Conjuring the spectre of authorship: Ethical concerns for studies of higher education in a globalised world


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Conjuring the spectre of authorship

Ethical concerns for studies of higher education in a globalised world

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2nd Annual International Symposium on “Higher Education in a Global World”
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My argument

Conjuring the spectre of authorship, considered passé in continental philosophy and contemporary ‘western’ criticism for some time, may provide a valid and poignant ethical reference point for studies of higher education in a globalised world.

In this paper, it is argued that the concepts of author, text and reader allow for a reconsideration of taken-for-granted discourses and interpretative approaches in higher education, particularly for those with academic concerns. Informed by the author’s drive to be responsive to an ethical obligation to the global South and in contexts with legacies of conflict and inequality, surfacing the politics and problematics of authorship poignantly brings to bear that which is de/legitimised between the gazes of the local, national, global.

The ways in which the concepts of author, text and reader are constructed, and their roles positioned, may enable us to deliberate the sub/text of the macro-, meso- and micro-curricula of higher education in varied contexts, and, in turn, put us in a better position to analyse the significance of what we ourselves design, as such texts operate beyond our own intentionality in the world.
Why the spectre of authorship?

Death of the author

- Sever actual authorial intentionalism from the determination of meaning

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➢ Sever actual authorial intentionalism from the determination of meaning

➢ Open the text up to plurality of reader-responses


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➢ Open the text up to plurality of reader-responses

➢ Analyse the way the text figures and operates in context


Why the spectre of authorship?

Death of the author

- Sever actual authorial intentionalism from the determination of meaning
- Open the text up to plurality of reader-responses
- Analyse on the way the text figures and operates in context
Why the spectre of authorship?

Consequences...

- Rise of the critic as author-ity
  [Rise of assessor as authority over another’s text]

- Relinquishes the author of responsibility for the reception of meaning*

- Creates potential for re-asserting responsibility within interpretation (& therefore implementation)**


Ethical relations

- Contemporary notions of author – reflexive co-creating/ curating
- Wisdom gained through relational interactions
- Dialogue between espoused, in-use, experienced

Situational/ agential  ↔  Collective; Cultural; Structural
Author    Text    Reader
Validity for Studies in Higher Education

• Re-consideration of taken-for-granted discourses & power relations
Re-consider taken-for-granted discourses & power relations

**Figure 1.** A mapping of notions of transformation prevalent in institutional discourses and how they were experienced by participants

From Belluigi, D. A & Thondlana, G. Submitted for peer review. ‘Why mouth all the pieties?’ Black and women academics’ revelations about discourses of ‘transformation’ at an historically white South African institution.
Validity for Studies in Higher Education

• Re-consideration of taken-for-granted discourses & power relations

• Unearth tacit interpretative approaches
Unearth tacit interpretative approaches

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<th>Operative criticism</th>
<th>Objective criticism</th>
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<tr>
<th>Author/ Artist (A)</th>
<th>Text/ Artwork (T)</th>
<th>Reader/ Viewer (R)</th>
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Micro-curriculum: Interpretative approaches at agential; cultural; structural levels

Implications of the mis-fit between **intentionality** (curriculum) & **reception** (assessment practices)


Validity for Studies in Higher Education

- Re-consideration of taken-for-granted discourses & power relations
- Unearth tacit interpretative approaches
- Raise consciousness of complexities of academic agency & responsibility
Situating the author within academic development

- Coming to voice as the authorial self
- Questioning the authority of authorship of curriculum
  - Students as co-authors/ collaborators
  - Excavating subject-ivities of the hidden curricula
- The autonomy of the text – curriculum as autonomous/ intertextual/subject
- Readership as a means towards informed situated criticality and reflexivity

Recognising geopolitics, Higher Education’s role in social formation

The implications for academic agency & for knowledge construction
Validity for Studies in Higher Education

• Re-consideration of taken-for-granted discourses & power relations

• Unearth tacit interpretative approaches

• Raise consciousness of complexities of academic agency & responsibility

• Unearth politics and problematics of authority
Validity for

Ethical obligation to the global South

• Unearth politics and problematics of authority
  • What is de/legitimised in the shifts between the local/national/global/commons? ‘Geopolitical re/production’
  • The power of the ‘proper noun’ of institutions [author], The ‘figure’ of powerful journals [text], The received authority of global ranking systems ‘Geopolitical re/presentation’
  • Neutrality of the archive, canon & pedagogies in the face of heterogeneous & indigenous knowledge(s)
• Deliberate the subtext of the macro-, meso-, micro- curriculum

• Curriculum theory & Constructions of Author/ text/ reader

• Emphasis on responsibility
Validity for Studies in Higher Education

Ethical obligation to the global South

• What is the significance of y/our design, production and dissemination, recognising that texts operate beyond our own intentionality, in this globalised world?

• Research in, of and for higher education?

• Whose education?

• What is y/our intentionality in this ‘field’? What is our responsibility to global l/readership?

• How might such a framework ‘work’ for Critical Higher Education Studies to trouble the authority of our assuredness in an increasing uncertain world?
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