Gazing Inward: Teaching in the Postgraduate Milieu

Ronicka Mudaly

Abstract

This paper focuses on a critical reflection of my practice as a woman academic who supervises the research work of postgraduate students, and who teaches collaboratively in a Masters level module in the higher education context. This epistemological vigilance is facilitated by my temporary withdrawal from teaching in order to analyse my modes of academic pedagogy and practice. Drawing on theoretical frames from feminism and cultural production theory, I use journal entries to reflexively explore my experience as a woman academic navigating the postgraduate landscape.

The findings include a description of my learning in the workplace through three primary activities, namely, individual supervision, team supervision and collaborative teaching on a postgraduate module. I consider the intersecting influences of my age, gender, experience in teaching and research, and the hierarchy of different types of work, on my academic development by charting my individual journey from the undergraduate to the postgraduate terrain. The concluding remarks describe how the formation of partnerships can be achieved by working with a cadre of fellow academics. This team of academics shared the same values and practices about teaching and resulted in creation of a more authentic gestalt, and enabled postgraduate students to develop skills related to expression and critical thinking en route to becoming organic intellectuals.

Keywords: teaching, postgraduate, gender, supervision, academic development, reflection

Introduction

Wayne Hugo (2009), Aslam Fataar (2005) and Yusuf Waghid (2005) are among the few academics who have contributed to scholarship about the lived experiences of supervisors in the South African postgraduate landscape. There is a paucity of literature about teaching in the postgraduate programmes and the supervisory experiences of South African women academics in general - and of those who are black and younger in particular. Given this limitation, I address the need for beginning and sustaining conversations about experiences of women academics. In this paper I offer a personal, reflective account of how I negotiate my identity as a novice woman academic who teaches postgraduate students in a Masters in Education module, and who supervises student research projects. I do this by examining the influences of gender on my academic development (which underpin social relations in general and those in higher education institutions in particular), and of globalisation. The 'complexity of women's academic positions' (Husu 2001: 178) compels me to explore the intersectionality of a plurality of influences which shape women's development in higher education.

Shaping the Identities of South African Women Academics: A Historical and Political View

Although more than 18 years have passed since the inception of the democratic order in South Africa, gender and racial disparities continue to plague the society. Higher education institutions have acknowledged the race-based history of the country, and have transformed by adopting admission and employment strategies to redress disadvantage. Black women academics, within the South African context, are inclusive of three racial categories, namely, women of African descent, women of coloured or mixed race descent and women of Indian descent. It is important to contextualise black women's entry into the academic workforce during the past one and a half decades. Within the South African political landscape, the transformed political dispensation resulted in the affirmative action policy, among others. This has resulted in many South African higher education institutions favouring the employment of black women academics (Soudien 2010), who

are lured by scholarships and promises of structural support (Rabe & Rugunanan 2012). The outcome of these strategies is a transformation in racial demographics of staff, but this has yet to be translated into academic development of black women which is perceived to be substantial and worthy of consideration for promotion. A study conducted by Rabe *et al.* (2012: 9-10) revealed that racism at higher education institutions was viewed as the reason for why many 'newly arrived black academics leave historically white universities in South Africa'. Black women academics cited racism as the main reason for them being disregarded for permanent or promotion positions in academic institutions.

In South Africa, as well as globally, gender distribution of academic staff is skewed, because women are concentrated in junior echelons of academic departments. In Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular, higher education institutions are not suitable for the advancement of the careers of women academics (Rabe *et al*. 2012:5), and this resonates with Mama's assertion that 'Africa's campuses remain difficult and challenging places for women at many levels …' (2005:100). In the study by Rabe *et al*. (2012), white women academics reported gender discrimination and their experiences can be linked to what Mama (2006:57) refers to as 'gender-biases of malestream epistemologies, methodologies and disciplinary rubrics'. Despite efforts to modernise and liberate African universities, a marked feature of their profiles is sustained and persistent forms of inequality.

This article does not develop the story of black women's struggle, to become truly interwoven into the fabric of the world of academia, around a discourse of victimhood. It does, however, shed light on how more favourable opportunities to participate in mainstream academic life have increased challenges associated with reconciling raced, gendered and classed identities. It draws on Du Bois conceptualisation of 'double consciousness' (Lyubansky & Eidelson 2005) because it forces a reflection, a gaze, on one's professional reality through the one's own eyes, as well as the eyes of the dominant academic group. The new academic terrain in post-apartheid South Africa has resulted in a hypervigilance of black women's academic practices by themselves and by other groups. The Lacanian construct of the gaze 'entails that the human being's subjectivity is determined through a gaze which places the subject under observation, causing the subject to experience

themselves as an object which is seen' (Lee 2003:1). The formulation of the black women academic's professional identity is not simply a result of a bruised self conception; it is shaped by, among other influences, other groups' perceptions of who she is. The black women academic's concern about her subaltern status which is borne, firstly, of a socio-political history of legitimated oppression, and secondly, and paradoxically, of the implementation of affirmative action policies which are embedded with notions of 'lowering standards for black people', increases her feeling of vulnerability (Eidelson & Eidelson 2003). This results in an ever-prevalent pressure to prove her epistemic credibility.

Given this background, I begin this article with scholars' views about supervision and the potential for the process of supervision to lead to emancipatory goals. Using theories from feminism, critical education and cultural production I look at the potential for novice academics like myself to exercise agency in academic development through postgraduate teaching. Simultaneously I interrogate my own practice as I create spaces which enable transformation of my students into organic intellectuals. I offer an inside view of my academic development by drawing on my journal entries, which I compiled after each lecture in a Masters in Education module, and after each individual and joint supervision meeting. I chronicled my personal experiences, feelings and views, and reflect on these to explore my induction into postgraduate teaching. These journal entries were used to 'support reflexivity' (Pinnegar & Hamilton 2009:123).

Supervision as an Avenue of Possibilities

A supervisor of postgraduate students facilitates a student's journey from becoming a student to being a scholar. Hugo (2009:704) underscores the importance of exploring the 'affective dimensions of supervision … and subtle energies flowing through what is a very human endeavour'. For Hugo, the supervisor engages the student in processes of consciousness raising, breaking through silences and barriers and entering a new world of possibilities in which they can extend existing or establish new research discourses. In order to achieve this, the supervisor is required, among other things, to direct the research, motivate students and serve as a sounding board and mentor (Gatfield 2005).

Ronicka Mudaly

Theoretical Insights

My reflection takes into account these views of the role of supervisors, and draws on theoretical frames from Kathleen Weiler's critical educational theory, Chrisler's identity construction of women academics, which is embedded in feminist theory, and theories of cultural production as expounded by Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire.

In their introduction to Weiler's work entitled *Women Teaching for Change* (Weiler 1988: ix-xiv), Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire add that practices embedded in hegemonic ideals on the one hand, and resistance to these on the other, mutually inform each other, and that these contradictory relations can create a space for an emancipatory pedagogy. Freire stressed the link between the process of education and 'the process of becoming fully human' by asserting that 'education is humanizing when it is critical, dialogical and praxical' (Roberts 2000:1). Freire conceived of a pedagogy of hope and optimism as opposed to fatalism, where education can be used as a vehicle of struggle against discrimination such as racism and sexism. He appealed to teachers and students to become agents of their own history, through co-constructing meaning (Weiler 1988:17). Within the higher education context, a reflection on how academics as teachers create spaces for transformation of their own identities and those of their students is useful.

On academic identity, Hugo (2009:712) alludes to 'ways in which intellectual power are constituted, located and reproduced'. Although academics are historically constituted within higher education environments, this does not negate their potential for creativity. Antonio Gramsci's discourse reflects this, by moving away from theoretical approaches of reproduction of class, social and gender interactions towards the potential for 'agency and the production of meaning and class and gender identities through resistance to imposed knowledge and practices' (Weiler 1988:3). Gramsci argues that our consciousness not only comprises hegemonic ideas but also contains the capacity for self-critique and transformation, referred to as 'critical elaboration', and this is vital in the development of the 'organic intellectual' (Weiler 1988:3).

Borg, Buttigieg and Mayo (2002) give further insight into Gramsci's view of an intellectual as one who cannot truly claim to know, without the sense of understanding and feeling for people being educated within a particular socio-cultural-historical context. Gramsci argued that for abstract

and philosophical knowledge to become alive, it must be linked to lived experiences and passions of people for whom that knowledge is intended. The intellectual who mediates knowledge in this way creates the space for people to think coherently and to become 'organic intellectuals' (Borg *et al*. 2002:27). Stromquist (2005) underscores the need for academics to take the initiative and become progressive, in order to develop their students as organic intellectuals who can reverse trends which ignore the redressing of inequalities. While Gramsci and Freire focus on the potential of education to address asymmetrical relations of power, especially as this relates to class discrimination, Weiler (1988) and Chrisler (1998) seek ways of re-organising education in order to resist gender oppression as it unfolds in higher education institutions.

Men of Knowledge versus Women ~~Scholars~~ Teachers

Chrisler (1998:107) asks whether the woman academic identifies herself as a teacher or as a 'man of knowledge'. She draws on numerous studies which suggest that at higher education institutions women are generally the teachers while men are the scholars. Her review of women's and men's work at colleges and universities reveals that as teachers, women academics communicate existing knowledge in undergraduate modules, while mostly men academics, who serve as scholars, engage in innovating, developing new knowledge and teaching in advanced modules or postgraduate programmes. Women academics measure the success of their teaching in terms of their ability to sustain students' interest to remain in the programme; men academics measure their success in terms of research productivity and conference presentations. Men academics are perceived to possess the innate ability to skilfully present their findings and engage in academic arguments and debates. Consequently, women academics are more likely to name teaching in undergraduate modules as their primary work activity while men consider research as their principle activity; this leads to what Husu (2001:174) frames as 'women's systemic under-representation' in higher education institutions. Men are therefore more likely to be engaged in research with postgraduate students (Chrisler 1998:108-116), while women serve as what Stolte-Heiskanen (1991) calls 'handmaidens of the knowledge class'.

Chrisler's (1998:108-116) synopsis of studies about careers in higher education reveals that higher education institutions consider the work of teaching (especially of undergraduate modules) as unchallenging and not contingent upon specific skills. Research and scholarly writing, on the other hand, are perceived as work which involves the mastering of rigorous skills which are not intuitive and need to be learned. Men, as scholars, spend more time on reviewing and publishing - on doing that which promotion committees value. Women, as teachers, spend more time on counselling students, and design teaching in a way which promotes the development of students as responsible citizens. Women academics reveal a passion for teaching which enables transformation of students from passive to active personae constantly moving towards positions of empowerment.

African intellectuals, such as Dzodzi Tsikata (2007:36), reported on a study at a Ghanaian university, which found that the institutional culture was underpinned by the

> perception that real academics were male, the practice of giving more challenging and higher profile jobs to men, the continuing expectation that women would play domestic, ceremonial roles at work and the subjection of those who did not conform to these norms to ridicule and disapproval.

The discourse of men of knowledge versus women teachers, is extended by Teresa Barnes (2007:8), who argues the struggle of African women in intellectual life is rooted in the association of 'men and masculinity' with 'labour of the mind', and 'women and femininity' with labour of the body.

Women academics who engage in research and publication tend to focus on interdisciplinary research areas. Gatekeepers such as editors and reviewers doubt women's scholarly credibility, because they do not focus on primary aspects of traditional disciplines (Burgess 1997; Gregory 1995). They view women as unskilled scholars who do not theorise and analyse adequately, who do not present rational arguments due to their innate emotional nature, and who locate their work in (inferior) qualitative methodological paradigms (Burgess 1997; Gregory 1995). This type of less visible discrimination sustains gender inequalities in knowledge production. This position and view of women academics is particularly significant in

South African universities, which are dominated by the global market discourse. Rowland (2002), Subotsky (2003) and Stromquist (2005) remind us of the tension between the global market discourse and the transformative distributive discourse, which are rooted in opposing ideologies: how higher education institutions are expected to support wealth generation and simultaneously engage in transformation and wealth re-distribution to meet the political goals of the democratic order.

From Secondary School Teacher to Academic

I had worked as a senior science educator in a secondary school for more than two decades and had qualified with a PhD in Education before I joined a university as an academic. During the first two years at the university my workload comprised teaching undergraduate students only, although the job description clearly indicated multiple roles which were embedded in three broad areas: teaching, research and community engagement. Several requests to teach in postgraduate programmes in my school were unsuccessful because those posts were filled by more senior and experienced colleagues. Nevertheless I was not insulated from constant pressure to publish, because publications are a significant source of income at the university. I quickly learned that gender matters, age matters, experience matters and that the type of work an academic does, matters. My lack of engagement in research work, which is generally located in the postgraduate terrain, created a barrier to my ability to publish. In South African universities the funding system favours research and the publications which arise from this over teaching. It was not long before I understood that the source of academic power and status was research, and that in this system teaching was undervalued.

Despite this knowledge of what the higher education institution values, I chose to teach a postgraduate module and to supervise students engaged in postgraduate research. This formed a part of my teaching workload, and created the opportunity for me to engage students in a transformative discourse as a way towards developing organic intellectuals.

Developing Epistemic Credibility

A review of the literature suggests that the expertise of a supervisor generally

resides in the number of publications they have achieved in a research area, the type of journals which publish these works, and knowledge of relevant literature in the field and of methodological and philosophical research paradigms. I did not have the benefit of what Fataar (2005:41) refers to as the 'aura of experience to mediate my authority relations' with staff and students, in the same way that those who fit more appropriately into that academic triad of age, gender and experience might have had. As a novice academic I was given the opportunity to engage only with teaching undergraduate modules; I had a limited number of research publications and no experience in postgraduate teaching. Given this professional reality, I worked tirelessly to develop my epistemic credibility through collaborative teaching and independent learning. This 'self-investment' was possible by my conscious decision to pay less attention to the lonely, sometimes chilly nature of academic climates (Vacarro 2007:104) and to actively seek or generate academic spaces which were supportive and inclusive.

Learning in the Workplace

Numerous workshops, research schools, conferences, colloquiums, seminars and other activities, which were intended to build the capacity of academic staff to engage in research and teaching, were organised by the institution at which I worked. Many of these activities were scheduled during the times which were allocated for teaching, and those academics with high teaching loads could not attend these programmes and benefit from these opportunities for professional development- in this way, lines of exclusion were constructed. Many meetings of committees and various boards also occurred while teaching was expected to take place, and once again, academics with high teaching loads were unable to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the life of the institution. Although activities were organised for training and mentoring staff to serve as supervisors, they were not easily accessible by those who had teaching commitments. There was an increase in the postgraduate enrolment, and supervisors were expected to work in diverse research fields. This was probably based on what Gatfield (2005) alluded to as the assumption by higher education institutions that supervisors have an innate knowledge of supervision processes and styles in multiple research fields. I developed my

capacity as a supervisor by engaging in three activities, namely individual supervision, working as a team with more experienced supervisors, and teaching on a Masters in Education module which enabled students to develop research proposals. I read widely about conducting educational research and scholarly writing. I also read in the field in which my students' work was located. In addition, I attended workshops and research schools, when these were scheduled outside of teaching time. Initially, I paid to attend some of these activities from my salary, because I had not generated research funds from publications.

Working with Students and Academics
Collaborative Teaching on a Masters in Education Module
I accepted an invitation to lecture jointly with three other more experienced, more senior academics on a Masters in Education module which facilitated the process of development of a comprehensive research proposal. We worked collectively to assist students in developing the skills related to formulation of a research topic, developing a rationale for the study, conducting a literature review, selecting a suitable methodological approach which articulated with the philosophical paradigm and research questions, developing a realistic time frame and considering ethical issues. Several assessment tasks were designed, related to each part of the proposal development. I developed rubrics for assessment which I shared with my fellow academics. The rubrics served two purposes: firstly, they enabled me to focus on aspects which were tested for, and secondly, they facilitated some degree of standardisation among the assessors.

I benefited from this collegial arrangement, which was underpinned by reciprocal peer learning. A collaborative teaching approach was adopted; this blurred the roles of experienced and inexperienced academics. I was praised by my senior colleagues for well-planned and successfully presented topics. My sustained participation in teaching this module was due in no small part to the professional ethics exercised by each academic who taught this module, which included the academic values of autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility. I taught the module for a period of three years, and during the third year was given the opportunity to work with part of the

group of students independently of my colleagues. This signaled my peers' confidence in my ability and marked a fundamental moment in my development as a teacher in the postgraduate arena.

Commitment by experienced personnel to the development of novice academics like myself and their celebration of the small successes of novice academics, contributed to my academic development. The experienced academics served as role models of how to teach students and interact with them in and out of lectures; they exuded confidence and their preparation to teach at postgraduate level was impeccable. I used journal entries to reflect on my practice at the end of each lecture, and improved my time management and level of confidence by adopting different strategies, for example, issuing printed notes to students and referring them to relevant readings which could not be engaged with in class due to time constraints.

The students who studied this module were diverse in terms of their educational experiences, age, language proficiency, cognitive ability, motivation to complete the degree, work (from mature professionals to young M.Ed. students with little/ no teaching experience), and personal life challenges. I was careful about the effects of qualitative remarks on the emotional well-being of students. I affirmed students' ability and offered specific guidance on how they could contribute to discourse in their field of study. I was cognisant of Hyatt's (2005) insight into the negative impact of ill-conceived and insensitive remarks made by academics. For many of our students, English was not their first language. I used many conventional terms which constitute academic discourse, for example 'methodological and analytical rigour', 'plagiarism', 'critically evaluate' and 'coherent narrative', and on reflection I realise that these terms should be simplified and explained further.

Joint Supervision

I approached more experienced supervisors and requested that we supervise our students as a group on Saturday mornings. Each of us developed teaching materials which related to specific aspects of thesis development, for example, literature review, conceptual frameworks, research methodology and data analysis. After each presentation students were invited to discuss their difficulties and successes. This provided a platform for students and

academics to co-construct understanding. Seven students, each at different stages of progress towards their Masters in Education degree, formed this group. They developed the ability to offer constructive critique in a sensitive manner. They formed a resource network and sent relevant readings to individual members. These students informed one another about debates and television documentaries which were relevant to individual student's projects. They spoke about their difficulties in developing their theses and shared coping strategies related to their domestic and work lives. The students perceived this environment as a safe space where they could disclose their difficulties and seek resolutions. At the time of writing this article, three of the students in this group were awarded their degree a year after they had participated in the joint supervision programme. One of the student's thesis is currently being examined. My view is that the collaborative forms of supervision and teaching had a positive influence on the favourable pedagogical outcomes for the students.

Individual Supervision

The supervisory process, according to Fataar (2005:38), is 'framed by the interaction between the scholarly identity of the supervisor, on the one hand, and the identity of the student, on the other hand'. I reflect on my supervision of women students who completed their dissertations towards the Masters in Education degree.

One of the students had worked with another supervisor and had begun with her study several years before I was requested to work with her. I was not briefed about why the previous supervisor did not continue to work with this student. She had read literature and identified an area of paucity in the research field. Her research questions did not articulate with the philosophical and methodological paradigms. Her approach was located in the positivist mode of thought, and she had planned to solicit mainly statistical data. She sought to evaluate the implementation of an intervention programme on science students' academic scores, using quantitative research methodology. She wanted what Fataar (2005) refers to as an 'activist-driven, pragmatic intervention'. During the initial meetings I sensed her passion for teaching sciences and her search for strategies which would improve students' academic achievement. I wanted to extend the boundaries beyond

descriptive statistical data and encouraged her to explore the social, economic and political dimensions as a way towards developing 'conceptual and explanatory depth' (Fataar 2005:53), and in doing this I provided fertile terrain for her development towards an organic intellectual. My intellectual contribution allowed her to re-shape her study from a statistically descriptive into an explorative one which used a qualitative approach and was located in an interpretive paradigm.

Another student planned to study the effects of providing material resources on the teaching of science. Her intention was to look towards immediate, visible, tangible improvement in the teaching of science through the provision of science kits. Although I did not articulate this, I thought that if the science kits were provided to these schools, then the student would have no research project to speak of. I encouraged her to locate the teaching of school science in the fragmented apartheid landscape and to examine the effect of historically unequal provision of human and material resources on the teaching and learning of school science. She was guided to track the transforming educational policies in post-apartheid South Africa, and to analyse national and international studies on the state of science education in this country. She was encouraged to broaden her analytical lens and examine the complex challenges experienced by students and teachers which affect science education. In this way I enabled her to interact with teachers to obtain a greater depth of understanding of their teaching experiences. Her consciousness about the perception of a scientist (a white man in a lab coat who does important work in a value neutral space), and how this related to black science teachers who were subjected to multiple forms of subordination and oppression, was raised. Connecting herself with the lived experiences of these teachers enabled the student to develop towards the identity of an organic intellectual. She revised the goal of her project to include strategies to empower teachers to teach more effectively.

Gazing Inward: Supporting Postgraduate Students

I place my account of my development as a supervisor and teacher of a postgraduate module under the analytical spotlight by drawing on Gatfield's (2005: 315-316) model of supervisory management with its three elements of structural, support and exogenous factors. Structural factors comprise

organisational, accountability and skills provision elements. Organisational processes which direct the supervisory process include elements such as roles and expectations of students and supervisors, formulating a researchable topic, scheduling meetings and setting goals. Accountability elements include contractual agreements between the student and supervisor, evaluation of chapters, time taken for feedback to students, and progress reports. Skills related to oral presentation and scholarly writing are among those which comprise the third element of the structural component, namely skills provision.

Support factors include pastoral care, which incorporates elements such as boosting students' morale, encouraging and praising students' efforts, being sensitive to their needs, building confidence and providing feedback in a way which is sensitive to students. Support factors also include material support such as provision of a working space, computers, email facilities and policy handbooks by the supervisor.

Exogenous elements are related to how the supervisor deals with the psychological needs of the student, which may relate to students' motivation, personality and maturity. This element considers variation in students' abilities as they relate to their organisational and research skills, their ability to work independently and the extent to which they are goal-driven.

Structural factors which pertained to the roles and expectations of the student and supervisor were enshrined in a contractual agreement which the university formulated. This was signed by the students and me. The processes of enabling students to formulate a researchable topic and develop a coherent proposal were shaped by my own research interests, located in youth activism and socially just science education. This influenced my students to explore the emancipatory potential of education; they did this by examining 'the intersubjective world of ordinary people' (Fataar 2005:41) in order to understand the people they were teaching and researching, and then to create spaces for making participants their own agents of transformation.

I was acutely aware of my relative inexperience as a teacher in the postgraduate module, and as a supervisor, and invested large amounts of time in reading students' work, meeting with students and providing intensive, rapid feedback. I also read widely in the field and shared readings with students to enable them to progress more effectively. For me this process was simultaneously time-intensive, exhilarating and exhausting.

My provision of what Gatfield (2005) refers to as support factors impacted positively on all our students. For several students, women in particular, our meetings served as an opportunity for them to speak about constraints they experienced at work and in their homes. Although I did not overtly encourage these discussions, students from the three groups (those with whom I engaged in the Masters module, joint supervision and individual supervision) seemed to need someone with whom they could share what they considered to be barriers to their progress. I listened to their challenges, which were related to time constraints due to their domestic and professional responsibilities, childcare duties, high workloads in their homes, at their places of worship and in their schools, being coerced into teaching new subjects and having to train in these fields, and their health and that of their families. Some women brought their children to our individual supervision meetings because they did not have the privilege of being able to engage the services of child minders.

My response to some of these challenges was to find a way to get students to work on the campus during weekends. I booked venues for them to work in at the university without interruption and arranged with the library staff to assist them in their search for resources. I was pleasantly surprised by the large number of students who used these opportunities to advance the writing of their theses.

Students varied in terms of their personalities and the ability to work independently (exogenous factors). I perceived most students as being over-reliant on academics. This was probably due to my own experience as a postgraduate student, who did not enjoy the benefit of studying modules about writing a proposal or thesis. In order to enable these students I enlisted the support of the librarians to assist them in locating specific literature which I viewed as useful in the development of their research discourse. I sought to enable students to increase their independence as researchers by inviting them to numerous research workshops, which were held by national and international experts and were funded by the university. Some students did not submit their work timeously, and others arrived late for lectures, workshops or meetings. Initially, I viewed this as tardiness on their part, but through sustained interaction, I reflected on their multiple commitments outside of their work towards their qualification and I responded more sympathetically.

I regret that I cannot claim to have stood on the shoulders of specific academic foremothers in order to work in the postgraduate field. This is not because women have constructed themselves as victims of a gendered division of labour or fallen into the metaphorical black hole of academic hierarchies; it is more likely because few women academics located in the southern global context have shared conversations about their learning journeys. My workplace learning was not formally structured; it was non-sequential and non-linear. It occurred because I refused to accept my novice status as an academic, the colour of my skin, my relatively younger age and my gender, as a liability. Through reflexive explorations of my practice, I was able to take control of my professional development and that of my students, by investing in my learning.

Conclusion

There is an absence of formalised barriers which are embedded in overtly discriminatory laws in South African higher education institutions. However, less visible forms of discrimination related to age, experience and gender persist and render women subaltern academics. Mentoring and professional development programmes are planned and implemented, but often, these coincide with teaching activities and as a result, are inaccessible to those academics who are mainly women and who have high teaching loads. Universities can create opportunities for real transformation by examining the micropolitics of institutional culture which enable and disable particular groups. I have sought to give an account of my own construction of my work as a woman supervisor and teacher of postgraduate students in the South African context. My view is that central to the discourse of enabling academic development are the vowels which represent the following elements embedded in interaction: A for autonomy, E for encouragement, I for induction, O for opportunity, and U for understanding. The novice woman academic should be granted or should generate the opportunity to work in the postgraduate field as an autonomous agent who has strengths and can benefit postgraduate students, instead of applying institutional constraints to limit her work to teaching in undergraduate modules. An understanding of the novice woman academic by experienced peers can facilitate her induction and sustained participation in postgraduate teaching. Mutual respect and encouragement of the novice woman academic are vital

in enabling her to re-invent a positive professional identity. Women academics who move beyond the depressing discourse of oppression, which emphasises their isolation, exclusion, and positioning as outsiders, towards one of agency, which provides insight into their resistance and transformation, can enable them to empower their students.

References
Barnes, T 2007. Politics of the Mind and Body: Gender and Institutional Culture in African Universities. *Feminist Africa* 8: 8 - 25.
Borg, C, J Buttigieg & P Mayo 2002. *Gramsci and Education.* Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
Burgess, NJ 1997. Tenure and Promotion among African American Women in the Academy: Issues and Strategies. In Benjamin, L (ed): *Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.
Chrisler, JC 1998. Teacher versus Scholar: Role Conflict for Women? In Collins HL, JC Chrisler & K Quina (eds): *Career Strategies for Women in Academe Arming Athena.* London: Sage Publications.
Eidelson, RJ & JI Eidelson 2003. Dangerous Ideas: Five Beliefs that Propel Groups toward Conflict. *American Psychologist* 58: 182 - 192.
Fataar, A 2005. Negotiating Student Identity in the Doctoral Proposal Development Process: A Personal Reflective Account. *Journal of Education* 36: 37 - 58.
Gatfield, T 2005. An Investigation into PhD Supervisory Management Styles: Development of a Dynamic Conceptual Model and its Managerial Implications. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27,3: 311 - 325.
Gregory, ST 1995. *Black Women in the Academy: The Secrets to Success and Achievement.* Lanham, New York: University Press of America.
Hyatt, DF 2005. 'Yes, a very good point!': A Critical Genre Analysis of a Corpus of Feedback Commentaries on Master of Education Assignments. *Teaching in Higher Education* 10,3: 339 - 353.
Hugo, W 2009. Spiralling Reference: A Case Study of Apprenticeship into an Academic Community of Practice. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 23,4: 703 - 721.

Husu, L 2001. On Metaphors on the Position of Women in Academia and Science. *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 9,3: 172 - 181.

Lee, P 2003. Lacan, 'The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze'. Available at: http://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/lacansplit.htm (Accessed 22 April 2012).

Lyubansky, M & RJ Eidelson 2005. Revisiting Du Bois: The Relationship Between African American Double Consciousness and Beliefs about Racial and National Group Experiences. *Journal of Black Psychology* 31,1: 3 - 26.

Mama, A 2005. Gender Studies for Africa's Transformation. In Mkandawire, T (ed.) *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Mama, A 2006. Pursuing Gender Equality in the African University. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 1,1: 53 - 79.

Pinnegar, S & ML Hamilton 2009. *Self-Study of Practice as a Genre of Qualitative Research*. New York: Springer.

Rabe, M & P Rugunanan 2012. Exploring Gender and Race amongst Female Sociologists Exiting Academia in South Africa. *Gender and Education* DOI:10. 1080/09540253.2011.630313.

Roberts, P 2000. *Education, Literacy and Humanization*: *Exploring the Work of Paulo Freire*. Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Rowland, S 2002. Overcoming Fragmentation in Professional Life: The Challenge for Academic Development. *Higher Education Quarterly* 56,1: 52 - 66.

Soudien, C 2010. Transformation in Higher Education: A Briefing Paper. Available at: http://www.dbsa.org/Research/Higher%20Education %20and%20Training/Transformation%20in%20higher%20education-%20A%20briefing%20paper%20by%20Crain%20Soudien.pdf (Accessed 26 April 2012.)

Stolte-Heiskanen, V 1991. Handmaidens of the 'knowledge class': Women in Science in Finland. In Stolte-Heiskanen, V (ed): *Women in Science: Token Women or Gender Equality*. Oxford: Berg.

Stromquist, NP 2005. The Impact of Globalization on Education and Gender: An Emergent Cross-national Balance. *Journal of Education* 37: 7 - 38.

Subotsky, G 2003. Symbolism and Substance: Towards an Understanding of Change and Continuity in South African Higher Education. In Eggins, H (ed): *Globalization and Reform in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Tsikata, D 2007. Gender, Institutional Cultures and Career Trajectories of Faculty of the University of Ghana. *Feminist Africa* 8: 26 - 41.

Vaccaro, A 2007. Toward Self-Investment: Using Feminist and Critical Race Lenses to Analyze Motivation, Self-Esteem, and Empowerment of Women's College Studies. In Pasque PA & SE Nicholson (eds): *Empowering Women in Higher Education and Student Affairs*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

Waghid, Y 2005. Education, Imagination and Forgiveness. *Journal of Education* 37: 225 - 241.

Weiler, K 1988. *Women Teaching for Change.* Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Ronicka Mudaly
Mail Address: Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605
South Africa
mudalyr@ukzn.ac.za
Tel: +270312603643
Fax: +270312603697