

THE ETHICS OF CARE AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Higher education institutions have commonly understood ethics and care as separate functions, rather than as an integrated practice, and have tended to delegate these responsibilities to research ethics committees, professional bodies or Human Resource departments as custodians of institutional codes of conduct. The ethics of care (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Tronto 1993; 2010; 2013) provides an alternative normative framework to such principal ethics or codes of conduct. The current higher education context, both in South Africa, and internationally is in a state of turmoil, having to face many challenges in terms of access, available funding, casualisation of labour, demands to decolonise the curriculum, amongst others. This special issue considers some of these effects of colonisation and neoliberalism on the academy from a political ethics of care perspective.

Care ethics is a growing body of scholarship in relation to education (Engelmann 2009; Noddings 2002; 2005), and more specifically, higher education. In recent years, there has been a burgeoning scholarship on professional development (Bozalek et al. 2014; Bozalek and Zembylas 2017) and there is an increasing interest in the potential of care ethics for evaluating teaching and learning in higher education (Bozalek et al. 2016; Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer 2014). Academic development has particular resonances with regard to care ethics in higher education because of the nature of its practice and the concerns for human flourishing for both students and academic staff. Academic developers, in faculties and in teaching and learning centres, have encountered many challenges in the daily practice of their profession. The ethics

of care can provide a useful normative framework for examining such challenges, as well commonplace assumptions and underlying values underpinning social arrangements in higher education and for making complex moral judgements about human flourishing and well-being of academics and students (Bozalek, Gachago and Watters 2015).

This special issue is dedicated to the theme of the joint conference of the International Consortium of Educational Development (ICED) and Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA): “Ethics, Care and Quality in Educational Development”, held in Cape Town in November 2016. It is also dedicated to our dear colleague and friend Professor Wendy McMillan, who sadly passed away in December 2015. Wendy was the Education Specialist in the Dentistry Faculty at the University of the Western Cape. She was deeply interested in academic development and the political ethics of care and co-wrote two articles on this topic, one of which was published in *Teaching in Higher Education* (Bozalek et al. 2014) and the other is currently still under review in the same journal. She played a major role in expanding the views and abilities of those with whom she wrote and worked in terms of their conceptions of academic development and care ethics. Another significant example of her influence is the impact she had on the Actuarial profession, as is explained in the article written by her husband and partner in this volume. Mickey Lowther gives credit to the ways in which they worked together in a care-full and Slow way to develop professional development for actuaries.

The articles in this special issue use the lens offered by a political ethics of care to reimagine what higher education might look like if it was guided by the values of care. The first cluster of articles, by Joan Tronto, Selma Sevenhuijsen and Dorothee Hölscher use a wider societal framework to argue for necessity of care against the neoliberal project that characterises much of present-day higher education.

The work of Joan Tronto and Selma Sevenhuijsen, two of the most eminent scholars in the political ethics of care, provide expansive and thought-provoking ideas for the application of care ethics in academic development practices. Tronto’s article is based on her keynote address at the ICED and HELTASA “Ethics, care and quality in educational development” conference. Her article frames academic development as care discourse which has struggled to gain legitimacy in higher education. Tronto advocates that academic developers need to decide which side they are on – that of encouraging those in higher education to accept their place in an unjust world order or working towards transforming profound inequalities. Academic development is problematic when regarding its task as “civilising the academic” to engage in better teaching practices. Tronto suggests that for academic development to make a meaningful contribution it must be committed to the development of caring democracies, rather than reinforcing a reliance on neoliberal market thinking and the way in which this infects the

academic project. This would mean paying attention to issues that care ethics have foregrounded such as relationality and interdependence, power and responsibility, privilege and unfair burdens of work. It would also mean that the notion of “development” should be interrogated – Tronto justifiably asks the question why it is necessary to label the improvement of teaching and learning as “development”.

Sevenhuijsen’s article provides a close-up examination of attention and attentiveness and in so doing provides a framing document for the other contributions in this special issue. Attention – a moral element in the political ethics of care focusing on the needs of others, is a concept which is gaining more prominence with regard to higher education practices such as scholarship and pedagogy (see Boulous Walker 2016; Bozalek 2017; Bozalek and Zembylas 2017; and Karen Barad’s work in Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012 for example). In terms of understanding our academic development practices from the lens of an ethics of care, we need to engage in what Sevenhuijsen terms “active attention”. This requires that we learn to wait and be patient, focusing first on our own actions and reactions, in order to improve the quality of care we offer to others. Sevenhuijsen also outlines seven interwoven activities for practicing active attention: *presence* or being there for the other, *seeing* or discernment, *active, careful listening*, *thoughtful speaking*, *honouring our intuition*, *reliability*, and *the recognition of plurality*. If academic developers could exercise these activities in their practices, it would significantly improve their ability to contribute to the flourishing of those with whom they work.

In her article pertinently titled “‘I wish I could learn that money is not everything’: Caring for justice in a neoliberal university”, Dorothee Hölscher proposes a democratic ethics of care against the structural injustices of South African higher education. She proposes that a democratic ethic of care can be employed to further the ends of social justice against the odds of a neoliberal learning context. This will also contribute to enhancing the well-being and academic development of both students and staff. To care, she claims, is “a subversive practice” and argues that practice can “provide, protect and expand opportunities” for greater engagement across an unequal higher education system; such “participatory parity” is the cornerstone of social justice. This trio of introductory articles lays the groundwork for the more specific studies that follow.

The second cluster of articles turn their attention to caring for student learning. Cheryl Belford, Daniela Gachago and Bronwyn Swartz in their topical piece on “To care or not to care – reflections on the ethics of blended learning in times of disruption” analyses the experiences of academic staff who continued to support staff and one another during campus closures. They note that the ethics of care framework helped the teachers to explore what ethical open practices might involve in a time of student protests. Arona Dison in her article titled “Development of

students' academic literacies viewed through a political ethics of care lens" draws on the insights offered by the political ethics of care to re-imagine students' academic literacies development. This article marks an important milestone for research on academic literacies at the frameworks provided by the ethics of care approach has not previously be used in academic literacies development. In this article, data on academic literacy development within a health sciences faculty at a South African university is analysed through an ethics of care lens to argue for the contribution of care ethics to the decolonisation of higher education. In "Creating 'safe-ish' learning spaces – attempts to practice an ethics of care" Pam Sykes and Daniela Gachago argue for locating "decolonising pedagogies" within the normative framework of Tronto's ethics of care. While fully safe spaces cannot be guaranteed when "gendered, classed and raced subjectivities" are revealed in a digital storytelling project, the practice of an ethics care by facilitators and students creates a space for the "generative dialogue" that is needed in building a more socially aware and socially just higher education.

The final cluster of studies address the role of care ethics in academic staff development. In the first article in this cluster, Nicoline Herman, Eli Bitzer and the late Brenda Leibowitz in their article titled "Professional learning for teaching at a research-intensive university: The need for a 'care-full' environment" show how much of the work done by academic developers and faculty staff towards the enhancement of university teaching, particularly in research-intensive universities (but those who aspire to be so), occurs in a "care-less" environment. Against this, the authors propose the transformative potential that a more "care-full" approach might offer. Karen Collett, Carolien van der Bergh, Belinda Verster and Vivienne Bozalek in "Incubating a Slow pedagogy in professional academic development: An ethics of care perspective" put the insights from the "Slow pedagogy" approach (Berg and Seeber 2016) into conversation with an ethics of care to re-imagine professional academic development and how such an approach might build and sustain caring professional learning communities. Much of evaluation work in academic staff development is untheorized and assumes an unproblematic and straightforward relationship between a professional learning intervention and measurable performance and efficiency outcomes. Diffracting a Slow pedagogy through an ethics of care perspective provides one way of re-imagining the design and delivery of professional academic development courses which is different from neoliberal imperatives. Steve Bennoun, Philippe Haeberli and Mallory Schaub in "Taking an ethics of care perspective on two university teacher training programmes" develop an ethics of care framework with which to evaluate two university teacher training programmes. The authors show more caring practice is also transformative practice that could be used as "a basis to not only evaluate but to rethink and elaborate training programmes".

Mickey Lowther in "Working with Wendy: A tribute to Slow Scholarship" shows how

key concepts in “Slow Scholarship” and Tronto’s ethics of care framework were drawn on in professional development work with the actuarial profession. The model of authentic, caring Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that emerges from this work is proposed more generally as an appropriate framework for academic development practitioners in their work with educators in professional and vocational fields. This fine study, with its moving tribute to the work of Wendy McMillan, is a fitting close to this exceptional collection of articles that begin to build a vision of (how) caring matters in higher education.

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