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Teaching policy literacy: A case study from the field of disability and rehabilitation studies

Abstract

Policies guide how we practice as professionals and service providers. A critical engagement with policy analysis is needed and the field of disability and rehabilitation is no exception. This is because the discourse of rehabilitation is a fluid construct that has been subject to the changing understandings of, and approaches to, disability. Research indicates that professionals and service providers struggle with the divide that regularly exists between policy formation and policy implementation. Reasons for this divide include the fact that the process of policy formation does not take the context of implementation into account, leaving professionals and service providers on their own to interpret and apply the policy to their work. We posit that policy literacy is a core contributor to the capacity to understand policy content, to interpret it in light of existing factors and to implement policy in a contextually relevant manner. In this paper, we describe a practice-based teaching innovation of authentic learning through which a cohort of 11 postgraduate diploma student-participants was supported to address the challenge of understanding, implementing and contributing to policy in their own work contexts.

Keywords: *Authentic learning; disability and rehabilitation; policy literacy*

1. Introduction

The landscapes of knowledge are ever changing (Blignaut, 2007). It has become necessary to take cognisance of the role played by policy in steering these changes (Hyatt, 2011), and one can argue that a critical engagement with policy analysis is needed. In the era of human rights advancement and ethical codes of practice, as upheld by the South African constitution, professionals and service providers who work at various levels of practice are grappling to correctly interpret and apply policy to their work context. Thus, there is a need for policy literacy that is "a critical understanding of policy to understand, critique and participate in policy" (Lo Bianco, 2001: 213). This is particularly important considering that the discourse of rehabilitation is a fluid construct that has been subject to the changing understandings of, and approaches to, disability (Mji, Chappell, Statham, Mlenzana, Goliath, De Wet & Rhoda, 2013).

We present our methodology using examples from the field of disability and rehabilitation, as the policy analysis course being described here is positioned within disability and rehabilitation. However, we want to emphasise that the methods and processes described in this paper could be replicated when teaching policy literacy within other courses and disciplines.

Various authors confirm that disability and rehabilitation practitioners experience challenges at the level of service provision, and these challenges are further compounded by inadequate knowledge and skills to interpret and implement policy in a manner that supports the alignment between policy formation and actual practice (Dube 2006; Duncan, Sherry, Watson & Booi, 2012).

A gap between formation and implementation has become a common attribute of policy formation (Muller, 2016). The main reason given for this gap is the lack of trust between policy makers and researchers. Researchers reproach policy makers for not ensuring that they create policies informed by research evidence, while policy makers state that the formation of policy cannot depend solely on research evidence (Muller, 2016). Policy makers maintain that research outcomes should be conveyed in practical, realistic terms that take note of the various interest groups within the context of implementation. Therefore, policy outcomes must be interpreted meaningfully to address diverse stakeholders on a practical level. Policy literacy is aimed at addressing this gap by increasing the practice of evidence-based implementation.

To address these policy implementation challenges, capacity of the relevant implementation structures must be strengthened and this is where policy literacy comes in. There needs to be skills development, informed insights and the will to apply changes to enable implementation (Naledi, Barron & Schneider, 2011). Policy literacy is a core contributor to knowledge acquisition and capacity to understand policy content, to interpret it in light of existing factors and to implement policy in a contextually relevant manner (Barnes, 2007; Duncan *et al.,* 2012; Neille & Penn, 2015). In essence, policy literacy can serve as a catalyst for the effective alignment of policy with practice as things change when people have the knowledge and skills to help themselves (Duncan *et al.,* 2012; Howell, 2015; Neill & Penn, 2015; Sherry, 2012; Torres-Harding, Steele, Schulz, Taha & Pico, 2014).

There has been a shift in recent times to perceive issues of literacy as being diverse across nationalities and as culturally and contextually located (Lo Bianco, 2001). There is thus a need to ensure that any policy related literacy is grounded in context. While literacy is increasingly recognised as influenced by human capital thinking, there are also issues of advocacy, resource allocation and protection of marginalised communities that speak to issues of power (Lo Bianco, 2001). Within the ethos of the Foucauldian position (with its focus on the relationship between power and knowledge), policy is perceived as power, and literacy as knowledge, with policy seen as discourse constructive and open to interpretation (Lo Bianco, 2001). Language, text and culture of the policy and the context of implementation (Lo Bianco, 2001; Luke, 2003) influence this interpretation process. Dockweiler, Putney and Jordan (2015) discuss the relevance of exploring various methodological approaches in policy analysis that bring to the fore better understandings of the complexities of policy formation, which often include issues of language and power. An example is the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is focused on identifying how power is used and abused in societal processes. Applying critical discourse analysis to policy analysis for instance, would then reveal complex contextual processes that show the interplay between language and power within policy and engagement of the societal elites within these processes as they influence public discourse through policies (Dockweiler, Putney & Jordan, 2015) and ultimately, impact on end users of

the policy. There is however currently, more need for the use of methodological frameworks for policy analysis, as the policy analysis framework is predominantly guided by theoretical positioning. In alignment with this assertion, we posit that any discussion on policy literacy should include a critical understanding of and exploration into the complexities that inform the awareness, knowledge and application of policies as mentioned above. These complexities are also reflected in the chosen definition in this paper.

We define policy as "a broad field of practice that marshals particular kinds of knowledge to bolster executive action" (Lo Bianco, 2001: 213) and literacy as "critical understanding of the process, history and dilemmas of the overall practice of public policy-making to contribute towards a more reflective and full participation in its processes" (Lo Bianco 2001: 213). There are texts on basic policy analysis methods in other disciplines. For example, Patton, Sawicki and Clark (2015) describe two main methods of approaching policy analysis within the public policy domain: basic methods (focus on specific, immediate short-term solutions by staff and policy implementers) and researched methods (large scale with a longer time period to produce responses to policy dilemma, often led by the academics). Patton *et al.* (2015) posit that a basic standardised process of policy analysis exists, while stating that an understanding of the micro and macro structures within the context of policy formation and implementation is crucial to the policy practitioner. They however, advocate that these strategies are better learnt and practiced even before one gets involved in policy planning and implementation. While this might be the ideal situation, it is not always the case, which is where our course is uniquely positioned.

While we agree that context is crucial and unique, our strategy firstly involves the inculcation of the work environment into learning, especially when working with adult learners. This inclusion of work in learning is a methodological strength within this course. Secondly, the course pulls together the two methods in that learners who are policy implementers get to identify short- and long-term solutions to policy dilemmas, within an academic problem solving research process. This is beneficial to the learners as they get to walk the tension-filled space between researcher and implementer. Even within a locally developed policy analysis framework in rehabilitation studies, which focused on disability inclusion within health policies (Law, 2008), a gap remains in terms of what should be taught, and how the development of policy literacy in disability and rehabilitation studies can be supported (Neille & Penn, 2015). In this paper, we document the process we followed in teaching policy literacy, considering existing inequalities, in an attempt to align policy and practice.

2. Study background, motivation and aims

This paper is one of the outcomes of a project that aimed to explore awareness, knowledge and application of key international, national and local policies, frameworks and guidelines of a multi-disciplinary cohort of eleven students in a Postgraduate Diploma course in Disability and Rehabilitation Studies at the Centre for Rehabilitation Studies at Stellenbosch University.

A scaffolded teaching and learning approach was applied; consistently allowing for, encouraging and integrating student experiences and current understanding of policy into their learning activities at different levels of complexities according to Bloom's taxonomy (Kolomitro & Gee, 2015). The students' awareness, knowledge and application of key international, national and local grassroots disability policies were assessed through an ongoing process

(This aspect is beyond the scope of this article but discussed in a separate paper titled "tracking the policy literacy journey of students" to be published elsewhere).

3. Theoretical framework

The social constructivist framework informed the course process. This framework allows for situational context and experiences to inform the construction of knowledge or discourse and impacts on how we understand phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Aligned with this pragmatic approach, we developed class and web-based activities in a format that supported the exploration of different interactions and factors that influenced student awareness, knowledge and application of policy. It also enabled an opportunity for students to relate and co-construct policy literacy from their diverse understandings and worldviews (Chilisa, 2012; Cresswell, 2013; Mertens, Holmes & Harris, 2009). Thus, content and learning activities of the course were structured around three areas:

- the student context and experiences;
- the policy context at all levels; and
- the lecturer's positioning of the course itself.

These areas allowed for a co-construction of knowledge, informed by the contexts and experiences reflectively identified by the students, who performed tasks that systematically challenged the different levels of complexity as given by Bloom's taxonomy (May, 2015). This culminated in an opportunity to apply their learning and competence in a contextualised assignment at the end of the course. The discussion on how the taxonomy influenced the course content and structure follows.

4. Ethical considerations

This no-risk study was conducted in keeping with research ethics principles grounded in the Declaration of Helsinki (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2008; Horn, 2011; National Department of Health, 2015). Approval was received from the university's Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC Ref. N16/02/025).

5. Methodology

Selection criteria required student-participants of the course firstly, to meet the admission criteria of a completed undergraduate degree and secondly, a personally identified need to understand disability and rehabilitation in their specific professional context. The group comprised two students from Lesotho, one from Zambia, one from Zimbabwe and seven students from South Africa (one based in the Gauteng province and six in the Western Cape province). Of the participants, two were male and nine were female. The group represented diverse professional backgrounds, including one nurse, three psychology/social work/pastoral counsellors, three occupational therapists, one speech therapist, one biokineticist, one physiotherapist and one theologian/pastor/academic. The students were all working while studying part-time with some working in the private and some in the public sector. Furthermore, some were involved in clinical institution-based work in their disciplines while others were working in non-governmental organisations and at community levels of work. The students were also based in different contexts of work: rural, semi-urban and urban environments respectively. The module was piloted with a cohort of 11 students, and all 11

agreed to participate in the study. The students are from diverse professional and contextual backgrounds; including state institutions, the private sector, civil society and the non-profit sector. One of the students was admitted via Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) while the others all came with undergraduate professional degrees and the required experience of at least three years of work in the field of disability and rehabilitation. All eleven students consented to becoming study participants and provided written consent.

A blended learning approach meant that students attended a two-week contact session on campus at the beginning of the one-year course and then participated in six weeks of web-based teaching and learning activities for each of the four modules. These comprised an introduction to disability and rehabilitation; then the policy module, followed by an applied ethics module and finally a module on community integration of persons with disabilities. Six weeks of web-based tutorials, readings and participation in discussion tasks on key topics were followed by an exam week comprising a web-based assignment.

Application of Bloom's taxonomy to course methodology

A "block release" method was used within a blended learning approach, meaning that the students first had two days of contact time in the physical classroom while the rest of the module was web-based and completed online over 7 weeks. Mindful of the social constructivist framework, the course was aimed at interrogating issues of policy literacy and analysis through graded practical strategies and authentic learning. All three of the web-based discussions and the final assessment aimed to facilitate the students' learning through self-led meaning making and application of their own experiences and contexts to policy issues. The course was structured in three sections: policy analysis, policy implementation and policy monitoring. Each section included a formative online discussion assessment (requiring students to utilise and apply their own experiences and contexts to their learning) and culminated in a final, summative assessment that synthesised their learning in the writing of a policy brief for their specific work context. Applying Bloom's taxonomy as a learning framework (Figure 1, below), class activities began with the familiar (i.e. basic remembering) progressed to more complex understandings and finally created an opportunity for the application of their knowledge in the creation of a policy brief.

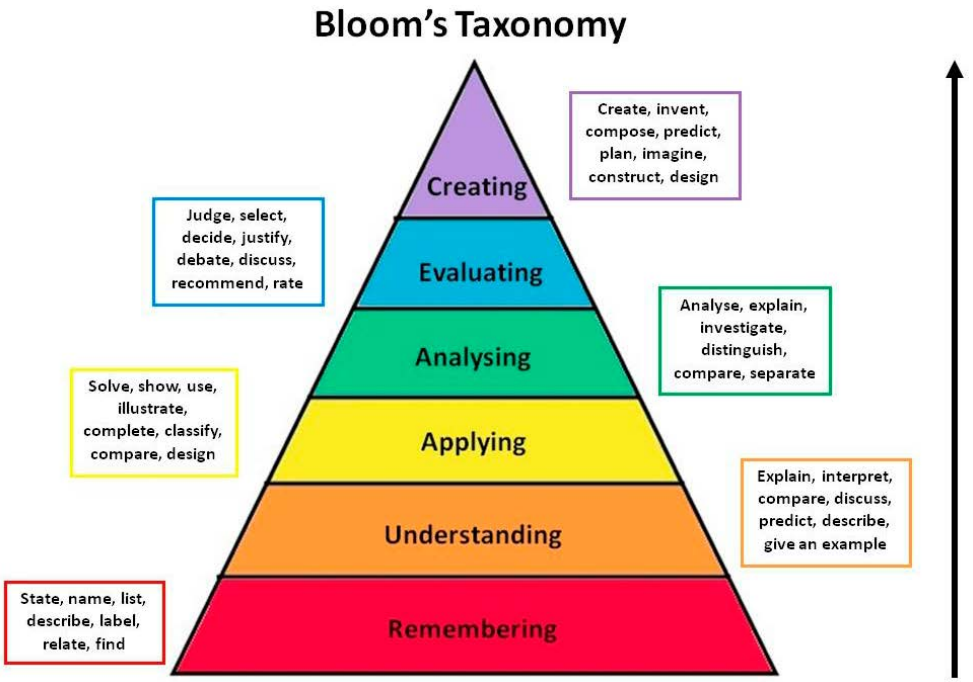

Figure 1 Bloom's revised taxonomy as a learning framework (Source: Kolomitro & Gee, 2015:7)

6. Findings regarding process

The findings of the study that emanated from the course methodology are discussed below.

The process: Policy analysis

The first activity was the introduction of the course to the students through a reflective process, which was aimed at personalising policy and making the students realise that they are involved in policy one way or another; either as duty bearers or rights holders. Students were asked to say the word that comes to mind when they hear "policy". Students responded with words such as: "boring", "tedious", "top-down", "challenging", "not interested" and "bogus". Lo Bianco (2001) also describes this negative view of policy among teachers and researchers in the literacy field, stating that policy has become a symbol for "cut-backs" and an unwelcome intrusion into their professional spaces. This first expression of the students' reaction to policy gave room for a legitimisation of their emotive responses (as allowed by Bloom's taxonomy) to policies, which is often linked to personal experiences and context. Then, in small groups of three, students did a critical reflection (Breier, 2001) of their previous experiences of policy and unpacked what their relationship to policy had been like. Issues identified by students as influencers of their reaction to policy, were then deconstructed and linked to a brief discussion of discourse theory and the socially constructed nature of meaning. Here, students understood that although previous encounters with policy had acted as barriers to policy literacy, they now had an opportunity to change that narrative and apply it differently. Context and experience could therefore be applied as a facilitator of policy literacy, rather than the widely held view of being a barrier. This was done by explaining that every policy document carries a discourse

with it, and does not rest in an empty space. Every policy document comes from somewhere, right from its statement of purpose to problem identification, which is influenced by philosophy, is often contested and negotiated and aimed at certain outcomes, depending on the type of policy (Taylor *et al.,* 1997). The relevance of understanding voice, text, language, and "the who" of policymaking was emphasised, as the understanding of the context of policy formation is important for interpreting and analysing the policy. Students identified policies of choice to which they could apply these analysis tools and which were debated by peers, with feedback given. Then, for the web-based discussion assignment students were given a contextually relevant local policy document on disability and asked to apply the analysis tools discussed, using their own illustrations (in terms of aims, discourse, dominant/silenced voices, intended audience, text and sub-text, language used, context of formation and possible negotiations made) of that policy. Students were also required to respond to their peers' contributions.

The process: Policy implementation

From these discussions on personal experience and their link to discourse that influences policy, we entered into the space of implementation. Here students again brought in the personal and socio-cultural context, discussing how these affect their implementation of policy/ies as duty bearers. This was linked to personal history, knowledge discourses, lack of adequate resources, attitudinal challenges and existing power dynamics, which often influence how policy is interpreted. It highlighted how policies often do not take the context of implementation into account, including the important role of culture. Students were asked to identify policies from their home countries or work contexts and discuss how they would effectively implement these policies, taking note of the challenges identified. Again, students worked on this and gave feedback to each other, identifying key challenges and/or enablers within these contexts of implementation that were similar to, or different from, each other. The outcome of the discussion was to identify and consider different stakeholders involved and their particular roles within the process, with the students also identifying their own roles within the process. Moreover, they needed to understand the diversity of spaces for policy implementation and that an analysis of the context of implementation is important. Students were then asked to identify policies that did not work out well in their workplace and discuss possible factors that might not have been taken into consideration during planning. The need for a constant negotiation of the processes and context when implementing policy, looking at what works and what does not work, was highlighted.

For this web-based discussion contribution, students were asked to select relevant articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN, 2006) related to their work or research interest and discuss how they could best implement these policy instruments within their work context, school or community. First, they were requested to present an introduction of their context, followed by a discussion of the chosen UNCRPD article and how they would implement it. They needed to show how they had taken note of the imbalances existing within their context, power dynamics, prevalent socio-political and cultural discourses and especially the use of an intersectional perspective to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the process.

The process: Policy monitoring

The first section on policy analysis thus touched on personal experiences and its influence on policy processes, for policy makers, implementers and end users, while the second section extended the personal to the immediate context of the individual and the dynamics

of implementation. This last section links to a wider discourse and community of practice and was intended to highlight the relevance of monitoring policies for effective implementation; showing how monitoring is more effective when it is carried out as a collaborative process, with stakeholders for instance. Here the experience of policy implementation is engaged with retrospectively to list what could have been put in place to make implementation more effective and what can be identified as parameters for a successful implementation. Students then went through an activity with a policy of their choice trying to identify and select factors that indicate successful implementation and factors that show unsuccessful implementation. These factors were then compared to the intended outcomes of the policy document, highlighting the gaps. Students went through a didactic session on how to write a policy brief after which they identified one issue related to disability on which they could practice writing a policy brief. For the third web-based discussion, students were asked to select one of three sets of country reports and corresponding shadow reports from three countries to the United Nations. They read and identified the similarities and differences between the government and shadow reports, highlighting dominant discourses and voice, language, text and various compromises expressed within the policies. The outcomes of the analysis were then compared to their own contexts of policy implementation, considering and coming up with a plan of contextually relevant ways to monitor policy implementation across communities of practice.

From these discussions, the final assignment on writing a policy brief emanated. Students were required to identify an issue related to their work or research interest from all previous discussions related to a particular target group within the disability sector. They wrote a policy brief on the identified issue, referring to relevant discussions and academic literature sources and showed careful consideration of involvement of persons with disabilities and respect for cultural sensitivity and diversity relevant to the context of policy implementation/practice.

7. Linking process to learning theory

Although the first two sections of the course were mainly drawing from, and had activities that primarily worked through the first four levels of the taxonomy, some learning and application of skills touched on all levels to varying degrees. First, through reflections, students remembered their previous experiences of policy and this elicited statements about what policy meant to them. They described their emotive responses to policy that we noted as one barrier to policy literacy. Next, within this same activity, they were asked to sit in small groups and discuss why they see policy this way. This gave them an opportunity to begin to compare narratives, discuss and give examples of events that informed their dislike of and a propensity towards a lack of engagement with policy. Students for example, discussed the issue of written (government/institutional policies) versus unwritten policies, for example; rules that guide the home and they were asked to think of what influenced some of rules they have at home. Through analysis of what informed these policies at home, they learnt about philosophies underpinning policy and applied their learning to work policies that was the focus of the second aspect of the course.

The second section of the course again supported the students to reinforce their learning from the first section. Then they applied this learning by investigating, separating and distinguishing factors that influence policy implementation, illustrating with their own narratives as they participated in the small group discussions and again comparing each other's knowledges that they then presented to the plenary. One-on-one and small group discussions were constantly used through the course. Thinking of the politics of implementation called

for the use of the students' judgement; for instance, when implementing a policy within a traditional African community, they had to apply judgement by adhering to the cultural norms of the community and first get the buy in of the gatekeepers. So at this stage, an evaluation of their practices and strategies when implementing policy was already happening.

The final section of the course again reinforced previous learning and skills, but now focused more on what can be done to improve practice. In evaluating the process and coming up with a plan, they began to utilise their creativity, operating at the highest level of Bloom's taxonomy. This creative space culminated in a final assessment that required the students to produce or construct something from their learning; that is, a policy brief.

As part of gaining feedback on the course delivery methodology and class discussion, a questionnaire was sent via email to the 11 students after completion of the course; four students responded. Some written feedback from the students at the end of the course on how this methodology reshaped their thinking about policy is presented below:

> *Policy was very foreign to me – something that was imposed on me, rather than something that I had a role in shaping. It felt as if I had to (sometimes blindly) implement or follow policy, rather than policy being a tool I could use to advocate alongside my patients. It was eye opening to learn how much is encompassed in policy – policies affect so many areas of the lives of the individuals I work with, and also affect the way in which I can deliver my services (Student 2).*

The response above demonstrates a shift from seeing policy as something foreign to reconsidering policy as embedded in and shaping everyday work practices. Other students shared similar shifts in mind-set towards policy below:

> *Yes, the more I learnt about policies, the more I realised how important it is to have policies in place for every aspect of life, but even more where working with human beings is concerned (Student 9).*

> *My contributions are much more informed than they were before I enrolled for the policy module. It has allowed me to bring about positive change wherever I am called in to undertake a certain task. I am much more aware that policy is impacted by issues around duty bearers and rights holders and that it needs various support structures and development of contextually relevant strategies for it to work well (Student 10).*

Some students equally experienced a mind shift in their personal approach to policy engagement as they expressed below when asked how they perceive policies after the course

> *Yes! Before I enrolled I had very little interest in policies, as the lack of understanding both the jargon and the process of developing and/or changing policies left me feeling completely removed from it (Student 7).*

> *…now I am motivated to lay my hands on any policy that I come across because I am now appreciating better what a policy should look like; types, process etc. I am now familiar with different policies on disability and rehabilitation (national and international) and ways in which they can be constructively appraised (Student 10).*

8. Implications for teaching policy literacy

Policies are always changing and being updated. As Hess-April (2013) puts it, the weakness in awareness and knowledge of, and engagement with, policy as well as translation of policy to practice can possibly be attributed to the lack of policy literacy within undergraduate curricula.

As discussed above, one of the greatest challenges to the successful implementation is the gap between policy formation and context of implementation between researchers and policy makers (Muller, 2016). The strategies (reflection, peer engagements and authentic learning) used within this course afforded students an empowering engagement with policy whereby they bring together policy and practice at theoretical and reflexive levels. The presentation of contextualised learning in teaching policy literacy, as structured in this course, facilitates a balance between reflexivity with policy theory thus allowing for comprehensive engagement with policy processes. Within rehabilitation, sharing this expertise with persons with disabilities and community members in their countries so that together, they can advocate for effective policy implementation (Hess-April, 2013) is key. Furthermore, policy literacy within disability and rehabilitation for instance, should not merely be a case of orientating students to policies relevant to disability and rehabilitation, but calls for addressing policy processes in terms of interpretation of policy and factors that influence analysis, implementation and monitoring (Hess-April, 2013). Consequently, contextualising policy enabled critical reflexivity and an interaction between conceptualisation and actual practice.

Reflection as applied within this course, is a critical underpinning component of growth and learning (Schön, 1991), a doable strategy for teaching policy literacy when it focuses on the individual level and the broader social contexts including issues of power, language, text, structures and systems in the critical engagements with policy. This is what students were given an opportunity to engage with, in the process of understanding and analysing policies taking cognisance of their varied contexts where such policies are implemented.

Taking cognisance of the relationship between the policy context and student's context of implementation emerges as a critical component that influences policy literacy and supports authentic learning (Rule, 2006). Authentic learning posits that learning should reflect real life activities in meaningful ways that centre the student within the process. Again, using examples from the course methodology, learning activities were set to include the workplace experiences, the personal/emotive experiences and these were structured into an academic problem framework (Rule, 2006; Walton & Rusznyak, 2016.) at various levels of complexities as informed by Bloom's taxonomy.

Engaging students in a discussion of the different levels of complexities that emanate from the interaction of varied physical, environmental, socio-political and cultural contexts that influence policy formation and the duty bearers is vital. These discussions, as highlighted above, create a cohesive approach that grounded policy within students' experiences, so policy seems "less formidable", making it more accessible and realistic to the students' practice. Situated learning, collaborative problem solving and goal-based scenarios (Rule, 2006) were the three main methods used for formative assessments and feedback, but there are many more methods that could be used to achieve this outcome and enhance policy literacy.

The emotive responses to the question of how students perceive policy were important to the process of contextualising learning. Hajer (2003) and Hendriks (2005) affirm that most people absolve themselves from participating in politics, even when it comes to actively

seeking political representations or engaging with policy documents. This may be because people do not traditionally link the idea of policy formation to politics, and policy making itself is often presumed to take place within certain boundaries and stable predictable contexts, with the assumption that people prefer to live their individualistic lifestyles and not be bothered with any form of politicking. This is because policy discourse is not just about a guiding document, but is emotional and political, carries with it a certain ideology and identity that often touches on what people are attached to or care about, or people's sense of self. When this happens, people suddenly experience a policy awakening (Hajer, 2003). In acknowledging and grounding the emotional attachment to policy formation and implementation, the learning becomes personal as students engage from a new perspective.

The role of a student's emotional context and the manner in which they interact with learning processes should be emphasised as these emotions act as indicators of the student's positionality in terms of their learning, rather than the focus being mainly on putting forward facts and information to inform cognition. A person's emotive state affects learning (Challco, Andrade, Borges, Bittencourt & Isotani, 2016; Craig, Graesser, Sullins & Gholson, 2004; Kort, Reilly & Picard, 2001). This is particularly true in terms of the history of South Africa when related to policy formation and analysis. Discussions in this area elicited certain emotional reactions and responses that revealed a personal aspect to the engagement with policy for the students, which could form a barrier to authentic learning if ignored. This particular point above proved very helpful during formative assessments. The feedback could be given in a way that acknowledged the student's emotional responses, while encouraging a knowledge construction and locating of self within these policy processes.

Situating learning to inform policy literacy also meant that students worked through frustrations and confusion as they performed class activities, confronting contradictions and affirmations from their classmates in the form of feedback and discussions as they began to co-construct knowledge on policy (Craig *et al.,* 2004).

Although the teacher gives feedback, he or she is more of a facilitator of this process, ensuring a space for and taking note of the interaction of emotions and class activities to facilitate meaningful learning for the student (Faria, Almieda, Martins, Gonçalves, Martins & Branco, 2016). Hence, an intersection of the personal or emotive with the cognitive created a more meaningful learning experience that contributed to authentic learning. An example of this meaningful experience of learning is reflected in the fact that one of the students, after completing the module, submitted her final assessment (the policy brief) to inform a current, ongoing community project in mental health. She not only had a cognitive interest in this area, but also an emotional commitment. This combined approach created motivation to see through and commit to concretising this assessment as part of lifelong learning beyond the academic space.

9. Conclusion

Teaching and learning to build policy literacy is often perceived by students to be onerous, as students and professionals' experiences of policy implementation are often very different from the expectations that inform the policy. One reason for this is that policies are formed in spaces removed from the realities of implementation and the inequalities that inform these contexts. The findings of this teaching innovation indicate that facilitating learning that builds policy literacy must include a contextualisation of learning so that the policy context itself and the students' personal, social, political and cultural experiences are constructed within an academic framework that

supports authentic learning. The teacher becomes a facilitator of this process, allowing students to journey through their affective and cognitive milestones to co-create meaningful learning.

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