

# **Power, Democracy and Technology: The Potential Dangers of Care for Teachers in Higher Education**

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## **Abstract**

Internationally, there is a growing interest in the potential of care ethics as a useful normative framework to evaluate teaching and learning in higher education. However, to date there has been little engagement with the inherent dangers of care such as those of paternalism and parochialism. This is particularly pertinent in the South African context where there are on-going struggles to find ways of dealing with continuing inequality experienced by students, who may be at the receiving end of paternalism and parochialism. This article focuses on interviews conducted with teaching and learning practitioners collected during a larger national project on the potential of emerging technologies to achieve qualitative learning outcomes in differently placed South African higher education institutions. An analysis of the interviews indicated that while these lecturers were portrayed as innovative educators, using emerging technologies to enhance their pedagogy, issues of paternalism and parochialism inevitably affected teaching as a practice of care. The findings showed that without self-reflexivity and critical engagement with issues of power and control, including choice of technology, there exists danger that teaching could be paternalistic, leading to disempowerment of students and a narrow parochial focusing on the student-teacher dyad. What also emerged from the findings was that interdisciplinary teaching and student-led cross-disciplinary learning has the potential to mitigate parochialism in the curriculum.

**Keywords:** ethics of care; dangers of care; parochialism; paternalism; inequality; higher educators; technology-enhanced-learning

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the political ethics of care as a normative framework. Normative frameworks are generally used to evaluate commonplace assumptions and underlying values underpinning social arrangements and for making complex moral judgements about human flourishing and well-being in various fields and in relation to social issues (Robinson 1999; Sevenhuijsen 2004). The interest in the political ethics of care as a normative framework has now been extended to the field of higher education policies and practices, both globally and locally (see for example Bozalek & Carolissen 2012; Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012, Bozalek *et al.* 2014; Zembylas, Bozalek & Shefer 2014). The political ethics of care can be regarded as a useful normative framework in higher education for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides an alternative lens to the assumption that the world consists of independent, self-sufficient human beings, recognising that dependency is an inevitable, central and normal condition in human life. Secondly, the political ethics of care is based upon a relational ontology that has as its focus the connections between human beings as well as the connections between human and nonhuman beings, focusing on the interconnectedness of humans and the environment. Thirdly, the political ethics of care foregrounds particularity, embodiedness, vulnerability and the political contestation of needs, as well as otherness and difference as central to human existence (Bozalek 2011). In contrast to the aforementioned, rights-based approaches and traditional social justice theories, as dominant ways of reasoning, have the ‘rational economic man’ who is disembodied, autonomous and independent as their normative ideal of a citizen. Fourthly, traditional social justice and rights-based approaches tend to favour universal rules, whereas the political and critical ethics of care focus on responsibilities (Donovan & Adams 2007). These considerations of the political and critical ethics of care make it a useful framework to think about social inequalities in the higher education arena globally (Mahon & Robinson 2011), but even more so in our local context, in which severe social inequalities continue to prevail. In considering the usefulness of care as a normative framework, it is important to distinguish between approaches which have as their focus family

or dyadic relationships (see e.g. Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; 2005; 2004; and Ruddick 1989), and those which focus on public, policy, institutional and global issues (Bozalek *et al.* 2014a; Robinson 2011; Zembylas *et al.* 2014). It is the latter approaches (i.e. the political ethics of care which focuses on macro issues) within the South African higher education context which will be the focus of this paper.

The contribution that this particular paper makes is its focus on what has been termed by Joan Tronto (1993; 2011; 2013) as the *dangers* or *problems* of care as a normative lens. In particular, we look at the problems of care in relation to teaching and learning in South African higher education institutions. While the ethics of care has been used as a normative lens to analyse professional development in teaching and learning (Bozalek *et al.* 2014a; Engelmann 2009), feminist critical citizenship in higher education (Bozalek & Carolissen 2012), assessment practices (Bozalek *et al.* 2014b) and institutional arrangements (Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012; Tronto 2010), there is a paucity of literature on the *dangers of care*, particularly as it pertains to higher education. Tronto (1993; 2011; 2012) is the prominent author who has identified both *paternalism* and *parochialism* as constituting the dangers of care, and we will mainly be focusing on her work in this article in relation to how caring practices such as teaching and learning in higher education can inadvertently fall into the trap of parochialism and paternalism (Robinson 1999). Consequently, this paper's specific contribution is making explicit the dangers of care pertaining to teaching and learning in higher education that have not been extensively written about.

In order to examine how these dangers of care - viz. parochialism and paternalism - play out in South African higher educators' teaching and learning practices with emerging technologies, this paper uses data from in-depth interviews from a larger national research project. In this project we explored the potential of emerging technologies, which are often, although not always, located outside the institutional realm and hence transfer the locus of control to the learners and the educator, to transform the educator's teaching and learning practices (see for example Bozalek, Ng'ambi & Gachago 2013; Bozalek *et al.* 2013; or Gachago *et al.* 2013). Here we investigate in more depth the relationship between the choice of technology and its locus of control, level of expert knowledge, and interdisciplinary teaching within a political ethics of care framework. In particular we show how interdisciplinary teaching and learning creates spaces of vulnerability,

both for lecturers and learners (Leibowitz *et al.* 2010; Leibowitz *et al.* 2011; Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds 2014) and can offer a democratic and empowering approach – potentially mitigating *parochialism*. The paper also demonstrates that while academics set out with the best intentions regarding how their educational practices impact on students, this may not be enough to achieve human flourishing and qualitative educational outcomes. As a practice of care, teaching involves more than good intentions. According to Tronto (1993: 136), ‘It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation and of all the actors’ situations, needs and competencies’. Thus self-reflexivity is a crucial practice to diminish *paternalistic* tendencies in teaching and learning.

The paper is structured in the following way: we first provide an explication of the theoretical framework we use in this article and then briefly discuss the research methodology that was used. Thereafter, we present the findings, and explain the model we developed from analysing the findings, using the political ethics of care as an analytical lens. We then discuss the findings and develop some conclusions from the findings.

## Care as a Practice and Disposition

Tronto (1999; 2013) sees care as both a *practice* and a *disposition*, which is different from the way Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984) and Ruddick (1989) have viewed care. Tronto and Berenice Fisher describe care in the following way:

At the most general level, care consists of everything we do to continue, maintain, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher & Tronto 1990 in Tronto 1993: 103)

We see university teaching with technology as a practice of care, which can either be done well or badly, depending on how the moral elements of care described by Tronto (1993) are integrated into teaching with technology. Tronto is unique in her identification of four phases of care with their associated moral elements in her earlier work, and has more latterly added a fifth phase of care (Tronto 2013). The phases of care and their associated mo-

ral elements are the following:

1. Caring about - this is where the need for care is identified. The associated moral element of this first phase is *attentiveness*.
2. Caring for - once a need is recognised, it should be acted upon - the associated moral element with this second phase is *responsibility*.
3. Caregiving - the actual hands-on process of giving care - the associated moral element is *competence*.
4. Care receiving - the ways in which the recipient of care responds to the care received - the corresponding moral element is *responsiveness*.
5. Caring with - the reiterative process of care which is the fifth phase recently added by Tronto (2013). The moral qualities of *trust* and *solidarity* are developed through the reliance of others on care and the caring of relational beings with each other.

For a political ethics of care, all of the abovementioned phases and their moral elements would need to be present and the integration of these phases in teaching approaches would also need to be present.

## **Paternalism and Parochialism: The Dangers of Care**

### ***Paternalism***

Tronto (1993) cautions against the dangers of care which includes paternalism and parochialism. She sees paternalism as stemming from the powerful position that a caregiver holds in relation to a care receiver in meeting the latter's needs. The caregiver may thus have an overdeveloped sense of his or her own importance in solving problems leading to the caregiver assuming that he or she is all knowing about the needs of the recipient of care. Ultimately, the recipient of care (the student in our case) becomes infantilised in the relationship. As Tronto (1993: 170) puts it, 'especially when the care-givers' sense of importance, duty, career, etc., are tied to their caring role, we can well imagine the development of relationships of profound inequality'. From our perspective in this article, this would mean that if a teacher in higher education as a caregiver is overconfident in 'knowing' or deciphering the students' needs, students may in the process become infantilised and relationships of inequality may be an

inevitable result of such a situation.

In addition to considerations of paternalism from a political ethics of care perspective, paternalism has also been considered by bioethicist Tom Beauchamp (2010) and economist Esther Duflo (2012). Beauchamp is concerned that paternalism in health care intentionally limits the autonomy of individuals without their consent, by taking decisions on their behalf, and overriding their preferences for 'their own good'. Duflo (2012), in her Tanner lecture on 'Paternalism vs Freedom?', refers to paternalism as providing for people's basic needs without consulting them about what their needs are, overriding people's freedom on the understanding that those in power know better. Yet Duflo (2012) shows that for the poor, having the state take basic decisions on their behalf makes them more rather than less free, in that they are less exploited and more protected by the state in terms of their basic needs. She provided the example of water, noting that those who are deprived of such a basic necessity in life do not need to be consulted about whether they want it or not.

Michael Slote (2007) in his discussion on paternalism in care ethics observes that in some cases, such as insisting on riding a motorcycle with a helmet, paternalism may be acceptable in a person's best interests to prevent damage to him or herself. One could argue similarly in the field of teaching and learning in higher education that in some cases, the educator may *through the connectivity of his/her relationship with the student*, be able to intervene in a student's best interests regarding his/her educational trajectory in an empathetic manner.

The decision-making processes in education - who is involved and who is excluded - are important to consider with regards to paternalism (Tronto 2011). With paternalism, decisions are taken by the caregiver or those in power (teachers, managers) on behalf of the care-receivers (students). In this paper, we define democracy as students' ability to be part of the decision-making process regarding their learning, and their ability to participate on an equal footing in this regard. Students' participation in their own learning would alter power relations between lecturers, students and their institutional contexts.

In the South African context where many students do not have access to basic resources, paternalism regarding provision of resources to meet the aforementioned needs may be necessary. For example, many students find it difficult to study because they do not have access to transport or food, and

institutional provision of such resources should be regarded as a basic necessity. However, once basic needs are met students should participate in democratic decision-making processes regarding their learning needs.

### ***Parochialism***

With regard to parochialism, Robinson (1999; 2011) sees the danger of care being relegated to the private or intimate sphere of life. It is for this reason that political care ethicists such as Tronto (1993) and Slote (2007) are critical of authors such as Nel Noddings and Sara Ruddick, who base their notions of care exclusively on dyadic mother to child relationships. Additionally, Noddings' exclusion of distant others in her conception of care (Slote 2007) is troubling, as higher education teaching can involve more than two people and can also traverse geographical contexts and disciplines.

The parochial and partial nature of care, which focuses only on those close to us rather than distant others or little known strangers, makes human rights-based critics of care sceptical about its usefulness as a normative framework. These critiques are addressed by political care ethicists (Tronto 1993; 2011; 2013; Robinson 1999; 2011; Sevenhuijsen 2004; Slote 2007) who conceptualise care beyond private/public binaries and see it as concerning human flourishing more generally, as can be seen, for example in Fisher and Tronto's (1993) definition of care. To care only for those near to one, would in Tronto's (2013) consideration, be a form of *privileged irresponsibility*, in that it would exclude a concern for more distant others. Iris Young's (2011) notion of a socially connected responsibility also encourages a morality which links responsibility for issues of social justice across distances to institutional and structural relations which are socially connected and affect all, thus breaking free of a parochial form of care and social justice.

Parochialism can also be seen as a narrow focus on disciplinary and geographic contexts, in contrast to what Bob Lingard and Amanda Keddle (2013) call *deparochialised* pedagogies. A deparochialised pedagogy would be one which has the global citizen in mind and which assumes a cosmopolitan and transcultural teacher, who is able to go beyond the local and national, while keeping a connection to it, and to traverse the local and global.

Interdisciplinarity and peer and team teaching can create spaces to

address the narrowness of disciplinary boundaries and of dyadic teacher-student relationships. This would serve to broaden perspectives and worldviews, and allow participants to question taken for granted assumptions, and recognise their vulnerabilities.

### ***Paternalism and Parochialism in the Phases of Care***

The integrity of care assumes that each phase of care and each associated element is done well – caring about (attentiveness), caring for (responsibility), care-giving (competence), care receiving (responsiveness) and caring with (trust and solidarity). If *responsibility* is foregrounded above the other elements then there may be a tendency for the pedagogical (caring) practice to be patronising, as the caregiver (teacher) assumes too much responsibility for the caregiving (teaching), leaving little responsibility and diminished agency for the care-receiver (student).

In terms of the phases of care, the problems of paternalism and parochialism can be understood as distortions of the kinds of responsibilities that people should appropriately assume (Tronto 2011). For paternalists, the problem is that they claim too much authority in the allocation of *responsibility* for themselves. In these instances, the integrity of care is compromised as the phases are out of kilter and the educator is assuming responsibility in problematic ways. In addition to this, the caregiver does not pay *attention* to what the care receiver is expressing regarding their needs, but assumes that they know better as an expert what the care-receiver's needs are. In the case of parochialism, the lecturer sees only him or herself as being responsible, or views the relationship as dyadic rather than including other experts and other students in the process of learning. Thus the phases and moral elements of care are out of sync in instances of paternalism and parochialism.

### **Methodology**

This study follows a qualitative research paradigm. It draws data collected as part of a larger study that was funded by the South African National Research Fund (NRF) to investigate how emerging technologies can be used to improve teaching and learning in the higher education sector. During the



months of August and September of the year 2011, a survey was sent to all public higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa to establish the use of emerging technologies by academics and support staff to improve teaching. There were 262 responses with representation from twenty-two public HEIs in South Africa.

A subset of the twenty responses submitted was selected for in-depth face-to-face interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by five members of the NRF project team, three of whom are authors of this paper. The interviews focused on the rationale, design, impact, and challenges of the individual teaching intervention(s) using emerging technologies and lecturers' underlying teaching and learning beliefs.

The interviews were transcribed and were analysed using Tronto's phases of care and their associated five elements – viz. caring about (attentiveness), caring for (responsibility), care-giving (competence), care-receiving (responsiveness) and caring with (trust). The integrity of care – how well each phase is done and how well they are done together– as well as a focus on power and vulnerability provided useful markers to judge the pedagogical practices (see for example Bozalek *et al.* 2014a). To foreground the lecturer's voice in our findings, lengthy quotes are included. Based on a political and critical ethics of care analysis we created a framework based on two dimensions (paternalism vs democratic teaching and parochialism vs peer-to-peer learning and inter-disciplinary teaching). Seven of the interviews were selected to exemplify these elements and excerpts will be presented in the findings.

Ethical approval was sought and granted through the appropriate institutional channels and participants gave informed consent to participate in the study. To guarantee anonymity, participants' names were changed where necessary.

## **Use of Emerging Technologies in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

The seven cases that formed part of this study were drawn from a larger project in which higher educators reflected on their use of emerging technologies in higher education, as we have indicated in the methodology section. In this project we used Veletsianos' (2010) definition of emerging

technologies, which emphasises contextuality - useful in our own context characterised by differently positioned institutions in terms of human and financial resources. It is important to note, that emerging includes both technologies and practices that are deemed 'emerging' or innovative in a specific context. Those technologies which are ubiquitously used by students in their everyday lives such as social media or instant messaging provide better opportunities to democratise learning. This has the effect of providing tools which are outside institutional and the educators' control (Bozalek, Ng'ambi & Gachago 2013). We argue that the loss of control and openness on the part of the teachers in higher education can work against paternalism and parochialism.

These seven cases employ emerging technologies/practices in the following way:

1. A blended learning course for MPhil health science students in a research-intensive historically advantaged HEI where face-to-face sessions are combined with online learning. During the online learning phase students keep their own blog for weekly reflections. The course facilitators take the conscious decision to use web-based tools that are openly available, to allow students to participate in an authentic context. The course facilitator keeps a course blog, to model reflective writing (BPJ).
2. A first year undergraduate social work course in a comprehensive HEI where the blog tool of the Learning Management System was used for e-journals through which students reflected on both personal issues and challenges encountered in their studies as well as issues discussed in teaching. These e-journals are accessible only to the individual student and the lecturer who reads these blogs and gives feedback (BVA).
3. An online Education PHD reading group on a Learning Management System at a research intensive historically advantaged HEI which is used to share and discuss readings (KMS).
4. The use of Google Drive in a second year Physiotherapy course at a historically disadvantaged HEI, to facilitate the co-construction of collaborative lecture notes by students (RM).
5. The use of blogs to document and reflect the adaptive management of a fish tank with first year Natural Science students at a historically

disadvantaged HEI (KR).

6. A non-credit bearing module for medical students in a research-intensive historically advantaged HEI where the students reflect through the use of multimedia on their first often traumatic experiences in the maternity ward, with a particular focus on human rights abuse (MV).
7. Use of closed Facebook groups to connect social work students from a historically disadvantaged HEI with students from an institution of higher learning based in the US to allow for formal and social communication, discussion and collaboration (RJ).

For a more in-depth description of these emerging practices and tools see for example Bozalek *et al.* (2013) or Brown and Gachago (2013).

## **Findings**

In this section we discuss the themes that emerged when analysing the interviews using a framework derived from a political ethics of care.

### ***Democratisation vs Paternalism***

Examining our data, we found differences in power relations between lecturers and students. Where there were more equitable power relations between a student and an expert lecturer, the student was able to maintain his/her agency and his/her status as a full human being rather than being infantilised, as is the case in paternalistic relationships. One of the interviewees for example reported seeing his students as vibrant participants with some element of choice regarding their educational practices, thus an example of democratic practice. He explained how, in his adaptive management fish project in a first year Natural Science course, students are able to select their own groups and given the space to find their own solutions to unexpected circumstances. Furthermore, students become invested enough in the learning process by taking responsibility for their own learning as shown below:

*They are active participants in the process; it's no longer a passive*

*exercise. They self-select [their groups], I don't like to impose those things (KR).*

*One of the other things is that we also tried to build in the idea of responsibility so that if they're given a fish it now becomes their responsibility. And in many cases we don't tell them to do it, but if the fish has died in every case they found a replacement. We give them so much food, in every case, every single case the students have found, sourced other food (KR).*

The following quotes by two lecturers, on the other hand, are examples of assumptions about students which may lead to a reduction in democratic processes, diminishing student agency. Here, lecturers are inclined to project their own assumptions onto students of what they perceive students' needs and expectations to be. The first quote below shows a lecturer's generalised labelling of students as poor and rural and the second a lecturer's assumptions of the sorts of expectations that a student has and who has travelled from far. While not necessarily misinterpreting students' learning needs, these educators do assume that they know what is best for the students involved:

*Many of our students come from very poor home backgrounds and also do not have the best educational backgrounds in terms of their formative schooling. And so my teaching philosophy is a very developmental one<sup>1</sup> (RJ).*

*I think it's also the sort of sense that people are taking a week out of busy lives, they are paying , flying to [campus], driving to [campus], paying for their accommodation – I want to make sure that they don't feel like that was a waste of time. So it's a bit of a balancing act between recognising that they're PhD scholars and that they actually need to drive it, and recognising that this whole academic writing doesn't come naturally (KMS).*

The examples above reflect the complexity of paternalism - as Duflo (2012)

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<sup>1</sup> By developmental the respondent is referring to a social change and social justice perspective.

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indicates paternalism is in some instances essential for providing for basic needs - in this case for a conducive learning environment. While these lecturers appeared to go out of their way to sensitise themselves to the students' needs, in other cases lecturer attitudes could be regarded as problematic in that they may be experienced as putting everyone in the same category, and as pre-emptive and limiting in terms of agency and choice, as shown in the following quote. Here the lecturer regards the sharing of resources from State financial assistance to family members as problematic.

*Many of our students take their Wizard card<sup>2</sup> that they get, which is supposed to be used for buying food and books and they buy stuff and they sell it and send the money home (BVA).*

### ***Unequal Power Relationships and the Importance of Dialogue***

To avoid such pre-emptive positions, dialoguing with students about what their needs actually are would be necessary. Teaching, as any caring practice, is defined by power dynamics, and generally it is the caregiver who is in a powerful position, with the care receiver being a supplicant in the process. This is why a political ethics of care as developed by Tronto, Sevenhuijsen, Robinson etc. emphasises the necessity for *dialogue* between these parties. The following quotes refer to the importance of dialogue between students and lecturer, but also among students themselves in creating an enabling learning environment.

*....what we're finding what's fantastic about the module is we've designed it to be agile, adaptable. And we get a lot of feedback from students and staff and we make changes all the time; every case we've run has been run slightly differently – because we want the students to feel like they have some ownership of the module, that their input matters – so we do try and make changes based on their feedback. But we don't only take what they say because a lot of the things that they ask for we specifically designed to not do it that way (RM).*

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<sup>2</sup> Card issued for those receiving financial assistance from the Department of Higher Education and Training.

### ***Protectionism and Expert Knowledge vs Student-led Learning***

Protection or the need to protect someone perceived as more vulnerable than others or self is part of paternalism and is another way in which good care may be compromised. Teachers may feel that they need to protect students by being prescriptive about technologies they can use, by keeping their work out of the public domain, by prescribing texts rather than allowing students to discover their own sources of knowledge, by controlling the assessment process, by encouraging compliance and by being the central or pivotal person for any potential questions and uncertainties.

In the example below the lecturer provides the reading as well as the analysis of the reading using Power Point, leaving little space for students to develop their own voice or to feel comfortable to contribute new interpretations of the readings:

*...that's what I've done for my meetings as well as I have prepared Power Points. So we'll do a reading beforehand and then at a certain time whoever wants to can come into the discussion forum to discuss that reading. And then I'll have prepared a PowerPoint of key point bullets or questions for reading. And then I sort of think maybe I manage it too much; maybe I should just shut-up more (KMS).*

*.... think maybe I'm posting too many things so my voice is too dominant. But I've asked and people say no; and interestingly when I don't post for a few days because I'm away, I'll get an email saying: Oh, you didn't post anything and there were such good articles in the Mail & Guardian, I thought you were going to post some of them (KMS).*

The above quote is interesting as it shows that just as in a face-to-face classroom where a teacher dominates the discussion, it is also possible that this happens with social media and other forms of technology. Despite conscious desires to avoid paternalism, the asymmetrical relationship (Caze 2008, Young 1997) of the caregiver and care-receiver (teacher and student) can mitigate the power asymmetry (Beasley & Bacchi 2007). Often the hierarchical relationship in care and the ways in which care and power undermine egalitarian relationships is not sufficiently acknowledged (Beasley

& Bacchi 2007). The above quote shows that this lecturer is aware that her approach may provide too much structure, by being too dominant, and that this may have the effect of silencing students' voices. This highlights the importance of continuous self-reflexivity and the difficulty of breaking out of established patterns of practice and power relationships. The following quote shows an alternative more democratic approach to sourcing readings for a course, in this case:

*We do have core readings ... so there are readings to help them along. But the model is definitely exploratory and discovery. One definite part of the reflection is just to get them going they must find at least one scholarly article that's interesting to them around ... and they must talk about it on their blog and reflect on it in an academic way (BPJ).*

The presumption that teachers possess all of the expert knowledge is a problematic one according to Tronto (2012). Transparency is necessary for student agency in the learning process. This transparency relates to the acquisition of knowledge and to the evaluation of knowledge acquisition and teaching. Transparency can lead to a more democratic teaching and learning context. This involves peer teaching and moving away from seeing the lecturer as the only source of knowledge. We can be both givers and receivers of care – in other words, as lecturers we can learn and as students we can teach.

This lecturer, for example, allows students to participate in the teaching process:

*I totally let the so-called knowledgeable students assist – I mean, they do, they just jump in. They would sometimes be working later at night than I am – so there would be a question and Frans would just jump in and the next morning I would see, [laughter in voice] okay, good, great, that's way better than I could ever say it. So that really is my style (BPJ).*

In the following examples, the first lecturer encourages students to create and find their own knowledge although he is an expert in the area being researched. The second example shows how a lecturer uses student-generated

notes in his teaching, rather than providing lecture notes. It also shows the importance of modelling and guidance – referred to earlier as transparency in knowledge acquisition.

*Too often what I see in courses is we [the lecturers] will design, tell you how to do a poster, but they [students] are not working with their own information. What we're trying to do is that students have their own personal information which they turn into knowledge and they're learning to share the knowledge through blogs (KR).*

*What we try to do is the students or in their groups they collaboratively construct their own notes. And so we expect them to provide citation; and then the facilitators actually go to those sources and give the students input on whether or not they think that it's a relevant source, if not why not. So we try and help guide the students but some of the feedback that we get from the students is that it's actually incredibly challenging to go and do that (RM).*

### ***Recognition of Vulnerability and Interdependence***

It is also important to acknowledge the interdependence of lecturers and students. This would mean that lecturers themselves should be conscious of their own vulnerability and bring this into their pedagogical practice, rather than seeing themselves as expert and independent and concentrating only on the vulnerability of the students.

We have found in the analysis of the interviews that teaching in a different discipline from one's own, which we define as cross-disciplinary, tends to make educators more aware of their own assumptions and certainties about their knowledge sets. The reflexive stance makes them more aware of their own limitations and vulnerability and thus better able to respond to the learners' needs. This may serve to present teachers in higher education as less intimidating and more approachable for care-receivers, in this case the students. We have seen in our examples of cases that those who are experts, even though they do not promote themselves as such, often unwittingly inhibit responses from care-receivers (students) in that students may defer to superior knowledge and feel afraid to initiate conversations. The first two



quotes refer to a lecturer's experience of vulnerability, one where she did not know about her student recording and posting a confidential role play enacted in a workshop on YouTube, being unaware of the consequences thereof, and her openness to learn from the student's unintentional breach of confidentiality to provide future learning for the students. The second quote shows her reflecting about how technology has assisted her to gain access to knowledge and at the same time increased her sensitivity towards others, which can be seen in her responsiveness towards students' needs in the interview. This is also an example of how teaching and learning with certain technologies such as social media may make the process more risky and lecturer more vulnerable. This lecturer was teaching outside of her field of expertise as an associated health professional to obstetrics and gynaecology medical students:

*One of our first abuse workshops, one of the students was taking photos and I didn't realise that he was actually taking a video that he subsequently posted on YouTube and I only found out eight months later that this was on YouTube. Fortunately he's a very responsible student, there was no indication of the university, there were no names provided, but it's there on YouTube. And so I actually now use that YouTube clip for presentation, and it's been an interesting process for me as a teacher how I felt first when I heard about it and then knowing that my classroom experience was posted on YouTube without my permission and I found that quite unsettling and I think maybe that's why I got interested in talking about professionalism in social media – I gave my first workshop to first year students a couple of weeks ago about their online digital identity and what that means (MV).*

*I have a little impairment and so technology has changed my life for me because material that wasn't accessible to me is now accessible, so it's just lifted me to a whole new space and put me on an even footing with other people, where before I would want to explore something and just couldn't because even just finding books in the library was always difficult because I couldn't see what was on other shelves and reading (MV).*

## ***Parochialism/ Dyadic vs Peer-to-peer Learning/ Team Teaching***

Another danger that Tronto (1993) identifies is parochialism, a narrow vision of patronising care for one's own near at hand relatives, which is often a critique which those who support justice or human rights perspectives level against the ethics of care, as care tends to concentrate on a concern for those who are close to the caregiver. This is why Tronto and other care ethicists, such as Kittay, Robinson, and Sevenhuijsen, insist upon the ethics of care being integrated with politics, democracy and the integrity of care. Politics extends care beyond the dyadic and private mother and child relationships, to the public domain, to look at policies, institutions and social practices which are beyond the individual. Some of the consequences of using a *political* ethics of care is that we should not assume that as teachers in higher education we need to have dyadic relationships with students, and that we are the only ones who can participate in the educative process - students as peers can also assist each other and students too have the capacity to look for relevant knowledge and to assess themselves in this process, as shown in the next set of quotes.

*We have about eight facilitators in the classroom at any one time... one of the biggest challenges we find is that there's contradiction in consistency where one group will be told this is very important and another group is told, no, that's not all that important. And instead of saying this is a huge problem, we're saying to the students, well, this is what the real world is like; you can have clinicians who will disagree on appropriate management strategies for patients, and how do you negotiate kind of a compromise between what you think is right and what someone thinks is right. So we do try and model that and what we'll often do is students will ask me a question and I'll say, 'Well, this is what I think, but let me just grab this other person who I know has a different view,' and we'll pull that facilitator into the conversation and then we discuss the difference in the viewpoint and model to the students that oftentimes there is no right answer (RM).*

*So it will be a group and they probably wouldn't identify themselves*

*as the leaders because it's just a group of people all doing their PhDs in our programme and they need to talk, but I can sort of see that these women are being hugely helpful. And the one woman in Johannesburg has set up a system of critical readers for each other (KMS).*

These examples show boundary-crossing, peer-to-peer learning and inter-disciplinary teaching facilitated through the use of emerging technologies, which allow for online communication collaboration beyond disciplinary and institutional boundaries. In the following quotes, the lecturer gives examples of how peers support each other, often in a more efficient, authentic way than a lecturer does, and in this case, positioned as non-experts. The course referred to in this example is in the medical health sciences and the educator is a technology expert, rather than someone from medical health sciences:

*Interviewer: Do you find that that support happens within disciplines or is it geographically based for example?*

*BPJ: No, not at all; it's across disciplines. Where it's in discipline it's usually sort of stronger because it's more obvious – it's around how do we teach measuring for wheelchair alignment, because that was one specific module one was developing. So I can't really comment. I can comment on the technologies but the other one will say, 'Listen, this is actually very good and it's needed.' And the others would say, 'Oh, that's interesting, we don't do that but we have this thing and we can also use it in this way'.*

The aforementioned quote is a good example of how a technology expert who was teaching a module in medical health sciences managed to use the expertise of peers in his group to interact with important content to do with medical health issues, as he felt as a facilitator he could not contribute to the discussion. Thus the role of the non-expert as facilitator can encourage more participation and ownership of the learning process among participants.

## **Conclusion**

This study looked at higher education practitioners' responses to student

needs through a political ethics of care lens. After analysing seven of the in-depth interviews gathered in a national project on the use of emerging technologies for teaching and learning from a political ethics of care perspective, we were struck by the different approaches to care that these higher education practitioners took. To understand the impact of lecturer assumptions and practices on the learning experience, it is important to pay attention to the problems or dangers of care viz. paternalism and parochialism. These concepts can be used to identify how paternalism can be addressed through participatory parity, and how in some instances, regarding basic needs and through a connectedness with students' learning needs, a paternalistic approach may be justified. A cognisance of one's own vulnerability as an educator seems necessary to avoid regarding the students from a deficit perspective.

The findings helped us recognise the importance of self-reflexivity when engaging in practices of care when teaching. Like any other practices of care, teaching is inevitably in danger of succumbing to the problematic sides of care – parochialism and paternalism. To be cognisant of these dangers of care, teachers in higher education may need to constantly re-evaluate their assumptions about teaching as a practice and the constituents of 'good care'. We are not arguing against care as such, as we regard teaching as a practice of care. However, the use of the moral elements of care – attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust, and the integrity of these elements – can help to guard against the inequalities of the teaching situation. This may help to send warning signals regarding for example, taking too much responsibility for the caring process (teaching). Good care which is informed by the ethics of care may even, from a politicised perspective, seem counter-intuitive. To be overly responsible for one's students, for example, or to engage only in dyadic relationships may fall into the traps of paternalism and parochialism. Based on our findings, the dangers of care may be lessened when the teaching process involves cross-disciplinary and multiple participants. Furthermore, being a non-member of a discipline as a teacher and facilitator makes one more vulnerable and perhaps better able to respond to the learners' needs. It also makes one less intimidating and more approachable for care-receivers, in this case the students. The choice of technology and the affordances of tools could also impact on providing a democratic and empowering way of teaching. While some technologies support a teacher-centred expert-driven interaction

between teacher and students, others are far more democratic and allow learners to take control and ownership of their own learning. These are all dimensions which temper the inequalities inherent in current higher education learning spaces.

Further research from a student's perspective is needed to understand the learning experiences of students from not only the personal, but also the social and political dimensions using a political ethics of care lens.

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