and peripheral groups. For instance, our understanding of how teaching methods that encourage critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving may be successfully adapted and implemented in various educational environments, particularly in marginalised populations, is incomplete. It is vital to comprehend how these tactics might be modified to include local knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices (Santos-Meneses *et al.*, 2023).

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It appears, however, that an understanding is lacking with regard to how teachers in peripheral or marginalised settings can be adequately trained and assisted in implementing these teaching methods. This includes understanding the specific difficulties they encounter, the resources they require, and the most effective professional development programmes to enhance their ability to cultivate these skills in their students. It is in this context that Lekgau (2022) contends that there is even a deficiency in our comprehension of developing and utilising suitable metrics and assessment tools to gauge the effect of incorporating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills in curriculum practices. This is especially true when it comes to meaningful and relevant ways to peripheral communities.

The reason for this setback is that conventional evaluation techniques may not completely encompass the wide range and profound extent of learning in these domains. Shawaqfeh *et al.* (2024) highlight an increasing focus on pedagogies that prioritise learners' needs and interests. A significant amount of knowledge thus is still to be gained regarding the development and execution of these methods in a manner that genuinely involves learners from various and frequently disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes comprehending how to enable learners to actively participate in their own learning and how to guarantee that their perspectives and experiences are at the core of the learning process.

Gumbo (2016) acknowledges the significance of technology in increasing learning outcomes for critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. However, there is a notable lack of comprehension regarding fair and equal access to technology and its utilisation to bring about educational change in communities that lack resources or are geographically isolated. This involves tackling the challenges of the

digital divide and ensuring that technological solutions are both culturally appropriate and effective in terms of teaching and learning.

According to El-Hamamsy *et al.* (2023) an understanding of how efforts to include these abilities in curriculum practices may be successfully maintained and expanded is lacking; particularly in situations with inadequate resources, political instability, or other obstacles. This entails comprehending the elements contributing to the successful implementation and enduring influence of such initiatives. Researchers, educators, policymakers, and communities must work together to address these gaps. This collaboration should be based on research and practice that considers the specific context, is culturally sensitive, and is responsive to learners and teachers' individual needs and goals in peripheral settings.

3.4 Methodology

The study reported in this chapter adopted the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to generate data. PAR is particularly relevant to advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries through integrating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving mastery (Goodman, 2024). Its relevance and connection with ACT further enrich the potential impact of this research approach. To empower peripheral voices, PAR focuses on involving community members as co-researchers in the research process, and this aligns with the goal of amplifying voices from the peripheries.

As part of incorporating PAR, we took seriously our Master and Doctoral students' numerous requests for assistance with proposal writing. To professionalise their involvement in the study, the Convenient Sampling technique was used to select them for participation. This was followed by each team member signing an Informed Consent Form. Consequently

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twelve postgraduate and three supervisory staff members agreed to address their common problems by establishing a team for this study. We agreed to meet every Saturday to discuss our studies and find a way to expedite the understanding of the execution of the project. We spent four hours each time we met.

This approach ensured that the research was grounded in the experiences, needs, and aspirations of those it intended to serve, facilitating the development of pedagogical practices that are relevant and transformative for marginalised communities (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2024). PAR contextualised solutions were used in which the team-building exercise was conducted. Through its iterative process of reflection, action, and evaluation, PAR allows for developing and testing educational strategies tailored to the unique contexts of peripheral communities. In this way, the pedagogical interventions respected and integrated local knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices, addressing a critical gap identified in the study. The study also used gallery walks and fishbowl as tools to generate data. Thus, through the study, building the capacity of co-researchers was also the focal point of the research team. Since PAR emphasises the development of local capacities, empowering teachers and learners in peripheral communities to become agents of change in their educational practices was a success (Nolen, 2024). This choice aligned with the focus of the study, namely on teacher preparation and support, aiming to enhance educators' ability to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among their students.

3.4.1. Africana Critical Theory - Participatory Action Research

While ACT emphasises the importance of African ways of knowing and understanding the world, PAR's emphasis is on integrating local knowledge and practices in research. Their principles align with each

other as they both seek to valorise and incorporate the epistemological frameworks of peripheral communities. ACT's concept of double consciousness, for example, resonates with PAR's aim to empower participants (Rowan *et al.*, 2024). Through PAR, individuals in peripheral communities have the internal conflict experienced by marginalised groups in recognising their cultural heritage while navigating the dominant culture, articulate PAR's contribution to creating educational practices that affirm their identities and are effective in broader societal contexts. Both PAR and ACT, furthermore, are committed to social justice and transformation principles. PAR serves as a practical methodology for enacting the transformative goals of ACT by engaging marginalised communities in the research process to address inequalities and enact change in educational practices (Abruquah *et al.*, 2023).

In summary, PAR's methodologies and goals are deeply aligned with the principles of ACT, making it a relevant and robust approach to advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries. Its focus on empowerment, contextualised solutions, capacity building, and sustainable change, complements ACT's emphasis on African epistemology, double consciousness, and social transformation, offering a holistic framework for addressing the challenges identified in the study.

For sustainable and scalable solutions, PAR enables the collaborative and inclusive nature of PAR to foster a sense of ownership among participants, which can lead to more sustainable and scalable educational innovations. This addresses the study's concern with the sustainability and scalability of pedagogical transformations in under-resourced or challenging contexts. Thus this chapter attempts to respond to the following question:

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- How can pedagogical practices that integrate critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving mastery be advanced to amplify transformative voices from the peripheries of curriculum practice?

The related sub-questions were:

- What strategies can be employed to effectively contextualise and implement critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving pedagogies in peripheral educational settings to honour local knowledge systems and cultural practices?
- How can teachers in marginalised or peripheral communities be prepared and supported to foster these pedagogical strategies
- How do these approaches impact student engagement and learning outcomes?

3.5 Discussion of findings

Three levels of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were used to analyse data. These are: power, ideology, and resistance (Fairclough, 2017). These levels were applied in understanding data that appeared in the form of extracts based on participants' utterances during our regular Saturday meetings. The focus of these extracts are on the following aspects of the findings: promotion of pedagogies for critical thinking, self-reflection and active knowledge participation. The focus of the analysis is on the ways in which the fostering of curricula, that empower learner identity, voice, and agency in the learning path, are realised.

3.5.1. Pedagogies for critical thinking, self-reflection, and active knowledge participation

It can be argued that critical thinking, self-reflection, and active participation in knowledge processes are foundational to transformative education. As already discussed, the ACT emphasis on the centrality of African epistemologies and the critique of dominant Eurocentric narratives provides a robust framework for reimagining pedagogies that promote the three skills. They also affirm the cultural identities of African and African diaspora learners. In one of the reflective sessions of our Saturday meetings, one of the co-researchers raised a concern as presented below:

I don't understand how one can be able to become critical and creative. I mean, I am an adult and still find it difficult to be critical and creative. You must know for me to understand these difficult words such as 'epistemology', 'ontology', and 'oxiology', and I need to ask myself 'ithini lento' [what is this thing saying]? If I have to explain to my grandmother at home, now what about our learners at school?

To analyse the extract above, CDA was deployed, and with infusing the lens of ACT, the study was able to offer a deeper understanding of language as a site of power, ideology, and resistance (Fairclough, 2017). The statement referred to in the above extract, for example, provided a better understanding of the complexities of embracing criticality and creativity within educational contexts, especially when confronted with dense academic jargon. The analysis will thus dissect the statement's implicit meanings, power dynamics, and the interplay between language, knowledge, and identity through the lens of ACT.

3.5.2. Textual analysis

The statement begins with a personal admission of difficulty in achieving critical and creative thought, which can be interpreted as acknowledging the challenges posed by traditional educational paradigms that often prioritise rote learning over critical engagement and creative exploration. This admission humanises the speaker and invites empathy from the co-researchers, positioning the speaker as an everyman figure navigating the daunting terrain of academic discourse.

The mention of “difficult words such as ‘epistemology’, ‘ontology’, and ‘axiology’” critiques the accessibility of academic language. From an ACT perspective, this highlights the Eurocentric dominance in producing and disseminating knowledge, which often marginalises non-Western ways of knowing and understanding the world. The invocation of these terms without immediate definitions or applications reflects a barrier to entry for those not initiated into academic circles, reinforcing existing hierarchies of knowledge.

The phrase “*ithini lento*” [what is this thing saying] is a critical juncture in the discourse, emphasising the alienation experienced by individuals when confronted with unfamiliar academic jargon. This linguistic shift to isiXhosa not only grounds the statement in a specific cultural context, but it also signals an act of resistance against the dominance of English in academic discourse. Through ACT, this can be seen as a call for the decolonisation of knowledge, advocating for epistemic diversity that honours and incorporates Indigenous languages and epistemologies.

The concern for the speaker’s grandmother and learners highlights the intergenerational and societal implications of inaccessible academic language. It underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and grounded in the lived experiences of learners. From an ACT standpoint, this signals a critique of education systems that fail to bridge the gap between complex academic theories

and practical, everyday knowledge; thus alienating learners from their cultural roots and hindering their ability to engage critically and creatively with the curriculum.

3.5.3. Ideological and power dynamics

The statement by the study participant implicitly critiques the power dynamics inherent in the production and valuation of knowledge, suggesting that academic elitism can alienate individuals from their capacity for critical and creative thought. By questioning the accessibility of academic language, the speaker challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocates for an epistemological pluralism that values diverse ways of knowing.

In conclusion, using ACT as a lens, this CDA reveals the statement as a multifaceted critique of the barriers to critical and creative engagement in education, rooted in the dominance of inaccessible academic language and Eurocentric epistemologies. It underscores the need for educational practices that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and attuned to the diverse epistemological backgrounds of all learners. Through this analysis, the statement emerges as a personal reflection and a call for action to decolonise knowledge and democratise the educational landscape.

Analysing the statement through CDA and ACT involves examining how language reflects, reinforces, or challenges power structures – particularly in the context of education and knowledge production (Gavriely-Nuri, 2012). CDA focuses on the role of discourse in society and power relations. At the same time, ACT provides a lens for scrutinising these dynamics from the perspective of African and African diaspora experiences, centring on issues of race, power, and the decolonisation of knowledge. We can also look at the extract from a social structural level to make sense of it.

3.5.4. Social structural level analysis

The statement reflects the reproduction of power hierarchies within educational systems, by which specific knowledges and thinking are privileged over others. The mention of difficulty in understanding academic terms such as “epistemology,” “ontology,” and “axiology” suggests a barrier to entry for individuals who are not familiar with the academic language, or who do not have access to higher education, perpetuating social inequalities by reinforcing the marginalisation of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or non-Western cultural contexts.

From an ACT perspective, the dominance of Eurocentric academic language and concepts marginalise African epistemologies and ways of knowing. By centring Western knowledge systems, educational institutions uphold colonial legacies that devalue Indigenous knowledges and perpetuate Eurocentric worldviews. The reference to explaining concepts to the speaker’s grandmother at home highlights the disconnect between academic knowledge and everyday lived experiences, particularly within African communities, where traditional knowledge systems may be sidelined or invalidated.

The shift to isiXhosa with “*ithini lento*” challenges the hegemony of English in academic discourse and asserts the value of Indigenous languages in knowledge production. However, this linguistic resistance also highlights the broader power dynamics at play, where English proficiency and adherence to Western academic norms are often equated with intelligence and success (Van Dijk, 2001), reinforcing social inequalities by marginalising individuals who do not conform to these standards or who are not fluent in English.

It is for these reasons that the statement may also be said to be implicitly raising questions about the role of education in social mobility and access to opportunities. Acknowledging the difficulty in understanding

academic concepts, the speaker confronts the structural barriers that hinder upward mobility for marginalised groups. From an ACT perspective, this highlights the need for educational systems to recognise and validate diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, particularly those rooted in African cultural traditions.

The statement can thus be seen as a call for structural transformation within educational institutions to make knowledge more accessible and inclusive. It also challenges the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocates for the integration of indigenous epistemologies and languages, calling for a decolonisation of education that recognises and values learners' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Based on the above, using CDA and ACT to analyse the statement from a social structural level reveals how language and discourse perpetuate power hierarchies and social inequalities within educational systems. By highlighting the marginalisation of African epistemologies and the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, the analysis underscores the need for structural transformation to make education more inclusive, accessible, and empowering for all learners, particularly those from marginalised communities (Chilton, 2005). This analysis calls for a decolonisation of education that recognises and validates diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, ultimately challenging the status quo and advocating for social justice within educational institutions.

We can also use the third level to analyse the extract above from a discursive level of analysis. Analysing the statement through CDA and ACT from a discursive level involves examining how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations. This analysis will focus on how the discourse in the statement shapes perceptions of knowledge, education, and identity, particularly within the context of African and diasporic experiences.

3.5.5. Discursive level analysis

The statement begins with an expression of uncertainty and difficulty in understanding concepts such as “critical” and “creative,” highlighting a power asymmetry within educational discourse, reflecting the dominance of certain forms of knowledge and ways of thinking that are often associated with Western academia while marginalising alternative perspectives. From an ACT perspective, this reflects the Eurocentric control over knowledge production and dissemination, perpetuating power imbalances and reinforcing colonial legacies.

The shift to isiXhosa with “ithini lento” challenges the linguistic hegemony of English in educational discourse, asserting the value and legitimacy of African languages. This linguistic resistance challenges English dominance and affirms the importance of linguistic diversity in shaping identity and knowledge. Through an ACT lens, this moment can be seen as an act of linguistic sovereignty, reclaiming space for African languages and challenging the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The concern about explaining academic concepts to the speaker’s grandmother at home highlights the disconnect between academic knowledge and lived experiences within African communities, underscoring the importance of culturally relevant education that reflects and affirms learners’ identities and experiences. From an ACT perspective, this reflects a call for decolonising education and centring African epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies in the curriculum to empower learners and validate their cultural heritage.

The difficulty in understanding academic terms such as “epistemology” and “ontology” points to barriers to access and inclusion within educational institutions, highlighting the exclusionary nature of academic discourse, which can alienate individuals from non-academic backgrounds or with limited access to formal education. From a CDA

perspective, this discourse reflects the reproduction of power structures that privilege certain forms of knowledge and marginalise others, perpetuating social inequalities (Fairclough, 2017).

The statement can be seen as a call for pedagogical transformation within educational institutions to make knowledge more accessible, inclusive, and empowering. By challenging the dominance of Western academic norms and advocating for the integration of African epistemologies and languages, it calls for a decolonisation of education that recognises the diversity of learners' experiences and validates their cultural identities. This analysis underscores the importance of language in shaping perceptions of knowledge, education, and identity and highlights the need for discursive practices that empower rather than marginalise marginalised communities.

Based on the above, using CDA and ACT to analyse the statement from a discursive level reveals how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within educational discourse. By highlighting the barriers to access and inclusion, and the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, the analysis underscores the need for pedagogical transformation that recognises and validates learners' diverse experiences and identities, particularly within African and diasporic communities. This analysis calls for a decolonisation of education that challenges linguistic hegemony, centres on African epistemologies, and empowers learners to engage with knowledge on their terms critically.

3.5.6. Fostering curricula that empower learner identity, voice, and agency in learning paths

When I joined this team, I initially felt the way things are done here is unprofessional. I could not make presentations to the entire team and subject my work to criticism by almost everyone,

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breaking it into pieces. I initially believed that your research work was between you and your supervisor. However, I have a different belief now. I enjoy every minute of presenting in front of brilliant minds because of the validity checked by many, forcing me to think prudently. I feel I am indebted to this team.

Looking at the extract above, it seems that the co-researcher changed her identity. An analysis of the extract above enables far better insights when CDA and ACT are used. When this is done from the textual and spoken word level, which involves examining the language used, the power dynamics at play, and the implications for knowledge production and social relations, the meanings become clearer.

3.5.7. Textual and spoken word level analysis

When the textual and spoken word analysis is carried out in relation to the initial statement about feeling that the team's practices were unprofessional and experiencing criticism from almost everyone suggests power dynamics within the team. Using terms such as "unprofessional" and "subject my work to criticism" reflects negative perceptions and feelings of vulnerability. From an ACT perspective, this demonstrates the reproduction of power hierarchies within academic spaces, where certain voices are privileged over others, contributing to the marginalisation of dissenting perspectives.

The extract also highlights a shift in perspective, with the participant initially believing that research work is solely between the individual and their supervisor, but later realising the value of presenting to the entire team and receiving diverse feedback. This shift can transform the speaker's understanding of knowledge production and collaboration. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and the role of feedback in academic settings.

The speaker expresses appreciation for the validation and critical engagement received from the team, stating that it has forced them to think more prudently, suggesting that social validation and constructive criticism play a significant role in shaping knowledge production and intellectual growth within the team. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of the communal nature of knowledge production within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement.

The concluding statement about feeling indebted to the team suggests a sense of belonging and gratitude for the support and intellectual stimulation, highlighting the importance of community and collective empowerment in fostering academic growth and development. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social relations and identities within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collaborative and communal endeavour.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that analysing the extract through the lenses of CDA and ACT from the textual and spoken word levels reveals insights into power dynamics, knowledge production, and social relations within academic teams. The analysis highlights the importance of collaboration, feedback, and communal support in shaping perspectives and fostering intellectual growth. It also underscores how language and discourse shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and community within academic spaces, reflecting broader societal norms and power structures. The extract illustrates the transformative potential of collective engagement and critical dialogue in knowledge production and academic development.

Analysing the extract using CDA and ACT from a social structural level involves examining how language and discourse reflect broader power structures, social relations, and ideologies within academic settings.

3.5.8. Social structural level analysis

The initial feeling of perceiving the team's practices as unprofessional and experiencing criticism from almost everyone highlights power dynamics within academic spaces, suggesting the existence of hierarchical structures in which certain individuals or perspectives are privileged over others. From an ACT perspective, this reflects the reproduction of colonial legacies within academic institutions, where Eurocentric norms and standards dominate and marginalise dissenting voices, particularly those from marginalised communities (Rabaka, 2006).

The shift in perspective regarding the value of presenting to the entire team and receiving feedback suggests a re-evaluation of norms surrounding knowledge production within the academic team, highlighting the influence of social norms and practices in shaping how knowledge is produced and validated. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that reinforce certain norms and ideologies within academic communities, contributing to maintaining power structures and social hierarchies (Chilton, 2005).

The speaker's acknowledgement of the value of social validation and critical engagement from the team indicates the importance of collective input and collaboration in fostering intellectual growth and development, suggesting that social relations within the academic team play a significant role in shaping knowledge production processes and individual learning experiences. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement.

The statement expressing indebtedness to the team suggests a sense of belonging and community within the academic environment, highlighting the importance of social support and camaraderie in

fostering academic success and well-being. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social identities and relations within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collective endeavour that requires collaboration and mutual support (Wodak, 2006).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that analysing the extract through the lenses of CDA and ACT from a social structural level provides insights into power dynamics, social norms, and communal practices within academic settings. The analysis highlights the influence of social structures and relations in shaping knowledge production processes and individual experiences within the academic team. It also underscores the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and community to support academic success and well-being (Rabaka, 2014). The extract illustrates the interconnectedness of language, social structures, and knowledge production within academic environments, reflecting broader societal norms and power dynamics.

Analysing the extract from a discursive level using CDA and ACT involves examining how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts.

3.5.9. Discursive level analysis

The initial expression of feeling that the team's practices are "unprofessional" and the experience of subjecting one's work to criticism suggests a negotiation of power dynamics within the academic team. Using terms such as "unprofessional" and "subject to criticism" reflects a perception of vulnerability and a power asymmetry within the team. From an ACT perspective, this demonstrates the reproduction of power hierarchies within academic spaces, where certain voices are privileged over others, contributing to the marginalisation of dissenting perspectives.

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The subsequent statement about experiencing a shift in perspective, finding value in presenting to the entire team, and receiving feedback suggests a transformation in the speaker's understanding of knowledge production and collaboration. This shift can be interpreted as adapting to the academic team's discursive practices and norms. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and the role of feedback in academic settings.

Acknowledging the value of social validation and critical engagement from the team suggests that social relations within the academic team play a significant role in shaping knowledge-production processes and individual learning experiences, underscoring the importance of communal support and collaboration in fostering intellectual growth and development. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement (Bassey, 2007).

The statement expressing indebtedness to the team indicates a sense of belonging and community within the academic environment, highlighting the importance of social support and camaraderie in fostering academic success and well-being. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social identities and relations within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collective endeavour that requires collaboration and mutual support.

Based on the above, analysing the extract from a discursive level using CDA and ACT provides insights into how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts. The analysis highlights the negotiation of power dynamics, the importance of social validation and collaboration, and the

role of communal support in fostering intellectual growth and well-being within academic teams. The extract illustrates how language and discourse shape perceptions and experiences within academic environments, reflecting broader societal norms and power dynamics.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the extract through CDA and ACT has provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play within academic spaces. From a social structural level, we observed the reproduction of power hierarchies and the marginalisation of dissenting voices, reflecting broader societal norms and inequalities. The shift in perspective and acknowledgement of the value of social validation highlighted the transformative potential of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, emphasising the importance of collaboration and collective wisdom. At the discursive level, we delved into how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts. The key themes that emerged from the analysis were the negotiation of power dynamics, the importance of social validation and collaboration, and the sense of community and belonging. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of language, social structures, and knowledge production processes within academic environments, shedding light on the complex interplay between discourse, power, and identity.

Overall, the analysis has deepened our understanding of the multifaceted nature of academic discourse and its implications for social relations and knowledge production. It highlights the need for critical reflection on the discursive practices and power dynamics within academic spaces and the importance of fostering inclusive and collaborative environments that recognise and value diverse

perspectives and experiences. It is imperative to continue interrogating and challenging dominant discourses and power structures to create more equitable and empowering academic spaces for all moving forward.

3.7 References

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