Questioning the narrative: stories from a Community Learning Centre in the Western Cape

Jessica Loizides LZDJES001

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Supervisor: Lyndal Pottier

Co-supervisor: Leigh-Ann Naidoo

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

In 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training released a new vision for South Africa's postschool education sector. Part of this vision was the creation of a new kind of institution: the Community Education and Training College (CETC). These colleges consolidated the public adult education system into nine provincial CETCs, each with several community learning centres (CLCs). The goal – community-based learning offering a diversity of programmes that respond to local needs, facilitate access to occupational training, while also providing ways for adults to complete formal schooling.

Several years on, this study explores the stories of four educators from one CLC in the Western Cape in relation to the promises and proposals put forward by this new system.

Through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, applying a constructionist narrative approach, the project considers how educator narratives reflect, complicate and reject dominant narratives about the roles and purposes of education through their experiences at this CLC.

A review of the literature and policies informing the CETC system, including the proposed GETCA and NASCA qualifications, shows that despite claims for a more responsive and localised focus, it continues to emphasise top-down approaches to curricula and testing, while often portraying a deficit view of educators, their knowledge and skills.

In contrast, educator narratives provide a deeper understanding of how they work within restrictive curricular structures to perform relational care and knowledge work, with in-depth knowledge of who the CLC students are and their needs. These narratives also assist us in shaping a vision for community learning, engagement, healing and collective solidarity beyond the often vague and symbolic discursive work of policy.

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Abbreviations

ABET – Adult basic education and training

AET – Adult education and training

CAPS – Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

CET – Continuing education and training

CETC – Community Education and Training College

CLC – Community learning centre

CNA – Constructionist narrative analysis

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

DPA – Deputy Principal Academic

ECD – Early childhood development

GEAR – Growth, Employment and Redistribution

GETC – General Education and Training Certificate

GETCA – General Education and Training Certificate for Adults

HCT – Human capital theory

LO – Life Orientation

NASCA – National Senior Certificate for Adults

NFE – Non-formal education

NOLS – National online learning system

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

OBE – Outcomes-based education

OER – Online educational resources

OL – Open learning

PALC – Public adult learning centre

RDP – Reconstruction and Development Programme

PSET – Postschool education and training

SC – Senior Certificate

SETA – Sector Education and Training Authority

TVET – Technical and vocational education and training

WP-PSET – White Paper for Postschool Education and Training

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Chapter 1: laying the foundations

This research project explores how four educators narrate their experiences of teaching at a community learning centre (CLC), including issues of curriculum and knowledge, the needs of their students, and imaginings of future possibilities for CLCs. The discussion looks at how educator stories engage with dominant narratives about adult and community education and its role in society.

This chapter lays the foundations for this topic, providing a brief history of adult and community education in South Africa, including contested debates and policies around its purposes in our context. Then, I review research literature on the kinds of education taking place in CLCs and the roles of educators in these spaces. Lastly, this chapter outlines some key policy developments since the establishment of the Community Education and Training College (CETC) system. This background serves to locate educator narratives within a broader political and historical landscape.

Adult and community education in South Africa: an overview

History and abandoned alternatives

We cannot engage with the current conditions of adult and community education in South Africa without understanding its rich and nuanced history, which is entangled in broader debates around political economy, policy, ideology and the material conditions generated by colonialism and apartheid capitalism. While this chapter does not allow for an in-depth discussion, several authors have engaged this work, which I summarise below.

Pre-1994

Many trace aspects of the South African adult education tradition back to the night school movement (Bird, 1984; Gush & Walters, 1995; Aitchison, 2003; Department of High Education and Training, 2012; I. Baatjes & B. Baatjes, 2019; Pottier, 2020; Vally & Motala, 2022). Initiated by the Communist Party of South Africa, these literacy and basic education programmes 'started with a few community initiatives in the early 1920s, and by the 1940s grew into a system of community-based adult education' (I. Baatjes & B. Baatjes, 2019). Also during this time, adult education and literacy groups were emerging with an explicitly anti-radical agenda, advocating for adult literacy to address the needs of labour (Bird, 1984).[1]

In 1948, the National Party came to power, instituting the Bantu Education Act in 1953. What followed was a turbulent struggle through the apartheid regime's closure of most adult literacy and basic education centres for black South Africans throughout the 1950s and '60s (Bird, 1984; Aitchison & Land, 2019). Student and worker uprisings of the 1970s, and subsequent government crackdowns, saw a renewed focus on night schools, but

[1] See for example Bird, 1984 on the work of the South African Institute of Race Relations.

administered by the state in line with the Bantu Education Act, and only for those who were employed. These centres, and other literacy programmes, were explicitly required to align with the schooling system. This emphasis on literacy and school-equivalency was both an exercise of tight state control over any and all educational activities for and by black working class groups, and as a response to the growing labour demands of capital at the time (Bird, 1984).

At the same time, there was a groundswell of non-governmental, non-formal, and social movement-based adult basic education (ABE). This tradition[2], often drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, engaged in forms of popular education focused on addressing the structural and oppressive relations that create inequality, illiteracy and poverty, while forging various kinds of collective solidarity (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004; Pottier, 2020; Vally, 2020; Vally & Motala, 2022). This became a powerful catalyst and platform for apartheid resistance during the 1970s, '80s and '90s, and for the development of alternative formulations of adult and community education for social justice (Vally, 2020; Vally & Motala, 2022).

ABE in a new democracy

Alternative approaches to adult education were influential in the transition to democracy in the 1990s when a new system of adult education was being designed. For example, emphasis on the central role of education (and adult education specifically) to address the legacy of apartheid exclusion and oppression (Gush & Walters, 1995). Features of this tradition and its ideals are still present in adult education policy today. However, several authors have noted the negotiations and compromises made during this transition period. In particular, the international and local pressures placed on the ANC-led government to adopt neoliberal economic policy frameworks (Aitchison, 2003; Baatjes & Mathe, 2004; Fataar, 2006; Rule, 2006; Christie, 2008; Vally, 2020; Vally & Motala, 2022).

Initially, this administration was characterised by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), in which public goods such as adult education were essential tools for redistribution and social justice. After just two years, however, this programme was replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004). Unlike RDP, GEAR was 'a neoliberal macroeconomic policy with an emphasis on economic growth and global competitiveness' (Rule, 2006:117).

Neoliberalism, as an ideology, prioritises the 'competitive individual' over the social and collective, the private over public, and asserts the 'supposed naturalness of "the market"' (Robertson & Dale, 2013; Hall, Massey & Rustin, 2013:10). Education is valuable only to the extent that it serves certain functions of the labour market and macroeconomic growth strategies. This is closely linked to human capital theory (HCT) in which education is 'viewed as an investment… which brings rates of return to individuals and societies' (Christie, 2008:26). More education is assumed to increase productivity, which is compensated more

[2] Also called the radical or emancipatory tradition (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004).

favourably, and education supposedly addresses both inequality and unemployment through alignment with skills gaps in the market (Allais & Nathan, 2014; see also Vally, 2020).

It is argued that an education system beholden to the perceived needs of the market requires control for specific outcomes. Furthermore, neoliberal effects on education include limited teacher autonomy, placing a heavy emphasis on standardised testing and quantifiable results (Maistry & Africa, 2020).

Despite its educational reform and redress goals, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) brought a focus on standards, outcomes and individualised certification (Fataar, 2006; Vally & Motala 2022). The currency of particular knowledges associated with certification become increasingly valuable in a commodified education system. Meanwhile, other forms of learning are less valuable to an agenda that positions waged work and economic growth as the main remedies for poverty.

> *In the face of mass unemployment, aligning skills to the competitive global 'new knowledge economy' has become the obsession of most nation states. Solidarity and learning that address the self to public life, and social responsibility to robust public participation and democratic citizenship are marginalised. Subjects and disciplines that have a purchase in the marketplace are valued more highly.* (Vally, 2020:15)

This period saw a concentration on general education over the Freirean-inspired literacy focus, and the introduction of the 'T' in 'ABET' (adult basic education and training) – adding 'training' for labour market entry as a key tenet of state adult education programmes (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004).

In the late 1990s, Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) were established as official ABET institutions, offering mainly school-equivalent certificates like the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) (Level 4), and Level 1-3 classes, as well as Senior Certificate (SC) preparation classes (DHET, 2012). Over the years, PALCs were chronically underfunded and largely failed to meet their aims, with decreasing enrolment and throughput rates (DHET, 2012; DHET, 2013; Aitchison, 2018).

Baatjes and Mathe (2004:413-414) observed how '[t]he human capital tradition… precipitated the formalisation and bureaucratisation of ABE'. In particular, state control of ABET policy development along with the 'reproduction of the curriculum categories of formal schooling. This is clearly reflected in the pre-packed curriculum being taught in PALCs and the emergence of formal qualifications for adult learners.'

This was a far cry from the creative and emancipatory potential of adult education that had developed prior to this. Vally and Motala (2022:1) explain how alternatives and possibilities for adult and worker education were subsequently 'abandoned by the prevailing regime of policy and practice'.

DHET reforms

In 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) released the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (WP-PSET). Following the DHET's formation in 2009, this document presents a vision for an integrated and expanded postschool education and training system with improved access and quality. As responsibility for the Adult Education and Training (AET) sector had now shifted from provincial education departments to DHET, the WP-PSET introduced a new institutional type: community colleges (later called CETCs).

These DHET institutions effectively absorbed the former PALCs in 2015 creating nine CETCs[3] for each province (DHET, 2015a). With this move came a renewed focus on the 'community' aspect of adult education where centres would offer a range of formal (occupational and academic) and non-formal programmes to better meet community needs (Kgobe & Baatjes, 2014; DHET, 2015a).

Pottier (2020), outlines a continuation of ambiguity in the state's approach to adult education, describing a 'tightly plaited rope' (Gush & Walters in Pottier, 2020:15) of competing and intertwined agendas leading to a series of complex and contested policy moves. In general, these agendas represent three approaches: 'education as a right', the 'human capital approach' and 'non-formal popular education forms within an emancipatory framework' (DHET, 2012:5-6). However, the strong HCT impetus remains in the new CETC system (more on this in the policy discussion below).

What's happening in CLCs?

Following this background, I review some of the literature on the kinds of education CLCs are currently engaging in, including educator and/or student perspectives on curriculum and the purposes thereof. I draw on research on the South African public CETC context since the transition to DHET in 2015.

A clear critique in much of the literature reviewed is that, despite policy promises, the focus on formal academic programmes remains, and is often disconnected from wants and needs in local contexts (Leurquain-Steyn, 2015; Sibiya, 2015; Baatjes et al., 2018; Mginywa, 2020; Hendricks & Aploon-Zokufa, 2021; Land, 2021; Rivombo & Motseke, 2021; Tawiah & Thusi-Sefatsa, 2022; Leurquain-Steyn, 2022).

Land (2021), as part of a DHET commissioned study of educators in 44 CLCs across the country, notes how educators are frustrated by restrictive programmes, while the number of Level 4 (GETC) graduates has stayed low. Overall, CETC enrolments have declined since 2015. Mginywa (2020) interviewed 13 Cape Town-based CLC educators, centre managers and officials as part of a master's thesis on the DHET transition. This study notes that, contrary to what has been promised, the shift to DHET resulted in a *decline* in non-formal and non-

[3] Within each provincial CETC are community learning centres (CLCs) and their respective satellite centres.

academic programmes. This is mainly due to a loss in centre autonomy, as the DHET now centrally controls most aspects of CLC operations (including budgets and funding), which acts against CLCs' responsiveness to community needs.

In a nationwide study of people's experiences of adult learning, Baatjes et al. (2018:179) found that, especially in TVETs and CLCs, 'hierarchical curricula and testing systems… discouraged local decision-making' and AET educators expressed frustration with both the curriculum and standardised testing. This study also found that the formal postschool education and training (PSET) system and its policies predominantly 'serve the market, rather than people' further noting that 'people in poor and working class communities are most negatively affected by this system' which, among other things, 'devalues their knowledge, skills and experience' (Baatjes et al., 2018:261).

What is often positioned as an alternative, either by CLC-based research participants or by researchers themselves, is the need for 'skills'. Yet the nature and purpose of these skills differ. For example, studies by Tawiah and Thusi-Sefatsa (2022) and Rivombo and Motseke (2021) criticise the lack of skills offerings at CLCs. Tawiah and Thusi-Sefatsa (2022) interviewed students in Mthatha, focusing on women's 'empowerment', evaluated by access to skills that lead to income generation (though mainly through a livelihoods perspective). They note students' dissatisfaction and recommend communities, and women in particular, contribute to curriculum development in centres. Rivombo and Motseke (2021) have a more labour-market focus. Through focus groups and interviews within the Free State CETC, they conclude that 'CLCs were unable to develop relevant skills development programmes that would attract the youth to study and improve their chances of employment. These challenges made it difficult for the CETC to meet labour needs of the local industries' (Rivombo & Motseke, 2021:1).

These two studies highlight the sector's shortcomings. However, without questioning the logic and evidence of market-driven skills or empowerment through income, critique will not likely develop alternatives that change the conditions responsible for poverty or disempowerment. In a discussion on PSET curriculum development, Sibiya (2015:13,12) raises the 'urgent need to map an alternative theory of skills formation' and unless a curriculum is 'informed by theory and practice embedded in civic agency' it cannot address social needs. Furthermore, Allais and Nathan (2014) outline why a focus on vocational skills alone cannot meaningfully address unemployment, poverty or inequality within the current labour market and macroeconomic conditions.

The role of CLC educators

Another prominent theme in the literature reviewed is that CLC educators do important, often overlooked care, community and knowledge work, characterised by a strong sense of purpose and commitment (Rule et al., 2016; Mginywa, 2020; Hendricks & Aploon-Zokufa, 2021; Land, 2021; Leurquain-Steyn, 2022; Daniels, 2023).

In a study of what makes an 'effective' CLC, Rule et al. (2016:20,22) researched 12 centres across three provinces. One takeout was, despite grave institutional and resourcing problems, 'the existence of such committed educators was remarkable and a sign of hope for the system,' contributing to an 'ethos of care'. This, along with findings of peer and inter-generational learning, counselling, and forms of connected and 'life-wide' learning makes a strong case for why we should be hearing from educators about what adult and community education could be (Rule et al., 2016:30).

In a paper titled *Adult education as care work in a South African prison: the role of adult educators,* Daniels (2023:143) explores how a prison-based centre engages in transformative learning experiences for students serving prison time, noting how adult educators developed 'a caring pedagogy' based on empathy and compassion. Educators worked beyond formal curricula to challenge the stigma and hostility of that environment. Daniels also notes this 'often go[es] unacknowledged because [adult educators] are seldom the focus of educational research' (Daniels, 2023:143).

In a master's narrative research study of two older adult students and their educator in a rural Eastern Cape town, Leurquain-Steyn (2022:71) notes the following: 'educators have first-hand experience of what adult education means to the people currently in it and more often than not, go beyond the call of duty to ensure that communities are served'.

Two other studies informing this research lie outside of the CETC sector. These studies explore the nuanced ways in which educator subjectivities and life experiences profoundly shape their pedagogy and how they enact prescribed curricula in context. Machawira and Pillay (2009:763) investigate how a policy for HIV/AIDS education in Zimbabwean schools demonstrates a profound 'dislocation between policy visions and practical realities'. They interviewed educators who were HIV-positive and tasked with implementing an acontextual policy that was highly insensitive to the trauma and stigma of this topic for both educators and learners. Educators engage as 'whole beings' and their experiences affect what and how they teach (Machawira & Pillay, 2009:756). The recommendation was for educators to be involved in policy processes from a place of lived experience.

Similarly, John (2016:268) calls for 'greater attention to the life and experiences of the educator in the learning process' through a narrative study with one educator from the 'Human Rights, Democracy and Development' project in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The programme overlooked how educators were entangled in dynamics of inequality and injustice through their own experiences. The study shows that even progressive curricula, when developed externally, can miss their aims and fail to understand the risks educators take on in mediating these worlds within themselves and in the learning space.

Related to the marginalisation of educator knowledge highlighted in the literature is the ongoing precarity of CLC educators' work.

Hlatswayo (2015:6) notes that 'adult educators have to be recognised as public sector workers providing a crucial service to working class people. Their recognition has to be accompanied by a decent wage and full access to all the benefits to which workers are entitled…'. Land's (2021:19) research showed CLC educators feel 'worse off' post-2015 and continue to be undervalued in the PSET education system. Fair pay and job security are major concerns and educators want training opportunities. As Baatjes and Baatjes (2019) note: 'Despite numerous policy interventions and programmes, adult educators remain precariously employed, under-employed, unemployed, marginalised and/or excluded'.

The top-down, centralised system is clearly not delivering an effective or responsive community education infrastructure, despite the promises of 2013 policy shifts and subsequent DHET transition in 2015. These studies offer strong critique of the current system and its offerings, often drawing on educator voices, and highlight the importance of educator knowledge and inclusion in curriculation and decision-making processes.

Taking up these ideas, this study explores educator narratives about education at their CLC, what it is and how it could be. Rather than a critique of implementation, resourcing, or political will (important as those are), this discussion looks at how these stories engage with dominant narratives about education and its role in society.

Policy landscape: adult and community education post-2013

Building on the historical overview above, what are the dominant narratives in South African adult education? Here, I offer a brief policy overview to locate the issues and experiences raised by participants within a broader policy landscape. Particularly, policies concerning curriculum and the pedagogical work of CLC educators.

I question the contradictions amidst calls for engaged and responsive CETCs, which do not seem to be materialising in proposed qualification policies, or funding mechanisms for non-formal programmes and civic activity.

I raise three brief points to frame the analysis below:

1. The policy interpretation of a constitutional right to 'adult basic education' continues to be almost inextricably linked to the NQF and formal education.
2. The educator is either missing or their experiential and pedagogical skills are undervalued.
3. Despite attempts to acknowledge and address the students' contexts, formalised curricula limit space for educators to curriculate and be responsive to these needs.

A brief policy overview:

Following the WP-PSET, a range of policies governing CETCs were released. These include:

- ***National Policy on CETCs (NP-CETC) (DHET, 2015a)***

This is the guiding policy for CETCs as a new institutional type. As part of a 'holistic approach' (DHET, 2015a:14) it specifies that CETCs will offer formal academic qualifications under the DHET; occupational programmes through Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and other partnerships; and non-formal programmes on a 'needs basis' (DHET, 2015a:15).

- ***National Policy on Curriculum Development and Implementation in CETCs (NP-CDI) (DHET, 2017)***

This policy offers guidelines for the development of qualifications and programmes offered by CETCs, including academic, occupational, non-formal and literacy programmes. This is referred to as the 'Programme and Qualification Mix' (DHET, 2017:16).

- ***National Policy on Students and Community Support Services for CETCs (NP-SCSS) (DHET, 2021)***

This policy communicates guidelines and recommended actions to develop a supportive and locally responsive environment at CLCs. It lists multiple social and structural challenges that CLC students face, which affect completion rates and attrition.

- ***The Community Education and Training College system: National plan for the implementation of the White Paper for Postschool Education and Training system 2019-2030 (DHET, 2019)***

This implementation plan sets out eight proposals for the CETC system in line with the WP-PSET and the National Plan for PSET. This includes the rationale for CETCs as a new institutional type, their purpose, the programmes, qualifications and curricula offered by centres, and other institutional matters such as stakeholder engagement and funding.

- ***The General Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETCA) (DHET, 2015b) and the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) (DHET, 2014)***

Policies have also been released for the two formal academic qualifications specifically for the new CETC sector: the GETCA (NQF level 1 – replacing the GETC) and the NASCA (NQF level 4 – a 'matric' equivalent).

Both qualifications are completely exam-based (not units standards-based) and require candidates to pass a minimum of four subjects. Because these examinations form the entire grade, they would likely be 'performance-based' curricula (Muller & Hoadley, 2019:116) requiring highly specified content. Candidates are also not required to register at an institution or formal programme to write the examinations. There is a strong emphasis in both documents on the flexibility of these qualifications, in terms of modes of delivery, part-time study and opportunities for 'self-study'.

CETC policies still prioritise formal qualifications at the expense of non-formal programmes and other kinds of knowledge

Consideration of the GETCA and NASCA is relevant here because even with the new vision and plan for adult and community education, arguably, there is still a heavy emphasis on formal qualifications in CETCs. Thus, the kinds of qualifications being developed have bearing on the research questions of this project and the insights raised by educator-participants.

The South African Constitution (1996:s.29) includes a strong directive for state-provided adult basic education:

> *…Everyone has the right –*
>
> *(a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and*
> *(b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.*

Thereafter, policies were developed offering a framework for the fulfilment of this mandate. For example, the ABET Act of 2000, which defines 'adult basic education and training' as equal to level 1 on the NQF (or grade 9) (ABET Act, No. 52 of 2000, 2000:chap1).

As noted above, this emphasis is closely tied to the theory that an education system structured in this way can develop the necessary skills to address unemployment and grow the economy (Vally & Motala, 2022). While also, the NQF was considered a form of redress for the majority of the population who were historically excluded from quality formal education. Barring a larger discussion on this, in pre-2013 adult education policy we see a conflation of educational rights with the NQF and certification[4]. But has the WP-PSET changed this?

The WP-PSET and its subsequent national policies advocate strongly for the diversification of CETC programmes that respond to local community needs, be it skills towards sustainable livelihoods or other programmes with social or communal value (DHET, 2013; Kgobe & Baatjes, 2014; Gamedze & Black, 2020). These policies critique the PALCs' focus on general education qualifications for poor completion and not reflecting the desires of adult students. In response, the NP-CETC notes the new system's 'holistic approach', also stating that:

> *[CETCs] shall be flexible in their programme offerings and include programmes driven by the community developmental priorities, as well as the priorities of the State.* (DHET, 2015a:14)

[4] See also Aitchison (2003) and Baatjes and Mathe (2004) who outline key post-1994 policy developments leading to the formalisation of ABET.

The economic growth agenda and education for the labour market (i.e. 'priorities of the State') is still a strong feature of the WP-PSET, which exists (seemingly) unproblematically alongside a renewed spotlight on community and non-formal education.

The opening paragraph of the WP-PSET states:

> *This White Paper seeks to set out strategies to expand the current provision of education and training in South Africa, to improve its quality, to integrate the various strands of the postschool system, and to set out modalities for ways in which employers in both the private and public sectors can play an important role in the creation of a skilled labour force.* (DHET, 2013:1)

Overall, the document, particularly in relation to CETCs, tries hard to strike a balance between macroeconomic and community-based goals.

However, Gamedze and Black (2020:7) note that despite some discursive changes in adult education policy, overall, the state continues to prioritise formal qualifications over non-formal, non-qualification programmes:

> *While the policy documents contain a clear mandate for NFE [non-formal education] in the community colleges, this mandate is largely marginalised in both discourse and material provision by the emphasis on formal education, qualifications and articulation into the formal system.*

The most glaring problem here is that, unlike the proposed NASCA and GETCA, NFE is not funded by the DHET, and Gamedze and Black (2020) stress the lack of clear strategy for how these programmes will materialise in CETCs.

Much of the literature reviewed above shows how educational alternatives were effectively abandoned during the policy reform processes of the 1990s. AET's shift to the DHET and subsequent policy re-work, arguably, provided an opportunity to re-assess.

However, the 2013 amendment to the Continuing Education and Training (CET) Act[5] (which repeals and replaces the ABET Act) merely replicates the definition of its predecessor, extending it to NQF4:

> ***'continuing education and training'*** *means all learning and training programmes leading to qualifications or part-qualifications at levels 1 to 4 of the National Qualifications Framework…*
>
> (Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Act, No. 1 of 2013, 2013:s.1)

It is under the CET Act that all other community education and training policies fall. This also potentially explains the state prioritising funding for formal programmes. The NQF continues

[5] Formerly the Further Education and Training Colleges Act

to be inextricably linked to the constitutional mandate of providing ABE, even though aspects of policy wording have changed over time.

This focus on formalised, 'pre-packed' (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004:414) education feeds through to CETC policies. The CETC curriculum policy defines 'curriculum' as:

> *… a statement of intended outcomes to be achieved, what knowledge content is to be acquired, which competencies and skills are to be developed, and the levels of performance that are expected from students. It defines what is to be taught, what students must learn and what is to be assessed. This definition finds expression through curriculum statements that are being developed for the various qualifications in the CET College sector.* (DHET, 2017:10)

It later notes that: 'Curriculum implementation is the core business of the College. **It is through curriculum implementation that the shift from Adult Education and Training to community education and training will be felt by adults and out-of-school youth**' (DHET, 2017:20, my emphasis).

The GETCA and NASCA: qualifications and curricula that can do it all

To frame an argument about the under-valuing of educator knowledge, and questioning whether formal CETC curricula alone can address students' needs holistically, I quote a segment from the GETCA policy document, which appears under the heading 'Purpose':

> *The GETCA aims to equip adult learners with* ***a sufficiently substantial basis of knowledge, skills and values to enhance meaningful social, political and economic participation****, to form a basis for continuing education and training and/or more specialist learning, and to enhance the likelihood of employment and/or career development. In these respects,* ***the GETCA promotes the holistic development of adult learners****. The intention is also that* ***the quality of learning offered by the GETCA will reinvigorate an interest in learning for many who have had negative experiences in schools or were denied such opportunities in the past.*** (DHET, 2015b:15, my emphasis)[6]

This excerpt shows the multiple claims these qualification policies make about what they can do for adult learners. Both the GETCA and NASCA state the purpose to 'enhance meaningful social, political and economic participation' while facilitating further learning and/or employment. This is considered 'holistic development' through 'knowledge, skills and values'. 'Quality of learning' is positioned as that which responds to 'negative experiences' of schooling. The policies do not explain these concepts, and readers are left to assume what these mean in practice.

[6] An *almost* identical paragraph appears in the NASCA policy but with subtle yet interesting differences (although these are beyond the scope of this discussion).

Multiple curriculum goals are being served here including learner-centredness, a version of emancipatory language, and economic/employment goals. Earlier in the document, the GETCA is described as a 'subject/content-based curriculum' (DHET, 2015b:14) and the NASCA emphasises its 'discipline-based knowledge' focus (DHET, 2014:4). This is consistent with the move towards a social realist position on curriculum content, which prioritises specialised, disciplinary subject knowledge in curricula, connecting access to formal knowledge with broader educational justice goals. This position has had significant influence in South African school-based curriculum reforms (Fataar, 2006; Zipin, Fataar & Brennan, 2015)[7] and contributes yet another dimension to the 'tightly plaited rope' of competing policy agendas.

The educator's role, knowledge and skills are either missing or marginalised

The marginalisation of non-formal programmes in the CETC sector is possibly linked to marginalisation of the kinds of educator knowledge, practices and pedagogies that are not explicitly valuable to a subject-based formal curriculum.

Across the policies reviewed, mentions of educators or lecturers are often related to training, retraining, upskilling and capacity building. While addressing the need for training is not inherently problematic, generally there is a deficit portrayal of educator skill and knowledge by repeated emphasis on what they don't have or still need. For example, the White Paper notes:

> *… colleges must select suitable and qualified adult educators, and that they provide the conditions which will guarantee maximum opportunity for successful learning. New educators must be trained and many existing adult educators retrained in methodologies that are appropriate for teaching adults and youth.* (DHET, 2013:23)

The policy on student and community support services, arguably a central part of many educators' work and experience, notes multiple times the need to train educators to perform the support services mandate in CLCs. Here is one example:

> *The Department and CET colleges must plan for capacity building programmes for both administrative and lecturing staff on students and community support services and transformational priorities of the Department. These include, but not limited to inclusive education, upgrading skills of educators to enable them to facilitate learning of intergenerational groups, gender mainstreaming and utilization of enabling teaching methodologies, such as the use of NOLS [National Online Learning System] and OERs [Open Educational Resources].* (DHET, 2021:26)

The National Plan for the implementation of the WP-PSET in CETCs notes:

[7] There are nuances to this argument beyond the scope of this chapter. For a broader discussion, see Hoadley (2018), Muller (2016), Young (2013) and important critiques thereof including Zipin, Fataar & Brennan (2015) and Rudolph, Sriprakash & Gerrard (2018).

> *… the Department is to finalise a policy for student support services that aims to provide guidance to the CET colleges and the centres. Further, the lecturer expertise in this regard has to be developed as part of retraining of the current cohort of lecturers in the system* (DHET, 2019:26)

The students and support services policy does, however, acknowledge at various points the relational and classroom-based aspects of education at CLCs, with specific mention of educators. Although, it implies this is not yet happening. For example, a list of 'recommended' interventions includes 'Use of a variety of learning, teaching and development methodologies by lecturers' and 'Collaborative teaching by lecturers to enhance learning' (DHET, 2021:19-20).

The section of the National Plan titled 'Lecturer development and support' is mostly dedicated to the underqualification or inappropriate qualifications of educators, and a training and development plan. However, this is also one of the few places where existing skills are mentioned, albeit briefly. Yet it still represents a top-down approach to 'transform[ing]' lecturers into 'agents of change'.

> *One of the critical strategic levers for steering the CET college system to attain its vision are its lecturers. In this regard, this Plan, addresses (a) identification of the salient features of the current lecturer cohort in the system (b) the skills and capacity of the current cohort of lecturers to enable the CET college system to attain its vision and (c) the actions to be taken by the Department and the CET colleges to transform the current cohort of lecturers into agents of change for the system.* (DHET, 2019:27)

It's not specified what these 'salient features' and skills are. The emphasis of this section suggests these may lean towards skills supporting completion of the formal curriculum. The only non-formal training included here was 'voter education'.

In the policies reviewed, there are instances where mention of educators is altogether absent. For example, in the GETCA and NASCA policies, educators or lecturers are not mentioned, and the *qualification* is the subject-doer. One of the few references to teaching (appearing in both documents) is in the section titled 'Curriculum and Assessment', highlighting the emphasis on a top-down curriculum approach to what happens in learning engagements:

> *The national curriculum policy must be succinct and must provide guidance for the teaching and assessment of the subjects while conforming to the necessary curriculum dimensions.* (DHET, 2014:11)

This, along with Umalusi's standard definition for the 'enacted curriculum' which clearly relates to an institutional context, despite both policies stating enrolment at an institution is not required.

In the National Policy for CETCs, there is no mention of 'educators', 'lecturers', or 'teaching'.

The absence of educators, especially in the qualification policy documents, potentially relates to another policy agenda: Open Learning (OL). The WP-PSET dedicates a chapter to 'Open Learning through diverse modes of provision'. OL is described as an approach that removes 'barriers to access learning' and, among other things, promotes a spectrum of delivery from 'traditional' face-to-face, to mixed methods, to distance and online learning (DHET, 2013:48).

However, through a Critical Discourse Analysis of the draft Open Learning Policy Framework (OLPF), Black (2022) proposes that OL *is* advocating for distance and online education (even if it claims not to be) and that it presents OL and OERs as a solution to access within a context of increasing fiscal austerity. Here, merely providing the opportunity for people to learn by themselves is enough to improve 'access' to PSET. Black (2022:14) notes the concerning implications for the role of educators:

> *The work of lecturers and pedagogues gets scant attention in the OLPF: the envisioned increase in enrolment is somehow 'teacher-less'. This sense is further evidenced by the frequency and normative approval of 'independent' or 'self-driven' learning throughout the document—the pedagogue is absent and/or (ironically) difficult to access.*

The NASCA (and potentially the GETCA) are planned to have aspects of ICTS delivery. The Implementation Plan for CETCs notes that the launch and piloting of the NASCA will be through the OL framework (DHET, 2019).[8]

The question is then, can a potentially individualised learning programme removed from relational classroom contexts promote 'holistic development' or enhance various kinds of 'participation'? I think it greatly overstates what curriculum content alone can do and reveals the instrumentalist undercurrent of these proposed qualifications. As Vally and Motala (2022:14) explain:

> *Even as it adopted the struggle language of empowerment, participation and a people-centred approach, ABET discourse and practice remain firmly within, and in service of, a political economy of vocationalism, market values and individualism…*

'Negative experiences' and 'reinvigorating' an interest in learning: CLC students

Lastly, how do the policies reviewed position the students who attend CLCs, and their needs and/or learning contexts? For instance, the two proposed qualifications for CETCs claim that 'quality of learning… will reinvigorate an interest in learning' for those with 'negative

[8] Notably, OERs and distance education have an important history in the resistance of authoritarian education (see Motala, 2018 and Aitchison, 2003). However, consistent and robust scrutiny is needed to assess if and how these are being co-opted for market-based agendas.

experiences in schools' or who 'were denied such opportunities in the past' (DHET, 2014:4; DHET, 2015b:15).

The policy on curriculum development and implementation (not forgetting its focus on content prescription) notes:

> *Rekindling a love for continuous learning, bringing respect and dignity to those who have had unpleasant experiences of schooling, fostering collective and peer learning, providing responsive programmes that enable students to address their immediate challenges and recognising that students bring valuable experiences into the learning situation are approaches that must underpin learning and teaching in [CETCs].* (DHET, 2017:9)

The NP-CETC is perhaps the most descriptive about the realities of CLC students, including 'physiological, psychological, situational and structural' 'barriers to participation' which it notes, are usually 'directly related to the physical and learning disabilities as well as socio-economic conditions of youth and adults' (DHET, 2015a:7). It is also the policy that makes no mention of educators.

The students and community support services policy raises several issues and challenges that CLC students deal with, as well as interventions to respond to these. For example, counselling services, psycho-social support and referrals, concessions and other support for students with disabilities. However, while it seems to identify a range of factors affecting students' lives, the motivation for support is often (though not always) to facilitate completion through programmes or qualifications, rather than a general commitment to community support structures. The document notes:

> *Academic and psycho-social support must improve retention and success of CET students.* (DHET, 2021:16)

While, illustrated in excerpts above, collaborative classroom environments and recognising the value of students' lived experience and prior knowledge are encouraged, other passages seem to emphasise the need to stick to the curriculum. The curriculum policy mentions the importance of 'time on task' in relation to 'improved student performance' (DHET, 2017:21).

Some questions remain: While some policies note important aspects of classroom pedagogy, where and when do educators have the autonomy to curriculate in addressing the complex, situated needs and diverse learning contexts of their students and communities? Are the prescribed curricula and out-of-class support intended to bring about these results? It is unclear.

The concern is, stated desires across multiple policies for more engaged and responsive CETCs are not, for the most part, materialising in the policies for formal qualifications, or in planning and funding mechanisms for non-formal programmes or civic activity. The broader focus on formal qualifications in the CETC policy landscape, the CLC in this study, and the

literature reviewed above, further raise concern. If this trend continues, the proposed GETCA and NASCA could be the main offerings at centres, making the issues raised here even more pertinent. Of course, this argument requires a more in-depth analysis of these qualification policies, associated curriculum statements and workbooks.[9]

Conclusion

This chapter sought to lay a foundation for the discussion that follows. In particular, understanding the historical background of AET in South Africa, as well as the recent research literature on what is currently happening in CLCs, and the roles of educators. I then reviewed some of the policies informing the CETC sector, with particular emphasis on issues pertinent to this study – curriculum and knowledge, the role of educators, and conceptions of student and/or community contexts. This brief analysis highlighted dominant policy narratives including a continued emphasis on access to formal qualifications as educational justice, the undervaluing of educators and their role in the CETC system, the desirability of individualised and distance learning, and the portrayal of top-down curriculum content addressing the humanist and contextual needs of students. Despite some policy shifts since 2013, the chapter suggests a continuation of the uncomfortable tension between social justice aims, individual certification and market-centric education policies to the detriment of other possibilities for engaged, contextual adult and community education.

[9] For example, does a move away from unit standards actually allow more room for educator autonomy? What is the content of these curricula and how specified are the learning materials? And, what are the reasons for the ongoing delays in their roll-out?

Chapter 2: Framing the project

Following the overview of adult and community education in South Africa historically, the shift to CETCs and subsequent policy changes, this chapter frames the research project in response to this broader context. Specifically, I describe what brought me to this topic, the project's goals and research questions, followed by the theoretical and conceptual framing – thinking about different levels of narrative construction.

Locating myself in the topic

The questions leading to this project came from a process of journeying with a community-based group of young adults looking for alternative ways to complete formal secondary education and further studies. Starting in 2017, we spent years collectively searching for options that would suit various needs and challenges including limited study time, work commitments, childcare responsibilities, and issues accessing safe and affordable transport. Over the years, this process of finding workable study options sparked debate amongst us about the purposes of these qualifications. In our context, they are so valued symbolically but also required for further study and employment in careers that members were interested in – nursing, counselling and social work. And yet, the content felt so separate from daily life and the other forms of community work we were involved in. Personally, I began to feel like these certificates were more like a means to an end, which brought not only financial costs, but huge time and energy costs. Was there another way to imagine adult education, its broader purpose in society, and what forms it could take?

Project goals and guiding research questions

Many conversations, along with the literature and policy debates outlined above, deepened this questioning. It also spurred questions of how those working in our province's public community learning centres, with situated knowledge and experience of these spaces, communities and students, imagine the role and purpose of adult education. How would these insights relate to policy and other widely held beliefs about education? How might dominant narratives be reinforced or disrupted by educators' lived experience and proximity to sites of practice?

In summary, this project has the following goals:

- 'A critical step in creating a new vision for education in South Africa is to do away with popular myths' (Baatjes et al., 2018:261). I hope to explore some of the myths and contradictions of education narratives through storytelling.
- CETCs are marginalised in the broader PSET system (Land, 2021) while educators are at times invisible and undervalued in policy and continue to face precarious working conditions (Hlatshwayo, 2015). This project aims to contribute to existing scholarship highlighting educator stories as important sites of knowledge, practice and experience for engaging in present issues and future possibilities.

- Drawing inspiration from other narrative research, this project seeks to hold a nuanced discussion through working with longer excerpts of transcripts, exploring insights from and complexities of situated knowledge and researcher/participant dialogical construction, resisting the temptation to summarise or resolve. For this reason, I speak of 'guiding' questions.

With these goals in mind, the guiding questions for this study are as follows:

How do educators narrate the role and purpose of education at their CLC?

1. *What education and knowledges have value?*
2. *What is the role of the CLC and educators in particular?*
3. *Who are the students?*

Locating the project theoretically

To answer these questions, I draw on one-on-one interviews with four educators from one CLC.

The research design has a predominantly constructionist orientation, influenced by feminist scholarship (hooks, 1989, 1994, 2003; Ahmed, 2017) including standpoint theory (Hill-Collins, 1997), and Stuart Hall's (1988, 2001) writings on discourse, hegemony and ideology.

Constructionism is concerned with how meaning is made. In other words, 'understanding the changing meanings of events for the individuals involved' (Riessman, 2001:704-5).

This differs from a naturalist approach that would investigate how events took place in 'truth' or reality (Squire et al., 2014). I am not trying to prove what exists 'objectively', but rather how meaning is constructed by and about the educational contexts participants find themselves in through a series of interview-style conversations.

Furthermore, I am interested in linking this meaning-making to broader social structures and political economy. Meaning is not just what we interpret as individuals; our interpretations of the world – language and practice – are also shaped by dominant 'systems of representation' (Hall, 2001:72).

Drawing on the works of Foucault, Hall (2001:73) describes these systems as discourse, which have the power to 'constitute the truth of the matter'. He also notes that 'dominant conceptions' profoundly shape what is sayable and doable in a given social context, and that some have more power to shape normative ideas than others (e.g. the state or media). And yet, these concepts are not inherently prescriptive – there is room for multiple forms of agency and resistance (Hall, 1988:44).

Standpoint theory lends an important angle to this – that social location shapes how we experience the normative status quo, and furthermore, provides alternative perspectives from which to know, understand and disrupt what is accepted as ideal, good or common

sense. Hill-Collins (1997:377) stresses this is not primarily concerned with individual experience: 'Standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations'. However, standpoint theory is not reductionist – it leaves room for different experiences and interpretations within groups but is critically concerned with power and knowledge within socio-historical context.

To hold these ideas together, I use the concept of 'narrative' and 'constructionist narrative analysis' as an analytical framework (which I discuss in the Methods chapter).

Conceptual framework

Initially, I set out to analyse how educators and policy documents constructed the purpose of adult education in relation to four approaches. Aligned with the agendas noted in literature, these were human capital theory, human rights discourses, radical adult education traditions, and social realist arguments for epistemic access.

I soon found these concepts wouldn't work. They slotted stories and reflections into categories based on phrasing and explicit ideological positioning. The more I spoke with educators (and the more I spent time with community workers in the neighbourhood I live in), I realised my framing missed important methods, tactics and strategies people use to subvert the status quo while simultaneously finding ways to survive within it. And that this required both pragmatism as well as a deeply embodied and relational response to dehumanising conditions, which could possibly exist while using the words of normative sense-making. On the other hand, we can also (and often do, in my case) use the words of counter-hegemony and still act in deeply dehumanising ways, to ourselves and others.

Furthermore, in reading the stories educators shared with me and their reflections on the purposes of education, I found these were thoroughly interwoven with lived experience (personal stories as well as classroom stories), located in space and time, formed by people and places, characterised by important interruptions and revelations.

I sought concepts that, rather than fracturing and boxing, could readily embrace the space between – the blurriness of working with, against, and away from the educational conditions set by neoliberal capitalism. Writings on narrative analysis provided a framework for thinking about this, at least, in the context of a dissertation project. It also enabled analysis without claiming that interview-based research like this can represent someone's full perspective, experience, actions or ideology.

The 'participants' represented here are, to an extent, my own analytical constructions based on real conversations with real people. This feels like a more honest way to write about this project. This conceptual framing provides a clearer language to talk about how I see narratives at work in the transcripts.

Narrative construction

The ‘levels’ of narrative described below are loosely based on Somers (1994) which I have adapted for this project[10], drawing on other authors.

- **Researcher narratives** – acknowledging the narrative implications of the researcher's own analysis/interpretations
- **Master narratives** – widely accepted ‘truths’ about the world. These span across space and time but are also negotiated contextually (national/local master narratives are always in conversation with global narratives)
- **Located narratives** – how we make sense of our own lives and contexts – a combination of lived experience and the discursive resources we use to interpret them
- **Counter-narratives** – when located narratives messy and distort master narratives, bringing nuance and/or an alternative version of the world and how it could be

These categories are enmeshed rather than discrete. For example, located narratives are always spoken in the context of master narratives, but may draw on lived experience to form a nuanced counter-narrative. As counter-narratives gain traction, master narratives may need to adapt to resolve dissidence. Alternatively, lived experience might be used to further legitimate a master narrative.

Researcher narratives

'These are the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers’ (Somers, 1994:620). Specifically, the concepts I use to interpret and discuss the conversations with educators.

This locates my own research in a narrative frame – the analytical work of research reporting is not a kind of better-knowing observation and does not exist outside of narration, performance and construction.

In the application of a conceptual framework, all the following categories are researcher narratives within the research report. That said, I cannot always separate what is co-constructed between myself, participants, their lived experiences, my lived experiences, concepts I have read, conversations throughout life, and disruptions to normative scripts which continually re-shape my view of the world.

Bhattacharya (2017:158) uses the helpful term ‘re-presentation’ for the discussion and analysis sections of qualitative reports, because concepts or themes do not simply ‘emerge’. They are re-presentations of co-constructed meaning, rather than researchers representing anyone through their work.

[10] I have used different names for these levels than found in Somers (1994).

Master narratives

Master narratives make up the broader discursive conditions that shape constructions of ourselves and the world (what I have referred to as 'dominant narratives' up to this point). As Andrews (2004:1) puts it, 'they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience. In this way, such storylines serve as a blueprint for all stories...'. They include widely accepted and repeated theories about what education is, what it can do for people and the forms it should take.

These are 'narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions...' (Somers, 1994:619).

HCT and neoliberalism are strong and often uncontested master narratives. As Hall, Massey and Rustin (2013:12) explain:

> *The current neoliberal settlement has also entailed the re-working of the common-sense assumptions of the earlier, social democratic settlement. Every social settlement, in order to establish itself, is crucially founded on embedding as common sense a whole bundle of beliefs - ideas beyond question, assumptions so deep that the very fact that they are assumptions is only rarely brought to light.*

I am interested in how particular ideological or theoretical positions (like HCT, among others) influence dominant stories about education. Such as:

- We all need a 'basic' education, the quality of which can be quantified through performance in standardised tests.
- Gaining access to increasing levels of formal education is inherently good and necessary.
- Certain kinds of training and qualifications can and should address a skills gap and will lead to employment.
- Macroeconomic growth leads to more jobs. Jobs lead to better lives and greater equality.
- Universal access to prescribed, discipline-based curricula is educational justice.

These all have implications for the research questions which look at constructions of *what* education/knowledge has value, *who* is 'being educated', and *the role of educators* in these narratives – what skills and pedagogies are required. This study seeks to explore how participants' constructions interact with these narratives.

For this project, I draw mainly from public policy outlined above and the literature reviewed to identify master narratives, along with other local and international scholarship on these debates. Policy has a particularly powerful role to play in perpetuating and reinventing dominant stories.

Verger (2012:111) explains how certain ideas construct both policy problems and their solutions. These ideas then act as 'cognitive locks', narratives that:

> *restrict decision-makers to certain intellectual paths, reduce uncertainty among policy-makers, and constitute broad cognitive constraints on the range of solutions that they perceive and deem to be useful for solving problems.*

They also 'de-legitimize alternative interpretations, approaches, or solutions' (Verger, 2012:111).

Located narratives

Adapted from Somers' (1994:618) 'ontological narratives', located narratives are a way to describe how lived experience and relationships (expressed through storytelling) shape the ways we construct our being and make sense of our lives. For example, how we view the role of education in our life story and the lives of those around us, and what has shaped those views.

Unlike master narratives that often seek to resolve uncertainty and mask complexity, Hall (1988:71) notes the importance of rooting theory in 'a real field of struggle' which requires the analysis of something inherently 'contradictory'. By exploring theory in the concrete, in actual events and contexts, one gets the sense of how messy and contested things can be. Along similar lines, Ahmed (2017:10) notes 'theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin'. It is the involved, embodied character of this kind of theory where we find its explanatory and potentially counter-normative power. Located narratives are directly related to sites of practice and living.

Counter-narratives

Closely related to 'located' narratives are counter-narratives. That our lives, relationships and experiences often bring 'disruption, fragmentation and incoherence' (Andrews, 2004:5) to the neat and normative character of master narratives. However, not all located narratives are necessarily counter-narratives, and counter-narratives can be co-opted into public discourse and even inform policy.

Counter-narratives are stories and ways of knowing that 'contest… dominant reality and the framework of assumptions that supports it' (Gates in Squire et al., 2014:32). While normative ways of seeing the world (master narratives) become taken-for-granted truths or common sense, 'their real-life presence/impact is experienced with particular clarity by those for whom they do not speak and about whom they do not speak' (Harris et al. in Squire et al., 2014:32).

This process of lived experience coming up against or complicating master narrative, provides what Andrews (2004:5) calls a 'rupture'.

bell hooks' work has had a clear and formative influence on the development of counter narrative as a concept, especially relating to the link between social location, lived experience and alternative ways of knowing. In an essay titled *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness,* hooks (1989:20) explains how the margin, rather than characterised by lack or deprivation, is a space that 'offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds'.

While I cannot do justice to hooks' full argument here, she identifies this as a powerful and necessary 'counter language' that one consciously chooses (hooks, 1989:36). I speak about counter-narratives as this, but also as that which may not be conscious, including 'a different way of telling a story' (Squire et al., 2014:34). Counter- and master narratives are complex and entangled, and disruptions rarely present as 'fully oppositional' or 'untouched' (Torre et al. in Squire et al., 2014:33).

Rather than perpetuating 'cognitive locks', located and counter-narratives can expand the space for alternatives – a dream space deeply affected and informed by the real conditions of the present while carving out possibilities for new futures.

Conclusion

This chapter described some of what brought me to this topic: in questioning formalised adult education through my own experiences, I became interested in how dominant education narratives might compare to CLC educators' lived experiences, situated knowledge and proximity to sites of practice. Following this, I note the project goals and research questions, and explain the constructionist orientation of the project. Lastly, I outline the conceptual framework – levels of narrative which I refer to as master narratives, located narratives and counter-narratives, with researcher narratives a consideration that runs through all of these.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter describes the ethical considerations of this project, the interview research process, analytical framework along with how I interpreted the interview transcripts.

While the overall goals remained constant, the research process led me to a shift in analytical framework through ongoing reflection on the project and my subjectivity as a researcher.

Negotiating the ethics of this project

I want to begin with a reflection on the ethics of the project. Despite formal ethical processes followed, I acknowledge that this is 'outsider' research which raises a host of other ethical issues (Bhattacharya, 2017:8). I do not teach or work at a CLC. I am not from the community (or even a similar community context) where this particular CLC is located. I do not share the lived experience to fully understand the experiences of educators or their students. I am 're-presenting' (Bhattacharya, 2017:158) and re-constructing stories and reflections shared with me through my own lenses, which have been shaped by very different socio-political and socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, language, gender, race, class, formal education among other social locations still have bearing on power dynamics in our context, which also would have shaped what and how participants shared with me.

And so, I am presenting this research as flawed work, trying to be honest about its shortcomings; what it can and cannot do. It is work that sits squarely in an institutional hegemony shaped by western social science, while also trying to notice it, name it, and rethink how it manifests in my research process.

Reports like this position authors as 'knowers of things' while really, participants – in this instance, educators with decades of experience – are the knowers. Engaging with their rich knowledge and practice directly would be far more valuable than this project can hope to be.

I respond to some of these challenges through a shift in analytical approach to narrative constructionism that at least allows for more transparent processes of interpretation and recognition of the interview context.

There is a responsibility that comes with having done this research and personally benefiting from it. As I write this, I think it means consistent engagement in the long-term work of figuring out a commitment to humanising adult and community education, what forms a commitment to this particular CLC and its educators could take, and what living and working in solidarity mean for me. It requires making actions of words and being part of communities that hold one another accountable to this responsibility.

The formalised research ethics process for interview research

The planned research and data collection were approved by the University of Cape Town's School of Education Research Ethics Committee. An application to conduct research was also submitted to the Western Cape CETC (WCCETC) and approved via email.

Each participant was given an information sheet and consent form explaining the research (Appendix 1). This detailed the nature of the project, what participation would involve, the commitment to upholding confidentiality of participating educators and centres as far as possible, and that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. All interviewees signed a consent form. Before each interview, I explained the form, including possible limitations to confidentiality (for example, as other colleagues may be aware of their participation), offering opportunities to ask questions.

I recorded interviews on two devices, stored on the cloud as well as on my laptop and hard drive. These were transcribed with some identifying information removed (including all names). I did not transcribe parts of the audio where participants spoke 'off the record' or detailed particularly sensitive student stories.

Towards the protection of participants' identity, this report does not mention specific neighbourhoods, academic institutions, previous employers or names of friends and family members. Where the report includes sensitive stories of student engagements or experiences, I summarised the details of these accounts in brackets.

Overview of the interview research process

Selection of centres and potential participants

The main criterion for participant selection was educators who work directly with students at a CLC, as a goal of the study is to theorise how proximity to these spaces and students shape educator narratives about adult education.

In particular, the research question explores how educators narrate the role and purpose of the education they engage in at CLCs. I focussed on full-time/day CLCs with permanent premises (rather than satellite centres primarily offering evening classes), with the assumption these educators generally have more class time with their students and tend to be CLC educators by profession.[11]

The research design and approach changed during the project. The initial design focused on policy and educator discourses, rather than a narrative approach. For this reason, I used purposive selection with the goal of heterogeneity and contrast (Maxwell, 2005) to explore

[11] Satellite centres often use existing school buildings in the evenings and in some cases, schoolteachers from mainstream public schools to teach classes (Land, 2021).

how educators across CLCs and programmes were making sense of their educational contexts.

I set out to focus on two CLCs – one urban and one rural. I also intended to include different roles and programme types, for example, centre managers and educators of both formal academic and non-formal skills classes.

Overall, I interviewed seven participants from four CLCs. This included three AET educators (ranging between Levels 1 and 4), a centre manager who also taught AET subjects, a former centre manager, a Senior Certificate educator, and a sewing/beadwork educator. One of these CLCs is a rural centre outside of Cape Town and three are based in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area.

For reasons discussed below, I selected just four participants from one CLC for the final study.

Research relationships and navigating access

I first made contact with the Acting Deputy Principal Academic (DPA) of the WCCETC in June 2022, who connected me with centre managers of CLCs that fit the project criteria.

Participant interviews took place between August and November of 2022. However, contact with participants, including member checks and other check-ins were ongoing until the final report was submitted in July 2024.

Attending WCCETC workshops for context

The DPA invited me to four educator workshops between June and August 2022. As I did not include this in the WCCETC research application, these meetings do not form part of the project data. Still, workshops became key touchpoints with potential participants, providing opportunities to connect with educators and find out which programmes CLCs were offering.

They also provided important context for CLCs, the structure and processes of the WCCETC, prominent issues and discussions at the time, and policies informing operations. These insights confirmed hunches about pertinent themes to explore and shaped my interview topics.

The workshops included the launch of the Student and Community Support Services Regional Forum, a regional workshop on Academic Support Strategies for CETCs, and two smaller workshops discussing digital learning options for the GETC and 'Artisan Ambassador Training' on the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, equipping lecturers to provide career guidance to CLC students.

Contacting potential participants

I soon realised that, unlike the structure outlined in policy, not all CLCs offered the SC and even fewer centres offered non-formal programmes. Anecdotally speaking, most centres I contacted at the time focused on formal academic programmes.

I gained access to CLCs through centre managers. However, due to the mid-year holiday and general busy-ness of the sector, reaching educators took longer than expected. For three of the four CLCs, centre managers arranged an initial group meeting between myself and interested educators. Here, I introduced myself and the project, distributed information and consent forms, and received details of anyone interested in participating. In one instance, the centre manager sent me an educator's contact details directly and we arranged an interview thereafter. Another educator's details were publicly available, so I contacted them that way.

At the first centre I contacted, three AET educators agreed to interviews. I also contacted the former centre manager who agreed to participate.

I found skills educators incredibly difficult to access because skills programmes often were not integrated into the main CLC operations (external providers) or because many CLCs I contacted were not offering these programmes at the time. I contacted two skills educators (both from independent organisations) but only one interview materialised.

Finding SC educators was also challenging as most were mainstream[12] educators teaching at night while some SC classes were no longer operating. I eventually interviewed one SC educator, but they were very new to the role.

The centre manager of the fourth CLC agreed to an interview, offering valuable insights about their teaching context and the challenges they were experiencing. However, I could not secure interviews with any other staff there, in part because of the intense administrative burdens of the GETC at that time of year.

Scaling down

Each participant shared insightful reflections and stories about their context, CLCs and beliefs about adult and community education. However, after transcribing all the interviews, the participant selection felt ad hoc and disjointed (due to the challenges of securing participants across programmes and sites).

It was also clear that scope would be an issue. Including all seven participants would limit the depth of the analysis. At this time, I was shifting the analytical framework towards narrative approaches. The changing nature of the research design was partly due to my limited knowledge of the CETC context beforehand. It was also an experience of learning

[12] 'Mainstream' here refers to ordinary public schools.

while doing – implementing a research plan, simultaneously questioning much of my prior research training, and finding new ways to do things.

For the final analysis and report, I selected four participants from one centre. I felt the engagements with these participants were the most organic and relational. We had made good connections, and as a result, there was a depth to these interviews not always present in others. Storytelling and reflection strongly characterised these conversations.

Furthermore, despite participants being from one centre and teaching AET subjects, there was an unexpected degree of heterogeneity: they taught different subjects at different levels, had different educational and career backgrounds, some participants were from the surrounding community while others not. This all contributed to interesting and diverse positions and stories. But coming from one centre, there was also a common language, common student cohorts, common community challenges. I felt this gave the analysis a clearer direction.

Designing interview guides

The interviews were semi-structured. I wanted a clear focus across participants but with flexibility to follow themes as they came up. Ultimately, this allowed for the unplanned narrative shift.

I used interview guides, edited slightly depending on the roles of participants (Appendix 2). The guides were shaped by the research questions and key debates in literature on South African adult education and the CETC context. By attending workshops, I also noticed issues (explicit and implicit) that raised further questions. I tailored the guides to follow some of these hunches.

The topics broadly focused on:

- the role and purpose of adult education in society (what does it do and for whom?)
- what education/knowledge has value for these purposes?
- for whom is this education designed and what are their needs?

Each guide also asked about 'ideal futures' – what educators dreamt about for their centres (and adult and community education more broadly) and what an ideal CLC would look like. I sent participants a summarised version of the questions/topics in advance.

I found participants readily shared in-depth stories, which prompted me to think about why and how stories were used in response to the questions, and what their significance was.

Interview moment(s) and ongoing checks[13]

For three of the four participants, interviews took place in their classrooms during exam time when usual classes weren't taking place allowing a small window in an otherwise busy

[13] This section refers only to the four participants included in the report.

schedule for educators. One participant engaged via Zoom. In each case, participants chose the time and venue/format.

With all four educators, I felt there was an eagerness to participate and a readiness to share. For example, they each made themselves available for meetings soon after our first conversation, were responsive to pre-emails and WhatsApp messages. I felt we had a quick rapport and ease of conversation. However, I was mindful of our age differences, and always addressed participants as Ms. [surname], endeavouring to frame and guide questions respectfully. I had to manage this tension when we went too far off topic, trying to bring the conversation back to the questions. An initial question about their role brought out different things for different people, and from there we spoke about other topics in the guide as they came up. At times I would direct the conversation with more pointed questions.

I think our age difference and their experience in the sector was beneficial to our engagements. I felt like a student at times, being told, usually in a generous and nurturing way, about how things work and why.

After each interview, I thanked educators for their time and insights, and asked if they would be willing to schedule a follow-up conversation if needed. All four participants said they would like a copy of the transcript, which I sent, explaining the option to review, edit or remove anything shared. None opted to edit or remove content. Two participants explicitly stated they were fine with what they said.

Some transcripts included follow-up or clarity questions, which I explained could be answered in a second meeting, a WhatsApp voice note or phone call (noting there was no obligation to answer more questions). I had follow-up conversations with Participant 2 and Participant 4. Participant 3 opted to send voice notes in response to the questions. These were also transcribed and included in the analysis.

Because of the length of time between the interviews (August-November 2022) and the final report (July 2024), I checked in with participants at various points to share transcripts, participant profiles and the specific quotes I wanted to use for the report (for those who opted to review), as well as project updates as some time had usually passed between my last call/email. In June 2024 I sent a full draft of this report to each participant, as per the DHET guidelines for conducting research.

There was a tension between offering opportunities for participants to check how I was documenting their words, and requesting yet more voluntary service for the project. Three of the four participants approved either transcripts, quotes and/or profiles. I had stressed that feedback was not obligatory.

A narrative analytical approach places emphasis on member checks. However, the shift towards this approach after conducting interviews meant I hadn't set expectations upfront by communicating the possibility of ongoing review or contact after the interview.

Analytical framework: reconfiguring speech to text to analysis

So why the shift in analytical focus? Why did storied moments become important? Firstly, the stories shared in our conversations felt particularly poignant. They provided nuanced examples of how educators were constructing the important issues confronting the CLC space, the role of education in that context, and what education mattered most. These reflections, I thought, provided insights beyond straightforward statements of opinion or fact. I wanted to draw on approaches that could help me engage with stories in a way that was both transparent about my assumptions and interpretations, and honoured the sequenced and interwoven nature of how we speak in conversation (rather than pulling out short quotes to support an argument).

At the same time, I was increasingly questioning my assumptions about how interview research worked – that we could speak of transcripts as perspectives or claim to represent someone's point of view. I was exploring and critiquing how my presence, questioning and analysis significantly shaped the 'findings', and how rarely this is discussed openly throughout a report. Dialogic and constructionist narrative approaches held all these concerns together, providing both a method and a language to talk about them. That said, I have maintained the more traditional 'methods', 're-presentation', and 'discussion' chapters for this report, whereas much narrative research would do away with the separation between methodology and analysis.

What do I mean by 'narrative'?

'Narrative' in social research often refers to life histories and/or stories of particular events (Riessman, 2001). Narratives can be analysed chronologically, creating a 'biographical account' (Riessman, 2008:57). But they can also be less structured: 'the researcher may collect material that will likely *include* narratives without explicitly asking for them, for instance, by… simply encouraging [participants] to talk at length about their opinions about something that matters strongly to them' (Squire et al., 2014:7). In this case, stories might not necessarily have a beginning, middle and end, and might be interwoven with opinions, asides, and reflections. I'm using narrative in a very broad sense here, responding to the ways in which participants shared stories of past events, but also narratives as that which build a representation of the world and our place in it.

Some researchers also consider narrative to be a reflection of someone's perspective – a 'window into an "essential self"' (Riessman, 2008:3). Riessman (2008:8) contests this, noting that 'narratives do political work. The social role of stories – how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is an important facet of narrative theory'.

Constructionist Narrative Analysis (CNA) as a guide

Drawing on this approach to narrative theory, I use CNA to guide the interpretation of interview transcripts. CNA pays close attention to specific and broader contexts of narrative production, including issues of power and the researcher's influence in what is spoken and

how. It incorporates dialogical analysis with considerations of discourse, counter-narrative, history and political economy (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013).

In each interview conversation there are combinations of statements, opinions and reflections which are often contextualised and explained through storytelling. I am interested in how stories create meaning and, more specifically, a sense of purpose in the educational work that participants engage in daily. How do participants construct the environments in which they work, their students, and how is this positioned in relation to how things *should* be or *could* be?

A constructionist approach 'aims to explore how meaning is constructed in narratives in relation to available cultural, social and interpersonal resources' (Squire et al., 2014:8) and 'how different levels of context – processes of research and broader socio-cultural and historical contexts – generate stories and are responded to by them' (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013:207).

CNA does not take interview narratives as a reflection of one's identity or 'internal state': 'the narrative constructionist approach, by contrast, is more concerned with stories as social events and/or social functions' (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013:204-5). Because of this, the analysis also includes the interviewer's questions and responses as 'data' (the co-construction of narratives) rather than looking at participant responses as isolated truth-statements (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, interviews must be analysed contextually.

This perspective considers not only how people create narratives/tell stories, but that researchers also create narratives as they ask questions, interpret interviews, and write reports. Furthermore, readers and audiences create narratives about what these reports are saying (Riessman, 2008).[14]

I appreciate dialogic and constructionist narrative approaches for encouraging uncertainty and transparency about the tensions of research processes. I have specifically lent into uncertainty as a value while writing this report, following Ahmed's (2017:6-7) reflection that '[t]here is no guarantee that in struggling for justice we ourselves will be just. We have to hesitate, to temper the strength of our tendencies with doubt…'

I think this could move social research in more ethical directions. We can learn from the mistakes and compromises of other researchers, who make these decisions available to us through their writing: 'Not eliminating [this] effort or labour becomes an academic aim because we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere' (Ahmed, 2017:13).

The conceptual framework, outlined in the previous chapter, develops the personal, interpersonal and socio-political/historical narrative levels inherent in the CNA approach

[14] This doesn't negate researchers' epistemic privilege in writing the report, which is why understanding reporting as narration is helpful, rather than simply an investigation of others' storytelling.

while making known researcher interpretation and reflexivity (which I conceptualise as 'researcher narratives').

As I explore how educators construct the education they engage in, I select particular stories, looking at if/how they disrupt or messy normative conceptions of what education is and does in our context.

Process of interpretation

Transcribing as creating narratives

Narrative approaches consider transcription as part of analysis and interpretation. We make a range of assumptions at this stage about what does and doesn't matter; what to take note of and what to leave out. All these decisions combined, 'ultimately create different narratives' (Riessman, 2008:50).

For example, I chose to include the pauses and hesitations as well as laughter or particular body language that I recalled. I added emphases on words or exclamations by writing them phonetically (like 'pleeeaase' or 'crrraaaammmp'). Depending on the type of narrative analysis, the level of detail in transcriptions varies. Some even note lengths in pauses and include each 'uhm' or utterance in the analysis of shorter, bounded stories (Riessman, 2008). I did not opt for such a detailed analysis, instead selecting multiple stories from each participant to form a larger picture of our conversation.

I transcribed the interviews myself soon after each interview. I typed while listening and regularly re-played segments to make sure I captured the words, pauses and emphases correctly. I made analytical notes throughout this process. During the analysis, I returned to audio recordings to re-check my transcription and interpretation.

Close readings: dialogical and thematic analysis

Here I outline my process of analysing interview transcripts to develop a set of thematic 're-presentations'. I combined aspects of thematic and dialogical analysis.

Dialogical analysis 'interrogates how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative'. It 'requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of narrative' (Riessman, 2008:105). On the other hand, thematic analysis only focuses on the content of 'what' was said (Riessman, 2008:56).

At many points, my analysis leans more toward thematic analysis – what was said rather than why it was said or the circumstances of production (Riessman, 2008).

However, I reflect on how my questioning and the context of stories/reflections within each conversation shape what this could mean. I discuss these utterances in relation to myself as the audience – not only in response to my questions, but at times, why a participant might choose to tell a particular story, and what that might mean about its significance to them.

Because dialogical analysis also looks at the broader societal context, it prompts us to ask about the 'omissions' in a story. For example, why participants might not problematise macroeconomic policies, broader structural conditions, or the causes of inequality in the first place (Riessman, 2008:114). A choice not to raise a counter-normative opinion *could be* because the speaker hasn't applied a broader social analysis to this experience. But, there are many valid reasons why someone may choose not to share their analysis or political views with me. Furthermore, the nature of my questioning and how I set expectations for the topic of conversation may have limited its subject matter. Nonetheless, looking at the omissions does provide the researcher an opportunity to extend the narrative beyond what the speaker chooses to say in the interview conversation (as I have done in the Discussion chapter).

I took the following steps to interpret the interview transcripts:

- During and after transcribing, I made notes and reflective journals. I became very familiar with the transcripts (using hardcopies), reading and re-reading them over a period of about 11 months. During this process, whenever I came back to the transcripts, I would underline and make notes on the hardcopies.
- I then summarised each participant's transcripts, noting what felt like pertinent 'storied' moments as well as the main themes across our conversations.
- In a separate document, I developed an initial outline of key themes I was noticing across interviews. I then discussed this summary with my supervisors, who gave input on what they felt were important threads to follow. From there, I selected 4-5 main themes from which to develop a more detailed analysis.
- At this stage, I went back to the original transcripts, dealing with each one in its entirety, making notes on how themes and stories were interwoven and built up through the conversation.
- I then developed participant 'profiles', noting information about roles and background, but also what I felt were some of the ways they had positioned themselves in relation to the research questions and other key points. These were sent to participants to review.
- Once again, I returned to the full transcripts (the same hardcopies as before), carefully going through each with the 4-5 themes in mind. I started building a picture of how stories were related to the themes, and which parts of the transcripts felt most important to include as excerpts, and how I was framing their significance or meaning. I assigned a colour to each theme, using highlighters to indicate where themes were addressed in the transcript. This allowed me to see where a story referenced several themes at once, and where one theme, for example student experience, was spoken about in close succession to views on the formal curriculum, leading to a discussion about pedagogies of care, linking these stories conceptually.
- For each participant, I developed detailed mind maps – A3 pages divided into themes, noting what stories I was categorising into each. This allowed me to keep a

full picture of the participant's transcripts, and how themes were connected within a conversation, while better understanding the development of themes as categories.
- I kept notes of all these insights and excerpts in a separate document for each participant, which I then used to write the 'Data re-presentation' chapter.

This process moved iteratively between detail and summary. Using summaries and themes to organise my thoughts, then going back into the detail of transcripts to test these ideas, adding nuance. Using the full transcripts throughout the analysis was important in trying to hold the patterns of how our conversation had built up to each point.

The 'Data re-presentation' chapter acknowledges this challenge, and even with a commitment not to fragment or code too harshly, the excerpts are still decontextualised to an extent. I felt for some participants, depending on their style of storytelling, the reporting process lost much of the richness and nuance of what I felt they were saying, which I could only fully know by being in a room with someone, dialoguing for an hour or more.

Validity and generalisability in narrative research

> *…the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation.*
>
> (Neander and Skott in Riessman, 2008:21)

As stated, the constructionist and narrative orientation of this project is not primarily concerned with verifying stories or events. Rather, narrative analysis looks at 'how [narratives] affect people's understandings and actions in the world' (Squire et al., 2014:8).

Riessman (2008:193) notes that 'following a methodical path, documenting claims, and practicing reflexivity strengthens the case for validity' in narrative research. Furthermore, good narrative research relies on 'detailed transcripts', pays 'attention to language' and 'contexts of production', engages with narrative as dialogical, and locates both the researcher and the epistemologies underpinning the project.

I believe I addressed these points by detailing the project's conceptual underpinnings and engaging in ongoing reflexivity.

Regarding the 'contexts of production', in Chapter 4 I acknowledge the dialogical nature of the interview context – what may have led to a particular utterance and where my questions may have been leading. I have tried to make transparent my thinking and interpretive process throughout the report.

At each point of the analysis, while carving out a theory of what a participant was saying, I checked in the transcript for I how might be wrong, or what else a participant said to strengthen or contradict that position. I worked with full transcripts, so as not to fracture stories or take them completely out of context.

I think the conceptual and analytical frameworks also support validity by encouraging discussion of contradictions, rather than promoting a bias for resolution. This facilitated an openness to these nuances, with reflection on how my own beliefs about education and social change are deeply complex and contradictory.

Member checks further assist validity. Although (as noted above) transcription is not an objective process, asking participants to check transcripts, profiles and drafts can avoid glaring misrepresentations.

This project does not and cannot generalise beyond the individuals interviewed. It does not even attempt to claim interviews as representations of a full person or perspective. However, shared experiences among educators in the CETC context and the themes and concepts developed here could aid further research and discussion.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methods used for this research project, including my own reflections on the process, the tensions, mistakes and compromises along the way. Reporting methods in this way sought to make known the decisions and techniques used in line with the ethic of CNA – writing myself into the process as a narrator of the research, not just a researcher of narrative. The following chapter details the outworkings of this analysis.

Chapter 4: Data re-presentation

In this chapter, I discuss my interpretations of interview transcripts, using the main themes and excerpts selected as part of the analytical process outlined above. I attempted a version of constructionist narrative analysis, focusing on storied moments, the dialogical interaction between myself and participants, and how participants drew on their lived experiences to make meaning.

I experienced tensions between holding the important threads within each conversation – how we dialogically built logic and meaning within each interview – while drawing connections and/or diversions across interviews. I begin this chapter with 'profiles', briefly describing the participants, including their roles, background, and reflections on education at their CLC. I then discuss interview re-presentations in four themes:

- CLC students
- CLCs as transformative spaces through pedagogies of care
- Formal qualifications: both a way 'out' and a 'dead end'
- Bread for me and bread for you: education for collective sustenance and community thriving

These themes overlap and I talk back-and-forth between them. But I hope to create a narrative using these headings, even if not always neat. There are places where I focus on one participant at a time to hold the connectedness of different stories they tell, and places where I intersperse different participants' narrations.

Profiles

Participant 1: CLC Educator, Level 4

P1 teaches AET Level 4 Afrikaans and Life Orientation. She is also responsible for academic coordination at the centre. This involves oversight of things like timetabling, assessments and lesson planning.

Teaching since the 1980s, P1 was a primary school teacher before moving to adult education. During her career, she trained in the apartheid curriculum, the post-1994 OBE[15] *curriculum and more recently, in CAPS*[16]*. P1 has been at the CLC for about 10 years and is nearing retirement.*

After completing matric, P1 studied teaching at university. Her psychology studies shaped a dream to become a school psychologist and career guidance teacher.

[15] Outcomes Based Education

[16] Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

In a former school, she was part of the 'teaching support team' that helped students struggling academically while working with psychologists to offer the necessary support. This is linked to P1's passion for Life Orientation (LO) and the opportunities this subject provides for classroom dialogue on issues directly affecting students' lives.

P1 isn't from the community where the centre is located but grew up in very similar circumstances to her students, experiencing issues of poverty, gangsterism, and substance abuse from those around her. It's from this perspective that she describes motivating her students to take educational opportunities to change their life circumstances – to 'break the circle' and become 'better community members'. This is not only through qualifications, but also the decisions you make, and whether you have a dream and a vision for your life.

P1 describes her role as an educator to facilitate that process. To build relationships in the classroom, inspiring personal and academic growth in her students so they can generate an income, possibly move away from areas with high gang activity and other social problems, and create a safer space for their families.

Participant 2: CLC Educator, Level 3 and 4

P2 teaches AET Level 3 Mathematical Literacy and Communication, and Level 4 Travel and Tourism. P2 joined the CLC about 12 years ago but has been working in adult education for 20 years.

Working as a nursery school assistant led her to study child psychology at university. After some changes in life circumstances, a friend introduced P2 to a job in an advocacy group doing various kinds of popular education, training, and counselling work with adults, which she did for several years. This platform led her to adult education. P2 also worked in local government before becoming an AET educator at the CLC. In addition to this, P2 is very involved in an organisation that does non-formal adult education work, primarily with youth.

P2 reflects on her passion for education shaped by her mother, wider family, and community life growing up. She notes that 'education chose me'. P2 reflects on experiences of becoming socially conscious through witnessing injustices in her community and becoming engaged in anti-apartheid activism. This has shaped much of her approach to adult education and learning.

The subjects P2 teaches at the CLC have been assigned due to staffing/teaching needs rather than chosen. However, P2 describes using the classroom to facilitate dialogue. She encourages reading, engaging, and questioning, and holds art and other forms of expression highly. P2 links the role of AET-trained educators to an emphasis on holistic learning and holistic student care/development.

P2 explains her role as going beyond the prescribed curriculum to what she calls popular education. That education is and should be about more than just getting 'a piece of paper'

and sees non-formal and informal learning as important for individuals and communities, starting from what people know.

P2 grew up in a community very close to where the CLC is located. She describes adult education (and the role of CLCs in particular) as directly linked to community work, and broader community wellbeing through collective organising and engagement. For this reason, P2 also wants to see the centre more engaged in the surrounding community and other community groups/organisations than it is currently.

Participant 3: CLC Educator, Level 2 and 4

P3 teaches Afrikaans Kommunikasie and Wiskunde Geletterheid at Level 2 and Reis and Tourisme[17] at Level 4. These subjects are taught in Afrikaans for first-language students.

P3 describes the experience of returning to education after leaving school before grade 12. After a painful divorce experience, P3 was without a job or qualifications to build on. She used this as an opportunity to pursue a career of working with and caring for people, which she had always wanted to do. She completed an Advanced Diploma in AET and went on to facilitate literacy classes for corporate employees as well as teaching other work-related and academic skills. Thereafter, she started her current role at the CLC about seven years ago.

P3's experience of teaching Levels 1 and 2 (as there was not a Level 1 educator at the time) provides first-hand experience of many students who cannot read and experience varying degrees of learning barriers and disabilities. She also encounters the deep trauma students carry, often from experiences of violence and family/home life. P3 describes the tension in her role between teaching the formal curriculum, preforming the many administrative tasks required, and caring for the additional needs of her students which the current curriculum, student support and teacher training environment do not adequately provide for.

P3 aims to motivate and prepare her students to one day earn a living and/or sustain themselves and their families – be this through formal or informal work. She explains how CLCs should offer things that students can directly apply to jobs or entrepreneurial ventures once they leave. P3 also describes the role of education at the CLC to help students uplift themselves from poverty, not just through the formal curriculum but also personal development, soft skills, and the relational care work that the centre and educators provide in different ways.

P3 notes that CLCs have the potential to provide skills and/or qualifications taught by community members that lead to broader community benefit and strengthen local economies. For example, engaging in non-formal programmes that develop food gardens or respond to the many social issues facing the community, like gender-based violence (GBV), health, and safety. Though P3 did not grow up in the neighbourhood where the CLC is

[17] Afrikaans Communication, Mathematical Literacy, and Travel and Tourism.

located, she wants to see the centre more engaged with the surrounding community, and for the community to take collective ownership of it.

Participant 4: Former Centre Manager and Educator

P4 is a former educator and centre manager at the CLC. After teaching in mainstream schooling for 25 years, P4 encountered an opportunity to go into adult education, allowing her to give back to the community she grew up in. P4 positions the role of teaching as both a service and a calling, providing education that can change people's lives and improve life circumstances – not just for individuals and families, but also at a community level.

Although P4 later moved to a different neighbourhood, she describes a strong passion for community work and engagement through the centre. P4 suggests the work of the CLC should be closely connected with broader community goals, relationships and partnerships. Through stories and examples, P4 shows how a core part of being a CLC educator goes beyond teaching the curriculum, and is about how you treat people, providing care, showing a different way, being committed to the wellbeing and flourishing of students and the community alike. P4 emphasises the benefit of educators who are from the community where the centre is located – who know the community and will go the extra mile.

P4 came into adult education during the RDP mass adult literacy and Adult Basic Education campaign. She has the comparative experience of the state's early vision for adult education (particularly working with older adults who were denied basic literacy skills under apartheid) and the CETC sector of the last decade or so (where many CLCs serve much younger, school-aged students). P4 notes how, since CLCs came under the DHET in 2015, their ability to offer relevant programmes is significantly impeded.

Because of the current student cohorts and their needs, P4 emphasises the importance of programmes that simultaneously put bread on the table for families, bring community economic empowerment (making a living, creating local jobs), and promote community care work (knowledge sharing, gardening, care for the elderly, etc.).

However, P4 does reflect that some subject areas and/or formal programmes could have significant community benefit and that qualifications still have value for those wanting to access further study (like TVETs) and job promotions.

P4 shares a vision for a CLC that has a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with community members, where the CLC can respond directly to educational (both non-formal and formal), economic and social needs and where community members can also engage in activities that give back to the centre and its operations – through sharing knowledge, practical skills and providing key services.

CLC students

This section explores how educators describe their students' experiences and needs, and the influence of a changing student profile on the purpose of the CLC as well as the role/s that educators play on a daily basis.

I discuss this in three main parts. Specifically, comparisons between the past and present, the CLC's role of standing in the gap, and the ways educators engage with these challenges.

Early in our first interview, P4 shares about her past years of teaching in the RDP period where centres partnered with government departments to deliver basic education to employees. In this story, P4 reflects on how the changing student profile has affected the focus of education at CLCs, and adult education in general:

> *P4: And that time […][18] when I started in adult education, we were focusing on people that… you need to understand that this was the introduction of… adult teaching was part of the government Reconstruction and Development Plan. It all started there. So, it was a case of here are people, because of apartheid, we can't forget about it, that couldn't go to school. Because… so, so now I'm in the position of giving something back to them.*
>
> *And although I didn't receive any money for it, it's like looking at that people and their only goal that time when I was there, the people was… 'We want to read the Bible' you understand. And it was a very emotional rollercoasting experience because you want to give. And that time you were working mostly with people, 50 years and 60 years and older and they can't read the Bible and they want… it was that people that really uphold you. That constantly come and tell you, the morning they will pray for you. It's just a completely different environment than the environment than I've been in the past 10 years. So it's those people that would uphold you. You know, it's… I can't explain to you the… the type of relationship that you had with these people, you understand. Even if they had nothing. I can remember, then one aunty will say, 'Don't worry Ma'am. Juffrou gaan môre vir Juffrou brood bak.' [Tomorrow, I'm going to bake you some bread] … And then you can recall how important bread is in our… a valuable thing bread is in our lives, because, you know? So it was… I … it was fulfilling and I enjoyed every minute, every second that I was there.*

As with the literature reviewed, P4 described a stark contrast between RDP adult education and what we have now. I then asked if what was taught had changed since then – whether there was a greater focus on literacy. Although my question was focused on *what* is taught, P4 reflects more on *who* the students are:

[18] In participant quotes, '[…]' signals where I've excluded parts of the transcript, whereas '…' signals a hesitation, unfinished thought or pause.

P4: Yes, it changed, completely changed. That time when I started, it was… the focus was on literacy. […] So it was really, but the beautiful part was, all those people that we were working with was hungry! They were hungry to be uplift[ed] [...]

The dynamics changed because… completely changed because now people have a completely different, I don't know how can I explain it to… different understanding of what CLCs really are. You understand. We are now focused… people who are the high school dropouts, they entering the centre. You understand. And even some educators are teaching children that do have… mental… Can I… people might just say, 'No, you can't use the word'… are mentally challenged, are now coming to the centres. And unfortunately, the type of people teaching within the centres are not equipped to teach those learners, you understand. So what is happening to those learners? ***They going nowhere slowly****. It's just very, very sad to experience it on a daily basis. Because the parents will come and tell you, '****Ma'am, where can I take my child? Waarentoe kan ek hom stuur [where can I send him]?****' ****There's nowhere to go. There's no place for them.***

Throughout my conversation with P4, there's a recurring pattern of past nostalgia in comparison to an almost dystopian present – a deterioration and sadness about the way things have turned out. Whereas adult education used to be a beacon for rectifying apartheid exclusion and bringing justice and 'upliftment', it is now a means to rectify an ailing public school system. There's also a nostalgia about past reciprocity and mutual support between student and educator. In this story, adult education has a much less hopeful role to play because it is fulfilling this role by default, not because of a broader vision for what CLCs could be.

P1 shares a similar reflection, drawing connections between who the students are (referring to younger 'drop-outs'), the desperation of parents to find places for them to go, and the de facto role of CLCs to keep young people safe from dangerous people or activities.

Following from a comment about younger students having an attitude of not caring, P1 says the following:

JL: Why do you think they come then, if they… if that's the attitude?

P1: I think students come here because they're being forced uh… Parents. The schools don't want them because they're over age. They not… maybe they had a fight with the principals, so they have been expelled. Now they… maybe they 18 years, the parents feels they can't work yet or they can't find work and they're sitting at home. Now what does the child do at home? He becomes… The devil is looking for people with idle hands… devil's advocate, and then parents bring them here. So now they're actually being forced […] ***but the parent know outside is the criminal element waiting for him so rather let him be at school so they try their best.*** *And when the student is in the class they struggle because the student don't want to work, they give the lecturers a hard time […]*

[…]

JL: Do you feel like the schools should be taking responsibility for those younger ones, or do you think the [CLCs] should take them?

P1: The schools don't want them. ***So the schools don't want them and unfortunately this is almost like a dumping site.*** *We don't want them, the parents come and they say… um [other places] don't want the child, they went here, they went there, 'please', and they plead with us – 'Please take my child', 'Pleeease do this', 'Pleeeease do that'. Right? And you feel sorry for the... But on the other hand, you as a lecturer in the class, you not... it's not only that one person in the class, you have another 20 students and sorry it becomes difficult for you as a lecturer.*

P4 and P1 give an image of a changing CLC, now playing the role of taking in young people with nowhere else to go. They both raise something heartbreaking here – parents' desperation. CLCs are positioned as a last hope for young people rejected by almost every other public institution. Not only because of a failing school system, but because of how vulnerable youth are to criminal activities, substance abuse and other social issues. The CLCs become a way of keeping people both safe and occupied. I think this positions their CLC as standing in the gap between vulnerable students and the outside world.

P4 also reflects on the desperation she felt as an educator, trying to protect students while needing to keep the centre operating. I felt P4 shared a deep sadness for the compromises she needed to make in her role because of the lived realities of younger students and the limitations of what the CLC offered. The GETC enabled some to go on to TVET colleges while the rest ended up leaving the centre.

P4: […] So, you need to think in terms of you… not the Lord, you can't perform miracles. You can only work with those students that are willing and interested. You need to make a mind shift and say, 'Listen here, yes I want to change my community for the better, but I can only work with those that want to empower themselves.' And leave whoever to find the rest, which is difficult. ***Because you don't want to throw the rest to the wolves. Because you know if they not gonna succeed here, they gonna become gangsters. We know that!*** *And that is the bitter… People say that is the bitter pill I have to swallow. Because you know if they not gonna make it here… over two or three years, that is the skollies that will be on the streets.*

This affects the perceived role of CLCs, but also educators' roles that involve various kinds of care work in response to these challenges (addressed in more depth later).

Stories from P3 and P2 show how this creates an almost impossible conflict between meeting the formal demands of the role (administrative and curricular) while simultaneously providing the attention students need.

Early in our conversation, I asked P3 two different questions – about the 'ideal' centre and why she thinks people enrol. In both answers, P3 shared specific student experiences relating to disability, learning barriers or trauma. To me, this signalled that she first wanted to communicate her teaching context and who the students were (through stories) before we could talk about anything else. It becomes clear how greatly this affects her daily work – dealing with 'brokenness' that students come to the CLC with and this potentially being the only place they receive support. But P3's reflections also show the personal cost of doing the kind of work the CLC context requires.

When asked about the 'ideal' situation for CLCs, P3 emphasises the need for additional support structures. She then shares the story of one of her students:

> *P3: [...] And ja, the ideal situation to have a… teaching environment to have a social worker on board, to have an occupational therapist on board. If I maybe… suspect there's a problem with the student, can I send the student to the social worker immediately. We have students that have outbursts on a daily basis.*
>
> *This one student of mine, she stayed out of school for about two weeks… more than two weeks. I make contact with my students'… guardians or their parents or whatever and I phoned and… the gran, she's raised by her grandparents, the grandfather said that… […] that he doesn't know what's wrong with her [...] And I got hold of her grandmother as well and I spoke to the grandmother and then the grandmother told me the whole story that she raised her from the age of three, [shares more about the student's traumatic experience with her parents] and [they were] struggling to keep her in school and she's got learning problems and that.*
>
> *Then I told her grandmother 'she doesn't have learning problems. When I give her a task or something, she can do it very well. There's other issues that's maybe hampering her from completing her schooling or doing her work… to the best of her abilities.' Because when I ask questions and stuff she's the one who answers. [...] So you have to deal with these things, and [when she eventually returned to class] she just burst out crying. And we always try and be accommodative and not to be too harsh with these students* ***because most of them are broken. They are broken. Hence the reason they here.***

Educators deal with families and caregivers directly. They're involved in the personal lives of their students – it is the reality of the job without fitting into the official framework of an adult learning centre. This is part of the 'extra mile' educators go to because of their students' lived realities.

I've taken a shorter excerpt of the story above, but while speaking to P3 at the time, I could feel the deep compassion she has for her students, as well as the distress of not being able to do more.

P3 also talks about taking work home, having to miss family and community events, and the toll this takes on her along with the thankless nature of the work environment. This signalled to me the potentially dehumanising effect educational bureaucracies can have on educators and administrators – the workers in the system.

P3 then describes how the curriculum demands (and resource constraints) can be in competition with assisting her students who have learning difficulties, or those who need additional support:

> *P3: [...] So, there's no um… say for instance I have a class of 24 or 25. 20 out of those 25 are students who struggle with learning, they've got learning difficulties. And the most prevalent learning difficulty I notice from the students are dyslexia.*
> *[...]*
>
> *JL: So do you feel that the centre prioritises the curriculum over the other needs of the students?* [Note my question is a bit leading here, but I felt it reflected what P3 had been describing up to that point]
>
> *P3: Ja.*
>
> *JL: Is that a good thing, or a bad thing or…*
>
> *P3: They prioritise the curriculum, which must also be done in order for the students to receive their certificates at the end of the day**. But… the… real needs of the students and the difficulties that they have are not really met.***
>
> *Like I have a student in my class… I have two… they are Level 1 students, nuh. They failed Level 1. We don't have a Level 1 educator here currently. Now the Level 1 students must sit in the Level 2 class, they in my class. I can't teach both levels at the same time! I can teach Level 1 students, I can assist them with their reading and writing, but I'm not capable of doing it while I have the Level 2 students in the class as well. I need to teach them, how am I going to spend time with these two students who can't read? I've been struggling, I tried in the beginning. I got the one student to practice and read at home. But then, we have to teach Level 4 as well. Now this one student, I've been struggling with him. Now, he still can't read. He can't read to save his life. And that makes me feel… I feel some days inadequate, I feel sad, and I feel sorry.*
>
> *And I can imagine how frustrated this child must be. Because he's struggling. He came from Level 1, he failed Level 1, he was put in Level 2. There's no Level 1 teacher, he's gonna fail again**. And then he's gonna drop out and what is gonna happen to him? He's gonna be sucked in by the… sick society out there**. So, this is the things that we have to deal with aaand it gets you. It gets to you because you have… I have sleepless nights thinking about my students. 'How can I assist that boy that's still*

> *struggling to read?' And we almost in September already.* ***Then I feel I'm a failure. I failed this student because I never had the time to get to him*** *so that he can at least…* ***He started reading, but then as the workload increased, increased, increased, I don't have the time to get to him*** *because the Level 2's only come two days a week [...]*

This story not only develops a picture of who enters P3's classroom (particularly at lower levels), but also the harsh tension educators carry. I felt moved while P3 told this story because of how it communicates a feeling of hopelessness alongside a deep care and concern for students. The stakes feel even higher when P3 notes that 'he's gonna drop out and what is gonna happen to him?' Along with P4's story about students being 'thrown to the wolves', this again positions the CLCs as standing in the gap between vulnerable youth and a sense of imminent danger awaiting them if they leave. This places a heavy burden on the work of educators in addition to multiple curricular and administrative pressures.

A final story P3 shared, I think, further illustrates her earlier point that curriculum is often prioritised above meeting students' other needs. When I asked why students enrol, P3 told a story about a student completing a prescribed class activity:

> *P3: I think people enrol here because they realise that they need to complete their schooling in order to find a decent job, or to find a job for that matter. And I realised most of our students are being pushed by their parents or their guardians to come and complete their schooling.*
>
> *I had one boy in the class, both his parents passed away. Then he was raised by his grandmother and he was very fond of his grandmother. His grandmother passed away last year [...] Our very first task this year was about your family and your family tree. And it was an oral task that the students had to do […] That particular boy, when he had to come stand here, he burst out crying 'cos he couldn't speak about his family and he was still so hurt about his grandmother that passed away, he couldn't speak about his grandmother either.* ***But now they expect, the… curriculum that they give and the task… DHET doesn't have a clue what we are dealing with. They don't have a clue.***
>
> *And these are very sensitive subjects for these students because most of them are being raised by either foster parents, by their grandparents, by an uncle or aunt, and they don't get the love that they supposed to get. They don't get the affection that they supposed to get. And now they vent in ways that is wrong. So, we not only lecturers, I'm not only a lecturer, I'm a mother, I'm a comforter, I'm a caregiver, I need to feed them on a daily basis or whenever I can give them something to eat. This is all the roles we need to play here. Most of our lecturers.*

This shows competing demands on the CLC – to provide ways to finish schooling so people can 'find a job', as places to occupy young people who have dropped out, to teach and

complete a formal curriculum during the school year, and to respond to students who face multiple forms of rejection, trauma, and in some cases, learning disabilities.

P2 shares a story that adds to P3's reflection on the relational and care work educators do to meet the needs of their students.

> *JL: [...] what's [the students'] reason for coming to… this centre, for enrolling?*
>
> *P2: Most of them has been expelled. In a sense, for misbehaviour, drugs, gangsterism, anger and emotional trauma.* ***And ja, it is mostly those that wasn't dealt with on a personal level. They were just thrown away, you know.***
>
> *And to me, I can tell you, I phoned his granny last night, he sits over there. He's been with me two years... And he was so angry. Oooh he was angry. If I address him, he takes his bag, he walks out by the door. And then I spoke to the granny because he lives with his granny and I'm trying to figure out why is he so angry. And then it came to light that he… the granny took him when he was very young, a few months old... [P2 continues to share the difficult home and family life of the student].*
>
> *You see, so we look at these things that… ja these children is just misbehaving but there a cause, why. Anyway, so we have [an NGO] that also work with the students on an emotional level. And I first asked [the class] [...] 'who wants to go before I make you go?' And he put up his hand. He put up his hand and I went like 'Really?' I didn't make a fuss, but he volunteered. I didn't make a fuss about it and then I, okay and most of them in this room put up their hands to go.*
>
> *[...] So I phoned his grandmother, and I said to her, this child now put up…. And she complains, he fights and he breaks windows and stuff like that. For him, to put up his hand, that to me was very big. Personally, on a personal level… The school wanted to expel him and stuff like that I said, 'No man, come back tomorrow.' Tomorrow then he just sits there angry and I just left him. But now, he participate and I said to the granny yesterday, 'his face is more open'.*
>
> ***And people don't look at the changes of the person because they hold you accountable for what you have done before. But they don't see the change within the person in growing, you understand what I'm saying?*** *So whatever you do or say 'Ja you smoke, ja you this and you did drugs and ja you fight!' and that just makes them go…* ***So you gotta allow them to come out in their own terms and in their own time.***

This was just one of many stories P2 shared about her students' experiences. She raises issues like expulsion, familial trauma, aggressive behaviour, gangsterism, substance abuse but makes sure to convey that her approach is not to dismiss students because of their past experiences or behaviour. She notes that they weren't 'dealt with on a personal level. They

were just thrown away...' (assumedly in mainstream schooling) and positions CLC educators' roles as doing that 'personal' work.

I quote this story here because it shows that the lived experiences of CLC students has a direct bearing on the kind of educational contexts they need, and the care work required by educators at CLCs, along with the skills educators use daily to perform this kind of care (and almost rehabilitative) work. This happens in addition to the administrative pressures of running the formal curriculum, and the high stakes of feeling like they are the last resort for their students.

CLCs as transformative spaces through pedagogies of care

This section discusses CLCs as potentially transformative spaces for students through pedagogies of care. I draw on educators' stories to illustrate classrooms as spaces for collective care through sharing of experiences, knowledge and resources. In some cases, this allowed students to see themselves, each other and the world differently.

Relational teaching and relational knowledge

P4 repeatedly mentioned the role of education and the CLCs to 'change lives' and 'empower' or change communities. So, I asked a question about the role of 'education' and 'knowledge' in this, looking for a response about programme or curriculum. However, P4's response revealed my ignorance to *how the space,* through certain kinds of relational pedagogy, is what brings change. She links this directly with her positionality – being from the community and deeply invested in it.

> *JL: […] what do you feel is the role of education or even knowledge specifically at a CLC, what role does that play in changing some of the challenges that the community faces?*
>
> *P4: I mean, we all know knowledge is power. You need to have a different mindset when you go there […] you need to understand, I am coming to serve the poorest of the poor. That is your main focus. I'm coming to serve the poorest of the poor. And whatever it takes, I need to give my all to that.*
> *[…]*
>
> *And that is the sad part when you see those students that are being labelled, the so-called dropouts, you are amazed to see them! Because… it's like maybe he's half skollie or whatever because therefore he didn't continue his schooling, but there are your respectable students that come from the high school and because of simple things like bullying, because a teacher or lecturer's attitude towards him, thinking because I come from a poor community I'm this and the other thing.* ***And then they experience life at the CLC, dedicated lecturers teaching from their heart, you will be amazed how that students change in completely something different.***

It's… and you feel ashamed that why are we doing this to people, why are we doing this to the poorest of the poor?! Why do everybody fail them? […] Because that community, when I didn't have the money, it was that community that put bread on my table […] My mind is completely different. And I'm blessed that… my husband is also coming from the same community, you understand. So now is it a completely different ball game. We both came from the community. We know that it was that community, that poor aunty or whatever that constantly encouraged us, 'You can do it. Go, go, go!' So I can't turn my back on them, you understand. So getting people from the community, teaching the community, it's a different ball game from asking people that comes from a completely different community to serve in this community.

P4 shares a generic statement in response to my knowledge-based question: 'we all know knowledge is power' but then gets to what she really wanted to talk about: her care work through the CLC and the role of CLC educators as being in service.

In our second conversation, I ask more about how CLCs have this transformative effect on students – P4 speaks of instilling value in students by drawing on *their* knowledge.

JL: […] I found it interesting… we were talking about the relationship between attending a CLC and avoiding… or taking people off the streets. And you mentioned 'if they are not gonna succeed here, they'll become gangsters.' […] what is it about people being at a CLC that takes them off the streets or changes their life decisions?

*P4: […] You understand when they, especially the high school dropouts, when they come to our centre, they don't want a formal education […] It's all about the way we present our courses. It's more student involvement. We allow them to interact. Instead of us just standing here and we're giving, giving, giving…. Shower them with information. That is not the way we teach. We want things from them […] And we need to… that is our focus point that we need to draw from their prior learning and that way present… Let them be involved. The minute they involved, the minute they give their input, **they feel valued**. You understand. So, and that is where they feel more comfortable being at a CLC instead of being at a school […] And we allow them, we give them that space and that really boosts their morale.*

This describes relational teaching – which includes both the relationships educators have with students, the students have with each other, but also the ways that educators draw on different types of knowledge (formal and experiential) in their classes. This, I think is all part of why all four educators described seeing a change in their students.

P1 also picks up on the dialogical and relational learning that happens in her LO classes. P1 described herself as an 'academicist' but explained her role as more than transferring information. There is a deeper knowledge about the self that she wants her students to take away from her classes. Despite this being a relatively individualised view of education's

purpose, I think it is a care response for P1 because of the hardships and harsh realities of the students in her class, which, through growing up in a similar environment with similar pressures, she relates to. She expresses care in her desire for them to leave what is harmful to them, to resist gangsterism, substance abuse, and to make informed choices in their relationships.

> *P1: Although we have it sometimes, we have our on days and our off days, but I always enjoy it and I enjoy my students. For me it's always the satisfaction to see, not the academics,* ***I always tell my students 'I do teach you a lot of stuff but at the end of the day, if I could change your mind, and you can become a better person, then I've achieved my job and I did something.*** *Because now you can go into the community and I know you are going to become a stronger person.'* ***And that is for me, the joy of teaching is although you do the academics, and you can see how your students unfold while you teaching them.***

After P1 explained the value of LO, I asked a follow-up question:

> *JL: And why do you feel like the essays and the life skills and that kind of things that you are passionate about, why do you feel it's important to teach?*
>
> *P1: It's important because they go out there… the life skills… they go out there, they can make their own decisions. If I just think of a topic like, 'How would you enhance your self-esteem?' Many of them sit with a low self-esteem, poverty, unemployment. Now how do you tell a student to enhance yourself if you're so low?*
>
> *You almost become a preacher… a preacher, you become a social worker. In one lesson you become a teacher, you become a mother, right, you become a friend to them. So now you start telling them what is the meaning of your self-esteem, how can I enhance my self-esteem, what can I do? I need to focus on… I must stop bullying myself, I must stop saying 'I can't do it, this is not for me.'*

Here P1 notes how she cannot just teach information about self-esteem. To address this topic, she needs to do deeper work with her class that actually builds their self-worth. P1 still describes a lot of teacher-led engagement but draws on her lived experience:

> *P1: [LO] is a fun time and it's something that the students love, and I always use my own experience to relate to them. Because many of them come out of the same situation that I'm from. I come from the township, we grew up in the township and my circumstances are very similar to theirs. […] I always tell them life orientation is about your own experience.*
>
> *[...] And when it comes to sexual education, I speak like I'm open with my students and I think they like it because there's seldom somebody that speaks to them in a manner… because maybe at home nobody speaks to them in the way it's supposed to…*

Coming from similar circumstances to the students allows P1 to engage in the topics that affect their lives, and the LO curriculum facilitates these conversations and provides the space to do so.

She also notes how more formal curricula such as languages, specifically essay writing skills, is an opportunity to share personal experiences while teaching a technical skill. For example, P1 describes how the class could spend weeks discussing exam papers because of all the experiences students share with one another, as well as a lesson about unfaithfulness in relationships.

P1 sees her role as filling in for what students don't get at home and in this way, I suppose, serves a community service as well – to dialogue about important issues like sex and reproductive health. I would describe P1's reflections as valuing collective learning spaces as beneficial to individual student development. Once 'your mind' is changed and you believe in yourself, and you have the support to follow a clear plan for life, you will become successful and 'break the circle' by 'rising above your circumstances'. Formal education and personal development go hand-in-hand to achieve this.

While P1 focuses on the 'mind', P2's focus is on 'holistic' learning and holistic care, which includes multiple levels of engagement. This is further connected to ideas of popular education and social consciousness.

I began our first interview by asking P2 about her role at the CLC:

> *P2: [...] And the other [student] over there [points] said to me that I am the reason why he gets up in the morning. And to me that was so profound because for myself, that is why I get up in the morning…*
>
> *JL: Mmm… for them.*
>
> *P2: For them. They inspire me. To me it is… my role it is so diverse, it is everything and anything so um [...] And I explained to [one of the students] that most of the work or what we're covering is things that they know. It's things that is applicable...*

I felt this reflection, following P2's story about student and educator inspiring and encouraging each other, connects the idea of a student-educator respect with valuing students' experiential knowledge – 'things that they know'. A commitment to building on different kinds of knowledge in a classroom also requires a commitment to relational, respectful teaching.

P2 further explains how talking and interaction in the classroom are part of her pedagogical practice. I particularly enjoyed the idea of noise in classrooms as educational – as part of

questioning, speaking up, speaking out and digging deeper into a topic, which P2 relates to her own experience growing up:

> *P2: And because I was very outspoken since the day I was born most probably, my mother always used to say 'P2 keep quiet'. And I say, 'but why must I keep quiet? It is like that and that and this!' But I've learnt to be selective when I open my mouth [laughs]. I've learnt but you always… like I say, that's the verbal people [referring to the students who sit together at the larger table], they verrry opinionated. So in the opinions, I would say 'But did you watch, do you know that, do you know this? If you don't, go look it, go read it up, go Google it', whatever. Because they very opinionated and I don't shut them up like they did with us.*
>
> *JL: Mmm ja that's important also.*
>
> *P2: Now that's what's also happening in centres because you just supposed to be quiet and that. My classroom makes the most noise and I sometimes get told to keep soft… and we laugh a lot.*

P2 notes that part of this pedagogy also requires 'looking at the student holistically', on which I later asked a follow-up question:

> *JL: And this idea of the holistic learner… what kind of teaching do you think that requires?*
>
> *P2: Holistic? Everything! Religion… everything! Mental health, physical health, relationships, everything, everything. So in the morning when we come in then we would read, sometimes I don't read in my little booklet and then they would tell me 'Ma'am you didn't read'. I'll just start…. Just to see where they're at [...] And sometimes, this person comes in, I look at them, what's wrong, what's wrong 'why are you so quiet today? What's wrong?' and then that person will tell. [...]*

P2 then tells of when she shared with the class about her friend's struggle with mental health, which leads to a student sharing their own experiences of trauma and the effect it had on his life.

> *So a friend of mine phoned me and she had suicidal thoughts, depression and whatever. And I asked [the class], 'Why… she's 50 years old, why would she feel that way?' and we analysed.*
>
> *And then it came about, we were shocked, we were all quiet… and we let him [the student] speak. [P2 describes how the student shared with the class that he witnessed multiple murders as a young child]. See, so I said to him, 'two double murders, and you were 6 years old?' But we were all so shocked. We didn't know what to say. And then I said to him 'Ma'am can't speak to you about this because I*

don't think any of us experienced that, so here's a number, call that number'. [...] and only now after [that same student] came out of jail that he can understand why he did what he did, the repercussions of what he repressed. And then he could speak to [the class].

JL: Ja and I think that's why things like, as you said like mental health, speaking about those things in the classroom is so important.

P2: Ja it's very important. And those are not the things they get at a high school level, you see. And at home, the parents are too afraid of them to speak to them, I think. So, they don't get that teaching. You see, they don't get that teaching in what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

I have many reflections on this story. But one is that the space felt safe enough for this student to share part of their story with classmates. Another is that P2 facilitates her classroom in such a way that students can learn from each other about issues such as mental health, violence, and broader social issues. Plus, there's an opportunity to get help, which P2 doesn't think they get at home. This, again, shows how educators doing this kind of work perform a key community and social function among youth.

Lastly, my question asked 'what kind of teaching' does this require. P2's response was not about information or teacher knowledge, she spoke about classroom dialogue, and the bulk of the response was a story about a student educating others about trauma and mental health through his own lived experience.

At another point in our conversation, P2 speaks about becoming socially conscious as a child through an experience of witnessing gender-based violence and becoming involved in the 1976 student uprisings. But then links education for social consciousness directly to her approach in the classroom, which she describes as a form of 'holistic' education and care.

This leads directly into a story about a classroom 'kitty', collected and distributed by students as there was need. P2 also shares an example of making a pot of food, where each student brought something. Preparing this meal was used to teach measurements. So, a math's lesson was also part of cooking, which was also a practice of community sharing.

In line with the theme of relational teaching and relational knowledge, in P3's classroom there were posters on the walls about GBV, conflict resolution, and mental health. When I asked about these, she reflects on trying to create a motivational and inspiring environment for her students, which involves relational educator-student work:

P3: I always try to incorporate that on a daily basis. I try to motivate my students. Then I ask them to read there, if there's any conflict in the class, and then I would ask them 'Now you need to solve this conflict… in a manner where you have respect for each other and you listen to each other and that is the way you…' and I ask them

'What is the matter?' 'Why did this happen? Now come we read there.' And then we see how we can solve this conflict. And I try to motivate them every morning.

I have a speech [chuckles] or a preach to my students, try to… because you can read on their faces. You see their faces and you know exactly that that student is not well. And you can see when they… On a day they will participate and on a day they will just not participate. And then I just leave that student, I won't pick on the student and I will then afterwards maybe call and ask 'what is the problem, what is wrong today? You not yourself today.' And now the other day I told them that they must just know that they are capable of anything. 'You are capable of anything and you are capable of reaching the top.'

Like all four participants, P3 describes the role of CLC educators as motivators – inspiring students towards something beyond their current circumstances, while looking out for their wellbeing during their time at the CLC. Like P1, this generally has a more individualised focus.

Care work doesn't just come from educators – all the participants noted instances of peer learning, especially between older and younger students. Because of this age difference, the younger students have many tutors and mentors, while the older students develop a sense of purpose from their classroom roles. P4 expands on this a bit more, following our conversation about the role of CLCs in keeping youth out of gangsterism:

P4: And we constantly having people, especially adults… some of them will say, 'Ma'am it was very embarrassing at the beginning for me coming and sitting among these youngsters, but the way the lessons are being presented, and we didn't know it's a completely different ball game.'

And what we normally do… that is what makes it so enjoyable for the youngsters, because we'll ask the adults to sort of assist us… 'Listen here, take that student by the hand, let him sit next to you… he need that extra help.' So, they actually helping us. And you can imagine the complete different environment and you find these youngsters need that adult hand to assist them and guide them. So, that is one of the reasons why they stayed there and they do feel comfortable and… because now they feel at least they've got a voice now, somebody is listening to them.

JL: It reminds me of something you spoke about in our last conversation about taking the students on a camp and actually just by treating the students differently, it changed their whole demeanour.

P4: Exactly! And I'm telling you it's like when we see these adults coming, especially those mature ones, the 30s, 40s, we also very excited. Because the more adults we have, it's like now we know we going to succeed! Because that youngster will have an adult on his side, ***somebody sitting next to him and sort of encouraging him and***

saying, 'Listen here, I'm here. *Because of one or other reasons, you still young, don't fall along the way. I made a difference to my life, you can do it also. I'll do it with you, I'll assist you.'* ***And that is what we really need, that interaction.***

Unfortunately, they don't have a lot of role models within the community. Unfortunately. So, having that adults there provides them… at that moment, sometimes the adults are not even aware of it, but they are their role models within that learning centre at that moment.

Seeing and being someone different

The other aspect of pedagogies of care discussed here is how CLC spaces offer something different to students' everyday lifeworlds. This creates opportunity for them to learn or experience something different, and more importantly, see themselves differently through the way they are treated. Here I draw on P2 and P4.

P2 often referred to the importance of art as a form of popular education:

JL: [...] and what are some of the things you value about the role?

P2: Teaching? Everything! I cannot I, that is all things that they done [points to the walls where there are large artworks done by students]. There's two more that they're busy… Let me show you something [leads me to the cabinet storing more student artworks]. So for me, it is not just my role. Teaching is so bloody broad. They still busy with this one. You wouldn't believe… this is one student's work [shows different artworks].

[...] You see, so teaching, in my opinion, it's all about also popular education. You see? It's not just curriculum based because this is not prescribed in the curriculum… […]

JL: Mmmm and what would you define as popular education?

P2: Popular education where it is not… Popular education is not really a outcome in assessment. And it is not… ja... in assessment. Assessing the students for a particular mark. ***It's what they know and what they can identify with****… That one was the environment [points to another artwork] and that one was just after covid [points to a large fabric painting about mental health and covid] when we came back and we discovered that a lot of them suffer from mental health [...] You see so because some people… it is just the interaction with people I think. I'm more a social person, I don't know.*

Later we return to the artworks and P2 explains how the art is actually done on Fridays, when classes don't normally take place. On these days, P2 opens her room to students:

P2: [...] Ja so they come in on a Friday and come and paint, or listen to music or, just come and relax. And I will do my work and we will listen to music and stuff like that. Make them feel part of you, although they not part of you. Make them feel because they come from such broken things. Such broken things they come from. So to me, okay here's the ear. Somebody that's listening, someone that's laughing. […] Learning is supposed to be fun… You learn through play.

This is another example of going above and beyond or the 'extra mile' that came up in a few conversations. And here, P2 is holding space – physical space – where students can come as a form of collective care and belonging, which is a response to the 'broken'ness of home life.

A recurring theme in P4's reflections is how students and community members have been misrepresented, dehumanised, and vilified by the rest of society. Coming from the same community, having received support from that community throughout her life, she is invested in caring for them. In so doing, P4 embraces people's humanity and helps students to see their own worth and the worth of those around them. This is particularly contrasted with how mainstream schools treat students, describing a healing or restorative function that educators at CLCs need to engage with.

P4 illustrates this with two stories: one about the experience of working with gangsters in the community, and the other about taking students on a camp.

P4: […] I went to the gangsters, you know what I've done for that community? And I said, 'Listen here, you need to be involved in the community. Come on board! Maybe if we help you and show you this is… there's something else for you to do! Then, you probably will change.' And I think they themselves were shocked. When I went and talked to them and I think I was just crazy, calling the leaders and saying […] and it is really, a different person when you talk to that gang leaders one-on-one. ***And then you realised it's a human being. He are so stuck in that circle and he's looking for a way out.*** *And we as the learning centre, if we put our hearts and souls into it, we can change it.*

I then asked a follow-up question about the change P4 sees in people through how they're taught (again, focusing my question on 'education'). In response, she shares a memory of taking students on a camp:

JL: [...] I just wanted to go back to something you said about, if I remember correctly, that when people come into the centre something about them changes. Can you talk more about that and what kind of education is required to help give people that experience?

P4: [...] You understand. After a while you discover, my good Lord, I was actually teaching a gangster, a murderer, a rapist or whatever. But because you treat him like you would treat your children, and what we had and, now you understand the extent

that we went [...] Somehow, I had this mad idea that we need to take them on a camp, a weekend camp.

[…] Remember, it was… because of the situation that they in, they haven't been out of that environment. Just moving out of their environment and just seeing something different. We were there in the mountains [...] But just inhaling that clean air, just seeing the surroundings, it's… that made our job so much easier. And then you discover how disciplined they can be. Because once they are there in that environment... peer pressure plays such a big role, it's almost, they will tell you… this is the words that they will constantly use, and say, 'Juffrou verstaan nie. Juffrou weet 'ie waarvan ons uitkom nie. [Ma'am doesn't understand. Ma'am doesn't know where we come from]. We have to react a certain way in order to survive.' Those are the words they using. So, 'we are forced to react this way. We constantly be…' and they constantly being on the attack. They just want to attack, you know.

[...] We cooked for them!

JL: Wow! For 60? That's amazing.

P4: How… Just by serving them. Every morning, how they would say thank you. The way they said it has almost changed my life when I came back. Seeing the children differently, you understand because we always have this perception, they this and the other thing.

P4's story describes the transformative effect of CLCs in response to mistreatment or dehumanisation in other spaces. This change happens not because of a particular curriculum or programme, but because of how students are *treated* – like educators' own children.

Formal qualifications: both a way 'out' and a 'dead end'

This theme describes mixed portrayals of the formal curriculum which include 'just a piece of paper', 'breaking the circle', 'uplifting yourself', and 'becoming better community members'.

The GETC is positioned as both a way 'out' of poverty and community violence, as well as a 'dead end' for many students not able to complete it, or those for whom such a qualification does not reap material benefit. Other participants describe a dream centre where the skills and subjects offered are those that bring direct benefit to the community. Skills that enable communities to resist broader economic forces, become self-sufficient, addressing needs contextually and collectively.

At the time of interviews, this CLC only offered AET Levels 1-3 and the GETC (Level 4). There were some mentions of additional skills programmes in the recent past, and some NGO involvement, but these seemed ad hoc – as and when other organisations hosted something at the centre.

To some extent, each participant framed their view of formal education in relation to their own life story. While all described degrees of benefit and opportunity from formal qualifications, some reflected on stories that I would consider disruptions to a narrative of formal qualifications as inherently valuable in addressing poverty and improving life circumstances. Other participants talk of encouraging students to succeed in life through finishing the GETC qualification as a form of social mobility.

P1 is probably the most optimistic about the potential of formal qualifications as a way 'out'. As discussed earlier, she focuses less on formal knowledge structures within the subjects she teaches and more about how these subjects facilitate personal development so that students are ready to take the opportunities that qualifications provide (e.g. work, TVET entrance) and make life choices that 'break the circle'.

There's a connection between 'breaking the circle', becoming 'better community members' and achieving upward mobility through formal education and employment. But this goes hand-in-hand with personal development, self-esteem, making good choices and so on.

Towards the end of our interview, I asked P1 what she would like her teaching legacy to be:

> *P1: Ooh, that's a very difficult question… There's so a lot of things… Um I would like my students to remember that… to think that where they come from that mustn't determine their future… or their success. I feel that where I come from, I never let my circumstances determine who I am. I come from a gangsterism area, but I changed for the better, to become a better person, to become a better human being, to become a better mother, to become a better grandma. I would like my students to rise above their circumstances, that is my legacy for them and I will always speak about rise above… and become that person they really want to.*

Having a goal and a vision for life, and 'rising above circumstances' is something P1 links to her own lived experience at multiple points in the interview.

Earlier in the conversation I asked:

> *JL: You mentioned the concept of success a little bit earlier. What would you say is 'success' for your students? What would you hope that they go on to do after…*
>
> *P1: Success for my students I hope even though they've left, exited Grade 9, they would do something with their lives. And they would, in their minds, I always try tell them, 'if your parents are staying in a flat in a gang infested area and you have the opportunity to go further, and if you study, and you become successful, take your parents out of that area and put your parents somewhere else. Your parents are there maybe due to circumstances beyond their control.' But I always tell them 'You can break the circle', 'You need to break the circle and how you going to break the circle? By measuring by your success'.*

This shows a strong belief in what education, particularly formal education, can do for students. To escape (but not necessarily address) poverty, to provide safety and security for their families – a form of rescue from the violence of daily life for many students and their loved ones. Becoming financially secure through work is also linked to the concept of 'better community members'. Becoming this person is about upward mobility through work/education but also who you are, influenced by *how* you are taught:

> *P1: I always tell my students, when I see you in the road, I don't want you to walk, 'Oh! There's P1. Come, let's turn this way [turning away].' But you must see what I ask you, 'What are you doing now?' Then you must say, 'you know ma'am, I'm here… Remember ma'am what you said those days, we must break the circle? I broke our circle, I'm now in HR, I'm working for PEP… That's my success story.' Then I say 'Thank you Lord' that I made an impact, although it's small, I made an impact. If I can make my students better community members, of society, I have achieved my goal.*
>
> *And we don't even think about academics, we don't think about the maths and the science, but if I could with what I did, the way I do my lessons, the way I portray myself to my students, the way we interact… if I can do that and they can see the passion, that I have…*

P1 also notes that:

> *P1: […] your grade 9 isn't going to make you become a good community member, you see that's the other thing. It depends how you take the whole set up coming to a centre like an adult, what is your motivation why you're here and if you really want to and if you complete [...]*

Similarly, when I asked about P3's journey to coming to the centre, I could see the parallels between what she was telling her students (motivation to uplift themselves), and her own experience:

> *P3: I was unemployed and I thought by myself that 'I need to educate myself but I want to do something that I always wanted to do. I want to work with young people or I want to work with children.' And then I grasped this opportunity that I got from [a university] to go and study without a cent, without a job, nothing.*

When P3 shares an example of motivating her students, she tells this anecdote:

> *P3: And now the other day I told them that they must just know that they are capable of anything. 'You are capable of anything and you are capable of reaching the top.' I told them, when was it, yesterday I told them 'You know what, when I walk with my stick in the road, then you must hoot for me and say "Hi P3! Get in! I'll give you a lift home."' And they burst out laughing. So, that's the way I try to motivate them and I always tell them good stories about people that I know within my family, within my friend… friendship circle. 'Those people didn't just get what they have today. They*

came out of the areas you live in. And look where they today. So you can also. You can uplift yourself out of that. Just focus on the future.' I know it's not easy for them. So, I need to motivate them on a daily basis.

The motivation is linked to being 'uplifted' and able to move beyond where they are living through stories of other people who have 'uplifted' *themselves* through staying focused. This is about the individual student working to pursue social mobility.

But P3's reflections also reveal the complexities of school-equivalent qualifications that promise a way 'out', because of students' realities, their needs, and the limitations of these formal programmes.

We were discussing other skills offerings that could be useful for people to 'sustain themselves', which P3 juxtaposes with the current GETC enrolment process which is alienating:

P3: [...] The people must write a placement test. Now I think when you tell a person you gonna write a test of three hours, then they already put off. They already put off. They not gonna come.

JL: Especially with the learning challenges that you mentioned…

P3: They already have learning challenges, they already struggled at the place… like another boy was writing the three-hour test and he came to me. He sat here and he said, 'Ma'am, I've been struggling with this all my life. I don't understand this type of exams because it's algebra and I don't know what's all in there.' And I told him, 'Don't worry about that. You learn here how to do it. So if you don't know, just leave it. We gonna teach you how to do those things.' And especially the adults, they are being put off because there's nothing here for them.

In this sense, the formal offering is described more as what I would consider a 'dead end' as people are 'put off' by long and complicated placement tests before they even start. I think of the contrast between this and other pedagogies participants described. How must it feel to sit through a long placement test where you don't know many (if any) answers? How does that affect what educators try so hard to encourage like self-esteem, self-worth, valuing the knowledge that people already have?

P2 is possibly the most critical about formal qualifications like the GETC. She speaks about formal qualifications as getting 'a piece of paper', which may or may not be valuable.

JL: And what do you think is the purpose of the AET Levels 1-4, and the GETC specifically, what is the purpose… or the value of that qualification?

P2: Um, look, some of them. And I think the system failed them, this generation, the system failed them. They failed the 90s children.

[P2 continues to speak about her children's experiences of getting through qualifications and finding work]

P2: [...] But to compete, she has to have that piece of paper, you see. And the paper! They make it higher and higher… the value of that piece of paper. The value and it's got no value in what you… I wanted to shut them up on Friday [at the workshop] because it's, yes it's got value, but what value does that have for me in education per se?

[...] So, if you don't have that piece of paper, even if you die, you can't do anything! From the day you are born, you have to have a piece of paper, but that piece of paper, what is the value of it?

The 'piece of paper' is contrasted with other ways that people find skills and engage in educational and/or community activities:

JL: So, do you feel the GETC is just about getting the piece of paper?

P2: Ja. In order to sustain education. But if you… you know, my cousin […] he's 65. And he is a… oh man he puts in the fire hydrants. He never was taught that, he also left school very early. But his sister's son started a company in this because his uncle taught him the trade. When he finished school, I don't know if he finished matric or whatever, but his uncle got him a job, right. He currently has got his own business, so his uncle, that skill was transferred without a piece of paper.

JL: So if you could teach anything in this classroom, if we didn't have to do the piece of paper, what kind of education would you want to see here?

P2: Art [laughs]. Art and the holistic thing. When we grew up, in the community, I grew up in a community [names nearby community]. And those years, there was the community colleges, not colleges, community um… community halls. So, in that halls, you could do gymnastics, you could do needlework, ballet, knitting, baking, whatever you want and that is the idea of a community college. To get a skill. Not a piece of paper which they push us for. They push the student. They crrraaamp the student with irrelevant information.

P2's description of skills is not necessarily a labour-market skills focus either, as below, she critiques the promise of TVET-taught skills leading to jobs. Instead, skills are linked to communal activities like the example of community halls (above), as well as art:

> *P2: [...] please show me the people that is in a job coming from that [a TVET]. Now they're saying we must do skills.* ***This is a skill [pointing to artworks around the room], that is a skill that that students have.***

Lastly, P4's reflections are interesting because, as a former centre manager, she has a centre-wide view of the students and their needs.

> *JL: What is the main thing that you think the centre should be focussing on, in terms of programmes?*
>
> *P4: Skills, my dear. We need to focus on skills. The type of learners that do enter, you know our target market has changed. We… basically, most of our students are now high school dropouts. And they drop out of the mainstream because they are not academically inclined. So now we forcing them, again in the same route. And they not gonna last long within the centre too.*
>
> *[…] The students don't need all these academic programmes! They don't need it! We set them up for failure, that is not what they need! [...] They need money, they need to put bread on the table. These subjects is not going to put bread on the table [...] So, going forward, I really don't know, really. It's… sad. Because we don't offer the subjects that the community needs.*

Another reason for P4's dissatisfaction with the GETC is the limited subjects the CLC can offer because of policy shifts since the DHET took over in 2015. She describes Travel and Tourism, the elective offered at the time, as a 'dead end' which could not lead to real income opportunities:

> *P4: When I left there, we could only offer one stream. So all the students are only doing Travel and Tourism. And you know the Travel and Tourism we had, it's… because of part of the fact that we had covid, prior to that, it was like a… dead end.*

However, P4 also believes in the value of formal programmes. She speaks about education being a way 'out' for her, but because of her upbringing in that community, she has a life-long commitment to it:

> *P4: So, being there it's like… my heart and my soul and whatever was there. It's almost wanting to tell them, 'I come from that community, I changed my life for the better, you can also do it.' You understand, and that was from the moment when I started there, that was my message to my students. 'You can make it. I was there.* ***And education was my tool to get out there.*** *I'm staying now in a different area, but it doesn't mean I forget about you.'*

But in general, formal subjects that directly benefit the community are positioned as valuable, like ancillary health care, nursing, teaching, police work and so on – subjects

taught previously but no longer. When the value of the GETC qualification is mentioned, it's usually discussed in relation to the community value of specific subjects, or TVET access:

> *P4: And, I mean I've been in the sector for more… I'm almost 20 years, can you believe it? And coming from offering a hell of a lot of subjects… we offered, I'm thinking now a subject that we offered and that was a subject that the community needed, Early Childhood Development we offered, we've done Ancillary Health Care. Because with that they could at least go and do… what is the thing that they… home-based care and so on. But when the qualified teachers left, there was nobody to fill those posts.*

P4 returns to the value of the GETC when asked about the RDP days of adult education, picking up on a comment from our first interview:

> *JL: So, I was interested… what was it about that education of the past, in the RDP time, that really made you feel like that was changing people's lives?*
>
> *P4: The one thing that I remember it was, people, especially in the RDP time, people could sort of, because of the education that they received, they could go and acquire a job. I'm just thinking specific of this one lady, I think she was in her late 40s. And then she decide to come and complete her GETC, and from there she finished her matric and then she went to a TVET college, she completed the ECD [early childhood development] course and she started her own creche. You see, so that for me was remarkable.* ***Because that is what I want – just not empower her but she could go back to community and then empower her community too. So, that was more than just rewarding to me.***
>
> *Understand, for the young ones that we… they went to the TVET college and they did that community policing, and… you know, that was also very good course and they could sort of become policemen and women. So, that was good. Again, a career where they can give back to a community, you understand. So, that to me was absolutely fulfilling my dream. And then I can talk of a hell of a lot, especially when we had partnerships with the Department of Health and we could better those students' lives... because they were just ordinary workers and by acquiring their matric they could go and become a professional nurse. And so, again, careers where they constantly involved in community.*

This speaks to both the types of subjects available and the profile of students. P4 doesn't describe the GETC as value-less, but perhaps part of the qualification's value in the past was due to public sector jobs being available as a result. But she also notes a broader social purpose of some qualifications: the ECD training brought individual as well as communal benefit. This challenges the idea that qualifications can and should just help *individuals* escape poverty or leave their communities.

I should also note that P4 and P1 both mention the high demand for the Senior Certificate classes, which they did not offer at the time.

P4 notes its importance, but only in relation to the qualification as a growing requirement for jobs and promotions. Apart from opening up opportunities for careers like nursing, it mainly serves to help people move through the labour market.

Bread for me and bread for you: education for collective sustenance and community thriving

The notion of 'bread' as a theme primarily came from P4's reflections on the importance of putting bread on the table, which came up multiple times. To differing degrees, participants reflected on education not just for individuals to get 'bread', or even families – but education that can build thriving communities.

> *JL: So, I wanted to ask if maybe you could share a bit about what you think the core of [this] centre should be and how you would like the community to see the centre…*
>
> *P4: […] As I put down here, skills where they can sort of, at the end of the day, develop their own business, create jobs for people in the community. As I indicated to you, when we had the skills programmes, bricklaying and so on, someone in the community sort of he became a businessman and he could create jobs for the people. So if it is skills, bricklaying, painting, whatever, plumbing and all those things. Even in a new career that people are interested in… beauty services or whatever. If the centre can become a skills-orientated centre, then we could empower the community to sustain a job. And then we can… in that way, we can help them, we can put bread on the table and that is what they want to do – basically, just to put bread on the table.*

In this example, P4 recalls when bricklaying courses helped to create a small business in the area, which created some local income generation. But when sharing her vision for the centre, P4 also speaks about skills that can develop avenues for community care and skills to maintain the CLC and other local infrastructure:

> *P4: […] One classroom where we have that hairdressing, nails or whatever, letting the community, especially the elderly come on a Friday in and out and do that. Show them how much we care for them. We were thinking in terms of having another welding, because that is now securing the community burglar bars, and what, what… small items and so on. And then another… what's its name, where there are skills programmes going in and out, going in and out. And things that will benefit the community at large. Apart from these formal programmes… you still need to have formal programmes whether you like it or not, they still need to be there, but you need those practical things where people can move freely in and out. And we were visualising this and we already said, 'that room we gonna use for that, and that and*

the other thing.' If we had the funding and whatever available, that would be the perfect centre. Because then you can't just come up with this food parcels, and food… ugghh that thing, I'm not very into that. Teach somebody! Show somebody how you can put food… how you can feed your community. Those community gardens or vegetable projects, let them be involved!

This resonates with something mentioned earlier in the conversation:

P4: Some people with those little skills that we taught them then, became entrepreneurs. So, how wonderful is that? And when they were there and we taught them that skills, they could… even there are still buildings standing there, that they built. They painted the CLC, they did the plumbing while they were in training. So what now? If something happened at the centre, who must we ask? It's a struggle to get funding from the Department, or now from the College, to fix those things.

The concept of 'bread' and skills for sustenance came strongly from P4's interview. But part of this theme is also the idea of a local economy and societal change. P2 speaks more to this than other educators I spoke with.

I asked P2 how she would like the centre to run. In describing this, she tells a story of her mother who had a skill, and how valuable that was for her. But also links skills to the idea of 'comradery' and 'working on one common goal or mission', which I think connects with the story P2 tells about her upbringing – experiences of becoming socially conscious and politically engaged.

JL: [...] if you could run this centre the way that you would want to, what would adult education or community education look like here at the centre?

P2: Wow! Joh. Everything would be going. Hustling and bustling. English classes for the foreigners, sewing classes, hairdressing ummm, CV writing, oooh you name it, all kinds of skills!

JL: So, skills would be something that is important?

P2: Well, not the skills, skills for a piece of paper… but the ***comradery of being together, working on one common goal or mission*** *or something and organising events, having soup kitchens, having food gardens. [...]* ***But you're not allowed that little bit of space. You're not allowed to think out of the box.***

JL: And is out of the box meaning outside of the…

P2: The curriculum, yes. Outside of, of... they think this is the beginning and end all. It's not. My mother was the best cook. And she will cook for the whole neighbourhood and for weddings and stuff because she was taught that skill. And the domestic working that she done, she had to cook, you see and that was a skill. But if

you looked at her, you would've thought that she went to university. In her confidence of doing and taking leadership and ownership of what she… [...]

So, to me, I was, I got a hiding because of it, a lot of times… burning down John Vorster's face [in reference to the 1976 student uprisings]. You see, I was 14. And I always tell them, '14 you become socially conscious' […] So to me, education… if you educated, you got to know, not just curriculum but you get to know stuff if you educated. If you, learned, not educated. If you learned.

JL: Do you feel there's a connection between being socially conscious and community education?

P2: ***Ja, because then we won't just sit back and just accept things the way we are.*** *[...]*

JL: Ja! So what kind of community learning centre, would develop that kind of person?

P2: This is actually the platform, this is just for community awareness in politics, in your rights, in everything, this is the platform!

For P2, in the context of a holistic approach, drawing from her memories and experiences, we return to the idea of the 'dream' CLC. But when speaking about skills, P2 refers specifically to skills as a way to keep money within communities. In other words, to develop local economies to resist corporate monopolies that create exploitative work and inflate food prices.

P2: […] So, it's developing the community and keeping the money also within the community. [...] So if I make use of the community… You know, when I grew up my mom… it would be the… fish, it would be the groceries and it would be the fruit and veg. The only thing that my mom bought at the butchery was meat.

JL: So do you mean it was all… you buy from your own community?

P2: Ja it was within the community. [...] I don't know when last I had fish because if I go to the shop I pay my head off. I pay my head off for a piece of snoek. So [they] took that um rights away from the fishermen there in the West Coast. And [they] became the CEO of [commercial frozen fish brand]. […] They was just playing monopoly – you go there and I go here and that and there within, it remains within them. So now the fishermen is suffering, you see.

I went… waar was it? [where was it?] [...] So this guy was fishing, so the boat came in and I'm standing there, I had a workshop there. So I'm standing there and I'm thinking 'joh that snoek!' I took out a two-hundred rand – this is a couple of years

ago – I take out a two-hundred rand and went nearer to the boat, 'How much?', giving him the money. The guy looked at me like, 'How many fish are you gonna buy?!' I said, 'No, I just want one or two.' He said, 'Now why you give me so much money?' I said, 'How much is the fish?' and he says to me, 'No it's ten rand a snoek.'

*I nearly fell on my back! And he says to me, this is mos his words, and he said, '**How can I charge my community a hundred rand?**' But in the same breath there was a lot of bakkies and people standing so what they do they buy it there for ten rand and they bring it here and they ask us a hundred-and-eighty rand for a snoek that was for free. That was the man he say, '**How can I charge them when I get it here for free?' You see so if stuff remains within the community, we won't have this problem of expenses.** It's so expensive, oh gosh I can't survive on my own. Really, I can't.*

When I asked P3 about her ideal centre, she also spoke about skills that would have a broader community impact:

JL: [...] If *you could imagine an adult and community education system for the whole of South Africa, with no limitations – resource, no bureaucracy, DHET. What kind of things would you think are important in that adult education system?*

P3: I think I would incorporate things where people can, like I said earlier, sustain themselves. I would teach the community how to start a food garden and then I would teach them the soft skills on how to sustain that food garden and how they can make profit out of the food garden in order to generate money for them. But they can also feed the community from that food garden with… how can you say, with much… less… the cost would be much less for the people, for the community. Where they don't need to travel to a shop to go buy. It would be much cheaper then, to buy from the community. Teach the entire community how to live, how to utilise their own land in order for them to sustain themselves.

P3 goes on to list other skills such as sewing, support for the elderly to access their pension and other administrative support, first aid classes, health and safety to protect children and neighbours, sex and HIV/AIDS education, connecting and supporting the work of community workers. She then notes:

So those are the skills that lacks in our communities. And those are the skills that's going to bring… I think, I'm looking at this word now, more comfort to the communities. When people are… educated, there's less… trouble, there's less conflict, there's less poverty, ja.

P4 speaks about the interactive community – a dream for the CLC where people can engage on issues of importance to them.

P4: It should be… the community centre, that is my vision… it should be a interaction between the communities and the centre itself. They should be free to come and give

advice. We shouldn't be the only person, we know everything. Those people are streetwise. They know. So we need to create that platform that we can interact with them – what is it you need? What is it you want? What is the topic… we should even think in terms of what topic that we can render every week or monthly or… you know! Then you get things going! Because now the community is constantly involved. We can get the churches in… there's such a lot of things we could do! And then we have an interactive community.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed some ways in which educator narratives reflect, complicate and reject master narratives about the roles and purposes of education through their experiences at this CLC. Descriptions of CLC students, their needs, the surrounding communities, as well as the requirements of formal curricula show competing demands placed on centres and educators. But we're also given insights into how educators respond – through various types of relational, care and knowledge work through the CLC space, within and beyond prescribed activities. Lastly, different constructions of the value of formal qualifications (like the GETC) are discussed and contrasted with other visions for what CLCs could be doing – including skills for collective benefit. The next chapter discusses these re-presentations in relation to the conceptual framework and selected literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter brings together the research questions, conceptual framework, and other relevant scholarship into conversation with the re-presentations of educator narratives above.

The guiding question for this study asks how educators narrate the role and purpose of education at their CLC. Subsequent questions ask what kinds of education and knowledges have value, what is the role of educators and the CLC, and who are the students. The Data Re-presentation chapter shared selected educator stories that speak to these questions. Below, I extend some of these threads into a discussion of master, located and counter-narratives. Master narratives are dominant, taken-for-granted, and widely accepted 'truths' about the world; located narratives are stories that relate to lived experiences, memories and relationships in a particular space and time; counter-narratives messy or disrupt master narratives, often in ways that help us recognise alternatives. These three 'levels' are deeply interwoven and operate within this broader researcher narrative – the concepts and lenses I am using to interpret the meanings of educator stories.

I discuss these narratives in four sections: abandonment and the changing roles of CLCs, questioning what formal curricula can do, certificates as preparation for waged work, and dreams and ideals.

Abandonment and the changing roles of CLCs

Organised abandonment describes a process where, over time, states 'abdicate' their responsibility for presiding over and delivering social goods and services (Wilson Gilmore, 2023). Increasingly, local and non-state actors take on the roles of providing healthcare, education, housing and other vital services. States decrease spending on these institutions, and budgets are cut, safety nets disappear, and the rich become richer by expanding their markets to those formerly served by social welfare (public investment in public goods) (Wilson Gilmore, 2015). Rather than an unfortunate by-product, organised abandonment describes a set of strategic moves by the 'anti-state state' and private actors which 'exploits inequality and deepens it' (Wilson Gilmore, 2023). Meanwhile, the divestment in welfare for those who need it most is accompanied by increased spending on various forms of 'organised violence' – specifically policing, military and prisons (Wilson Gilmore, 2015).

The implication is that 'those who "count for nothing" [according to these logics] receive less' (Baatjes et al., 2018:163). We see this in various sectors of South African society. For example, 'school finance legislation privileges the rich' and 'service delivery issues and upgrading are addressed in wealthy neighbourhoods first' (Baatjes et al., 2018:163).

In adult education, historically, big reform promises have been made but budgets have not materialised (Rule, 2006; Aitchison, 2018). Again, post-2013, much of the funds needed to implement the CETC model have not arrived causing ongoing delays (von Kotze, 2021; PMG,

2022). Furthermore, within the planned qualification policies (NASCA and GETCA), we see broad allowances for private delivery of the 'open' educational materials through both in-person and online delivery, potentially shrinking the state's obligations to public-sector adult education even further. The WP-PSET clearly positions 'open learning' as a response to inevitable 'strain' on infrastructure competing with the need to increase enrolment and throughput numbers (DHET, 2013:48). Amid this equation, educators in CLCs continue to be under-paid and face precarious working conditions (I. Baatjes & B. Baatjes, 2019).

I think that in our conversations, participants were describing symptoms of organised abandonment and their stories showed how this affected who attends the centre, the role of CLCs in communities, and in turn, how participants positioned their own roles as educators. In contrast to P4's reflections on the past (with a real sense of promise in RDP adult education initiatives), participants described desperate parents bringing teenagers with 'nowhere else to go'. The dehumanising effects of deteriorating public schools who deal with overcrowding and chronic under-resourcing leave cohorts of young people being failed over and over again by multiple institutions. Be it due to behavioural issues and expulsion, addiction, trauma, or various kinds of disability (without adequate public services), P2 describes some of her students as having been 'thrown away' while P1 speaks of the CLC as 'almost like a dumping site'. The younger students being served by this CLC are at the coalface of organised abandonment in their communities and participants repeatedly described the responsibility they feel to stand between students and the violence or criminality that seem almost inevitable if they deregister from these programmes.

Through their storytelling, participants provide a strong counter-narrative to the notion in policy that the DHET takeover is bringing new life, relevance and purpose to the adult and community education sector. Rather, in the context of organised abandonment, *it is the educators who show up.* Where healing, humanising and relational work is being defunded and under-recognised, CLCs and their educators take on multiple roles, often working outside of the curriculum, to meet students and their families where they're at.

Questioning what qualifications and formal curricula can do

A particularly pervasive master narrative is that formal education is inherently good and necessary – that it 'benefits both the individual and society' (Baatjes et al., 2018:192). Furthermore, that the fundamental right to 'adult basic education' finds sole expression in qualifications on the NQF (linked to broader compromises made in the 1990s over the social purposes of adult education). The policy overview (above) showed that despite discursive changes over time, the emphasis on certification and formal qualifications remains in CETC policy and funding structures.

A counter-narrative to this is that formalised education (as in primary and secondary schooling, as well as 'second chance' schooling) can and does cause harm. Not just because of a few unkind teachers, but because it is part of a broader system of unequal service delivery and resourcing. Participants reflected on how students have been consistently let

down to the point where some teenagers arrive at the CLC unable to read. They also reflected on the damage mainstream schooling had done to some students, degrading self-worth, writing them off because of their behaviour without looking at the root causes, while overcrowded classrooms don't allow for knowledge sharing or recognise lived experience.

At a broader level, these systems also perpetuate unequal class relations while ensuring forms of compliance:

> *The state exercises control over the education system through, for example, emphasising certain kinds of knowledge over others in the curriculum… through what and how it funds; and through controlling certification (with the accompanying discourse that certification is all-important, since a certificate will ensure employment or 'employability'). In this way, education can be shaped to suit the needs of capital. In return, the education system serves the state by keeping children and youth off the streets, so that they do not disrupt the smooth workings of the system, and by emphasising individual rights and liberal representative democracy.* (Baatjes et al., 2018:204)

In this sense, certain kinds of education can work *against* collective organising, conscientisation and indigenous knowledges, while seemingly effective in keeping youth 'off the streets'.

While this kind of broader analysis was less present in our conversations, what educators did raise was how prescribed curricula can present trade-offs they must constantly navigate.

Stories from P3 and P2 show how the realities of their students and the demands of delivering the curriculum created an almost impossible conflict between meeting the requirements of the role (administrative and curricular) while simultaneously providing the attention students need. Baatjes et al. (2018) reported similar reflections from educators throughout the country. This also affects educators' own well-being. At a CLC level, the curricular focus means that community engagement and organising is additional and unpaid. The curriculum content itself can also be harmful. P3 reflected on the retraumatisation of her students through a prescribed activity, and the effects of long and technical placement tests.

When learning spaces are disconnected from lived realities, educators are left to hold the arising tensions, performing labour on multiple fronts to bridge these chasms.

This stands in contrast to the claims of CETC policy and the two proposed qualifications specifically. They emphasise 'holistic development' and 'participation', while claiming to 'reinvigorate learning' and address 'negative past experiences' of school. According to these policies, this happens through 'subject/content-' and 'discipline-based' curricula, while the presence and roles of educators and learning spaces are critically undermined, suggesting these outcomes are achievable apart from these engagements.

A strong counter-narrative in participants' stories was the reframing of concepts like holistic learning and participation by explaining how the CLCs become transformative spaces for students, not because of curriculum content alone, but through a commitment to aspects of democratic and caring pedagogies. In particular, teaching inter-generationally, resisting individualised education, engaging in relational knowledge work and classroom dialogue, valuing lived experience, and seeing teaching as vocation (Freire, 1998) – a commitment to service and care, thereby resisting technocratic modes of instruction. Furthermore, students weren't only seen as 'broken' and in need. Their knowledges and experiences were deeply valued in the classroom. Students had authority to share their knowledge while older classmates provided mentorship and guidance. These principles were integral to educators' classroom practice.

Furthermore, participants' reflections on the lived realities of students, I think, indicate that the stated purposes of the proposed formal qualifications (and, presumably their associated curricula) for CLCs would be impossible without this pedagogic work by educators. The structure of these qualifications may even be detrimental to their own aims.

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope,* bell hooks (2003:43) emphasises the importance of democratic education which includes teaching for 'wholeness', 'healing' and with 'love'. 'Love' being 'a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust' (hooks, 2003:131) – that learning cannot happen without *connection*. In an earlier book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, she (1994:13) notes that:

> *To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.*

hooks (1994:14), referring to her work in North American universities, provides examples of how educators can use these spaces for wholeness along with 'critical awareness and engagement' (drawing on the work of Freire). In this sense, formal PSET spaces (like CLC classrooms) could be seen as 'contested terrains, sites of struggle' over the purposes of education in society (Baatjes et al., 2018:208). For educators, this also seems to be a struggle for the wellbeing of their students.

In summary, through reflection on their practice, educators highlight important pedagogical skills that are not adequately valued or recognised in policy, even though these are essential for learning and responding to students' contexts in and beyond the classroom. Furthermore, *collective learning* in *physical spaces* is required for this to happen. In his final book, *Pedagogy of Freedom: ethics, democracy and civic courage*, Paulo Freire (1998:126) notes under the heading 'caring for students':

It is worth noting how much pedagogical experience itself is capable of awakening, stimulating, and developing in us a taste for caring and for joy, without which educative practice has no meaning at all.

He reflects that to care for students in wholeness, is to be 'steeped in that other type of knowing' (Freire, 1998:124). These educator narratives, I think, speak not only to a 'method' but a deeper way of knowing – a knowledge that is subjugated by master narratives of what skills and experience educators need, their practice, and what they should teach.

Certificates as preparation for waged work

The connection between education and skills, finding formal employment, and experiencing a better life are deeply ingrained in CETC policy discourse as well as our public consciousness. In other words, individualised education for individual social mobility. This positions the role of education as a remedy for unemployment, poverty and inequality. Furthermore, it explains unemployment as the result of '"deficits" among the un- or under-employed' – a mere 'skills gap' that education can solve (Vally & Motala, 2022:7).

But even these narratives have become murky since the WP-PSET's professed emphasis on programmes that respond to community needs and have communal value, including skills towards sustainable livelihoods. However, almost 10 years since the WP-PSET (at the time of interviews in 2022), these options had not materialised in many centres I spoke to, including this particular CLC.

Participants' reflections on the role of education provided by the CLC borrowed heavily from an education-employment-better life master narrative in some ways while this logic was also disrupted and rejected in other instances. The interplay of master and counter-narratives seemed deeply tied to participants' own experiences of formal education. And here perhaps, we also see how not all located narratives are necessarily counter-narratives. I risk over-simplifying these reflections but attempt to provide some examples from the previous chapter.

P1, P3 and P4 reflect on how formal education was a way 'out' for them – out of a desperate situation and/or unsafe neighbourhoods. In other words, education for individual social mobility in response to the dehumanising conditions of poverty. It is less important here whether this is formal employment or another way to make a living. This is a matter of survival – not only to eat, but to stay safe. Educators here become motivators, encouraging students daily to keep going, 'break the circle' and 'reach the top'. I believe this comes from a place of care, and yet, Baatjes et al. (2018:164) note how narratives of individuals uplifting themselves through education can do 'psychological harm'. When (due to broader structural forces and inequality) one's situation doesn't change, the blame is placed on the person rather than the system.

That said, P4 draws on her experience of the students attending the centre and the limitations of formal certificates, stating that qualifications like the GETC do not 'put bread

on the table'. They are not what the community needs. Although the function of the formal labour market is not explicitly challenged here, I do think P4 is exposing the cracks in the education for employment narrative – it is not working for their students. Her response: we need practical skills.

P2 is more critical of certificates in relation to jobs and society more broadly. Asking what value do these 'pieces of paper' really have. She reflects on other ways skills have been passed on within communities and families 'without a piece of paper'. She critiques what Ngcwangu (in Vally & Motala, 2022:9) calls the 'paper chase' and the devaluation of these certificates as more people attain them. Based on her reflections on protesting oppressive apartheid education, I think these experiences shaped a more critical analysis of formal education generally and how it can be used to maintain the status quo. Along these lines, Baatjes et al. (2018:199) challenge the notion of access to education as a gateway to social mobility through employment:

> *…widening of access to education also lowers the value of certificates and other qualifications, and more and more people 'get' them and then compete with the same pieces of paper for jobs, which, in the current labour market, are becoming increasingly scarce*.

In this sense, unemployment cannot simply be the result of a 'gap' in practical or academic skills. On the contrary, in South Africa, education levels are increasing, but so is unemployment, and growing numbers of people are working within the informal sector to sustain themselves (Baatjes et al., 2018).

Dreams and ideals

Teaching is 'a profession that deals with people whose dreams and hopes are at times timid and at other times adventurous and whom I must respect all the more so because such dreams and hopes are being constantly bombarded by an ideology whose purpose is to destroy humanity's authentic dreams and utopias' (Freire, 1998:127).

Freire was committed to the non-inevitability of injustice and oppression. The dominant neoliberal narrative is a fatalistic, 'anti-utopian' one – it says, 'everything is under control, everything has already been worked out and taken care of' (Freire, 1998:126). In response, dreaming can be a powerful counter-narrative.

While reflecting on the stories educators shared with me, and as we discussed dreams and what an 'ideal' centre might be like, I thought about how dreams aren't just the 'not yet' but are also inspired by glimpses of better worlds that we hold in memory. And in this way, dreams are profoundly located. They exist not only in the mind, but in the body. Like P2's memories of community halls, the togetherness that happened there. Memories of her mother's confidence and pride, and community economies where you bought from those around you. When thinking of P4's concept of 'bread', I re-read part of our first interview when she says, '*it was that community* that put bread on my table' (rather than simply jobs

or skills) and her recollection of the encouragement from elders as a young person, concluding, 'so I can't turn my back on them'. Their commitments to collective thriving, and what this could look like, appear to come from these experiences.

I think this is part of what bell hooks (1989:20) speaks about when framing the locatedness of position and lived experience as a 'space of radical openness' – a place 'from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds'. It's theorising that is close 'to the skin' (Ahmed, 2017:10).

When participants described dreams of education involving care for children and elders, living off the land, creating local and self-sufficient economies where people can afford fresh food, using CLCs as gathering places to socialise, debate and share knowledge, I think of the concepts of 'doing' (Baatjes et al., 2018:168) and 'socially useful labour' (Vally & Motala, 2017:1).

'Doing' is the activities that lead to wholeness, 'that help us to be fully human' – our wellbeing, the wellbeing of others and meeting our needs for food and shelter, but also for community, love, joy and belonging. Unlike 'alienated or abstracted labour', 'doing' is rooted in 'connection to other human beings and to the earth' (Baatjes et al., 2018:175).

Similarly, socially useful work leads to 'socially necessary and useful goods and services – outside the forms of commodification that are at the heart of capitalist production' (Vally & Motala, 2017:12). This concept challenges the notion that the 'skills' needed and productive are those that serve the economy and economic growth. It provides a way to name and evaluate activities beneficial to the humanity and well-being of people in a particular context. It requires 'situated' learning, which is 'related to [people's] local context, experiences and interests' and 'responsive to local priorities' (Baatjes et al., 2018:235-6). In educators' descriptions, this was not always separate from formalised knowledge, where for example, studies of teaching/education and healthcare were seen as highly valuable because of their communal benefits. However, there were also firm critiques of where the current conditions do not allow room for other kinds of learning and activity, such as P2's comment: 'But you're not allowed that little bit of space. You're not allowed to think out of the box.'

For education to be 'responsive' to community needs, educators and communities must have the freedom to curriculate from a place of engagement with 'theory and action' (Aronowitz, 1998:13). Imposed, top-down curricula cannot lead to situated learning and are unlikely to benefit 'doing' or socially useful forms of work. In the introduction to Freire's *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Aronowitz (1998:12-13) writes the following:

> *Part of Freire's ethical idea is the absolute necessity of teachers' self-defence of their own dignity, a struggle that includes their 'right' to academic freedom, to have autonomy in the construction of the curriculum and of the pedagogic process…*

teachers cannot be effective when they remain in the thrall of an exploitative school system that robs them of their own voice.

In realising humanness and humanising pedagogy, the autonomy and authority of both educators and students are needed to bring the world into a decidedly more ethical existence (Freire, 1998). This kind of 'participatory curriculum making' (see Eccles, Jaftha & Senekal, 2014:2) is not new to our context. As reviewed in the literature, alternatives exist but have been systematically undermined.[19]

I should note, many participants' stories did not speak explicitly of liberatory forms of education or the structural foundations of inequality. As noted above, the current conditions of the labour market, the harmful aspects of formal education, and individual social mobility were not always problematised.[20] The lines between instrumentalist and emancipatory education (Baatjes & Mathe, 2004) were by no means neat, nor have I been able to neaten them.

Aronowitz (1998) also notes that caring and dialogic practices are not in and of themselves humanising pedagogies if not connected to broader goals of social change. In doing this, the *content* must be problematised, assessing both scientific/formalised knowledge and experiential knowledge to reflect critically on 'the social, economic, and cultural conditions within which education occurs' (Aronowitz, 1998:12).

The context CLC educators find themselves, within the confines of prescribed curricula and the personal resources it requires, greatly restricts this kind of work. However, some of what educators have described, I think, are forms of resistance and counter-narrative: choosing love, dialogue, democratising pedagogies and dreaming of alternatives even within these limitations.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the interconnectedness of master, located and counter-narratives. While on the one hand, lived experience can reinforce master narratives about the benefits of certain kinds of education for individuals and families, stories can also provide nuanced and multi-layered disruptions to taken-for-granted 'truths' about education, its role in society and its effects on people and communities.

[19] Various forms of education for social change in South Africa have been well documented. For example, see Baatjes and Mathe, 2004; Ismail, 2009; Harley, 2012; Endresen, 2013; Luckett, Walters and von Kotze, 2017; Motala, 2018; Baatjes et al., 2018; Cooper, 2020; Vally, 2020.

[20] In the Methods chapter, I note how these omissions don't necessarily mean educators are not engaging in this kind of analysis. The various dynamics and considerations of the interview context may have produced such omissions.

Chapter 6: Concluding thoughts

Much of the literature on adult and community education shows a continued focus on formal programmes in CETCs, disconnection from community needs, and the loss of centre autonomy since the DHET transition, which undervalues local knowledges and participation in decision making around education. Funding models still seem to favour formal programmes because of the historical ties between the NQF and constitutional/justice goals.

This study reinforces the calls of other authors for educators to be included in the policy- and decision-making processes that shape education and learning. In particular, educators bring unique and valuable situated knowledge of social and learning contexts which appear to be overlooked by top-down and overly standardised approaches. But, perhaps educator narratives also show that what is needed is less about being brought into the centre, but rather ensuring that communities, and CLCs in particular have the authority and autonomy to curriculate and make decisions around their own contextual needs.

Another potential issue is that in response to the perceived failure of formal academic programmes and the unavailability of waged work, another master narrative is emerging – 'skills' as a solution to poverty. But which skills and why are not always interrogated. Skills is possibly becoming the new panacea for addressing unemployment, but we risk replicating the same myths that do not lead to better lives.

The roles that CLC spaces can play in encouraging what Baatjes et al. (2018:168,153) refer to as 'doing' and 'making a life' hinges on the abilities of students, educators and other community groups to engage robustly about what their needs are and how best to address them.

Some of the stories shared by educators here suggest that the kinds of engagements happening in CLCs provides fertile ground for analysis and curriculation 'from below'. There are some CLC educators, I think, that have the specialised skills to hold these conversations – because of their lived experience, pedagogical expertise, and unique commitment to community wellbeing.

The literature mentioned here as well as the memories and dreams shared by educators shows that it's unlikely we need to 'find solutions'. Alternatives exist but are still being systematically overlooked, undermined and resisted.

In terms of further research, much work has been done to critique the neoliberal character of public education in South Africa, including its effects on the AET sector. What could be useful is drawing on more engaged, participatory research approaches that bring together various role players from CLCs, universities and community groups to explore these alternatives practically – drawing on the knowledge and examples of the past, the activities that are already happening outside of formal spaces, as well as analysis of the conditions of the present to create new ways.

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Appendix 1

Participant information letter and consent form

Dear ________________________________,

Research invitation: Perspectives of Community Learning Centre staff in Cape Town

My name is Jess Loizides, and I am a student at the University of Cape Town completing a research project as part of a Masters in Adult Education. If you are an educator or manager who works directly with adult students in a community learning centre, I would like to invite you to participate in this project.

What is the research about?

The research looks at people's experiences as well as education policy documents to understand how the role of adult education programmes and community learning centres are perceived at various levels of the public education system.

Research title: An analysis of the GETCA and NASCA policy documents in relation to perspectives from Community Learning Centre staff in Cape Town (This is a working title for the project and may change)

The research has two main goals:

1) **To understand the perspectives of educators and staff working in learning centres about the role of education through the centre they work in**.
2) To analyse how the problems to which adult education must respond and solutions are presented in South African policy documents, specifically, the policies for the GETCA (General Education and Training Certificate for Adults) and the NASCA (National Senior Certificate for Adults).

Your contribution would be to **the first goal of the research** and you don't need to have knowledge of education policies or the GETCA/NASCA to participate.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve an interview in which you can discuss your experiences of teaching and/or working in the community learning centre and your views on adult education more broadly. The interview will take between 60 and 90 minutes at your convenience. You may be asked to participate in a second interview or follow-up questions (but you can say no to this, even if you have agreed to the first interview).

The insights from these interviews will be used for the research report.

Please note:

- Your name and the centre name will not be included in the research report.
- This is a university project. The report will be read by my supervisors and examiners and will be made publicly accessible online.
- A draft version of the report will be shared with interview participants and a summary of findings will be shared with the Head of the College.
- The research report (and any publications of the report) will uphold the confidentiality of each participant and participating centres as far as possible.
- Your participation in this research project is voluntary. Even if you sign this form, you may withdraw at any time.
- You can decide which information to share or not to share.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded for my use and transcribed. The transcripts may be shared with my supervisors. Your name will not appear in these transcripts.

If you would like to participate, please complete the form below to indicate your consent. You can ask any questions about the research by phone or email to Jess Loizides [REDACTED].

You can also contact my supervisors: Lyndal Pottier on [REDACTED], or Leigh-Ann Naidoo on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

Jess Loizides

Participant consent form

Research project working title: An analysis of the GETCA and NASCA policy documents in relation to perspectives from Community Learning Centre staff in Cape Town

Please show that you agree to each item in the boxes below.

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information sheet.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary, that confidentiality will be maintained in the report as far as possible, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time.		
If I happen to know or recognise the identity of other participants, I agree to keep their involvement confidential as well.		

I consent to:	YES	NO
Being interviewed		
The interview being audio-recorded		

Name: ________________________________

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________

Appendix 2

Semi-structured interview guides

Questions for CLC educators
1. Introduction: • What is your role at the centre? • How long have you been in this role and what brought you to it? • What do you value about your role, what are some of the challenges? • How are your classes structured (time of day, how often, how does it fit into the larger programme or qualification?)
2. Learners and surrounding community: • Tell me a bit about the community surrounding the CLC • What would you say the relationship is like between the community and the centre? • Are there other community groups or external organisations the centre is partnering with? • How would you describe the majority of the students attending your class? Have there been any changes in who attends during your time here? • Do most of your students live around here?
3. Specific course / subject: • You teach X, what about this subject do you feel is valuable for your learners and the community more broadly? • How would you define the purpose of the GETC qualification for students? / Why do you think students attend classes at the CLC? • Is there anything you could change about the curriculum or how you structure your lessons? / Are there any limitations on what you can teach or how you teach?
4. Relationship with students: • How do you define 'success' for your students? / What do you hope your students will go on to do after they complete your subject/qualification? • Can you describe an interaction or moment where you were able to gain a better understanding of your students' situations and their learning needs? How did you come to this understanding?

5. **Curriculum changes:**

- What do you know about the transition from ABET/SC over to the GETCA/NASCA?
- How do you feel about these changes? What are you hopeful about? What concerns do you have?
- How do you think the shift will affect how you teach?
- What do you think about blended learning approaches and students accessing content online?
    - How would this affect the role of educators?
    - Do you feel that educators are valued for what they do?

6. **Ideal futures:**

- What is your dream for this community learning centre? (If there were no resource constraints or time limits, what kind of education would you like to engage with here?)
- What do you think would be most valuable for the students? Why?
- What would be most valuable or needed for the community and why?

- If, in 10 years' time we could say we've got adult and community education right in South Africa, what do you think this would look like?
- How is this different from where we are today?

Questions for former centre manager

Introduction:

- What was your role at the centre?
- How long were in this role and what brought you to it?
- What did you value about your role, what were some of the challenges?

Surrounding community:

- Tell me a bit about the community surrounding the CLC
- What was the relationship like between the community and the centre during your time there?
- How would you describe the role of the centre in the community?

Students:

- How would you describe the majority of the student body? Were there any changes in who attends the centre during your time there? (age, programme demand, home community)
- How would you define 'success' for the students attending the CLC? / What do you hope would be the outcome of their learning?

Programmes:

- Were there changes to the programme offerings during your time there and if so, how?
- What kinds of learning do you hope the centre will offer in future?
- What kind of education do you think is most important or needed for CLCs to engage in?

Curriculum changes:

- Tell me about the transition from ABET/SC over to the GETCA/NASCA
- How do you feel about these changes? What are you hopeful about? What concerns do you have?
- What do you think about the shift towards blended learning approaches and students accessing content online?
- How would you describe the role of qualification programmes for the students and the community more broadly?

Non-qualification programmes:

- What is the centres approach to non-qualification programmes? Have there been any shifts in this regard?
- Are there any non-qualification programmes/courses you are excited about and if so, why?
- How would you describe the role of non-qualification programmes for the students and the community more broadly?

Ideal futures: • What is your dream for the community learning centre? (If there were no resource constraints or time limits, what kind of education would you like to engage with here?) • What do you think would be most valuable for the learners? Why? • What would be most valuable or needed for the community and why?
• If, in 10 years' time we could say we've got adult and community education right in South Africa, what do you think this would look like? • How is this different from where we are today?