Research as hope-intervention: Mobilising hope in a South African higher education context

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It is written that hope is contagious: once ignited it gains momentum, and is self-sustaining. My research project sought to stimulate dialogue and critical thinking with second year education students about what hope and hopeful schools mean to them as future teachers. The aim of this critical transformative study was to explore how the research process itself, i.e. engaging the students through multiple participatory visual methods (via collages, drawings, Mmogo-method, photovoice) on the topic of hope, might mobilise a 'practice of hope,' thereby mobilising student-led hope initiatives in the Faculty of Education. The key findings of this on-going study show that bringing hope explicitly into the research dialogue mobilised the participants' hope on a personal, relational and collective level. Further, discussions took an agentic turn as the participants formed the Hopeful Vision Gang, designed a logo and slogan, and initiated a hope activity to inspire fellow students and staff before having to face the challenge of exams. This study shows that threading hope with participatory dialogic engagement holds positive transformative value in teacher education programmes, and thus has implications for the possibilities of student-led agency through 'research as hope-intervention.'

Keywords: agency; dialogic engagement; higher education; hope; humanising pedagogy; participatory visual methodology; positive psychology; research-as-change; transformative student citizenship

Introduction

Institutions of higher learning in South Africa are being held to account regarding their roles in not only enabling students to achieve academic success, but also equipping students to be "skilled, confident, active citizens who can contribute to the deepening of our democracy and the sustainable futures of our world" (Olckers, 2017:86). However, as Delport (2016:6) states, higher education is a "space in desperate need of humanisation."

In 2010, Nelson Mandela University (NMMU)[i] embarked on a process of transformation to re-envision itself as a dynamic African university built on the values of diversity, excellence, integrity, environment, ubuntu, and responsibility (NMMU, n.d.). In response to the waves of change sweeping through higher education calling for institutions to reflect critically on their role and purpose in society (Botman, 2011; Odora-Hoppers & Richards, 2011) an aspirational 10-year strategic plan was designed aimed at producing graduates who are able to demonstrate "commitment to social justice and equality, civic consciousness, internationalism, adaptive expertise and personal responsibility" (NMMU, n.d.:8). Further, the plan was clear in its mandate:

> It is the staff and students who will build this dream, not the physical bricks and mortar, for they are the drivers, the ones whose knowledge, innovation and commitment will make it happen (NMMU, n.d.:13).

This institutional re-visioning laid the groundwork for the Faculty of Education to engage in a process of re-developing its own vision and mission in 2011, through numerous critical dialogues with multiple education stakeholders. This necessitated a process of curriculum renewal that sought to design a rigorous Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme grounded on humanising pedagogies, critical reflection and inquiry (Zinn, Adam, Kurup & Du Plessis, 2016). The focus of the new curriculum was to actively prepare future teachers for local school realities, and thus it was imperative to reconnect education with social justice. The Faculty had to reflect on its theoretical orientation and transform its learning programmes and teaching culture into experiences that would foster adaptable and critical teachers, who are able not only to face the current challenges in South Africa's schooling systems, but also to disrupt the status quo that perpetuates injustice and inequality in schools. This thinking is aptly represented in the Faculty's current mission, namely, to cultivate effective and compassionate teachers who are critical thinkers and agents of hope and social change.

It is the idea of 'agents' of hope and social change that caught my attention. As a hope scholar and community psychologist, I have been fascinated with the notion of change. Having gained experience at implementing therapeutic interventions at both the individual and community levels, I have always wondered what motivates people to make positive life choices and to enact transformation in terms of their personal or professional identities. It is one thing to talk about having hope for social change, but I wondered how student teachers might be enabled to actually become agentic; to have the confidence and ability to actively pursue and foster a hopeful transformation in their school community. However, there is a paucity of literature on putting such an ideal into practice. Hence, the small pilot research engagement described in this article reflects an interest with the possibility of applying the key principles underlying humanising pedagogy (using critical consciousness, and dialogic engagement) to put hope into practice in the context of a public university.

Literature Review: Humanising Pedagogy and Hope in Practice

Although both the concepts of hope and humanising pedagogy have been linked to Paulo Freire's seminal works on education, they have seldom been discussed together. According to Zinn et al. (2016:72), a humanising pedagogy, as a driving philosophy of the university, refers to an:

> integrative approach to teaching and learning […] based on a relationship of trust, caring and respect between staff and students, values the student as a whole person by taking into account the diverse cultural, socio-political, spiritual and linguistic realities of that shape their self-understanding, and promotes active (deep) learning.

The role, value, and practice of a humanising pedagogy in the sphere of higher education, have been well covered in the literature (for example: Delport, 2016; Roux & Becker, 2016). However, only a few authors have directly connected the philosophy of humanising pedagogical practice with hope theory (Cherrington, 2017; Salazar, 2013). According to Webb (2010), the process of forging one's own journey towards becoming fully human is termed humanisation, and the tool for realising this is an education driven by critical hope. Similarly, I suggest that a praxis of hope is a precondition for the practices of critical conscientisation and humanisation in education.

The following key principles or conditions for humanising pedagogy can be seen to align with those underpinning hope praxis: 1) humanisation as a process of becoming fully human; 2) humanisation entailing critical consciousness through dialogue and reflection of self and others; and 3) humanisation as an individual and collective endeavour leading towards transformation.

A process of becoming fully human

Freire's philosophy of bringing a humanising pedagogy into education is premised on the notion that we are all motivated to engage in the process of our own becoming (Salazar, 2013). This view of human motivation links with a description of hope as the capacity to participate in creating one's vision of a better future. According to Webb (2010), education and hope are both founded on the knowledge that human beings are incomplete. Citing Freire, Webb (2010:229) argues that hope "drives us ever onwards as travellers, wayfarers, seekers, in pursuit of completeness," and it is this hope-driven search that underpins the political nature of education. Similarly, hope is a process of creating possibilities. Further, a humanising practice correlates with values of trust, respect, relations of reciprocity, active listening, and compassion (Delport, 2016; Salazar, 2013). Such values and virtues have also been associated with hope as a relational process (Cherrington, 2018).

Dialogic approach, critical consciousness, and hope

The second principle of a humanising pedagogy includes a focus on a dialogic approach to promote spaces for critical consciousness to emerge (Zinn et al., 2016). A dialogic process creates awareness of reality and of visions of what should be, which enable change to occur. Roux and Becker (2016) propose that dialogue as a humanising praxis rests on two conditions: firstly, acknowledging the situated selves, as well as the ontological need for, and right to, have a voice. The notion of 'situated selves' takes into account the individual's past, present and anticipated future, while exploring dimensions of time, power, and space. The condition of voice speaks to issues of participation, inclusion, and exclusion, as "historic modes of perception (such as colonial and apartheid consciousness) determine who and what are visible and invisible, or are heard and not heard" (Roux & Becker, 2016:136). Similarly, Weingarten (2010:11) believes that the language of co-creating hope with others generates a different way of thinking about ourselves and others, as such "no one gives or provides hope to another, but rather one creates the conversational space for hope to arise from the forms of conversation one shares."

According to Salazar (2013:141), schools (and by extension, institutions of higher education) ought to be "spaces where all students feel supported as their multiple identities evolve within a meaningful sense of achievement, purpose, power, and hope." The value of creating such spaces for dialogue and personal transformation in teacher education has been demonstrated by Gachago, Condy, Ivala and Chigona (2014:1) through digital storytelling. They found that

> in the collective sharing of their stories, students positioned themselves as agentive selves, displaying the belief that they can make a difference, not only individually within their own classrooms, but also as a collective of teachers.

However, Freire's conceptualisation of a humanising pedagogy indicates that creating dialogical spaces for raising the critical voice needs to be linked with praxis (reflection and action). Such a process would allow individuals to create and recreate the world they want to see which in turn could lead to transformation and re-humanisation (Roux & Becker, 2016). Building on Marx's writing, Geduld and Sathorar (2016:49) claim that "knowledge produced change in people and change impelled action." Similarly, hooks (1994:202) states that

> critical thinking was the primary element allowing the possibility of change […] without the capacity to think critically about ourselves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow.

Therefore, if education is to become a practice of freedom, a humanising pedagogy should begin by

shifting mindsets and identities before it is put into practice in the classrooms for the purpose of change (hooks, 1994).

An individual and collective endeavour for transformation

Although critical self-consciousness is emphasised as a necessary condition for a humanising process and for hope, it was not Freire's intention to imply that the pursuit of humanisation is an isolated or individualistic endeavour (Salazar, 2013). As such, humanisation practices in education ought to be viewed in the context of human relationships, interpersonal engagements, and collective be-coming. This form of collective humanisation is described by Williams (2015) as transformative hope, namely, a collective action aimed at creating a vision of a sought-after reality. While "rooted in individual experiences, it is developed as a shared and communal undertaking through discourse and dialogue" (Williams, 2015:6). Working with learners to establish food gardens, she noted that for a transformative, regenerative hope to develop, a "shift must occur from individual dreaming and critique to collective community and convivial relationships in the process of knowledge construction" (Williams, 2015:6).

It can be argued that if education is intended to serve as a tool for transformation and empowerment on both the individual and collective levels, then it is vital for teacher education programmes to produce future teachers who are able to nurture and sustain a critical hope (Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen & Boler, 2014; Webb, 2010).

Importance of Teachers as Agents of Hope

Hope plays a dialectic role in education: while education systems should be outlets for fostering critical hope in order to be transformative the education sector itself requires a constant boost of critical hope (Bozalek et al., 2014). This challenge has generated much discussion about the role and value of integrating hope into education systems for sustainable social transformation (Botman, 2011; Le Grange, 2011).

My studies on hope in education derive from Freire's (2005) conceptualisation of hope as an essential human condition and experience. Con-sequently, "the role of education is not conceived as one of instilling hope but rather of evoking it and providing it with guidance" (Webb, 2010:329). This view moves away from the notion that a learner should be given hope, to one that recognises that all human beings inherently have the capacity for hope and that it is an ability that needs to be nurtured, developed and given direction. Therefore, Freire (1985 as cited by Webb, 2010:336) explicates that a progressive educator should guide students "toward a critical knowledge of reality [that] will enable them to initiate and lead the process of their own becoming." Botman (2011:16) adds that for the progressive educator "every educational moment – whether in the search for knowledge, the sharing of knowledge or the application of knowledge – is an opportunity to unveil hope."

This suggests that there is a need to ensure that educational role-players in rural communities are "enabled and empowered with appropriate skills and knowledge to achieve this vision of giving people hope" (Carl, 2011:129). Therefore, there should be a stronger focus in education on developing critical and reflexive teachers to ensure the existence of hope and also to enable learners to become carriers of hope (Carl, 2011). If teachers in South Africa are required to build cultures of hope in their schools and communities then it ought to be the responsibility of teacher education programmes in higher education to include mandatory practices in the curriculum aimed at equipping student teachers with such tools and abilities. However, Gore (1992 cited by Salazar, 2013:137) argues that while teachers are expected to apply liberatory ideas in the classroom and to become agents of empowerment in their school communities, many pedagogical projects promote such requirements "without providing much in the way of tangible guidance for that work." There is also a paucity of literature demonstrating how agency and hope praxis might be nurtured and developed in the context of teacher education programmes. To that end, I have argued that through collaborative, participatory engagements, which open spaces for critical dialogue, student teachers can foster relational and collective hope, thereby equipping them with the tools needed to build communities of hope in their future classrooms and schools (Cherrington, 2017).

The study outlined in this article involved engagements with a small group of student teachers on the issue of hope in education, specifically in a South African context. The aim was to explore how the research process, using a participatory visual methodology to explore hope, might mobilise a practice of hope among the student teachers, thereby shaping their developing identities as agents of hope in education. Hence, this study intends to contribute to educational research by demonstrating how 'research as hope intervention' with student teachers might create spaces for dialogic engagement, as well as mobilising their agency roles towards a positive transformation of their own identities as change agents in the school context.

Theoretical Framework

Cherrington (2018) adapted Scioli's (2007) integrated theory of hope to represent hope from an Afrocentric perspective, which she argues would be more in line with how collective-oriented comm-unities conceptualise and experience hope. The Framework of Afrocentric Hope demonstrates the multi-layered and complex nature of the construct,

as well as the interdependence of each level as hope develops in the individual and ultimately extends outwards to the collective. Hope is seen as a universal human capacity or drive, which develops in layers or levels. The first level of *Contextual Hope* refers to the people and resources in the individual's context, which either nurture or challenge his/her hope. When an individual experiences positive resources (physical, emotional, social) in the immediate environment, hope can then begin to develop internally. On the level of *Personal Hope*, the individual feels a sense of belonging, mastery and survival, which can nurture his/her sense of self and identity. As hopeful characteristics and personal values become internalised, the individual's confidence and sense of autonomy increases, thus motivating positive life choices and allowing the taking of responsibility for building and sustaining his/her own hope, even in challenging times. Once this level of hope has been achieved, the individual develops a sense of responsibility and is eager to extend this towards others. The *Relational Hope* level consists of hopeful thoughts, feelings and actions expressed via interactions with others. This level of hope is often demonstrated in "doing hope with others" (Cherrington, 2018:8). The final level is that of *Collective Hope*, which is evidenced in the individual's concern for pursuing collective well-being, together with the realisation that his/her own hope is intimately connected to the level of hope present in the community. At this level, the individual takes on the responsibility to build hope in the collective by promoting values and actions of togetherness, harmony, social justice, and mutual respect.

This framework is Afrocentric, as it places an emphasis on hope as relational and generative: therefore, to build, maintain, and foster hope, an individual needs to engage in hope-enhancing positive interactions with others (Cherrington, 2018).

Methodology
A qualitative study situates the researcher in the participants' world and is particularly oriented towards exploring, discovering and making meaning of personal experiences. The study[ii] described in this article was framed by a critical transformative paradigm, making use of various participatory visual methods to explore hope in education and to mobilise personal agency. It was conducted over several meetings, and a weekend workshop, during one semester at Nelson Mandela University, a public South African comprehensive university, where I am employed. All second year education students were given a short presentation about the intended research study and then invited to participate. Interested students were given more in-depth information in a follow-up meeting and asked to complete consent forms. Twelve students initially

volunteered, however a few were unable to commit to the weekend workshop and in the end seven participants generated the research data.

Research-as-intervention is built on the notion that when the research process is conducted in a collaborative, reflective, and inclusive manner, participants often experience a personal change in their attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Therefore, the research engagement itself can become transformative (De Lange, Mitchell, Moletsane, Balfour, Wedekind, Pillay & Buthelezi, 2010). Consequently, Cherrington and De Lange (2016) coined the term 'research as hope intervention' to describe the process of using participatory visual methodology to explore the construct of hope and its hope-enhancing value for the participants. It was found that by reflecting on their own hope and learning about hope theory and its applications, participants' own hope levels were stimulated, as was their sense of agency in terms of enacting hope with others.

The first step towards opening possibilities for change was to explore the participants' concepts of hope in education and of teachers as agents of hope and hopeful schools. This was done through drawings, Mmogo-method, i.e. using play-dough, sticks and buttons to construct an experience (see Roos, 2016). In addition, collage-making, and photovoice (taking photos of what enables you to be a hopeful teacher and what challenges it) were used. Data were also generated through group conversations about what needs to change in education for hope to thrive and how the group might 'take hope forward' in the Faculty. Participants provided written reflections on their experience of engaging in the study, and presented and interpreted their own visual artefacts so as to ensure clear and shared understandings by the group and the researcher. As the scope of this article is limited to the participants' engagements in the research process, findings in terms of the students' expressions of hope in education as generated by the visual methods are discussed elsewhere. At the end of this engagement ethical considerations were again negotiated with the participants and consequently they requested that their names be mentioned in all future publications. To ensure trustworthiness and rigour of the study, I followed Bradbury and Reason's (2008) recommendation that when working within the transformative paradigm and using visual participatory methods, the focus must be on the qualities of the participatory and relational practices of the research process. I further paid close attention to the integrity and authenticity of the knowledge produced through constant member checking and maintaining the verbatim voices (and visual artefacts) of the participants.

Findings
The data presented here to evidence the personal growth of the participants and their learning about

being agents of hope were generated from the various group conversations conducted during a weekend workshop, and also from subsequent personal communications on a Whatsapp group created by the participants. They are presented verbatim to capture the voices of the participants.

The group's discussions point to deep personal learning about their own hope as individuals, as well as about the importance of listening to other people's perspectives which might differ from their own. Their reflections also demonstrate thinking about hope as a relational and collective endeavour

which needs to spread outwards to include other students and lecturers in the Faculty, and even schools. The engagement resulted in the participants forming a group called *The Hopeful Vision Gang* and conceptualising a logo and slogan, as well as a vision for the group 'to spread hope within the Faculty and beyond' (see Figure 1). These discussions resulted in hope in action as the 'Gang' (with the permission of the Executive Dean), conducted an activity in the Faculty aimed at promoting hope among both students and staff prior to the year-end examinations.

Figure 1 The logo and slogan designed by the Hopeful Vision Gang

Mobilising Personal, Relational, and Collective Expressions of Hope

When asked what they found most enjoyable and valuable in the hope workshop, participants highlighted the collaborative sharing of ideas and experiences that had allowed them to get to know each other better. According to Thembeka, even though she had been studying with the other group members for two years, the engagement activities on hope provided her with an opportunity to really get to know them more personally, and to realise that despite differences in race, age, and background, they actually had a lot in common. For some, the experience was a more personal one as being exposed to different perspectives encouraged them to be introspective about their own thinking of hope.

> *It was great for me learning about hope. Seeing things in a different perspective it made me see that it is not only about me but the whole world.* (Pam)
> *For me it was an amazing experience I got to work with awesome people and it gave me hope to further my studies. Not to be just a teacher, to do post graduate studies and not to give up and to keep on moving forward.* (Teshé)

The development of personal hope into relational hope is demonstrated by Keeshia. In a written reflection she expresses that she has learned that hope exists in terms of how she sees the world and

relates to others. Realising that everyone has different ideas and experiences of hope and life has made her aware of how her own actions have the power to influence and motivate others. She has therefore decided to set a personal challenge to herself:

> *This experience has really open my eyes - in a sense what you think is true or right might not be right for the next person, but it's important for me.* […] *We don't realize that the smallest things count and matter or would mean the world to someone. This experience has changed my world in thinking, looking at things and even being as a person. I would first have to change my own life to be inspirational and motivational. And the way that I will be talking the talk and walking the walk. I will make it a goal to spreading that hope and that you can't be selfish with hope - it is something that must be passed on and knowing that having hope or being hopeful can be difficult but it's not impossible.*

Other participants also demonstrated an understanding of hope as relational and generative, as something that needs to be shared with others. According to Ziyanda, being hopeful meant that she had a responsibility to motivate and support others:

> *Being an agent of change in a community to me means that I have to be that one person or one of many people that have hope and give hope, to be selfless with others and that I can help people to*

become what they want to be, or hoping that they can become whatever that is what they want to become.

While the discussions helped Keeshia and Ziyanda to realise that it was within their capacity to influence other people's hope just by how they interacted with others, Teshé added: "*I feel like I have the responsibility towards my community and not just being a teacher in class but in your community as well.*" Thembeka, on the other hand, came to the project because she had several ideas as to how she wanted to help her community but felt she lacked the knowledge of how to put these ideas into action:

> *In terms of being an agent of change in my community I had a lot of ideas even before coming here. [...] The discussions we had about the importance of knowing how and the starting point inspired me to start things I can do like big vision and how to impact my community. So that's what I've learned. I learnt that it doesn't take one person and there are many people who are out there who want to be part of things like this.*

These reflections demonstrate that the participants were starting to think about hope on a collective level, realising that their own hope and their identity as agents of hope rests in the hope levels present in their community. This in turn motivated them to start thinking about ways they could promote hope and togetherness in the collective.

Hope in Action

During the engagement it was clear that the participants were starting to connect and feel more comfortable with each other. On the final day, the group was asked how they wanted to take the project further, with the prompt: "What do we do now?" The following conversation then ensued:

> Thembeka: *It would be such a shame we are here talking about hope and the main reason why this is happening is because of hope, and next year we give up on it. What would that say about us? [...] I think that should keep us going.*
> Keeshia*: First the vision and the mission.*
> Teshé: *... to encourage more people to join the project.*
> Solomon: *... and encouragement, gain more support.*
> Avivit: *You want to involve different people?*
> Ziyanda*: ... so that everyone can feel that they can fit in.*
> Keeshia: *What we're going to do, like the main thing that we're going to do a presentation and to raise awareness. I say going to schools and communities, so we raise awareness and stand in front of them and do a presentation.*
> Ziyanda: *I think we should start with people that we can relate to, people around us and people [...] like education students. We have a better chance of meeting other people you know spreading hope, especially young people. I'm not saying that we won't go to other students eventually. I feel like start right now here at home, make sure that teachers are hopeful agents and they give it to children; yeah, so*

I think starting within the Faculty.
> Thembeka: *Finding out what people, what would make a hopeful Faculty? What do they want, what are they hopeful for? So that our initiatives are directed at those things.*
> Avivit: *So, in other words if you go up to other students [...] let's talk to education students and ask them in terms of would make this a hopeful Faculty?*
> Thembeka: *Yeah, something like that, even the lecturers.*

Thus, the group began to conceptualise a hope activity whereby students from the Faculty of Education would be asked to write down what makes them hopeful about their studies, and what has motivated them to keep going. When I asked the group what would be the purpose and value of such an activity, they responded as follows:

> Thembeka: *The purpose is, it puts hope out there, so now we know what we're hoping for and take action if we do know.*
> Solomon: *I think the reason the why [...] the linkage, the hope and dreams are connected. So if you put your hopes down, the teachers can see what you are hoping for, and the children can also see what the teachers are hoping for.*
> Avivit: *So it connects people?*
> Solomon: *It connects them together and makes their dreams come true ...*
> Ziyanda: *And I think by also writing it down, that you get to think about what it is to, what it is what you hope to gain.*
> Pam: *And also, most people find it easy to express their feelings; they are writing them instead of talking them out; it opens a big platform for everyone to express their feelings.*

A few weeks later, the Hopeful Vision Gang hosted their hope wall activity in the Faculty to inspire hope before the exams. The student wall was placed in a busy passage outside a resource centre, and prompted students to write on coloured pieces of paper that which was hopeful to them about their studies. A wall activity for the lecturers was placed outside one of the staff rooms prompting them to reflect on their hopes for their students (see Figure 2).

The activity was well-attended by both the students and lecturers and it was decided by the group to leave the 'wall of hope' up for a few days as a visual reminder. Within days, the participants messaged the group to say that social media tweets and chats had been circulating among students about the wall activity. For example, one student posted a photo of the wall writing: "Yesterday after a long day […] was so down, passed by this at building 6 - it really uplifted me shame, big ups to whoever started this." Thembeka could not contain her excitement replying in an audio message to the group:

> *I cannot believe like this is impacting people's lives and that means we're doing a great job and wow this is just a pat on the back for us. Yeah (sigh) I am excited. I am happy!*

Discussion
According to Freire (2005), it is via the connection between reflection and action that transformation can occur. The findings show that the opportunity to explore the construct of hope through dialogue enabled the participants to first reflect on their own hoping process on a personal level. This then led to the need to express it outwardly through relational action, thereby spreading their hope to others in the faculty. Evidently, in perhaps a small way, this hope action led to a meaningful transformation in not only shaping their own identities as 'agents of hope,' but also seemed consequential for other students who participated in or witnessed the activity. This resonates with hooks' (1994:61) statement that when

> lived experience of theorising is fundamentally linked to a process of self recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other.

Figure 2 A hope wall presenting students' hopes about their studies

It therefore could be argued that for hope to be "meaningful in educational contexts it has to be about the *doing* and the *showing* — and then extended further towards the sharing" (Cherrington, 2017:82). It is therefore in the sharing that personal and social transformation is enabled and can be sustained. Similarly, Weingarten (2010:8) urges a rethinking of hope as a verb rather than a noun, stating that this could move the concept from the idea of a passive emotion to consideration of hope in action. She explains that

> hope as a verb automatically conjures a subject, a person who hopes. Hope as a noun in a quantifiable thing that resides within a person. […] Hope as a verb, as a practice, leads to different activities than hope as a noun. Reasonable hope as a practice, doing reasonable hope, is oriented to the here and now, towards actions that will bring people together to work towards a preferred future.

The findings of this study build on my previous work, where I noted that

> hope is not only about personal well-being and self-development, but is also intimately connected to social action and the capacity to pursue collective well-being and betterment (Cherrington, 2017:82).

Likewise, in his book, *Hope is an imperative*, Orr (2011, cited by Williams, 2015:5) emphasises the need to mobilise action to challenge current environmental and sustainability challenges by stating that "hope is a verb with its shirtsleeves rolled up." He asserts that hope is not passive: if you are hopeful, you will be moved to action. I like his intimation that hope as a construct is tired of being theorised about, and is now ready to get stuck in and get 'its' hands dirty with real work. I believe that this imagery aptly describes the findings of my engagement with the student-teachers. Once they began exploring the concept of hope, they seemed restless and eager to 'roll up their sleeves' and in starting to spread hope, as well as in mobilising it in their Faculty.

The findings further show that inserting dialogic engagement on hope in teacher education programmes has value in promoting an education, which Topshee (2011:51) describes as one where students are able to "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." Dialogue cannot happen, or be truly meaningful, without active listening (Roux & Becker, 2016). Consequently, the participants demonstrated that bringing hope explicitly into their dialogue created spaces for active listening, and helped to shift their perspectives about other people's points of view and ideas, of which they were previously unaware.

The notion of an education that encourages individuals to actively participate in constructing or disrupting the reality they are experiencing is an important one for discourses on higher education in the South African context. This builds on Giroux (2004:38), who emphasised that:

> Hope makes the leap for us between *critical education*, which tells us what must be changed; *political agency*, which gives us the means to make change; and the *concrete struggles* through which change happens (emphasis in original text).

I assert that understanding student-teachers' experiences of hope has value as a catalyst for mobilising agency, and is thus a valuable first step towards opening up a wider dialogue about decolonising education. I further argue that the right to voice, as expressed by Roux and Becker (2016), ought to be extended to the right to be seen and to be fully associated with one's voice and one's ideas. As such, the participants' choice to have their full names aligned with this article - and with future publications - is another agentic display of their commitment, confidence, and ownership of the ideas and learnings that were shared in their journey to becoming agents of hope and social change. It possibly also speaks to how the participants reframed their 'situated selves' as having a powerful voice, which has the potential to enact change.

According to Keet and Nel (2016:131), it is the "strenuous production of agency against habitus within which resides the promise and potentialities of institutional transformation." Perhaps then, the key to transformation in higher education lies in enabling the agency of its students and staff members through hope-focused dialogue? In that sense, I argue that for teacher education programmes to authentically claim to enable student teachers to become agents of hope and social change in their community, such programmes need to engage more meaningfully with student voices, and their lived experiences of exploring what hope means to them. I believe more research can be done to further explore the role that critical hope can play in higher education transformation, and how hope might be enacted to develop student voices into agency. In the field of education, understanding the value of hope in enabling student teachers to view themselves as agents of hope could contribute toward school improvement programmes that open possibilities for change and action.

This study was limited in its scope as it was conceived as a pilot exploratory endeavour for creating spaces for future possible conversations and actions. The aim was to critically examine how education students might respond to a research endeavour framed as a change process focused on hope. Given the limited sample, I cannot make any claims on these views as being representative of the South African education student population at large.

However, in line with Gachago et al. (2014), I believe that descriptive small-scale data can add value towards providing insight into lived experiences and stories that are not often shared. I am also aware that attitudinal and behavioural change is difficult to measure and could be said to reflect a subjective view of the responses of participants or researcher. Nonetheless, my intention was not to measure but to listen and facilitate a process for personal growth and awareness.

Conclusion
Although the term hope is ubiquitously used in the field of education, and often assumed to constitute an outcome of teaching and learning, it seems scholarship has contributed very little towards an application of hope in higher education, and more specifically in teacher education programmes. This article describes an example of explicitly using hope theory, through a research-as-intervention approach with student teachers at a public South African university seeking to enable agency and hope practice.

Using a literature-based point of departure, I argue that it is important to work with hope. Opening dialogue with student teachers about hope in education, and about their hopes for their futures as teachers – and unpacking their understanding of hopeful teachers – provided a starting point towards enabling them to become teachers who possess appropriate tools to foster and build hope in themselves and their school communities. As institutions of higher learning in South Africa embark on immense journeys to decolonise and transform education systems and programmes, this article calls for more dialogic engagement among the many education stakeholders so as to build hope in praxis, and thereby truly enabling teachers to be agents of hope and social change in their school communities.

Notes
i.   At that time the institution was still called Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and the re-envisioning project was led by then Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Derrick Swartz.
ii. The study presented in this article formed part of a larger three-year study funded by the NRF and titled: 'Dialogic engagement between local and university communities: Enabling agency towards active citizenship in the context of education.'
iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

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