A student's journey in South African higher education: Positioning and repositioning within a new space

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In diverse university contexts, students need to constantly navigate and negotiate their social identities. Students bring their unique embedded histories and cultures to the university context and position and reposition themselves to experience a sense of belonging. These experiences contribute to student self-formation and sense of being. This study explores the positioning and repositioning of a student on a diverse university campus. The positioning theory of Harré (2006) was used as a lens to examine the intentional positioning of one student, including deliberate self-positioning, forced self-positioning, deliberate positioning of others, and forced positioning of others. The study was underpinned by both the interpretivist approach and the social constructivist paradigm. A narrative methodology was used, which involved listening to and analysing the narratives of the participant. Data were generated through reflective exercises and semi-structured interviews over a period of four years. A number of themes were used to present the data, i.e., gender positioning, language positioning, racial positioning, and leadership positioning. The findings illustrate the interconnection between agency, identity, and positionality.

Introduction

Higher education is changing globally and is progressively marked by diversity as students from different racial, gender, ethnic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic groups engage daily with one another (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013). A diverse university context can empower and improve students' knowledge of the other, or result in inequality, marginalisation, and discrimination (Mampane, 2019). Students in subordinate positions may experience discrimination and marginalisation, based on their language, race, gender, or culture, when their social identities are not recognised on campus. This may leave them feeling powerless and voiceless. Within a diverse context, students constantly position and reposition themselves relative to the new interactions they may find themselves at in any given time. Social positions are therefore flexible and fluid, as each interaction may involve a different position.

There are numerous studies that focus on the positioning and repositioning of students in a higher education context. For example, Kayi-Aydar (2015) explored how pre-service teachers position themselves in relation to their context and revealed that teacher identity and agency are interconnected and context-specific. Meijer, Korthagen and Vasalos (2009), in turn, illustrated how student teachers re-evaluate their positions while building up consistency between the personal and professional aspects of becoming a teacher. In the South African context, Kamsteeg's (2016) study illustrated diverse positioning through student self-identity narratives on a South African campus, while Alcock and Belluigi (2018) explored the essence of students' self-positioning by using photo-elicitation. Most of the research on the positioning of student identities was conducted as cross-sectional

studies. This article explores how a student positioned and repositioned himself in a diverse university campus context over four years. A qualitative longitudinal study gives "insights into how people narrate, understand and shape their unfolding lives and the evolving world of which they are a part" (Neale, 2020, p. 1). The lived experiences of students' positioning and repositioning in terms of gender, sexuality, language, race, and leadership unfold over time. The study illustrates how one student narratively negotiated his position concerning others.

The first part of the article focuses on an overview of identity and narrative positioning. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework. The positioning theory of van Langenhove and Harré (1999) was used as a lens to explore the intentional positioning of this one student. In the third section, I discuss my choice of using a narrative methodology, which involved listening to and analysing the narratives of the participant. Data were generated through reflective exercises and semi-structured interviews over a period of four years. Finally, I present the narratives of positioning, focusing on gender, language, and leadership. I illustrate the positioning of the student with narratology.

Identity and narrative positioning

The concept of identity refers to both unity (*idem*) and difference (*ipse*) or the "dialectic tension and interrelatedness" of our inner and outer identities (Ericson & Kjellander, 2018, p. 206). On the one hand, identity is unique for every person and a way to differentiate the self from others, but on the other hand, identity implies a relationship with the other. The intrapersonal nature of identity refers to personal attributes such as values, norms, perspectives, and goals (Adams & van de Vijver, 2017). These individual characteristics constitute personal identity, which highlights the individuality and agency of individuals in distinction from others. The interpersonal or relational identity focuses on the interaction in the social world and refers to the relation between the self and others (Adam & van de Vijver, 2017). Collective or social identity subsequently refers to the category of sameness shared among individuals and may include race, gender, language, or political association. Social identity is the result of social interaction between people (Vignoles, 2017). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), in-groups will share a social category and experience a sense of belonging while out-groups experience social identity competition, stereotyping, and discrimination (Le Roux & Groenewald, 2021). Social identity theory initially focused on individualistic (i.e., mobility) and intergroup (i.e., competition and creativity) strategies for maintaining positive group distinctiveness (Vignoles, 2017). Whereas identity illustrates the "social positioning of self and other", positioning contributes towards "the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586; 591).

Identity construction is a meaning-making process that involves the interrelationship and interaction between individual, relational, and collective identities, each with their own embedded history and culture (McLean & Syed, 2016). The long-lasting and continuum qualities of identity render its construction an ongoing, fluid, and shifting process

(Booysen, 2018, p. 6), whereas our identity unveils the ongoing attempts to make sense of past, present, and future experiences, culture, and history, and power always plays a central role in this sense-making process (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005).

According to McNaughton and Billot (2016), the constituent parts of identity, *idem* and *ipse*, can be regarded as *being* and *doing*. Being in this context refers to the values, perspectives, and norms that direct the individual's outlook on life. Doing, as a consequence of being, involves the individual's interaction in the social world. From a social constructivist point of view, identity becomes a process when more emphasis is placed on social interaction (doing) than personal values and norms (being) (Vignoles, 2017). The tension between the paradoxical parts of identity can be balanced with a narrative identity approach (McAdams, 2013). Narratives play a crucial role in people's experiences, and a narrative identity approach enables exploring identity by focusing on both the subject and identity positions. In telling a story, the narrator adopts different positions by highlighting important parts of the story (Hiles, 2007).

The transition to a democratic South Africa created new opportunities for identity construction. Research emphasised the role of race and ethnicity in shaping identities (Thom & Coetzee, 2004). According to McKinney and van Pletzen (2004), students do not integrate apartheid into their identities. Booker, Brakke, Sales and Fivush (2021) indicated that life stories have three themes, i.e., agency, personal growth, and coherence. The first theme focuses on motivations and emotions and includes *agency* and *communion* of the self. Achievement (i.e., agency) and affiliation (i.e., communion) are considered the two basic personality orientations (Graci, Watts & Fivush, 2018). Agency can be described as the motivation and advancement of the individual through a social scale, using power, supremacy, and wealth. Agency also depends on the narrator's position towards others, while presenting a personal story. Agency plays a key role in identity construction and is always enacted in relation to the self and others (O'Meara, 2013).

Communion involves motivation for the universal advancement of others through social interaction (Walker & Frimer, 2015). The second theme, personal growth, focuses on the integration and reasoning of the individual. Through a process of narrative integration, individuals integrate different episodes into a coherent life story, while they make sense of past experiences and construct their identities (Somers, 1994). Negative reasoning focuses on the harmful results of past experiences, whereas positive reasoning entails the positive episodes in a person's life (Cox, Hanek & Cassario, 2019). The third theme, coherence, focuses on structural and organisational factors. Coherent narratives display episodes in a chronologic manner, are bounded by a specific time and place, and connect experiences in a significant way (Waters & Fivush, 2015). The three themes are influenced by cultural and developmental factors, highlight the essential aspects of the individual's life, and determine the capability to integrate experiences into a coherent life story.

Positioning is often linked to narrative identity studies (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). By narrating a story, individuals make sense of past experiences and begin to understand themselves better regarding their past, present, and future lives. Through positioning and identification, individuals make sense of their experiences by linking

episodes together in a coherent storyline. Identity construction is influenced by relational positioning with regard to prevalent narratives and local discourses (Donnelly, Gamsu & Whewal, 2020). Identities can thus be "ascribed, rejected, and assumed" by individuals' continuous negotiation between "subject positioning" and "social power relations" (De Fina, Bamberg & Schiffrin, 2006 p. 273). Bamberg's (2011) exposition of agency, difference, and constancy as the three principles of identity negotiation highlights the interplay between narrative construction and positioning.

Theoretical framework

The article draws on van Langenhove and Harré's positioning theory (1999) to explore how one student navigated his narrative identity toward self-positioning and positioning in relation to others in terms of gender, language, and leadership. The relevance of positioning theory for this article is its aim to understand "the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realised in the ways that people act towards others" (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart & Sabat, 2009, p. 5). Positioning theory was an appropriate analytical tool for this study as it assisted me to bridge the gap between the student as a participant, the university as a research context, and the wider society – or the micro, meso and macro levels (Zelle, 2009). Positioning theory aims to present the participant's voice and social identities within the diverse university campus.

Identity is never fixed and remains dependent of the different positions a person might assume at any given time (Phoenix, Howarth & Philogène, 2017). On the other hand, people position themselves and assume a different position during each interaction, and they are positioned by others. Therefore, positioning and positions are always dynamic, flexible, fluid, and challenged (Phoenix et al., 2017). Davies and Harré (1990, p. 4) aptly noted that the positions people assume, whether self-positioned or positioned by others, are "cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography".

Central to an individual's positioning in a social context are rights, duties, and obligations (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Execution of rights, duties, and obligations depends on personal characteristics, occupation, and assumptions (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Moral orders are linked to rights and duties, and power relations are always present and should be acknowledged in each position (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). For example, the dominant social groups on a university campus, be it gender, race, or language, have the power to assign the right to voice their concerns (Tan & Moghaddam, 1999).

Positions assumed in a moral order are considered *role-based positions* (McVee, 2011). Individuals may refer to themselves according to specific roles (student, daughter, son) and position themselves by these roles. For example, the role of a student is associated with specific actions and reactions (McVee, 2011). *Interactive positioning* (inter-group) is when "what one says positions another" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). In *reflexive* or *self-positioning* (intrapersonal), the individual positions him- or herself based on the expectations of others or by institutions. In addition, a person's subjective history can also serve as a determinant of the position(s) taken up (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 52).

Positioning is therefore always about the self or the self and others; the self *as* another positioning; the self *in* another positioning; the self as opposed *to* another positioning; and the self as aligned *with* another positioning (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as an individual who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they have participated. Who one is and the sort of person one is, are always an open questions with a set of shifting answers. The answers always stand in direct relation to the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices. It is within such practices, thus the stories within, that we make sense of our own life and the lives of others (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 35). Positions, and by implication positioning, involve *discursive processes* constituted by the individual's discourse, and the conversation between people, as well as the practices at an institution (Davies & Harré, 1990; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Arguably, discourse is central to the construction, acquisition, and transformation of meaning (Tirado & Galvez, 2008), and ultimately to identity and the self, as "doing identities" in conversations (Andreouli, 2010) plays a vital role in the stories of people relating to their experiences in the social world. Narratives can therefore be perceived as sense-making processes and reveal the positions people take up at a specific time and place. Davies and Harré (1999, p. 35) pointed out that when a position is taken up, the individual will see the world from the viewpoint of the position and "in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts" which are applicable as discursive processes within the specific position.

Positions have social and individual elements and should be explored through the positioning triangle. In positioning theory, people can attempt to take up or reject particular pre-existing subject positions located in existing storylines using appropriate communicative acts. The connected and dependable relationship between subject positions, speech and actions, and storylines can be illustrated with the positioning triangle. The complexities of speech and action can be analysed through the triangle. The three elements (positions, speech, and actions) determine how a conversation will unfold. A person may enter the triangle at any point. The position of an individual, considering the rights and duties assigned to it, determines the borders of possible actions in the conversation. The storyline reveals information about the context as well as the opportunity and suitability of positions. Speech acts are the actions taken to provide meaning to an emerging conversation (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, pp. 5-6).

Method

Research methodology

This qualitative study was couched within an interpretive framework focusing on "whole experience rather than considering certain parts of it" (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 42). A narrative methodology assisted me to interpret and analyse the participant's positioning regarding language, gender, and leadership, and to present it in story format (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2013; Wang & Geale, 2015). Through introspection, the participant reflected on past experiences, and relived and retold these as part of a

meaning-making process (Dell-Jones, 2018). Experiences, which are a key factor in narrative inquiry, can be understood by taking time and context into account (Clandinin, 2018).

Research context and participant

As the number of participants is not the primary factor in qualitative research (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012), I used the in-depth narratives of one participant. Joseph (pseudonym), a Black Setswana-speaking male student, enrolled for a four-year education degree at a newly established university in South Africa. Setswana is one of the 11 official languages in South Africa, mostly spoken by the ethnic group, the Tswana`s (South Africa, 1996).

The students at this university are representative of the official languages and racial groups in South Africa (RSA, 1996). Both Joseph's racial category (Black) and his home language (Setswana) are in the dominant position on campus. Although the medium of instruction at the university is English, most of the students speak Setswana. Joseph gave written consent for his narratives to be used in the study. I applied for and was granted ethical clearance to conduct this study. A pseudonyms is used to protect the identity of the participant.

Data generation and analysis

The data for the study were generated over four years, providing me with descriptions of Joseph's positioning regarding his gender, language, and leadership (Kim, 2016). During his first year, Joseph reflected on his lived experiences in his home community. Focusing on prompts that I provided him with, he wrote a reflective exercise, which was used as a point of departure for semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour each.

The same approach was used in Joseph's second, third and fourth years of study, but over time the focus shifted to his institutional narratives. Reflection, as a sense-making process, assisted Joseph to recall, re-evaluate and retell his lived experiences, while becoming the author of his own story (Park, 2013). An inductive thematic analysis assisted me to identify themes with "some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set[s]" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 82). The episodes of positioning were linked together in one story. Positioning theory served as a theoretical lens to explore how Joseph's narratives illustrated his positioning and repositioning. A relationship of trust was developed with the participant over the four years. This contributed to an openness during the interviews where the participant had the opportunity to voice his unique experiences (cf. Polkinghorne, 2007). Joseph had the opportunity to read each transcribed text to verify the accuracy of his narratives.

Findings on Joseph's narratives of positioning

Narratives of gender positioning

In his first year, Joseph recalled the gender roles in his culture, saying that "*we still believe that men are provider and women are housewives or their duties are to carry children and do domestic*

duties." Here Joseph positioned himself as part of his Tswana culture (Davies & Harré, 1990). In his culture boys were allowed to work in the yard and the community. During funerals, boys were forced to go to graveyards and dig the graves. Joseph had no choice, he had to accept the rules of his culture. Joseph felt there was "*oppression because some things were not allowed to be done – for example, a girl must not eat eggs. If a girl moves around a cow or a sheep, it is 'moila' (it's a sin to do that thing).*" If a girl physically moved around a cow her parents were supposed to pay the chief a fine. Tswana people were to be punished if they did anything against the chief or chief council. Joseph self-positioned himself as part of the Tswana culture by acknowledging the Tswana traditions and culture and by believing that the chief was the only one who had powers (McVee, 2011). The rights and duties in Joseph's culture were based on cultural norms (Harré & Moghaddan, 2003). Joseph translated this power to the household, stating that "*if people believe that male chiefs should be the only ones with power, this follows that men should also be the only ones with power in the households.*" For Joseph, being a man meant that he was "*the future of the family, and I hold a duty of leading a family in future.*" Through self-positioning, Joseph used his cultural beliefs to position himself in the future. According to Joseph, Tswana men had the right to provide while the women had to look after their, the men's, needs.

Joseph self-positioned himself as someone who saw the limited rights and many duties of girls in his culture as oppressive (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). In Joseph's culture, men were part of the dominant in-group and women part of the subordinate out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Joseph did not want to disrupt his culture, but he believed that some of the traditions needed to be developed for the century we are living in. Joseph self-positioned as a disruptor, as someone who recognised and supported the need for his culture to develop and become more aligned with the 21st century (Davies & Harré, 1990). He believed that it is wrong that women cannot be leaders. As an example, he referred to one of his aunts who wanted to run for the leadership and who could have won but because she was a woman, she was not allowed to continue. Joseph positioned people in his culture as needing to move away from normative beliefs about women in leadership positions. Joseph felt that Tswana people were oppressing women. He self-positioned by expressing the view that "*women are not going to be self-developed, but you can't speak out about it*" (Davies & Harré, 1990). Joseph integrated different episodes of his experiences of gender roles into a coherent storyline (Somers, 1994). Most of the leadership roles around his community were not given to women. His mother was not allowed to go to university but "*was told to go and work at the council's office.*" In Joseph's culture, it was only men who had the right to voice. That is why his mother decided to move to Potchefstroom. Joseph's mother broke the cycle when she decided to pursue her career away from home.

In his second year, Joseph started noticing the feminist phenomenon on campus. Joseph did not have a problem with feminism theory, but with the fact that women had to get first preference. Joseph believed that when it comes to gender and leadership positions, the focus should be on capabilities. Joseph did not have a problem with girls raising their voice, but "*the way they raise their voice that's the problem.*" For example, he referred to the Student Representative Council (SRC) elections, when girls wanted the leadership

position, because they felt women had been oppressed for a very long time. Through self-positioning, Joseph recognised the competence of women (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Joseph noticed in his third and fourth year that gender was a serious issue and that the SRC was not sure what their role should be. The SRC and Joseph realised that women were being oppressed. As in his own culture, Joseph recognised the oppression against female students on campus. Joseph observed that female students did not get the same opportunities as male students. He noticed that the leadership positions in the SRC were not balanced with respect to gender. There were seven male and three female students on the SRC. On campus, leadership positions were mostly ascribed to male students who determine the social power relations. Joseph stated, "*we have to try and understand our differences in terms of gender.*" To cultivate a culture of respect in the residents, students should be educated; "*trying to understand our differences in terms of gender.*" Joseph's self-positioning shows his obligation to understand women for who they are (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Narratives of language positioning

Joseph mentioned that 98% of his community members were Setswana speaking and the other 2%, mostly wives, isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans speaking. Joseph had a passion for his language. As one of the activists of PESU (Puo Ee Siang Union), he wanted to protect his mother tongue, Setswana. Feeling strongly about his culture, Joseph took up the duty to promote his home language (Tan & Moghaddan, 2003). Joseph felt that one should switch to English if anyone who joined a group did not understand the language, as he "*feels offended when other people speak their language when they are with us.*"

Joseph was sent to an Afrikaans-medium boarding school where most of the learners were Coloured and Afrikaans speaking. Joseph's teachers were supposed to assist him in English, but they did not. As part of an out-group, Joseph experienced racial and linguistic discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Joseph never complained about the language of instruction at school "*because I was trying to be independent*" and in the end "*the school has helped me to grow in many ways.*" Due to the language barrier, Joseph struggled to fit in and started to hate the subject Afrikaans. This negative attitude towards Afrikaans led to his bunking of classes. Joseph recalled how "*White learners were not willing to accommodate us – they would speak Afrikaans*", but "*would feel offended if we speak Setswana.*" Joseph rejected the marginalisation against him and illustrated his right and duty to have his culture and language accepted (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). His good results in mathematics were the game changer. Suddenly, the White learners in his class accepted him for who he was. Hereafter Joseph befriended Afrikaans-speaking learners and his Afrikaans improved.

At university Joseph realised the advantage of being able to communicate in Afrikaans. He observed how students switched to their mother tongue if they wanted to exclude him from the conversation. During group work, Joseph observed that when Coloured Afrikaans-speaking students wanted to "*talk about some things that might oppress you, they will speak in Afrikaans.*" The Setswana students were doing the same. In a multi-linguistic class, Joseph would never use Setswana unless he spoke on a personal level to someone. Joseph

promoted his mother tongue using proverbs in Setswana and translated the meaning in English. Joseph's self-positioning illustrates his respect for other languages (Davies & Harré, 1990).

The language barrier that Joseph observed during his first two years on campus almost disappeared in his third year. Students who socialised in different cultures and languages became more tolerant of each other. Furthermore, the Conversational Language module, which all Education students had to take in third and fourth years, also contributed to the respect and recognition of other languages. The discursive practices in the School of Education contributed to the inclusion of minority languages, which in turn led to positive social power relations (Tirado & Galvez, 2008).

During his fourth year, Joseph mentioned that students started to learn and appreciate the differences amongst themselves. Not only did they learn more from each other over the four years, but the education modules also made students more aware of diversity. Joseph acknowledged that language was still an issue on campus, especially when it came to students who had English Additional language at school. Joseph's positive values and norms influenced his interpersonal identity (Adams & van de Vijver, 2017). Joseph self-positioned himself as someone who recognised the challenges and opportunities of multilingualism (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Narratives of racial positioning

When he was younger, Joseph "*didn't like 'Whites' and 'Coloureds' but after learning their personalities and cultures - the way they live my perception of them changed.*" During the first two years at boarding school, Joseph did not get along with the White learners. He felt "*that they have power over us.*" Joseph observed how White learners were being favoured. Although Joseph grew up in post-apartheid South Africa, the behaviour and cultural convictions of teachers and learners in many instances still reflected a racialised past. Being a Black Setswana speaking learner, Joseph had to negotiate between the subordinate position of his race and home language and the social power relations at school (De Fina et al., 2006). Joseph had to interact with other races, and this helped him to understand other learners for who they were. Joseph rejected his marginalisation and felt that he had an obligation to fit in. His parents decided to send him to a boarding school with a good reputation for academic excellence.

Joseph never dated Black girls or girls from his culture. Both during school and at university, Joseph had a White girlfriend. Dating a White woman, his family would say he was "*bringing a foreigner to the village … and call her a nerd or this Afrikaner.*" Joseph's White girlfriend positioned his family to ascribe degrading names to her. By socialising with White people, Joseph's perception of other races changed. Joseph had a White friend in his final year at school. They learned about each other's culture and socialisation. Joseph "*believe that I became one of their family now.*" Joseph recalled that the White boys were only playing rugby and cricket but when the "*school hired a Black teacher who was a professional soccer player, the White learners became interested in soccer.*" By appointing a famous soccer coach, the

school promoted a sport which was associated with Black people in South Africa. The White boys became interested in soccer and the discourse of soccer changed.

It was only at university that Joseph interacted with Coloured students. Joseph started to appreciate Coloureds for who they were, and his stereotyping of Coloured in that they "*think they are White but, they are Black*", disappeared. He believed that Coloureds "*are violent, you can't be friends with Coloureds, Coloureds will make you go out every day.*" Living with Coloured students in the residence helped him to understand them better.

In his second year at university, Joseph explained that when it came to race "*it's easy to socialise with Black students because you can relate more to things – because the backgrounds are not that different*". In his second year, Joseph mostly socialised with Black Setswana speaking students. His friend would say "*the private schools have socialised you to like White people more than Black people.*" His friends had to accept his relationship with White girls and position themselves accordingly. Apart from his girlfriend, Joseph did not socialise with White people. He feels the problem was "*basically on Blacks as they still can't accept that White people are here, and they are not going anywhere.*" Joseph explained that most of the Black students, especially the Northern Cape students, "*still believe that the university was built to improve the lives of Black people, they classify Coloured people as Black – but they have a problem with the White students.*" The extra-curricular activities on campus were only attended by Black students and a few White students. Joseph observed that the race card came into play at certain times. For example, if a White student voiced a concern over fees, his ideas would be discarded as White people was still seen as privileged. Joseph self-positioned himself as someone who recognised the limited rights and duties of minority racial groups on campus (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Narratives of leadership positioning

Joseph joined PESU, an activist group for African languages, and was responsible for literature and growing his mother tongue around his community. Joseph promoted his language on campus by sharing Setswana proverbs and then translating these into English. Joseph positioned himself as someone whose right and duty it was to protect his mother tongue (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

In his second year at university, Joseph became editor of the university newsletter, *Boa SPU*. Joseph felt that the newsletter was on the right path but had not gotten to where it should have been. Most of the time, the editorial team reported on what was happening on campus, how to improve the lives of students, how to motivate students who were struggling, and how to motivate students academically.

In his second and third year, Joseph was invited to a Gr 12 event held at his former high school. He was the keynote speaker at the event, where he had the opportunity to motivate the Grade 12s. Joseph observed that students struggled with mathematics. He motivated the students to join a study group. Although the 60% target for everyone in the group was not met, all students who joined the group passed the mathematics module.

Joseph used his leadership skills to motivate learners and students. He positioned himself as someone who can take up a leading role.

Joseph was nominated to run for the SRC in his second year. He believed that he could make a difference. Joseph's vision was to build an inclusive university culture. Joseph argued that the annual fresher ball was only attended by Black and Coloured students. Instead of having a fresher ball, Joseph believes that a social-cultural day where students learned about each other's culture, could contribute to a more inclusive culture. In his third and fourth years, Joseph was elected to serve on the SRC. He wanted to use his leadership skills to position students towards inclusiveness. This was also a difficult year as continuous fights amongst the SRC members hampered their progress. Some SRC members were SASKO affiliated, and others were EEF members. Joseph said he was caught in the middle of the fight. Although he was an EEF member, he also had friends in SASKO. Joseph argued that the SRC was too involved in politics – the national elections spilled down to the SRC. Despite these challenges, the SRC still had a clear vision to "*bring students together and to start with transformation.*"

Joseph was elected SRC president in his fourth year. Being the new SRC president was very difficult for Joseph. He wanted to bring changes that students were not familiar with. The SRC's vision was to make SPU for human beings and not a university for customers. They started to build on relationships – the relationships from the top to bottom, between students and management, and between students and lecturers. Joseph believed that the relationships would end in the classroom if the focus was only on academics. The SRC also planned to monitor the first years and do some academic work. The SRC started with dialogues to change the residence styles. The SRC proposed that residences had to reflect the diversity of the campus. No residence "*should be occupied by for example Black only or senior students only.*" Although there was still an issue with language and culture, Joseph believed that putting students from different backgrounds, race, and ethnicity together in one residence, were right steps toward an inclusive campus.

Discussion

On a diverse university campus, students constantly position and reposition themselves in relation to their new interactions. Identity is grounded in the different positions an individual may take on at a specific moment in time (Phoenix et al, 2017). Who a person is depends on the positions either taken up or rejected. Positions and identity bring both those with a voice, and those without one to the fore. Positioning, positions, and identity are always flexible and fluid (Phoenix et al., 2017). Identity illustrates the social positioning of individuals, while positioning highlights the discursive construction of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Joseph's positioning illustrates how he situated himself in a specific place at a specific time. The interconnection between identity, agency, and positioning is depicted in his story.

Joseph's narrative on gender and sexual positioning illustrates his identity of being proud of his culture while at the same time displaying sympathy for marginalised women. Having a voice and power as a man in his culture, he self-opposed this privilege. As part of the

Tswana culture, Joseph was socialised (taught) that men and women have different roles. Boys dig graves, but girls are not allowed to move around cows. Men are providers, and have a voice and power, while women are caretakers and are not allowed to have any leadership position or go to a university. Joseph's mother broke the cycle and attended university away from the Tswana culture. For Joseph, a man is the future of the household. Joseph identified the oppression of women in his culture by saying that the culture should be in line with the 21st century. At the university, and as a member of the SRC, Joseph recognised the oppression of female students. For Joseph the fact that the SRC was not balanced according to gender, was an indication of oppression against female students. Joseph believed that there should be a greater understanding of gender differences and that anyone should be able to raise their voice. Joseph recognised the discrimination against female students, but he had a problem with the way they raised their voices. For Joseph, female leaders had to be capable and competent.

Joseph's story on language positioning emphasised his passion for his home language, Setswana, and the agentic positions he took on to promote his mother tongue. At high school, Joseph experienced discrimination against his home language. Learners communicated in their home language, Afrikaans, but felt offended if he used his home language. It was only after learners recognised his ability in mathematics, that they were willing to accept his home language. Joseph believed it to be his duty to protect this language, Setswana. After school, Joseph joined an activist group to promote Setswana. At university, he used opportunities to promote his language by saying proverbs in his language and then translating these into English. The conversational modules offered at the SoE gave students a chance to learn from each other. Joseph showed that, although multilingualism could be a challenge, it could also bring opportunities to the fore.

At his high school, Joseph initially did not get along with White learners. He felt that White learners were being favoured by the teachers and that the power that Whites displayed reflected the racialised past of apartheid in South Africa. However, Joseph rejected the racial marginalisation and felt that he had an obligation to fit in. He interacted more with White learners and dated a White girl at school and university. He and his girlfriend learned about each other's cultures. It was only at university that Joseph began to interact with Coloureds. His initial stereotypical ideas of Coloureds as being violent party goers changed after he got to know them for who they were. Joseph played an important role in motivating students at his former high school. As a member of the SRC, Joseph played a key role in building an inclusive university culture. He believed that residences should reflect the diversity of the university and that they should be balanced with respect to racial groups. Joseph positioned students toward inclusiveness, as well as academics. As SRC president in his final year, he initiated the building of relationships between management, lecturers, and students.

Although Joseph's story is unique to him, it carries the complexity of social positioning on a diverse university campus. Identification with a certain role (student, daughter, son, culture group) does not mean acceptance of all aspects of the role. All of us have dominant and subordinate social identities depending on the context in which we move. Highlighted by Tatum (2013) and illustrated by Joseph, we should reflect on our

subordinate social positions when we have power, and vice versa, as part of our journey of positioning and repositioning, and attempting to balance the self with the other.

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