THE NEED TO LINGER: CAN WE CHANGE EVERYDAY DISCOURSE TO ENHANCE BELONGING IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

S. Rudman
Department of Applied Languages
Nelson Mandela University
Gqeberha, South Africa
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8440-1378

ABSTRACT

A student's sense of belonging plays an important role in their overall experience and success at university. One of the factors which influence such a sense of belonging is the manner in which one is able to connect with those around one. On South African university campuses, student "connections" are often short-circuited by the tendency to "other" those from different ethnic / racial backgrounds. This happens despite the general abundance of "transformation talk" on campuses and much professed insight into issues of discrimination.

This article considers the relationship between talk and authenticity with reference to Heidegger's theory on the everydaynesss of discourse as well as his proposal that real understanding requires a willingness to "linger". Content analysis of student reflections on a module which created an opportunity for students to "linger" with the "other" implies the potential which such spaces may have in facilitating "connections" otherwise perceived as unlikely.

Keywords: sense of belonging, everydayness of discourse, diversity, stereotyped assumptions, othering, idle talk

INTRODUCTION

A student's academic performance as well as their overall well-being is greatly affected by a sense of belonging (Berryman and Eley 2019; Tabane and Human-Vogel 2010; Murphy and Zirkel 2015; Furrer and Skinner 2003). A sense of belonging refers to "the way in which people feel accepted, respected, included and supported by a community in which they are involved" (Berryman and Eley 2019). A number of factors contribute to having a sense of belonging in a particular context – one of them being "genuine connections" with those around one (Tabane and Human-Vogel 2010, 502). One's mindset – in this sense – is influenced not only by the relationships which materialise but also by the perception of relationships which are possible (Berryman and Eley 2019).

On South African university campuses, both actual and potential "genuine connections" continue to be affected by discrimination along ethnic and racial lines (Maseti 2018; Ngabaza, Shefer, and Clowes 2018). Our classrooms frequently still reflect what Jonathan Jansen (2013,

225) calls "unconscious space management" – the inclination of students to avoid those of different ethnic and racial background. Consequently, authentic interactions – which could lead to mutual understanding and meaningful relationships – are often evaded. Such unaddressed biases not only affect students relationally but also have an effect on their overall wellbeing (Berryman and Eley 2019). The feeling that one is discriminated against on grounds of ethnic or racial identity experience is referred to by Murphy and Zinkel (2015, 3) as "stereotype threat" – "a psychological state characterized by arousal and anxiety that interferes with performance, well-being, and the process of identification with the domain in question". It is thus particularly concerning that ethnic / racial discrimination remains an issue on South African campuses – despite the fact that South Africa's racially segregated past and related consequences are frequently addressed in formal and informal contexts on university campuses.

Despite narratives of transformation and a heightened awareness of the destruction wrought by discrimination, our campuses continue to reflect the tendency to "other" those of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Soudien (2012, 23) suggests that "the problem we confront in the area of race is that many are able to articulate an insightful social analysis of how it works but are unable to demonstrate in their personal lives the significance of what they know". What happens in the talk, thus, does not necessarily accurately reflect the daily and tangible realities.

This article will consider the reasons for the persistent racial and ethnic divisions in our university spaces in terms of the relationship between talk and authenticity. It asks the question: if good intentions and "talk" do not prompt effective action, what will? I will consider Heidegger's description of "everyday discourse" as a possible explanation for the incoherence between talk and action. His explanation of the "everydayness" of discourse theorises that, in general, human beings settle for a socially "dictated" understanding of the world, rather than seeking "authentic" experience and knowledge. The nature of this "everydayness", as Heidegger calls it, ensures that one feels no need to examine matters further, no need to "tarry alongside" (Heidegger 1962, 216) or reflect upon a particular issue/situation because, one assumes, one already understands. Real understanding, on the contrary, requires a willingness to "slow down" order to engage with the world and others in a way which the daily pace of the "talk" does not allow us to.

The value of an opportunity to "linger" in the quest for real understanding and "genuine connection" becomes apparent in a first-year university course which created a space for students from diverse ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds to engage and "tarry alongside" one another. Reflective feedback from students indicates that not only did this encounter encourage a process of critical thought regarding previous assumptions, but for many it also

initiated a desire to live differently alongside those previously considered "other". Excerpts from student reflections on the module and, particularly, on the group interactions give insight into the factors which keep students at arm's length but also indicate the potential for strategic classroom interventions to facilitate opportunities for "genuine connections" and thus contribute to a sense of belonging on our campuses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The explanation of "everyday discourse", as proposed by Heidegger, lays the foundation for his proposal that real understanding requires the opportunity and the readiness to "linger". His account of this is based upon the nature of the individual as he/she exists and interacts with the world within the context of a community.

The "everdayness" of discourse

Any attempt to account for the nature of a human being, must acknowledge the inherent social nature (Heidegger 1962, 210). As born into and existing within a particular society, the human subject is first and foremost to be found in the "everyday" nature of existence. This everydayness becomes visible in the discourse (language as communication) of the society, in which every (normal) human being inevitably participates because meaning is principally conveyed by words (Heidegger 1962, 204). Because of the conventional nature of language, it is inevitable that linguistically articulated meanings become normative within a particular context or community and that these collectively then form a particular ideological framework or discourse, providing a platform for communication and daily interactions. The assumptions and perceptions inherent within a discourse in the Heideggerian sense provide a framework for communication and interpretation and are thus constitutive in setting the stage for behaviour (which is inescapably discourse-orientated). Therefore, in trying to understand the manner in which people understand the world, one should start by examining the discoursal context which characterises their daily lives.

As far as South Africa is concerned, one needs to ask – what is the discoursal context in which people are living and how does this influence the quest for a "transformed" society? For almost five decades the South African apartheid system legislated societal structures according to race, thus ideologically positioning us to distinguish between "same" and "other". The lived reality of apartheid imposed severe restrictions upon the manner in which the "other" could be encountered and understood. For most, the primary source of information regarding the "other" was provided by what was "said" and then passed down as "common sense". As Soudien (2012, 15) explains, the "strategic essentialism" upon which the South African society was based

during the apartheid years, formed a racialised context in which all information was processed. These ideological structures grew to be so dominant and all-encompassing that they eventually became the "obvious" and "natural" way to understand things.

With the onset of democracy in 1994, the dominant discourse – in official and public terms anyway – moved from that of an apartheid legislated country to one in which racial bias and discrimination were positioned as being abhorrent. Within less than a decade, a society moved from imposing rigid ethnic identities, with strictly related behaviour restrictions, to one in which "politically correct" public discourse condemned ethnic and racial prejudice as not only unacceptable but also (in many cases) worthy of prosecution. However, as Soudien (2012, 15) notes, a society does not so easily "unlearn the logic" of race ideology and related stereotypes as these are not tied to legislation but function as part of discourse (Alexander 2002, 105).

There are three characteristics of everyday discourse, as described by Heidegger, that shed light on the way in which meaning is embedded in a discoursal context and hereby offer insight on the persistence of ideological concepts regarding race and ethnicity in the South African context. These three aspects – namely idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity – will be discussed in the following section.

Idle talk and belonging

"Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own" (Heidegger1962, 213).

Idle talk, as Heidegger's first descriptor of discourse, explains how an ideological structure can masquerade as truth. As the individual experiences different aspects of the world, normative "ready-and-waiting" interpretations of the world are confidently handed-down as authoritative explanations of how to understand what is encountered. In this way, idle talk closes the world off for us by giving the impression that nothing has been left unexplained and that there is no reason to examine something for ourselves. Authentic experience and thought, insofar as they are conceivable, are replaced by a (seemingly coherent) explanation which, despite being baseless, assumes an authoritative nature: "What is said-in-the-talk as such spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character. Things are so because one says so." (Heidegger 1962, 212).

Of course, in apartheid South Africa where interracial and interethnic interactions were strictly regulated, this "handed-on" knowledge systematically replaced "authentic" knowledge. This systematised protection of idle talk ensured that most knowledge claims about those of different ethnicities was uncontested and, by many, accepted at face value.

However, one would assume that a new South Africa, in which the legislated walls that separated us were broken down and replaced by an all-inclusive constitution, would provide the necessary opportunity to "unlearn the logic" (Soudien 2012, 15) of race ideology and related stereotypes.

Why then, after more than two decades of free access to one another, do we still cling to the stereotyped perceptions rooted in apartheid idle talk (informed by race ideology) rather than allowing our understanding to be shaped by genuine encounters and authentic experiences? Alexander (2002, 105) suggests that, although South Africa has entered a new political phase, identities are still constructed and perceived within the context of a race-based ideology (or race-based idle talk). However, because individuals are unaware of the ideological implications of this discourse, the "situation appears to be ideologically empty", rendering it "impervious to any form of critique and deconstruction" (Soudien 2012, 15). If one does not realise that one's perceptions of the world are formed within an ideologically biased context, external pressures are not likely to change them. Soudien suggests that the naturalisation of essentialised notions of race in South Africa explains why these have not only remained but also "come to settle in the popular imagination as an entirely neutral concept" (Heidegger 1962, 21). "Neutral" here referring to what is unbiased, obvious and natural.

For as long as the categorisation of South African citizens in racial terms persists, any changes required by non-race-orientated legislation will most likely be only skin deep and outward, as can be monitored by perceptions of political correctness. and political correctness. Ideology, in the form of idle talk, will remain safely and (largely) unconsciously ensconced within the individual's framework and understanding of the world. Thus, despite the appearance of a miraculous transformation from a dominant racist ideological system to one which espouses completely different values, by all appearances South African society is struggling to shake off old idle talk habits inherited from the apartheid system.
In this way, idle talk determines the rules regarding belonging. Although this applies in a broad sense to the issue of "belonging" on a university campus, it specifically influences perceptions (and realities) of potential "connections" among students. Idle talk impacts "belonging" by ensuring that many students continue to "other" those perceived as different and feeds the sense of "stereotype threat" which, in turn, affects the holistic well-being and potential of a student (Baumeister and Leary 1995).

Curiosity and belonging
Heidegger's explanation of how discourse functions as "curiosity" may shed some light on the

reason why ideological systems are so resistant to transformation. Discourse manifests as curiosity in the sense that it assumes the disguise of constantly seeking knowledge and experience but does so in a manner which disdains the necessary "lingering" (that is, the persistent probing for well-grounded answers) which true understanding requires. It therefore appears as a form of knowledge but is indeed a superficial experiencing of one entity before rushing to the next, thus preventing authentic engagement. The knowledge sought by curiosity "does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in the truth" (Heidegger 1962, 216), and thus it feels no need to probe or contemplate the issue beyond the dictated interpretation given of it. The prospect of being perplexed or challenged and needing thus to "linger" is unpalatable to curiosity as its desire is to move on, to yield to the temptation of distraction. Thus, it is characterised by a restless desire to move on to the next thing. This prevents one "tarrying alongside" (Heidegger 1962, 217) a particular issue/situation for any length of time in order to engage "authentically". In this way, curiosity provides no resistance to the ideological nature of what passes for "knowledge" but rather serves to protect it by constantly moving the subject on to a new focus, before the given explanations can be interrogated and thus put at risk.

In terms of the South African situation, the era of democracy has opened up the legislative boundaries which previously divided those of different ethnicity. However, in many cases, perceptions of anyone seen as belonging to the "other" are already set and thus determine the nature of interactions. This understanding, whether relevant or not, is routinely imposed upon dealings with that "other" and thus shapes the resultant relationships and the way they are understood. Because of the reluctance to "linger" and investigate thoroughly, the "obvious" explanation (as provided by idle talk) is taken as the valid one – thus negating any sense of needing to investigate further. As far as one is concerned, one has "investigated" and found it to be so (as dictated by idle talk). In this way, opportunities for authenticity in such interactions are minimised whilst still giving the impression of having provided real experience of the "other". In fact, these types of interactions – which have the semblance of providing "real" experience of the "other" – are dangerous in the sense that they "assure" one that real knowledge has been gained (or that one's assumptions have been validated) and that further investigation is not necessary. The misconception lies in the idea that, because our public spaces are now perceived as "multi-racial" and "multi-cultural", we feel that we have actually encountered the "other" and interacted for with her/him ourselves – and this counts as knowledge. In this way curiosity, as described by Heidegger, patrols the borders of "belonging" and discourages any venture to challenge contrary perceptions or behaviour.

Ambiguity and belonging

The consequence of idle talk (which ensures that authentic understanding is not sought) and curiosity (which prevents the necessary "lingering" for such understanding to occur) is "ambiguity". This third aspect of everyday discourse refers to an obscurity which, Heidegger (1962, 217) claims, is an implicit understanding within discourse. The manner in which the individual presents themselves through discourse, as well as the knowledge they claim may, or may not, be authentic in the sense that it is – for all intents and purposes – sincere, while unwittingly being subject to the constraints of idle talk and curiosity. The inauthenticity is not, per se, intended because the individual is convinced that they have correctly understood a matter, being unaware that their understanding is "dictated" and not their own.

This "ambiguity" has an effect on our relationships with those whom we perceive as "other". Heidegger (1962, 220) states that "the 'other' is proximally 'there' in terms of what 'they' have heard about him, what 'they' say in their talk about him, and what 'they' know about him". Our perception of the "other" is set by what is said in these discussions. Without attempting authentic verification on one's own part, the "other" exists for one only in terms of what "they" have heard and said about them. The perception of the "other" is constructed through ideas prevalent in the dominant conversations, and because of idle talk's "confidence" in already understanding, there is no sense that one should investigate further. In addition, these assumptions impose a specific framework upon interactions which then dictate a particular interpretation of all that occurs. This functions to minimise and contain any contrary indications, ensuring that the existing explanation remains consistent (Heidegger 1962, 219).

The South African situation, with its transition to democracy and its diverse range of people, provides for a deeply complex context in which to unpack the concept of ambiguity. For people in post-apartheid South Africa to surpass the idle talk that still haunts discourse, the ambiguity between talk and authenticity needs to be addressed – particularly as it manifests in the link between talk and action. Having someone express an opinion and intention may, or may not, reflect a genuine belief and intent to act accordingly (Heidegger 1962, 218). If, as Heidegger states, we are implicitly aware of the ambiguous manner in which discourse operates, it follows that this would have implications for our relationships with others. In this sense, one cannot be sure whether the goodwill shown by another is genuine or, as is more likely the case, merely a taking up of the "correct position" in, as Alexander (2002, 41) puts it, our "superficially united, non-racial" society. This superficiality mentioned by Alexander directly relates to the Heideggerian aspect of ambiguity in discourse and moving beyond it implies the need to somehow step outside of the everydayness of meaning-making.

LINGERING AND BELONGING

Heidegger's theory points to important implications for any intervention aimed at overcoming barriers imposed by assumptions and promoting the possibility of "genuine connection" with the "other". "Unlearning the logic of race", claims Soudien (2012, 7) "is central to our becoming fully human". Resonating with Heidegger's caution regarding "fore-knowledge", he states that reconceptualisation of the realities around us is possible but needs to be initiated from an awareness of the position from which we start. In addressing the race-based ideologies characteristic of South African society, he suggests that instead of operating within the realm of normative understanding, knowledge should be sought in a consciously deeper way. The starting point of such a quest should be the refusal to "work with symptomatic expressions of reality – of what 'things' appear to be" (Soudien 2012, 9). Normative assumptions about the world thus need to be foregrounded and acknowledged as emanating from an ideological framework. Perceptions of difference based upon racial categorisation need to be interrogated. The core role of education, states Soudien (2012, 7) is "fundamentally that of bringing to sight that which ideology obscures". True education, in doing this, would "release us from the false captivity of imposed belief and flawed logic in which we find ourselves" and thus provide the opportunity to note the contradictions and inconsistencies upon which these "natural" and "obvious" meanings are based (Soudien 2012, 15). Approached in this manner, there is much potential for change because we as human beings have the ability to think analytically and use a "variety of cognitive routes to apprehending and making sense of reality in both superficial and deep ways" (Soudien 2012, 9). Thus, Soudien's claims imply, in alignment with Heidegger's thoughts, that a starting point to true social transformation in South Africa would be the unveiling of ideological assumptions which continue to inform the understanding of identity according to racial and ethnic terms. He echoes Heidegger's call to authentic understanding in exhorting us to seek knowledge in a "consciously deeper way".

Heidegger (1962, 205) points out that, although one inevitably functions, to some extent, within the ideological framework of the everydayness of discourse, one need not be limited to the "dictated" explanations inherent in such. He suggests that genuine understanding, absent in the everydayness aspect of discourse, can be sought by attempting to interact with the world around us in a different manner. He speaks of "lingering", of seeking this authenticity in "an essentially slower time" and emphasises that the creation of such a context, with all of its possibilities, first requires the unmasking, of idle talk (Heidegger 1962, 218). Heidegger suggests that, in a quest for authentic understanding, it is necessary to have the courage to step out of this wave of idle talk in order to find the space in which to seek genuine knowledge and understanding. In contrast to curiosity which is characterised by "not tarrying" (Heidegger

1962, 217), but by simply grasping at pat "dictated" answers, a quest for real knowledge requires a willingness to linger, "to be amazed to the point of not understanding" (Heidegger 1962, 216). Such an encounter should allow one to focus one's attention totally upon the thing to be understood and this engagement to prompt reflection and guide one to genuine knowledge (Heidegger 1962, 218). It is with this in mind that the encounters related in this article were set up.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study used a qualitative approach consistent with Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) description of a content analysis. In this sense, the procedure followed was a combination of conventional content analysis and directed content analysis as described below.

Study setting

The excerpts used as data in this article were taken from reflective narratives by students in a first year English Language Studies module at Nelson Mandela University, co-taught by myself and a colleague. The section of the module referred to, entitled "Language and Ideology", consisted of lectures giving theoretical input on the concepts and links between language, ideology, discourse and identity as well as the opportunity to apply and clarify understanding of these concepts in class discussions and tutorials. During this time, students were prompted to apply the concepts to both hypothetical and actual contexts and to reflect particularly, on their own assumptions and experiences. This article references a task which comprised three parts based on this section of the module.

Data collection

The first part of the task required the 600 students to individually apply the afore-mentioned concepts to common sense assumptions made about the different language groups in South Africa in a reflective narrative. In the second part, students were put into groups of 6 or 7 students from different language backgrounds and given questions regarding these common sense assumptions. In this space, they collaboratively considered the obstacles they experience in gaining real knowledge of one another and critically discussed ideological constructs regarding assumptions made about one another. The questions were designed with the intention to prompt discussion on the way specific (South African) language groups are perceived, the validity of the perceptions and the consequences of such perceptions in terms of interpersonal

relationships as well as on society as a whole. Because these language groups inevitably included those of the group members, these discussions may – at times – have been uncomfortable and difficult. However, the student reflections on these discussions (in the third part of the task) indicate that despite the challenging topics (and indeed perhaps because of them), the time spent in these discussions allowed group members an unusual and – for many – transformational encounter with one another. This article draws on these reflections (from Part Three of the task) in the findings section.

Data analysis

When reading the student reflections (as required in part three) for assessment, the lecturers noted emergent themes. After application for ethical clearance for analysis of the assessment for research purposes, the narratives were analysed using content analysis, referencing both a conventional analysis and a directed analysis approach (deductive) (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The analysis was therefore primarily inductive and informed by aspects which were noted and expanded on by students. Upon my own reflection, the relevance of Heidegger's theory to some of the content of the student feedback became evident. The second stage of the analysis was thus deductive as I then reread the student reflections and noted particularly those which related to aspects of Heidegger's theory. The student excerpts which have been included are representative of the themes which emerged in the larger group.

Ethical clearance

Ethical permission was sought from students once I had decided to use their feedback in a research paper. The context and use of the excerpts was explained in writing as well as verbally (in class) and assurance was given in terms of anonymity. In line with our university policy, students gave ethical permission via signed informed consent forms. Assessment was already complete for this task and students were assured that their decision on whether to sign the consent forms would not affect their further marks in any way. The majority of students gave permission for their work to be included in the study.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The language and ideology module, and particularly the group discussions, presented an opportunity for students to step outside of the ideological framework of the everydayness of discourse. The theoretical input which preceded the task, as well as the first part of the task which required students to foreground normative assumptions about one another, meant that they entered into the group discussions with some degree of awareness of the ideological

assumptions they were taking into this space. This, as both Heidegger and Soudien mention, is an important aspect in the quest for a more authentic understanding.

Awareness of idle talk

A number of students indicate that they have gained awareness of the "idle talk" nature of their ideas about one another (even though they do not use these particular terms). The words of the students below words resonate with the idea that "idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own" (Heidegger 1962, 213):

> Student A (Xhosa-Sotho female): "In most cases half the assumptions I think I make about other language groups are not actually mine but that of other people, I just consumed them and made them mine."
>
> Student B (Xhosa female): "My assumptions were made from what I have also heard from other people and from one or two experiences .... It has never been interaction on a personal level and I had never attempted to do any research about the language group."

Both students note the uncritical and ungrounded nature of their relationship with the ideas they had accepted. As Student A so aptly states, these *ideas are not actually one's* own but are, nevertheless *consumed* by one and in this way appropriated as part of oneself. In the same way, Student B notes that her assumptions have not been based on her own experience of life. Similarly, Student C admits that he has "blindly taken" on certain beliefs without questioning their source or validity:

> Student C (English Male): "During the group discussions we had in the period of this module, opinions came to the floor that made me ask questions and change qualities within myself. Things that I have blindly taken as my own, all because my language group had taken this knowledge as the truth without asking why or where did these opinions arise."

Insight and interrogation

It was in the context of the group discussions that Student C found himself questioning the source of his own assumptions and coming to the conclusion that he had taken on beliefs simply on the basis of *hearsay*. Through the *foregrounding of assumptions and the subsequent interrogation* of these (particularly in group discussions), Student C and others speak of gaining insight into the manner in which they themselves have embraced everyday idle talk assumptions. In this way, they start to notice and interrogate their own ideologies, bringing to the fore many of the inconsistencies and contradictions which previously existed implicitly and unhindered. This resonates with the words of Soudien (2012, 7) who refers to the main

role of education as bringing "to sight that which ideology obscures".

As they discuss and reflect on assumptions regarding language groups (both their own assumptions and those of others), students begin to *note the manner in which idle talk functions*. They note that many of their ideas have been passed on to them by the "they" (society) and taken on uncritically as an explanation of how the world works. The recognition that such dictated assumptions are not reliable is emphasised by the following students after their participation in the group discussions:

> Student D (Xhosa male): "What challenged me was how I used to view other groups in a very negative way, but when I started to interact with them on an individual level, I noticed how wrong I was. I felt the shame of believing someone else's opinion."

Faced with the opportunity (in the group discussions) for real investigation of the "other" and the assumptions made about them, students start to *notice and interrogate their own ideologies*. This in turn brings to the fore many of the inconsistencies and contradictions which previously existed implicitly and unhindered. Student E reflects on her own realisation of this, saying that through the discussions she "learnt a lot" despite previously having no sense of lacking such knowledge:

> Student E (Xhosa female): "I learnt a lot that I thought I had already known about other language groups."

Student E's reflections resonate with Heidegger's claim that one of the reasons why idle talk flourishes, is because investigation seems unnecessary when one believes that one "already knows".

Application and reflection

Some students note how their preconceived ideas about one another have *imposed a constructed meaning on previous interactions*. As Heidegger explains with his concept of "*curiosity*", investigation of the world is often cut short by either the belief that one "already understands" and thus there is no need to investigate further, or by being confronted, upon investigation, with the "ready-and-waiting" explanation provided by society or the "they". This "idle talk" interpretation is imposed upon one's experience of the world and directs the actual experience which could, otherwise, have the potential to grant authentic insight. Student F speaks of realising how his perceptions of a particular language group caused him to impose meaning upon his encounters with them:

> Student F (Xhosa male): "I have often found that these ideologies are self-created as a result of what we have experienced or witnessed through others. I have found this to be true with other language groups as well as the whites. I have found that they are not 'unkind' people but it was due to the fact that at the back of my mind there was a predetermined idea within me that they are so, and it was therefore easier for me to see that than for me to be objective and see that they are not so bad or that they debunk the theory I had in my mind about them."

In critically assessing the manner in which he had made sense of previous encounters, this student realises that he had been interpreting interactions through a particular "lens" of understanding. In this way, the predetermined ideas at the back of his mind imposed meaning on the way he chose to understand the "other" and their actions. He admits that referring to these familiar ideas was easier to do than to try to be *objective* and see things differently, bringing to mind Heidegger's description of how curiosity is placated by the readily accessible explanations offered by idle talk. Interaction with the other, which could have provided real experience, was short-circuited by the "ready-and-waiting" explanation offered by idle talk. Such a "surface" interaction would probably have been seen as "real" experience of the other, and subsequently noted as "knowledge" (before moving on quickly in order to get to the next thing). However, this student now notes that this "knowledge" is not reliable.

Amazement and resolve

In a similar manner, Student G reflects a sharp *awareness of previous error* in the way that the other was perceived:

> Student G (Afrikaans female): "This assignment gave me an opportunity to work with other language groups and had a big influence on the identities I have imposed on other language groups. I discovered that my interpretation of them was totally wrong, they weren't as I identified them. They were pretty much amazing. What I learned in this module is lifelong. I will write it on the table of my heart."

One can imagine that, for Student G, part of the process of coming to this realisation involved an aspect of what Heidegger describes as being "amazed to the point of not understanding" (1962, 216) as initial assumptions are proven invalid. She marvels at the contradictory "knowledge" which emerges as a result of actual experience with the "other" and concludes by emphasising the immense value (to her) of these findings.

"Tarrying alongside" one another

The diverse composition of the groups (speakers from different language groups) and the topics

for discussion prompted *interactions which would be unlikely* to occur unless they were, as in this case, specifically orchestrated. A number of students mention this aspect:

> Student H (Xhosa female): "Usually I wouldn't even associate myself with other cultures simply because I did not need to."
>
> Student I (Xhosa male): "One thing I have realised here on campus is that most people are friends with people of the same language as theirs as I am also friends with the same language group as mine."
>
> Student J (Xhosa female): "The tasks given to our group gave me a chance to interact with the people I would not socialise with on a normal basis."

This tendency to seek and interact only with those deemed "similar" protects idle talk by creating an "echo chamber" type of context where the same ideas are strengthened by repetition. In addition, it minimizes the opportunity for actual investigation of the "other" and the possibility of findings which would contradict the ideas promoted by idle talk. Student K below notes the "vacuum"-like context created by this dynamic:

> Student K (Xhosa male): "Taking the way I was thinking before this module, it was like I am in a vacuum or I am with my language group only .... We are all humans, if someone needs to know about a language group, *sit down with him or her* and try to make exchange programmes so that you become familiar with that language group ... [group discussions] also changed me because they were very helpful to tell me about their language group which is very difficult for me to disclose .... Also they suggested some other time to exchange further because there are common issues."

Student K, reflecting on his experience of the group discussions, echoes the idea that knowledge about one another is best gained by *sitting down* with them, or – as Heidegger (1962, 216) would put it – "tarrying alongside" one another. In addition, his mention of *exchange programmes* implies that such *opportunities need to be consciously constructed* as they do not, as a matter of course, arise in the everyday nature of things. This is emphasized by Student L below who implies that, despite a curiosity about the "Xhosa speaking people", this was the first opportunity he had to authentically interact and speak to some of the Xhosa students.

> Student L (Afrikaans male): "I always wanted to know the Xhosa speaking people's ideologies better. I always wondered how they are, how they do things and why they are so traditional. This module had finally given me the chance to interact and speak to some of the Xhosa students. I had asked them a lot about their culture and their traditions. My whole perspective how I had seen them changed. I also discovered that some of them can even speak Afrikaans too. I do not see them anymore as a group of people who are distant from me."

The irony, which makes this reflection particularly poignant, is that the context in which these students live and study (South Africa, and the university in particular) is a multi-cultural one, and that Student L would certainly have often found himself in common spaces with Xhosa students. However, as Jansen (2013) points out with the concept of "unconscious space management", despite a multicultural context (like a university classroom), students generally associate with those perceived as similar whilst avoiding interactions with the "other" (Jansen 2013, 225). The ambiguity which characterises these everyday spaces is hinted at by Student M's comment below regarding *fake smiles* as well as *pretending and acting:*

> Student M (Xhosa male): "The content influenced me in a positive way since I used to provide other groups with fake smile It also changed me in a meaningful manner that I stop pretending and acting when I am around other groups."

This comment brings to mind Alexander's (2002, 41) comment about the South African society as a "superficially united, non-racial" society. As Student M confesses, although he may previously have appeared friendly and open to the "other", this was not a sincere reflection of his thoughts and feelings towards them. The reflection prompted by the course content prompts his resolution to *stop pretending* in these interactions.

The value of lingering

A number of students also emphasise the *value of the opportunity to "linger"* with those they would normally not interact with.

> Student N (Xhosa female): "what changed my perception about the other language groups is that *spending time with them* I noticed that they are not all the same."
>
> Student O (Xhosa female): **"**Some of my assumptions were invalid. People are not the way you think they are, you have to *stay or work with them* so that you can know their identities and the way they use their language."
>
> Student P (Xhosa male): **"**I was enjoying interacting with other language groups which that helped me to see the point of *making time to interact* with different language groups to overcome that barrier of separation between language groups."
>
> Student Q (Afrikaans female): "*it is only when spending time* with other language groups that you realise that you actually have so much in common. To me this exercise was only a revelation."
>
> Student R (Afrikaans female): "My perception of other language groups changed as well ... I could make a clear distinction between my views of the different language groups and *actually sitting and having a conversation with them*. After having discussions with the language groups changed the way I used to think of their identities."

These students, and many others, mention the aspect of time spent with the "other" and imply that this opportunity, this "time", has evaded them up to this point. However, the implication is that in the normal course of events, such "time" is not provided for. From a Heideggerian perspective, this is obviously because all the constituents of "everydayness" (namely, idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity) militate against spending time with those who have been categorised as a kind of inaccessible "other" merely to be "tolerated".

In contrast, after the group interactions, many students reflect an awareness of the need to "linger" with one another in order to achieve real understanding. For example, Student S details exactly the manner she intends to deal with these interactions in future. She speaks of the necessity to note assumptions, but not to assume the validity of these. Instead she speaks of the need to both investigate matters herself and then interrogate the conclusions she comes to.

> Student S (Xhosa female): "I learnt that before I could assume the type a person is, I need to associate with them first so that I could learn their language and the ways in which they do things then ask why they are doing it and not just jump to conclude that Oh! These people are doing this thing because of this and that, No, I have to know why they are like this. Is it because of the way and the type of people I assumed them to be? Or is it the way they have accepted themselves to be or are they like this because of the environment they lived and adopted? This module really helped me to never judge a book by its cover but to peruse the pages to get an idea."

In these resolutions, one senses the operation of a sincere curiosity – one which refuses to be appeased by the normative answers offered by idle talk but rather chooses to step out of that realm and investigate for herself/himself. Student T explicitly mentions a similar curiosity nurtured by the course and, particularly, the group discussions:

> Student T (English male): "This class has left me wanting to know more. This is the type of curiosity every student should have about other language groups and racial groups. One where you are introduced to these ideas wanting to find out more by getting to know that group. I did not want to use the internet, I went to the real person and said, 'I want to understand you, teach me your ways'. One will be surprised at how happy they are to share more about their culture, beliefs and language. This module could change the world just having us understand one another."

Not only does Student T realise the necessity of investigating the "other" for himself, he also expresses a realisation that this may not be as difficult as previously thought. His sense of marvel is expressed in the very optimistic final sentence. Although world peace may be a little harder to achieve than is envisaged by this student, the sense of hope and even joy which accompanies many of the student stories of insight indeed suggests the worth of attempting to step outside of the everydayness in order to "linger" with one another and really get to know the "other".

DISCUSSION

A sense of belonging can be greatly enhanced by positive interactions with those around one. This applies to those with whom one has meaningful relationships but also to interactions with people with whom one only has fleeting contact (Hirsch and Clark 2017). Studies by Sandstrom and Dunn (2013, 2014) found a strong correlation between students' interactions in a classroom and their sense of belonging and happiness. This link was consistent whether the interactions were with those known and seen as "friends" or those seen simply as "classmates".

With this in mind, the interactions reflected on in this article appear to have potentially contributed to students' sense of belonging in at least two ways. Firstly, the feedback implies that for most students, the group discussions facilitated interactions which would otherwise not have taken place and that these interactions were, for the most part, positive. Thus, even if contacts made in this setting were fleeting, the interaction itself as well as the goodwill generated would be significant. Secondly, reflections also imply a change in the way students see one another – thus also a change in the relationships they now see as possible. This in itself would also influence a sense of belonging which, as Berryman and Eley (2019) note, is encouraged both by actual relationships as well as the perception of potential relationships.

The overall positive experience of these interactions was probably enhanced by the preceding content of the module. Theoretical input was given on the nature of ideological assumptions and students were given the opportunity to clarify and apply their understanding of terms such as ideology, discourse, common sense assumptions and language groups. They were thus able to enter into the encounter with an awareness of these concepts as well as reflection on their own ideological biases in terms of fellow students from different ethnic and language backgrounds.

The encounters discussed in this article contributed to the development of a sense of belonging by facilitating an opportunity to "tarry" and get *to know the "other"*. In the group discussions, students were prompted to not only assess their own ideological perceptions of the "other" but to actually share and discuss these with fellow students considered as such. Feedback indicated that this activity disrupted the everydayness of discourse by foregrounding and interrogating ideas which are normally taken-for-granted – thus disarming idle talk. In addition, it prompted a curiosity alien to that of everyday discourse by creating a space for authentic investigation, and then initiated a discussion regarding some of the issues generally ensconced in ambiguity. In this way, it stepped out of the time frame of "everyday discourse" and into a "slower time" (Heidegger 1962, 218) where the "links" and "coherence" which are usually assumed and implicit were put under the spotlight for investigation. Feedback from

students indicates that not only were these interactions successful in encouraging a process of critical thought but also in initiating, for many, a desire to live differently alongside those previously considered "other".

Some principles emerge in this study as key in setting up a space for students to "tarry alongside" one another and seek an understanding beyond that lodged in everyday discourse. The first aspect which needs to be noted is that these conversations are unlikely to happen unless specifically planned and set up. Despite living side by side in a society characterised by diversity, perceptions of difference and "otherness" ensure that – for the most part – interactions are superficial and unlikely to touch on the deeper issues which divide nor grant opportunity to gain meaningful understanding of one another. Thus, opportunity for alternate interactions need to be purposefully set up. Secondly, it appears useful to prepare students for such interactions by prompting an awareness of how they may have come by their present perceptions. Although this needs to be approached in a sensitive and strategic manner, it allows students to shed – or at least be aware of – some of the "baggage" in terms of previous assumptions. Lastly, because of the tendency towards routinised, superficial – and thus non-threatening – interaction with those deemed different, the required topics for discussion should ensure that relevant issues are addressed and not avoided.

CONCLUSION

The persistence of ethnic / racial discrimination on South African campuses continues to threaten opportunity for "genuine connections" which could greatly contribute to a student's sense of belonging. Heidegger's theory on the everydayness of discourse offers a compelling explanation for the persistence of "othering" in a diverse society. With this in mind, this article discussed the potential to address these issues in a university classroom by facilitating opportunities for students to "linger" with classmates of diverse ethnic and language backgrounds.

The limitations of the study lie in the brevity of the actual group encounters and the difficulty of following-up on long-term implications of the module and these interactions. Future studies could consider the option of the group discussions being extended over a period of weeks, thus encouraging deeper connections and possibly friendships. Furthermore, it would be interesting to follow-up on students to assess whether, in the longer term, these interactions have made a difference to the way they related to their classmates and to their own sense of belonging. However, there is reason to assume that – even though the encounters described were brief – the accompanying theoretical input and opportunity to reflect have impacted student's perceptions of one another and contributed to their sense of connection and belonging

within the context of their fellow classmates.

Student reflections discussed in this article imply that, if strategically set up, such encounters could make an important contribution to a sense of belonging. Such opportunities – to "tarry alongside" one another – may be key in prompting understanding and deep transformation in contexts previously characterised by fragmentation and antipathy and in this way make a significant contribution in fostering "genuine connections" and thus a sense of belonging among students.

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