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Positioning a Practice of Hope in South African Teacher Education Programmes

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Abstract

Schools are described as ideal settings for nurturing and fostering children's hopes, and the teaching profession as rooted in hopefulness. However, there is a paucity of research linking hope theory and teacher education in the South African context. Using evidence from my own transformative, visual participatory research with rural South African children on hope and well-being, I argue in this position paper that hope theory, in particular an African perspective of hope, should be positioned alongside discussions on practising an engaged pedagogy to enable teaching practices that are more congruent with an Afrocentric worldview. This article argues a need to infuse relational hope in teacher education practices by encouraging collaborative, participatory learning engagements that create safe and creative spaces for critical dialogue, allowing for multiple voices and experiences to be heard. Such practices could in turn foster a sense of collective hope—characterised by the values of connectedness, caring, and collective agency—thereby equipping student teachers with the tools to build communities of hope in their classrooms and schools. The article concludes with implications of mobilising such a practice of hope through an engaged pedagogy in student teacher education in the South African context.

Keywords: Afrocentric perspective, engaged pedagogy, hope, teacher education

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Introduction

> *The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In the field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (Hooks, 1994, p. 207)*

In her renowned book, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), hooks endorsed the need for a pedagogy in the discipline of education that can bridge the gap between theory of education as freedom and its practice. She lamented the way educational institutions talk about the power of education to transform society and liberate learners from the grasp of poverty, while the oppressive *banking system of education* (a phrase borrowed from Freire's work) still dominates. She advocated an *engaged pedagogy*, where educators focus on connecting with their learners' lived experiences, hence creating a sense of community in collective learning. Thus, educators should not only strive to transfer knowledge from books, but also bring the ideals of cultural diversity and social justice into the classroom: they should jointly generate and reflect on knowledge about how to live as active citizens in the world (hooks, 1994). While she critiqued the American education system for its failure to provide a just and democratic learning context for marginalised groups, and for the imposition of the patriarchal Western knowledge systems that prevail in universities, her ideas are relevant for concerns about South Africa's current education context. Discussions on poverty and inequality in the country's schooling systems dominate many education journals, while institutions of higher education continue to grapple with the necessity of equipping student teachers with pedagogical tools that can foster culturally inclusive teaching contexts.

Drawing on Freire's work, hooks (1994) further emphasised the way a liberatory pedagogical process in the classroom can foster a sense of conscientisation in both the learners and their teacher "when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance" (p. 47). However, to achieve such a progressive, holistic, and engaged educational environment requires teachers who are "actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own wellbeing" (hooks, 1994, p. 15). Accordingly, hooks (1994) voiced her concern as to how a teacher who is not aware of her own development and being in the world could be expected to support her learners' struggle towards self-actualisation and empowerment. According to Waters (2011), who noted the positive influence of teachers who demonstrate high levels of social and emotional well-being, "teaching for wellbeing is a key aspect of 21st century education" (p. 76). My personal experience with young student teachers is their mounting frustration as a result of feeling underprepared in handling the socioemotional barriers that the learners bring into the classroom. Their vision of being teachers who can make a difference is soon dampened by the realities of overcrowded classrooms, underresourced schools, and uninvolved parents. This is consistent with Lopez's description of students whose hopes are diminished and who thus lack the energy or sense of efficacy to enact change:

> *These students may give up when encountering barriers to goals simply because they can't think of other pathways around the obstacles or can't get the support they need. This often results in frustration, a loss of confidence, and lowered self-esteem. (2010, p. 41)*

Given that teaching is a profession rife with challenges and expectations, fostering the well-being of teachers becomes a necessity (Jacobs, 2005; McInerney, 2007; Nolan & Stitzlein, 2010).

What is inherently implied but seldom mentioned outright in hooks' discourses on the practice of an engaged pedagogy is the place of hope—as a key facet for positive human interaction and development—for bringing about change in education. Yet, according to Webb (2010), education and

hope share the same ontological root and therefore are "inextricably tied" (p. 327), while Jacobs (2005, p. 799) stated that hope and education "are wrapped up in a kind of horizontal relationship of mutuality." In the introductory quote, hooks, like many others, referred to education as the "practice of freedom" (1994, p. 207), an expression often associated with the experience of being hopeful. Scioli and Biller (2010) stated that the hope system is enabled when an individual experiences empowerment and a feeling of liberation or release from oppression. Similarly, it has been noted that "hope is a necessary condition" for an education aimed at bringing about social change (Jacobs, 2005, p. 794). Schools have been described as potentially ideal settings for nurturing and building children's hopes and, therefore, it is important for teachers to root their practices in hopefulness (Nolan & Stitzlein, 2010). According to Lopez (2010), hopeful educators create an energy that produces ripples of hope for others: "Those hopeful principals and teachers spread hope by encouraging autonomy, modelling a hopeful lifestyle, promoting strengths-based development, and telling stories about how students and educators overcome big obstacles to realize important goals" (p. 42).

This holds implications for teachers' roles in supporting their learners' hopes, especially in communities facing adversity. Furthermore, it provides support for Hooks' (1994) earlier contention that teachers should first and foremost be capacitated to enable their own hope, well-being, and identity development. It is therefore puzzling that there is such a paucity of literature in South Africa on hope research and praxis in the field of teacher education.

When relating Hooks' ideas to my own experiences in the South African education context, I wondered how student teachers could be equipped to practise such an engaged pedagogy and to create a sense of collective learning in the classroom. Therefore, this article is driven by the question: "How can a practice of hope be positioned in teacher education programmes to equip student teachers to build communities of hope in their classrooms?" In agreement with Hooks (1994) that combining the theoretical with the experiential offers a richer way of knowing, I have made use of both literature and findings from my research study with 12 rural South African children exploring hope to inform my arguments. I seek to position a practice of hope in student teacher education, not only as a means of fostering emerging teachers' sense of self-efficacy and well-being (which in itself would be advantageous), but also as a practical tool for mobilising an engaged pedagogy in the university classroom, thereby enabling communities of hope to emerge in the learning process.

I begin the discussion by unpacking the concept of hope, exploring a framework of hope from an African perspective, and referring to literature on the value of hope in teacher education programmes. I then outline some practical suggestions of how a practice of hope, combined with Hooks' engaged pedagogy, could enable spaces for student teachers to become aware of their own developing identities and learn to listen to the multiple voices that contribute to the learning process. I further show that when such practices are combined with participatory collaborative engagements, a sense of community can be fostered in the university classroom, encouraging a shared spirit of learning. I consider how such teaching and learning practices connect with the values embedded in an African philosophy to life and education. I conclude the article with a discussion on the possible value and implications of fostering hope as praxis in teacher education programmes in the South African context.

Hope from an African Perspective

According to Nolan and Stitzlein (2010), it is often assumed that hope as a universal construct is a commonly understood concept with a common meaning; however, this is not the case. While the capacity to hope is regarded as universally human, its definition and expression are significantly influenced by many factors; these include upbringing, worldview, cultural and social norms, as well as personal experiences. Most established hope theorists agree that the construct is multidimensional, is significantly linked to human well-being, and can be strengthened or weakened according to one's biological and social circumstances. Scioli and Biller (2009) described hope as a "manner of

experiencing yourself, the world, and the future" (p. 204). It can therefore be described as involving an active orientation that enables agency and interpersonal engagement directed at pursuing purpose and well-being.

Du and King (2012) argued that the dominant theories of hope stem from Western individualistic cultures that emphasise personal agency; however, these theories are limited because they "cannot capture the more relational aspects of hope which are assumed to be more salient in collectivist cultures" (p. 1). This proclivity in collective-oriented African cultures towards a relational way of being (referred to as *ubuntu*) and towards collectively held aspirations of well-being has been documented (Mkhize, 2007; Mokwena, 2007; Venter, 2004). It is a way of life based on the values of respect, compassion, and connectedness, all advocating that an individual's humanity is made possible through the humanity of others. Living communally—from an Afrocentric perspective—is founded on an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people (Venter, 2004). Therefore, a sense of communal well-being exists if "people mutually recognize the obligation to be responsive to one another's needs" (Mkhize, 2007, p. 46) in conjunction with meeting their own needs. The philosophy of ubuntu is a deeply rooted African value system that also promotes an awareness of one's purpose and meaning in life (Venter, 2004), which links directly to the experience of hope.

Owing to the lack of hope theories that represent the construct of hope from an Afrocentric worldview, I used the findings from my study with rural South African children to adapt the Integrated Theory of Hope (Scioli & Biller, 2009) to a framework of hope from an African perspective. Over a period of a year I engaged with 12 rural primary school children in QwaQwa, South Africa using a variety of participatory visual methods (drawings, collage making, Mmogo-method®[4], and photovoice) to explore their conceptualisations of hope (Cherrington, 2015). According to the framework, African hope is represented as a multilayered and multidimensional experience, and founded on the description of hope as an emotional, future-directed system made up of three complex interrelated subsystems (attachment, mastery, and survival), which develop and function along six hierarchical levels:

> Level 1: *Biological motives*—comprised of three hope subsystems (attachment, mastery, and survival), which are all inherent human drives.
>
> Level 2: *Contextual hope*—refers to external physical, psychological, and social resources, which an individual can access to guide and strengthen his or her hope subsystems.
>
> Level 3: *Personal hope*—exists in the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, all pursuing a meaningful personal future, and adopting the values and character traits of a hopeful person.
>
> Level 4: *Belief system*—the individual's worldview (includes cultural and social norms) that shapes and guides how the personal hope is extended beyond the individual.
>
> Level 5: *Relational hope*—representing manifestations of the individual's hopeful thoughts, feelings, and behaviours extended outwardly through hopeful interactions and sharing hope with others.
>
> Level 6: *Collective hope*—where hope becomes a collaborative process of pursuing a collective well-being by promoting togetherness, harmony, and mutual respect.

[4] http://veraroos.co.za/contributions/mmogo-method/

In this framework, hope is described as "simultaneously existing in one's context, within one's identity, in one's interactions with others, and in the pursuit of meaningfulness in life as part of a hopeful, connected community" (Cherrington, 2015, p. 274). This view emphasises that hope in an Afrocentric context can be fostered and nurtured by promoting a foundation of care, respect, and trust through a collective pursuit of authenticity, inclusiveness, and connectedness. While the framework itself is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Cherrington, 2015), this article focuses specifically on only the last two levels of relational and collective hope, and their link to putting an engaged pedagogy into practice in teacher education programmes.

Positioning Hope in the Context of Teacher Education

The notion that explicitly working with hope can develop or enhance an individual's understanding of her or his hope process is well supported in the literature (Larsen & Stege, 2012; Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011; McDermott & Hastings, 2000). Hopeful thinking arises in the context of relationships with others who teach and enact hope (Snyder, 2000). As such, the hope process can be continually strengthened through its engagement in praxis; thus, the more it is enacted the more it is reinforced (Cherrington, 2016; Cherrington & De Lange, 2016). Therefore, educational institutions are ideal settings for fostering and increasing a learner's hope. In fact, according to McDermott and Hastings (2000) it is not only the education context but also the curriculum itself that lends itself to hope enhancement because many learners can then be reached simultaneously.

International studies have shown that hope-based interventions in schools can have far-reaching benefits for learners, educators, and school communities (Lopez, 2010; Marques et al., 2011). Children's hopeful thinking has been positively associated with perceived competence and self-esteem or self-worth. Children and youth with high hope tend to be more motivated and thus more successful in pursuing goals; as a result, they tend to experience more positive emotions. These strengths translate to higher levels of scholastic achievement and social competence, and a better ability to cope with future challenges. For example, a 5-week hope-based intervention conducted with learners at a Portuguese middle school determined that the measured benefits of increased psychological strengths (hope, life satisfaction, and self-worth) had been sustained even 18 months later (Marques et al., 2011). Hope-oriented thinking also has an active component and therefore programmes aimed at increasing hope also engender agentic thinking and active citizenship in pursuing a desired change (Cherrington & De Lange, 2016; Snyder 2000). This implies that introducing hope-based activities into educational contexts could have numerous benefits for the school system as a whole.

Like Jacobs (2005), I too liken Hooks' proposed engaged pedagogy to hope in practice, "both in its orientation towards the possibility of a better, changed future through collective, pedagogical action and its overt invocation of Freire's *A Pedagogy of Hope*" (p. 784). Both hope and education are about the process of human becoming, driven by the exploration of our incompleteness and longing for a better self in a better world (Freire, 1970/2005; Giroux, 2004; Webb, 2010). Consequently, if education is regarded as a key driver for changing the world and our place in it, hope contributes a vision of our active role in the "process of an unfinished, rather than historically determined, world" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 799). Similarly, Giroux (2004) spoke of *educated hope* as a subversive force that "pluralizes politics by opening up a space for dissent, making authority accountable, and becoming an activating presence in promoting social transformation" (p. 39). These are only some examples of literature in the field of education that highlight the need for a hopeful education. The problem is not that hope is seldom mentioned in education discourses, in fact, it is "so much a part of our conversations that we take little notice of it" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 799). However, hope has seldom been discussed practically in terms of its potential as an educational practice or pedagogy. Yet, hope is essentially critical and reflective and therefore involves praxis, making it "a powerful tool for fostering engagement and dialogue between educators and learners, students and lecturers, schools and their communities" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 799).

My positioning of hope in teacher education programmes is guided by two key shortcomings when integrating education practice and hope studies. Firstly, while various theoretical discussions exist about the significance of injecting hope and well-being holistically into the foundational core of education institutions (not simply as once-off interventions), few have anchored such notions in praxis by fleshing out exactly how this could be achieved. Hooks' (1994) critique on theoretical postulating in education once again bears relevance: "Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfils this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorising towards this end" (p. 61). Thus, simply theorising about teachers as agents of hope and of education as a practice of hope, does not simply make it so. This notable gap between theory and practice also points to the second shortcoming: Is there sufficient capacity and willingness among South African educators to enact such an engaged pedagogy? To implement and maintain hope enhancing school systems implies that all school stakeholders are open to, and have the capacity for, promoting meaningful school-wide hope practices. The following section offers suggestions on how a practice of hope could be mobilised pedagogically in teacher education programmes to equip student teachers with the tools and means for building communities of hope in their own classrooms.

Putting a Practice of Hope to Work in Teacher Education

A discussion around the need for an engaged education practice that places value on both the learners' and the teachers' senses of identity, self-determination, and voice, encapsulates the key dimensions of relational hope. Further, the conceptualisations of places of learning as fostering a sense of community and mutual regard, which "creates a sense that there is a shared commitment and a common good that binds" (Hooks, 1994, p. 40) reflects the dimensions of collective hope. Practices that foster relational and collective aspects of hope connect more closely with an African worldview and can thus be conducive towards creating a more diverse and Africanised learning environment.

Creating spaces for interaction, collaboration, and voice: Fostering relational hope.

Hooks (1994) argued that to open possibilities for hope, teachers need to critically examine their own positioning in the classroom, and reflect on how far their teaching practice promotes or hinders the ideal of freedom and social justice. Giroux (1993), a founding theorist of critical pedagogy, referred to educators as culture brokers, highlighting the important role they play in a democratic society as engaged critics able to "understand the nature of their own self-formation, have some vision of the future, see the importance of education as a public discourse, and have a sense of mission in providing students what they need to become critical citizens" (p. 15).

This relates to Venter's (2004) description of education from an Afrocentric perspective as one where

> *students should have an emotional learning experience where they could express their viewpoints; thus, teaching towards transforming the head as well as the heart. Teachers on the other hand are change agents and they should be aware that they can transform the students. (p. 157)*

While South African institutions of higher education seem to espouse the value of teachers as critical thinkers and proponents of hope, it is unclear how far these visions are being carried through into pedagogical practices and the teacher education curriculum.

Hooks (1994) related stories of personal disappointment on entering university and expecting an atmosphere of critical insight and inclusiveness, but instead discovering that: "Most of my professors were not the slightest bit interested in enlightenment. More than anything they seemed enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom" (p. 17).

She therefore advocated an engaged pedagogy that could minimise power struggles between educators and students, thereby making the university classroom an inclusive space where knowledge is coconstructed through collaborative engagements. However, for a pedagogy that places value in how all parties contribute to learning through their personal experiences and stories, two key conditions are crucial: teachers concerned with their own well-being and developing identities, and learning environments that foster spaces for open and critical dialogue where multiple voices and experiences can be shared. These conditions can be promoted in teacher education programmes, through hope praxis, in the following ways.

Learning about the self: Fostering positive teacher identity and development.

Hooks (1994) was quite critical about the lack of support at all levels for teachers to engage in a process of self-actualisation and personal development. Emphasising Freire's concept of conscientisation, she believes that liberation in the classroom can only begin to take form when "one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstances" (1994, p. 47). She further reminded the reader that Freire "never spoke of conscientisation as an end in itself, but always as it is joined by meaningful praxis" (p. 47). This praxis refers to a continual cycle of action and reflection with regard to the individual's positioning, and repositioning, in the world in order to change it. Central to such discussions on teacher conscientisation are questions of "how identity itself is constituted and what the enabling conditions might be for human agency?" (Giroux, 1993, p. 26).

Bringing hope explicitly into counselling sessions has numerous benefits for personal development and awareness (Larsen, Edey, & LeMay, 2005). According to Larsen and Stege (2012), because individuals (re)created ways of being in the world which they perceived as personally hopeful, this "supported new understandings of themselves and their potential. These aspects of identity contributed to a sense of purpose and self-worth, offering an anchor to self during difficult times" (p. 48).

I observed a similar connection between the exploration of hope and personal identity development in my own study with rural children, which led to the identification of relational hope. In exploring their own hope, the children started becoming aware of their own agency to influence not only their own well-being, but also that of those around them through positive thoughts and behaviours (Cherrington & De Lange, 2016). They also began relating their own orientation of being hopeful to various personal characteristics and relational behaviours that they aspired towards: being kind, helpful, trustworthy, and contributing towards promoting a better community. This empowered the children not only to redefine their own identity as being hopeful (rather than vulnerable), but also fostered a sense of agency and self-confidence that they were eager to extend outwards towards their friends and family. One of the participants, Edwin, explained excitedly that he wanted to share what he had learned about hope with other children in his community:

> *When I am [a] teacher, I teach small children . . . I am going to tell this, what is hope? Hope is like what? . . . and they know it. I want to tell like when you teach me and then me, I am going to take my words and give it to other children who are need to it. (Cherrington, 2015, p. 261)*

Edwin was not only passionate about sharing what he had learned with others, but saw himself in the role of a teacher, possessing the knowledge and skills to help other children develop their hope. Thus, it seems that learning about his own hope not only equipped him with a positive self-identity as hopeful, but also built his confidence about engaging with others. Moreover, it showed Edwin a

way of sharing his knowledge with others, and perhaps even provided him with a purpose or role in the community. As Jacobs (2005, p. 788) affirmed: "Seeing oneself as part of a larger social fabric of responsibility provides the impetus for people to consider how the exercise of their individual agency affects the world and the people in it." Such benefits from exploring hope could be transferred to the classroom setting where student teachers are encouraged to engage in ways that promote the development of their hope and sense of identity, as well as equipping them with a sense of agency to build the hope of those around them. This aligns with Higgs' (2016) view that in the South African context a higher education curriculum concerned with integrating indigenous African epistemologies should be "primarily concerned with empowering educators and learners to gain confidence in their own capabilities and to acquire a sense of pride in their own ways of being in the world" (p. 95).

Learning to listen to multiple voices.

Through an engaged pedagogy, Hooks (1994) encouraged lecturers to view their students as whole human beings who bring into the university classroom, complex lives and experiences. This requires paying attention to the issue of voice: Who speaks, who listens, and why? She premised her argument on Giroux's (1993) notion that students' experiences must be situated within the pedagogy of learning. He believed that incorporating multiple voices into the learning process opens opportunities for engaging differently with others, and with the world: "Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages, and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we can't deny it" (p. 16).

Roux and Becker (2016) extended this argument further by emphasising the need for enacting open dialogue in higher education to disturb inherent conditions of power, privilege, and otherness in the classroom. They described dialogic practices where multiple voices not only have the right to be expressed and authentically heard, but also where "disruptive questions" are dealt with truthfully (2016, p. 136). The significance of opening dialogue is further supported by Higgs (2016) who asserted that indigenous African voices and indigenous ways of knowing have been negated in educational discourses.

The need to recognise the emerging identities and voices of students in the learning process connects with Freire's writing on pedagogy, which assumed humanness as a necessary condition for transforming a "dehumanising system" into education as freedom (Roux & Becker, 2016). It also supports Venter's (2004) statement that in an African philosophy of education, a person gains knowledge "by listening to your fellow human beings" (p. 156). However, a prerequisite for such authentic and transformative conversations to take place is for each participant to be radically open to every other participant, striving toward "a mutual relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (Freire 1970/2005, p. 72). Further, to foster such diversity and inclusiveness in education, despair and fear should be replaced by a "shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (Hooks, 1994, p. 33). In my mind, both Freire and Hooks are alluding to the necessity for fostering hope in classroom interactions to nurture trust and openness.

Hope in practice, as with an engaged pedagogy, is about opening possibilities and opportunities for dialogue. Trust and openness are conditions fostered through hope praxis (Scioli & Biller, 2009; Webb, 2010). In other words, a discussion on hope can be a wonderful platform for opening safe spaces for sharing subjective experiences and perceptions. Building on Giroux's view of the need to acknowledge the multiple experiences that exist in the university classroom, educators and students also bring with them different stories of hope, which could add compassion and intimacy to the critical engagement. Talking explicitly about one's hope has been shown to foster reflective thinking from which broader issues may be examined (Edey, Larsen, & LeMay, 2005). This also emerged in my research engagement exploring hope with rural children as I realised that they began to view issues in their immediate contexts through a hope lens. This enabled them to critically reflect on, and negotiate, social issues

such as domestic violence, crime, illness, and alcohol abuse, which they believed affected their hope. This could be extrapolated to a teaching and learning context where opening dialogue on the role of hope in teacher education could create spaces for multiple voices and experiences to emerge. As Inderbitzin (2015) noted, when students

> *come to care deeply and personally about social problems and issues, they are imbued with educated hope and inspired to continue learning so that they can act with intent and clear purpose to improve conditions in their communities and the larger society. (p. 51)*

Opening such meaningful conversations would stimulate a hopeful orientation, thus contributing significantly towards fostering cultural diversity, openness, and trust. It could be argued that for meaningful transformation to occur in teacher education, we need educators who are "engaged in hoping to look beyond themselves to the larger context within which they are hoping and to investigate issues at a more global level" (Nolan & Stitzlein, 2010, p. 8).

Storytelling remains a valuable method of knowledge transmission in many African cultures and, consequently, it is a highly regarded virtue for learners to not only be skilled at telling their own story, but also to listen intently as others relay their stories (Venter, 2004). Student teachers who are able to become empathetic to their fellow classmates' hope experiences and challenges, become more empathetic teachers who have a better understanding of the issues facing their own diverse learners. As Nolan and Stitzlein (2010, p. 5) aptly stated: "Storytelling powerfully connects us to the past, present, and future. As education scholars, we must ask what story it is we want teachers to be able to tell regarding their time in the classroom." Similarly, Hooks (1994) believed that creating an atmosphere in the classroom where the value of each individual voice is recognised and validated fosters a sense of community.

Promoting a sense of community in the university classroom: Mobilising collective hope.

Curricula and educational contexts have been criticised for their emphasis on learning as an individualistic and competitive endeavour that negates scholarship as a collective activity (Giroux, 1993; Jacobs, 2005; Nolan & Stitzlein, 2010; Venter, 2004). When lecturers create competitive spaces, stressing individual achievement, they place extreme pressure on students to succeed at the expense of their classmates (Nolan & Stitzlein, 2010). The focus is then on content acquisition for assessment purposes rather than on shared meaning making and authentic dialogue. Further, such practices counter the African value system, which espouses harmony and collectivism rather than individualistic endeavours (Venter, 2004). By reconceptualising the teaching and learning engagement through a hope lens, the university classroom can become a space for encouraging a shared spirit of enquiry and belonging. In this section, I expand on this statement by arguing that to mobilise hope on a collective level requires a pedagogy that facilitates learners to take ownership of the learning process through participatory and collaborative knowledge construction. Consequently, a sense of community is established through the values of togetherness, shared interests, and mutual benefit.

Learning to construct knowledge through collaborative, participatory methods.

Learning opportunities that enable critical dialogue and pedagogical praxis are crucial for encouraging a liberatory education. Such practices, however, require educators to critically examine the way they conceptualise their learning space and their ideas of who holds the knowledge (Hooks, 1994). Hooks (1994) therefore advocated for learning environments that have a dynamic and evolving nature that "invites us always to be in the present, to remember that the classroom is never the same. . . . When the classroom is truly engaged, it's dynamic. It's fluid. It's *always* changing" (p. 158).

Moving away from the traditional view of learners as blank recipients of knowledge requires a shift towards an expectation that all students embrace, and are able to fulfil, their responsibility to

contribute to learning in the classroom (Freire, 1970/2005; Hooks, 1994). For both Hooks and Freire, pedagogical spaces entail partnerships of collaborative and mutual learning and, as such, an engaged pedagogy should emphasise participation and involvement. The classroom needs to be "a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute" (Hooks, 1994, p. 39). One way to foster collaborative learning and encourage an expectation of shared responsibility is by making use of participatory, action-oriented classroom practices. Being fully engaged in the classroom and participating as cocreators of knowledge can lead to an enhanced sense of collective autonomy and responsibility among learners. Strategies such as peer learning and group work, influenced by a social constructivist understanding of education, can encourage reflection and open dialogue (Leshem, Zion, & Friedman, 2015). These practices also support an Afrocentric philosophy of education, which views the teacher–learner relationship as underscored by cooperation and harmony (Venter, 2004). As such, teaching strategies that encourage collaborative educational action (Freire's preferred term) are seen to boost cohesion and inclusiveness, and thus have been referred to as learner-centred, democratic, and discovery-based methods (Rose, 2005).

It is well documented that hope is relational and often nurtured through positive interactions with others. Marques et al. (2011) noted that group work can stimulate the transactional process of fostering hopeful thinking. Similarly, in my own study, making use of a variety of visual methods that encouraged collaborative and participatory knowledge construction played a significant role in enhancing the children's hope (Cherrington, 2016). Collective engagement also leads to collective awareness, which in turn opens up spaces for active citizenship. I particularly like Jacobs' (2005) description that hope is a "collaborative and imaginative process" enabling agency thus pushing individuals forward "to collectively reimagine the future and its possibilities" (p. 800). Therefore, it can be said that university classroom interactions that enhance conditions of togetherness, belonging, and agency can also be regarded as hope enhancing. Such practices also demonstrate for students a hopeful way of being with others, operationalising the values of ubuntu, which encourage all involved to take ownership and responsibility for the learning process.

Learning to strive together as a community of hope.

According to Jacobs (2005, p. 789) an engaged pedagogy represents "teachers and students being wholly present in the classroom with a kind of intersubjective investment in the class and the outcomes of the class." This intersubjective investment in the learning process was similarly described by Nolan and Stitzlein (2010, p. 8) as a "coming together collaboratively over issues of mutual concern." I relate such statements to the idea of fostering a collective hope through the process of learning that in turn promotes the development of a community of hope. My emphasis on the benefits of creating a sense of community in the education context stems from the following description by Hooks (1994) of an engaged teaching style:

> I enter the [university] classroom with the assumption that we must build "community" in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor. Rather than focusing on the issue of safety, I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn—to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world. (p. 40)

Linking such a collective learning process with the goal of living more meaningfully in the world, Hooks once again, perhaps unwittingly, positioned hope practice directly in the classroom. She also alluded to an experience of collective hope that resonates more closely with an Afrocentric orientation. As Venter (2004, p. 151) explained: "Belonging to a community is part of the essence of traditional African life." Fostering hope through a shared vision or collective (educational) goal pursuits can stimulate a sense of shared agency among the learners (Lopez, 2010); moreover, it promotes the idea of

generativity (where the individual is positioned as part of a community). Similarly, Snyder and Feldman (2000) claimed "hope is borne out of a sense of connectedness to other people, and moral commitment is fostered when we share important goals" (p. 408). In the field of psychology the benefits of having a sense of belonging and being part of a community with others have been well documented. For example, Larsen et al., (2005) maintained that "there is hope in genuinely being part of community" (p. 516) and, according to Duckworth, Steen, and Seligman (2005), hope thrives in a context of belonging where personal meaning can grow out of "belonging to and serving something larger than oneself, a life led in the service of positive institutions is the meaningful life" (p. 636). It is important to note, however, that the concept of a collective hope transcends the idea of a shared hope that is collectively held by a group of individuals pursuing a common outcome. It is more aligned to Webb's (2012) description of a transformative hope, or a "collective, mutually-efficacious and socially transformative mode of hoping" (p. 409), which is rooted in shared experiences. Such a hope can transform the entire collective group towards a new way of being, thus allowing hope simultaneously to become the process, the orientation, and the outcome.

The notion of fostering a sense of collective hope—and thus building communities of hope—in educational contexts further correlates with South African discourses that call for teaching practices that accommodate collective-oriented cultural groups associating more strongly with shared group values and roles rather than with individualistic ones. Wilson and Williams (2013) also alluded to the connection between the philosophy of ubuntu and the practice of hope from an African worldview. Similarly, in the framework of hope from an African perspective, the collective level of hope also corresponds to values involving generative interactions and interdependence. Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2007) maintained that an individual's level of hope is closely related to how social justice, democracy, and citizenship are practised within his or her community. I augment this belief by suggesting that an individual's hope can be fostered by the demonstration of such principles in the classroom—when the classroom becomes one's community.

Hooks (1994) had a vision of creating community in her classroom that respects an openness of thoughts and ideas, thus advancing a spirit of education as freedom. Therefore, could generating opportunities for collective hope in the university classroom, where students experience a level of mutual respect in striving to learn, not serve to strengthen the sustainability and gains of an authentically engaged pedagogy? This would then point to a self-sustaining, generative cycle of interactions. Further, could such a pedagogy, infused with hope, embed in student teachers a hopeful way of teaching to take into their own future practice? After all, when hope is anchored in practice as a way of being in the world, then hopeful actions can truly take hold and genuine transformation can begin.

Discussion

The value of fostering hope in teachers and schools is unquestionable. According to Lopez (2010, p. 43), "our most hopeful schools are nestled in hopeful neighbourhoods, where community members proactively help the school create a desirable future for students." He went on to describe high-hope principals and teachers who model hopeful behaviour to their learners and parents, explaining that their conviction lies in showing—rather than telling—the community how to make hope happen within and beyond the school walls. Scioli and Biller (2009) added that hopeful teachers can become instruments for positive change by putting their hope into practice in their personal and professional lives. It is evident that hope is not only about personal well-being and self-development, but is also intimately connected to social action and the capacity to pursue collective well-being and betterment. What is significant in all these statements is that for hope to be meaningful in educational contexts it has to be about the *doing* and the *showing*—and then extended further towards the *sharing*. Giroux (1993, p. 11) argued that the role of education should be to direct the individual's awareness towards the development of democracy, "in the sense that social betterment must be the necessary

consequence of individual flourishing." In his later writing he asserted this idea more strongly: "Hope is more than a politics, it is also a pedagogical and performative practice that provides the foundation for enabling human beings to learn about their potential as moral and civic agents" (Giroux, 2004, p. 38).

However, the literature linking hope theory and hope practice seems lacking. How do schools become hopeful? Where do principals and teachers learn how to be hopeful, and to put that hope into practice? I argue that teacher education programmes tasked with the holistic development of future teachers should be considering such questions. In this article I have tried to present ways in which student teachers could be equipped with the necessary tools to practise hope through an engaged pedagogy aimed at building a community of hope in the classroom. The discussion in this article thus aims to help enrich Hooks' (1994) pedagogical ideas by interweaving tangible hope practices into her depictions of engaging and liberating classroom practices. As she so aptly stated: "Education as the practice of freedom is not just about liberatory knowledge, it's about liberatory practice in the classroom" (p. 147). Further, I seek to explicitly insert hope into critical thinking about how to integrate African educational practices in higher education and to stimulate possibilities for conceptualising the responsibility of teacher education programmes to foster the capacities of student teachers as agents of hope. Thus, I conclude that hope praxis enacted alongside the values of Hooks' engaged pedagogy in teacher education programmes offers many possibilities and implications for improving school functionality and addressing educational change in the country. As Webb (2012) proposed: "Rather than leading one to transform the world itself, hope leads one instead to transform one's 'inner attitude' towards it" (p. 401); this idea resonates with the purpose of a liberatory education.

The ideas presented in this article are not without limitations. Firstly, I am aware that often university teachers are constrained by what Jacobs (2005) termed, *limit-situations*, dictated by a restrictive curriculum, inflexible policies, and overcrowded classrooms. Even Hooks (1994) recognised that to be truly an engaged teacher required a constant presence and a strong dispensation, which could be "taxing to the spirit" (p. 202). Giroux (1993) too, humbly pronounced that in theorising about the need for schools to drive social change he had greatly underestimated "both the structural and ideological constraints under which teachers labor" (p. 1). However, it is precisely in times of such realities that creative thinking and collective learning should be given more attention. With a lack of applied research to evidence my position, I recognise that my own writing falls dangerously close to a charge of being mere theorising. I therefore acknowledge the urgent need for studies that explore the practicalities and challenges of hope in practice in the South African context. Secondly, while my description of an African worldview is pertinent for understanding the relevance and significance of conceptualising hope through a cultural and contextual lens, I do acknowledge that Africa as a continent is made up of many distinct countries, ethnicities, and cultural groups. Therefore, it would be presumptuous to assume this worldview is shared by all African people. Despite this limitation, what is clear is the need to further explore and understand the praxis of hope from an African perspective in teaching and learning practice.

Conclusion

> *One of the most powerful ways of spreading hope across a community is to help hopeful young people pursue their own ideas for making their schools and their communities better. The most hopeful of the students will create their own ripples that will touch the lives of friends and family. (Lopez, 2010, p. 44)*

This position paper was intended to initiate ripples of thinking about hope in the context of teacher education, and about the possibilities of truly enabling future teachers to act as agents of hope. I have described a framework of hope from an African perspective, paying particular attention to the levels of relational and collective hope which are crucial for developing student teachers' personal and

professional capabilities. I have also sought to address the problem of a shortage of literature linking hope theory and practice in education and, more specifically, in teacher education programmes, by describing how hope can be put into practice when combined with the values of an engaged pedagogy as proposed by Hooks (1994). Therefore, by positioning a practice of hope in teacher education, meaningful spaces can be created, providing a platform for student teachers to critically reflect on issues of personal development and well-being as well as equipping them with a hopeful way of being in the classroom. I have argued that in this way student teachers can truly make a difference and feel empowered in that they are doing so. Because hope is regarded as an intrinsic human capacity, strengthened by critical reflection and generative social action, perhaps it is wise to consider Webb's (2010, p. 329) perspective that the role and duty of education should not be conceived merely as "one of instilling hope but rather of evoking it and providing it with guidance."

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