

**When art informs: challenging stereotypes in a multicultural educational setting in Botswana****Donlisha Moahi<sup>1</sup>**

Visual Arts Department, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

mdonlisha@gmail.com

**Elmarie Costandius**

Visual Arts Department, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

elmarie@sun.ac.za

**ABSTRACT**

As classrooms become increasingly multicultural, authentic teaching and learning is essential to avoid the creation of a negative image of the 'other'. Using a case study from a secondary school, an interpretive analysis was used to gain insight into how students made sense of their experiences and the significance of art as a platform to negotiate stigmas and stereotypes in class and school. The project generated space and context for students with different backgrounds to tell their stories and hear each other. Students revealed that language and dialects are also fundamental components of culture that should be supported by the education system. Art can be an especially effective catalyst for developing a critical awareness of issues of race, immigration, difference, and privilege. It is a platform for the negotiation and construction of meaning and could contribute towards removing the historic inequalities and injustices created by a stratified society.

**Introduction**

We live in a world of difference, and all indications are that differences will increase. In this complex, interrelated and changing world, we are challenged to explore ways of coming to know difference. Educational institutions do not exist in a vacuum; they work in contexts with varying cultural, economic and political orientations. As Basu (2011:1307) notes: "School spaces are imbued with meaning and foster sensibilities of justice, belonging, and identity from an early beginning." Basu (2004) argues that schools are places where neighbourhood integration is exercised and civil society

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Donlisha Moahi's research which formed part of her Master's thesis in Visual Art (Art Education). She is the main author. Prof Elmarie Costandius supervised the Master's research.

is fostered, and where social and cultural differences are explored, negotiated and compromised in multiple ways. Educators must recognise the importance of learning conditions that give learners the liberty and safety to take risks and self-explore without fear of ridicule or criticism.

Diversity in any society is naturally reflected in its schools, and with the implications of globalisation and accelerated flows of migration, contemporary classrooms are increasingly becoming sites of multilingualism and identity negotiation. Battiste (2000:192) argues that for children whose languages and cultures are different from mainstream expectations, the educational system can lead to a form of 'cognitive imperialism' or cultural racism, defined as "the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview". Due to the fact that schools are situated within the larger social context and hence are not immune to the political pressure of the broader social body, the marginalisation routinely enacted within the public realm in the community finds its way into the school premises. As such, ethnic identities seem stronger than 'national identities', as they work at a macro level and on an immediate and daily basis.

Schools seem to contribute to inequality in that they are tacitly organised to differentially distribute specific kinds of knowledge. To free learners from being discriminated against due to their background, the aim of the study on which this article reports was to explore how art processes can facilitate an open, safe space where stereotypes and stigmas can be negotiated through dialogue. It provided a platform to create lessons that help all learners reflect on stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards minority groups – those with less political, social and economic power relative to the dominant group. Moore (2006:36) states that "individuals acquire stereotypes from society's major institutions such as the family, peer groups, schools, churches, and the media". Stereotypes, which are universal throughout multi-ethnic societies, become entrenched in the collective consciousness of the society in justification of all forms of socio-economic and political inequality among groups. According to Moore (2006:36), stereotyping is "the tendency to categorise individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardised image and attribute certain characteristics to all members of the group"; and stereotypes "are central to the formation of bias and the pervasive acts of violence, segregation, and discrimination directed against minority groups".

From this perspective, ways of knowing are limited and constrained by the dominant culture that educational institutions (in this case schools) maintain, and become a source through which social inequality is reproduced. As countries become increasingly multicultural, it can be argued that the authentic teaching and learning of multicultural education that encourages dialogue and learner participation in educational settings is essential to avoid the creation of a negative image – and an ever-strengthened fear – of the 'other'. Not many studies have explored ways of opening up learning spaces in the classroom through art to negotiate social issues such as stereotypes, stigma and labelling between ethnic groups in Botswana, which was the aim of this study.

In the art classroom, where art, identity and culture are intricately linked, racially and culturally responsive teaching plays a critical role in how learners come to understand cultural diversity, social inclusion and anti-racist behaviours. While diversity is celebrated and seen as a valuable and integral part of Botswana identity, "those members of groups seen as 'diverse' are often framed as 'the problem', as lacking what is necessary to succeed in society, and as threats to the potential for social

cohesion” (Eidoo, Ingram, MacDonald, Nabavi, Pashby & Stille 2011:66). Visual art as a learning platform was explored in this study to negotiate social and cultural meanings and inform understandings of self.

### **Theoretical perspectives**

Multicultural education was the overarching theoretical framework explored with reference to the role of art education in a multicultural curriculum. Aspects of postcolonial theory, colonialism and anti-colonialism were also employed here with education for social justice introduced to further interpret the findings.

### **Multicultural education theory and art**

Multiculturalism in society is taking on new dimensions of complexity as demographics, social conditions and political circumstances change. Increasing diversity in educational institutions implies the need for teachers to be prepared to work effectively with learners from different backgrounds, such as cultural, linguistic or national origin. Proponents of multicultural education (such as Banks 2004 and Bennett 1990) explicitly state that the inclusion of multicultural education creates an atmosphere where racial attitudes and academic achievement are improved. It respects cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that learners, their communities and teachers bring to the learning process.

Art has the potential to develop the intercultural competence of learners, and to reveal their assumptions, values and beliefs. It is an influential medium with which to consolidate a lexicon of national symbols, encouraging people to alter their habits in order to persuade or change their ideology (Graham 2009). Unprecedented immigration has created a vibrant mixture of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and experiential plurality. An artwork could help learners to view the world from new perspectives and to critically consider taken-for-granted assumptions as an alternative view of being in the world that surpasses all understanding, while disrupting everyday thinking (Greene 1995). As such, the study of art could enhance multicultural education by helping to build learners’ understanding of their own place in history and emphasising the capacity and ability of all human beings, including those who have been culturally degraded, politically oppressed and economically exploited (Knight 2006). As art focuses on raising personal awareness about different categories of individual differences, it can show how differences enhance or hinder teacher-learner interactions on a daily basis.

### **A postcolonial perspective**

This study uses a postcolonial lens to highlight that mainstream societies with histories of colonisation still ignore, marginalise and suppress other knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Colonialism has been, from its outset, a contest over the mind and the intellect (Dei 2006; Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001). Under colonial influence, the biological and intellectual heritage of non-Western societies was devalued (Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001). According to Dei (2006), colonisation did not seize land alone, but the minds of the colonised as well. This calls for a re-examination of educational practices in order to provide spaces to address colonial and neo-colonial relations in the school system. As Dei (2006)

advocates, the school must provide the space for learners to understand their privileges and oppression and to devise effective oppositional resistance to dominance. As far as the education system is concerned, there is a need to look at “the myriad ways that difference is ignored, suppressed or taken up in classrooms and curricula” (Kempf 2006:130). Therefore, due to failure to contest this approach, learners “neither see themselves nor their histories reflected in their education [which] allows for their continued amputation from their culture” (Kempf 2006:132-133). Given that the colonial project was not a charity undertaking, the use of foreign languages, especially English, in neo-colonial societies has become one of the main determinants of a child’s ability to master formal language. This further acknowledges that the education system continues to reproduce social inequalities through the absence of indigenous voices and practices in public institutions (Wane 2006). As Kempf (2006:132) asserts, “the uni-focal history of dominant/colonial education serves to amputate marginalised people from their past and consequently from their present”. The failure to teach and value an inclusive history must be understood as part of the ongoing colonial project in which power representation is paramount. Language, for example, can be a tool for empowerment or disempowerment. English could erode modern learners’ abilities to value their own culture in a globalised era. English is no longer simply a courtesy for outsiders or a gracious gesture, but has become the default language of choice. It comes to define and thereby potentially limit expression, representation and historical telling (Kempf 2006).

In postcolonial African states, tensions among ethnic groups about purity, belonging and entitlement are ongoing. Postcolonial notions largely focus on the interconnections between colonial cultures, colonised cultural practices and the constructions of hybridity and alterity. They demonstrate the shift of anti-colonial thought from a focus on agency and nationalist practice towards discursive analysis and an approach that directs our attention to the intersection between “Western knowledge production and the ‘other’ and Western colonial power” (Shahjahn cited in Dei 2006:13). Dei & Kempf (2006:3) argue that anti-colonialism is about the colonial struggle to resist the neo-colonial governing procedures that reside within everyday lived experiences. It “calls for critical awareness of the social relations and power issues embedded in the ways of organising the production, interrogation, validation and dissemination of knowledge in order to challenge social oppression and consequently subvert domination” (Dei & Kempf 2006:3-4).

The line between an anti-colonial and a postcolonial frame of reference, as defined above, perhaps becomes blurred in that while working towards liberation, one is involved in discursive negotiation between the authoritative and other voices present within society. The classroom can provide space for each learner to understand both privilege and oppression.

### **Education for social justice**

This research focuses on social justice as a means to find effective ways to challenge oppressive systems and promote social justice through education. According to Dewhurst (2011:364), social justice “is rooted in people’s experiences; it is a process of reflection and action together, and it seeks to dismantle systems of inequality to create a more humane society”. Its goals are equity, democracy and just distribution of social wealth and power. From the perspective of critical theory and critical pedagogy, Freire (1970:60) describes the nature of social justice education as “a process of humanisation” whereby authentic liberation “is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women

upon their world in order to transform it". The act of education, in other words, becomes the practice of investigating and deconstructing the world around us, aiming for rebuilding it such that all people can have equal access to their full human potential. Fraser (2008) views social justice as requiring a social arrangement that makes it possible for all to participate on an equal footing in social life, which she calls 'participatory parity'. Fraser (2008) argues that a politics of recognition in a difference-friendly world involves acknowledging the existence of difference, such as that based on ethnicity, racial diversity or gender. For Fraser, the struggle for recognition can never be disentangled from the struggle for redistribution and she argues that "both distributive and recognitive approaches can enhance the schooling participation, engagement and performance of marginalised students" (Keddie 2012:268). Fraser (2008) asserts that social justice, understood as recognition, is not assimilation into a dominant culture; rather, it is constituted by a world that embraces both redistribution of power and resources and recognition of cultural difference. The challenge for a critical educator is therefore to introduce new literacies in a manner that empowers individuals and simultaneously creates platforms for the critique of existing power and knowledge structures.

### **Methodology**

This study explores ways to use art as an agent of social change and to establish a classroom environment that models good citizenship skills, such as respectful listening and tolerance of difference. A qualitative approach was considered the most suitable way for conducting this research. Such an approach allows for valuing interpretation of individual responses, making it possible to gain detailed information about the complex phenomenon of how, in this case, school learners negotiate social stereotypes and identify themes and theoretical structures describing this process. Interpretive analysis was used to gain insight into how learners made sense of their experiences and of the significance of art as a platform to discuss stigmas and stereotypes in class and at school.

### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of the Department of Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University. Institutional permission was also granted by the junior secondary school administrators. Prior to the art project's inception, participants and their parents were provided with consent forms, which they read before filling in the necessary information with regard to the study and were made aware of the possibility that the research could be published.

### **Sample selection**

This study involved an intimate relationship between the researchers and what was studied, as it focused on signs of cross-cultural contact holding potential to explore issues of cultural hybridisation. It is a case study, by nature, as contextual interaction of the unit of study is a significant part of the investigation. The case studied is used to explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten those situations in which the intervention being evaluated had no clear set of outcomes.

A purposeful sample of 12 Form 1 and 3 (Grade 8 and 10) junior secondary school art learners in Botswana's South East District was used. Their ages ranged between 13 and 16 years. The learners

were selected by consulting identified ethnic groups represented in the school and were from varied social and economic backgrounds. In Botswana, where ethnicity and belonging had almost become masked as the state sought nationhood and consensus through dominant Tswana values and liberal democratic institutions, “there has been, since the mid-1980s, a resurgence of identity politics and overt tensions on the question of belonging, as minority ethnic groups seek equity, better representation and more access to national resources and opportunities” (Nyamnjoh 2002:755). The sample consisted of one representative from the Batlokwa tribe, one from the Bangwato tribe, two from the Balete tribe, four from the Bazeduru tribe, one from the Bakalaka tribe and three foreign learners from Zimbabwe. The study ran from February 2014 to October 2014. The methods used for data collection included written reflections before and after the art project and semi-structured interviews, as well as collection of the learners’ artworks.

### Written reflections

The learners’ reflections were used as the primary source of data in this case study. The first reflections, written at the onset of the research, were undertaken by a class of 23 learners. The participants who continued working thereafter were selected by consulting identified ethnic groups represented in the school from the first sample.

### Semi-structured interviews

Interviews took place behind closed doors where discussions could not be overheard and where the participants could speak freely without fear of being judged or victimised. The interviews provided them with an opportunity to voice their opinions. The participants responded to open-ended questions related to their experiences in school and follow-up questions were asked based on the responses of the participants. Each digitally recorded interview lasted between 10 and 20 minutes and started with the phenomenological question, “Can you tell me about your experience at school?”.

### Art project

Arts-based approaches to research have recently been introduced into qualitative research in order to elicit private and personal data from participants in an alternative, unobtrusive way through artistic creations, otherwise unobtainable from the participants being studied (Barone & Eisner 2012). During the art project, the learners were asked to use any media of their choice to represent one of the issues they wrote about in their reflection. The project was a way to use art as a medium of communication, allowing for another way to view the world through multiple frames of reference, exploring the taken-for-granted status of ethnic categorisation in contemporary society. The media chosen by the learners included lino printing, beadwork and collage making. Initially the learners wrote about their experiences in school and shared this with their partners as they worked in pairs.

Each pair reported to the rest of the class on their experiences. This sparked discussion on some of the issues that the learners were facing in their spaces of learning. In following lessons, learners were asked to give visual expression to their personal reflections or experiences. They were required to select and source their own materials. However, they were encouraged to exchange and share images, cutters and glue in exchange for something they needed. This was a way to foster collaboration and

encourage dialogue among the learners. Upon completion, they discussed the project. The collages and mosaics produced aided understanding of the social issues brought to the surface. For instance, because they worked in pairs to collect the materials, they learnt the value of communication around issues or misunderstandings of what each individual was trying to portray. The main purpose was to explore the participants' experiences and subjective views on issues of difference, which was one of the themes of the project.

### Data analysis

From the reflections written by the participants and the transcribed recordings made during the interviews, we searched for emerging themes across all the participants' responses. The data were reduced to fewer categories through a process of open coding. Coding is a process of "organising the material into chunks or segments of text in order to develop a general meaning of each segment" (Creswell 2009:227). Two major themes, namely difference and discrimination, were identified, each with their own sub-themes. The codes used to identify specific learners are as follows: M indicates a Balete learner, G indicates Bangwato, S indicates Mashona from the Bazezuru, N indicates Nyasa from the Bazezuru, T indicates Matebele from the northern part of Botswana, K indicates Batlokwa and F indicates foreign learners from Zimbabwe. The number following the code indicates the number of the learner in each category.

### Findings

The intent of this study was to find means to create an open space in which learners conceptualise and negotiate their dynamic diversities through art. Difference and discrimination were identified as two main themes from the interviews, written reflections and discussions during the art project, and these are discussed below.

### Difference

Difference was identified as the first theme, along with its two sub-themes: i) race, ethnicity and nationality, and ii) language.

#### *Race, ethnicity and nationality*

Educating learners to become more democratic involves creating spaces whereby they can learn to share "commonalities and to respect differences of others" (Waghid 2009:22). Learners need to be educated to accept that they cannot be excluded from performing certain tasks on the basis of their cultural differences. They have the right to participate, to be heard and to offer an account of their reasons "within a civic public space of multicultural understanding and confrontation" (Benhabib cited in Waghid 2009:22). The present study reveals that most learners experienced exclusion in the school. Instances of racism were not simply about black versus white, but involved ethno-racial categories and a form of hierarchy that produces disparities between different tribes as a result of their skin complexion. Examples of learners' comments include the following:

The Kalanga students are exposed to discrimination mostly because of their skin colour. (M1)

Students always judge me about my skin colour and like I am always an outcast when it comes to other students' skin colour because most of them are 'white'. People call me different names about my colour and tribe. (N1)

Learner S1 described his experience about those who fail to accept him as a Motswana: "I am 'black' but I am not 'moZimbabwe'." Growing intolerance and ignorance of cultural differences, coupled with increased racism and xenophobia, have created a climate of desolation and antagonism among the learners. In such a context, increasing prejudice constructs a perception, based on fear and anxiety, that diversity undermines cohesion and the building of a school community. The following comments from learners illustrate these notions:

Since I came to school ... I was treated like I was not a Motswana person. Teachers were not treating me like any other student and I don't know why ... I pushed myself to come to this school but all I had is tears on my face because I was treated like a person who did not belong to this country. (K1)

They start saying you Zimbabweans, 'makwerekwere',<sup>2</sup> you come here to our country to stay and have better future and talk our language not your language. This is not Zimbabwe that you can do whatever you want. (F3)

Although Learner N1 is a Motswana by birth, she commented that most of the time she is not considered as such:

Ever since I got to [this school] it has been tough for me to interact with other students. This is because they always ask if I am a Motswana and if I know how to speak Setswana. Wherever a new teacher comes they always ask the same question. Sometimes in some lessons like Setswana, the students always give examples about foreigners stealing or being caught for robbery or not having permits. (N1)

Learner T1 summed up with the following:

I feel like I am a ghost because so many people always ask me lots of questions like who is a Zimbabwean between your mom and dad ... I hated it when people made me feel like I am useless and I am sort of different from them but I am not. Everyone has the right to nationality not discrimination.

Racism is expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs), prejudice (racist emotions) and/or discrimination. According to Loury (2003:334), race is a social phenomenon that results from the combination of two processes: categorisation and signification. Categorisation involves the sorting of people into a cognitively manageable numbers of subgroups. Through the categorisation of race, it becomes possible for people to take note of and assign significance to others' skin colour, hair texture and bone structure (Loury 2003). This research suggests that schools, such as those studied here, need

---

<sup>2</sup> The term Makwerekwere is generally employed in a derogatory manner to refer to African immigrants from countries suffering economic downturns.

to recognise the power of other socio-linguistic groups and foreigners as not mere passive recipients, but as active agents within the school community. Language plays an important role in this regard.

### Language

“Language is a set of social practices – constructed, contingent and contested” (Stroud 2001:348). It is used as a marker of socio-cultural belonging, particularly within minority language communities; as such, denying another person’s language is the highest form of colonisation (colonial in this context is not defined simply as ‘foreign’ or ‘alien’, but more broadly as anything that is ‘imposed’ and ‘dominating’) (Dei 2006:3), because one is denied what is essential to one’s cultural growth. The learners in this study commented on language as a source of frustration while within the school premises, as illustrated by these comments:

Take for example the Shona students, these students never get to speak their language, most students would laugh at them and tell them to stop speaking their language. (M1)

I speak Shona at home and everywhere I am with other Shonas. In school, students always shout [at] me that I am Moshona I must go back to Zimbabwe; I do not belong in Botswana. (S1)

As such, the learners from other tribes, especially Bakalaka and Mashona, are forced to speak Setswana, despite being among those from their tribe:

Also these Tswanas make it uncomfortable for the Shonas to speak our language. (S3)

Kana they speak like maZim, so, ‘tota’ they are not Batswana, they should speak Setswana and stop gossiping about us here. If they want that language of theirs they should start their own school. (M2)

Although we established during the art project that one’s mother tongue is very important “in the process of learning and for psychological, spiritual, mental cognitive development of the self” (Dei 2008:16), Learner M2 insisted that everyone must speak Setswana, including foreigners, despite the presence of other local languages. In contrast, Learner N1 appeared to celebrate the linguistic diversity of Botswana, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Learner N1. Mosaic of different languages and cultures within the school. Beadwork on paper, 2014, 148 x 210. Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.

Education, in such an instance, becomes a key site for conferring

legitimacy on specific practices of language and for distributing control over linguistic and non-linguistic resources. This finding echoes Freire's (1970) notion that, in such instances, education is used by dominant groups to validate their own privileges while certifying the inferiority of learners marginalised by social factors.

During the conversations, as the learners worked on their art projects, they assigned social values to different cultures, particularly the Bazezuru; those who spoke Shona were perceived as hard workers, yet inferior, unintelligent and uncivilised for being different:

Kana maZimbabwe are ugly and black, but they are such hard workers. If you need anything done well 'makwerekwere' will do it well. (M2)

In this, we realised that language and culture were issues for most of the learners as we discussed their views on citizenship and globalisation. Such structural inequalities have serious consequences and have been linked to learners' low self-esteem. As Wane (2008:100) states, "language is a powerful tool for colonising peoples' minds". A foreign language indicates a foreign culture, and using a foreign language as a medium of education makes a child foreign within his/her own culture and environment. In this context, language loss has much to do with issues of power and prejudice and for this reason, language loss implies loss of ethno-cultural identity as well.

The conversations that were held during the art-making process projected the learners' inner understanding of the outside world onto the social world. The mosaics and collages (Figures 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6) became a way of disrupting and opening up spaces for discussing issues that affect learners in school. As the visual artworks were created by selecting and rearranging images or beads on a new surface, this process became a way to provide a safe space and structured resource for those who could not draw, paint or speak out on issues.



Figure 2. Learner M1. Mosaic of different languages and cultures within the school. Beads on paper, 2014, 210 x 297.  
Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.

The projects provided an opportunity to encourage the participants to reach beyond the safe boundaries of the familiar to hear and see the experiences of others, as most of the conversations were sparked by learners' projects. As they moved around to see their classmates work, they discussed the meaning of their work and why they made such works. The learners engaged openly in critical discussions about discrimination on a collective platform. They talked about experiences with less fear

or vulnerability and shared their thoughts as they worked on their project. The project created opportunities for the learners to examine topics of culture, diversity and social justice in a traditional

classroom and within the local context of their community. The results reveal that the school is ethnically more diverse than common knowledge suggests and that it is important for the school to take this reality into account.

Learner M1 made the mosaic piece in Figure 2 and described what the different colours stood for; this opened up a discussion on what languages people must speak and why. Language issues were tied to culture and heritage, and these were discussed in the process of producing artworks. In this way, learners addressed issues of language, race, citizenship and belonging as artists. Because learners cannot be sensitised to the existence of people who are not like them by merely being told to like others, silencing of these languages aids the denial of minority tribes within spaces of learning. Therefore, it was found that teachers should attempt to even the playing field so that the languages and cultures of individual learners are perceived as equally valued and powerful.



Figure 3. Learner S3. Lino print of interpretation of the stigmatisation suffered by the minority learners of a specific tribe. Lino block print on paper, 2014, 210 x 297. Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.

Through art, this study attempted to open up a safe space to identify and discuss the common patterns of talk and argumentation used by majority group members to construct various minority groups negatively. This research was an invitation for the learners to share their model of the world in a safe space through art as a medium and language of communication. It can be argued that the visual arts are culturally appropriate because they are universal – inherent to every culture in the world.

Despite this, one cannot say with certainty whether the learners' attitudes changed or not, because attitudes are hard to change quickly. However, there was a slight change in the way the learners in the minority looked at themselves. Writing from the perspective of critical theory and critical pedagogy, Freire (1970:60) described the nature of social justice education as "a process of humanisation whereby authentic liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it". As Learner S3 said:

I learnt how to accept myself and overcome situations like this. I turned from being a lonely, quiet person to being a talkative person. My classmates realised that I was now standing up for myself. I then gained control of my life and started accepting who I am because there was nothing I could change now, as I am who I am. When the girls always said 'I don't like these Zezurus, makwerekwere' I only told them that they should start living in the twenty-first century and back off our lives by minding their own business. One day I would ask if they are really willing to reach Vision 2016 and do what the pillars require them to have; if they are still discriminating by now. Nowadays I am free to do whatever I want without them saying what they want. I have now gained the freedom even though there are still some Tswanas who are still living in the twentieth century.

Her art work tackled stigmas and stereotypes and challenged how Mashona are viewed (see Figure 3). The art process assisted these learners to engage in self-reflection on their own biases and to develop respect for difference and a willingness to approach schooling from a multicultural perspective. Such a process can be a powerful tool to enhance their ability to embrace and affirm diversity. Learner S3 decided to stand up for her rights and not believe what other learners said about her when she had to discuss her artwork and what it meant to her. In this way, the act of education worked as a practice for investigating and deconstructing the world, with the aim of rebuilding it in such a way that all people can have equal access to their full human potential. The conception of education as offered by Freire can help to understand the world we live in and can make people better prepared to transform it.

It was perhaps inevitable that overtly racist beliefs would arise at some point during classroom interactions. Challenging stereotypical statements and prejudiced or racist ideology can dispel misperceptions as well as allow minority learners to feel respected and valued. Efforts to establish an atmosphere in which every learner feels comfortable to voice his/her opinion is an important prerequisite for discussing stereotypical beliefs and racist ideology (Schoem, Frankel, Zuniga & Lewis 1993). Given the existence of negative and culturally shared stereotypes about intellectual ability, educators must work to minimise conditions that lead to stereotyping. Some of the participants felt that the teachers made the situation worse, especially when they endorsed some of these words or name-calling towards minority learners. Understanding differences in culture and language and how these affect children's learning can help teachers understand or establish effective strategies to improve learners' social and academic achievement. Therefore, combating stereotypes and stigmas requires the empowerment of learners and teachers to contribute to constructing a school environment that is more inclusive and accepting.

However, the inflexibility of conventional education structures to accommodate alternative learner experiences does little to improve overall outcomes in the school. This system potentially threatens the cultural identities of minority learners. Too often, in school, attention is paid to shades of skin colour. The idea that foreigners, Bazezuru and Bakalaka, are 'too dark' or 'too black' is part of the collective Botswanan fantastic imagination. So is the idea that they 'dress funny' or are 'very bright' or 'ugly' (Figure 3). As mentioned by the participants, some learners endure constant labelling or stigma due to their physical appearance and teachers do not make it any easier. It is therefore the function of art to disturb, in the productive sense, to provide a counter story to the dominant narrative, and to gnaw away at the foundations of the status quo. In this context, anti-colonial education continually meets with open resistance, such as the denial of difference that provides the context for power and domination in our society. The discourse on difference is about power, racial and social oppression as well as silences. Difference is uncertainty, the unknown, something of which to be suspicious. As such, it is easier to ignore or exclude than it is to come to know people considered as different to dispel the uncertainty, especially when deep-seated, historical prejudices exist.

### Discrimination

The second theme that emerged from the data pertained to discrimination. Two sub-themes were again identified: i) stereotyping and stigma, and ii) othering/marginalisation, and these are discussed

below. This study explored ways to open up a space to negotiate such issues as marginalisation, stereotypes and stigmas within learning spaces. It aimed at helping learners to develop understanding and acceptance of others different from them. As this paper makes clear through reference to the verbal utterances of the learners, a major part of identity formation occurs “through the institutionalisation, formal and informal of essential social functions” (Kling 2001:146). As Kling (2001:146) asserts, identity formation “serves as sites both of group affirmation and of resistance against the impress of hegemonic orders and values”. Identity construction by dominant cultural orders is a complex set of historical processes working to devalue and marginalise minorities (Wane 2006).

### *Stereotyping and stigma*

Stereotypes and stigma are central to the formation of prejudice. Goffman (1963:3) describes stigma as an “attitude that is deeply discrediting”. It is created by the initial recognition of differences based on individuals’ distinct attributed characteristics and by the subsequent devaluation of those individuals. Once stigmatised, the individual is often treated as ‘less human’ and may be subjected to various levels of discrimination. Stigma is a social construct determined by the broader cultural context involving stereotypes. As noted by Learner S3:

Other children who are Kalangas and Zimbabwean are really not comfortable because they do not come from Taung. They are really exposed to discrimination most of the times because of their skin colour. They feel uncomfortable when students accuse foreigners of being the ones stealing from them.

Learner M2 could not hide his sentiments about Zimbabweans and how they are perceived in Botswana alongside the Bazeduru people:

Madame I’m sorry to say this, I’m just saying what is said; they say maZimbabwe smell. If they pass next to you, you can smell them, they have their own smell most of them ... not you, Madam, you are not one of them. It doesn’t suit you.

Mainstream education has distinct ways of arranging, utilising and transmitting knowledge, generally based within the framework of a dominant culture. In mainstream education settings, learners are expected to “abandon their style of speech and learning and conform to the ‘correct’ language and culture” (Vang 2006:24). Learners explained as follows:

The Zimbabwean students sometimes feel uncomfortable about some topics in certain subjects. For example, in social studies there is a topic about population growth and in one of the subtopics it talks about how foreigners can be blamed for certain activities such as crime. These issues make these children uncomfortable, as the students in their class may defend these Zimbabweans while the others would say that these foreigners would commit these criminal activities. This makes the child uncomfortable and he/she may request to be excused from the lesson. (M1)

At home, I always sat down and wondered why I was brought in the world as a Moshona person. I always asked myself where I had gone wrong for me to be a Shona. (S3)

For most learners, it was what their fellow learners said that made them uncomfortable, but Learner K1 explained as follows:

Many teachers of this school they never talk to me nicely like a person who has feelings. Since I came to school here I told my mother but she never listened to me and now someone is making me suffer in this school, even my friends had made me suffer.

### *Otherring/Marginalisation*

According to Christodoulou (2010:598), “Marginalisation is a process of becoming or being made marginal to centers of power, social standings, or dominant discourses”. Examples of the learners’ thoughts on this matter include the following:

Since Form 1 I haven’t been so uncomfortable in this school because of some people who used to discriminate against me ... There were a few Tswana girls who always discriminated against me; who always told me how they wish this ‘Mozezuru’ wasn’t in their class. (S3)

Balete students live well in school, while the Shona, Kalanga and foreign students never settle well in school, since they are victims of discrimination. (M1)

The learners discussed a variety of issues while they were brainstorming on ideas for their art project (figures 4 and 5), including issues of difference and discrimination. They identified similarities such as food types, which they used to produce their mosaic. By linking art-making to learner experiences that are personal and meaningful, learning became a process that was active, purposeful and critical. As Learner S2 noted when they were discussing a linoleum print on paper (Figure 3), art can develop understandings by depicting experiences that are common to all, by reflecting things that make each cultural group special.



Figure 4: Learner T1. Mosaic of different food and cultures within the school. Varieties of beans and seeds on paper, 2014, 210 x 297. Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.



Figure 5: Learner F3. Mosaic of different food and cultures within the school. Samp and beans on paper, 2014, 210 x 297. Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.

Some learners noted that other learners felt left out because of their racial status. Belief that differences between skin colours are ethnically driven implies that such beliefs are essentially fixed. These essentialist beliefs lead to categorisation of people (learners, in this case) into groups based on assumptions that surface characteristics reflect deeper essential features. Racial categorisation

assigns meaning to people's external physical features placing it in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. Existing definitions of racism focus on a mix of prejudice, power, ideology, stereotypes, domination, disparities and/or unequal treatment. Berman and Paradies (2008:216) cite Miles' argument that "through racist ideology, social reality is distorted, obscured and clouded by dominant social groups who have an interest in hiding the exploitative nature of their relations with other groups".

Education can therefore be viewed as "a political act ... transforming schools towards pursuing social justice ... [and] using education to engender social change" (Johnson & Morris 2010:80). This kind of education can help learners to build capacity to become active and effective citizens. Educators fail to equip learners with the skills necessary to ask critical questions about the role of power and privilege in established systems and structures. The art project in this study created space for learners with different backgrounds to tell their stories as well as a context for other learners to hear their stories. In some cases, types of traditional dance or clothes allowed learners to acknowledge differences and similarities that need to be celebrated within different cultures (Figure 6). During the lesson, the learners shared songs unique to their culture and tried different dances too. In the process, the learners and teachers were changed, becoming more knowledgeable about the complexities and hybridity of culture, more culturally competent and sensitive, more willing to consider others' viewpoints, and more appreciative of the richness of their community.

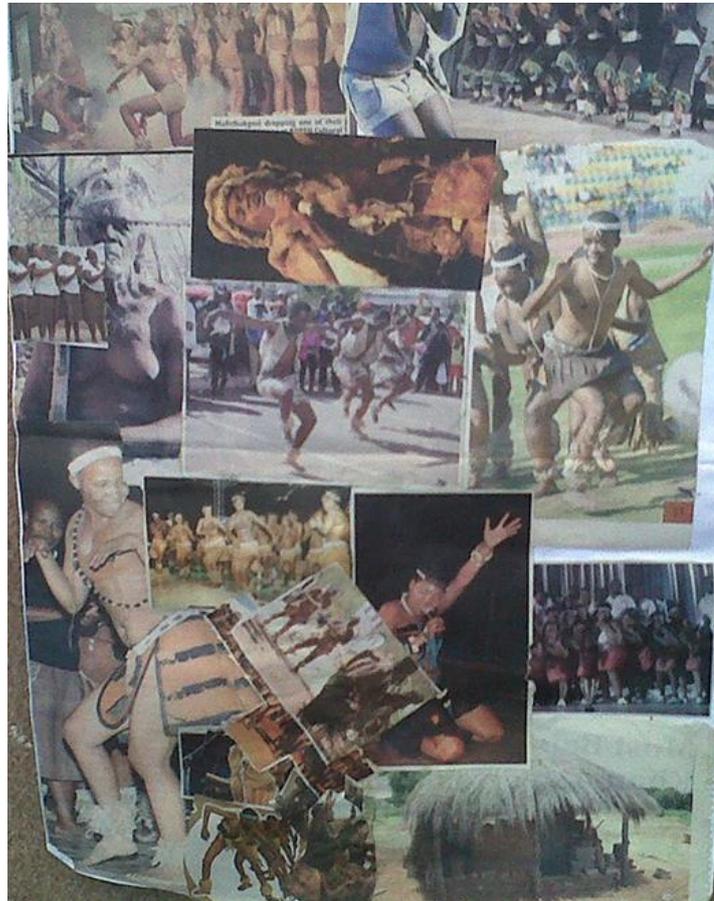


Figure 6: Learner S3. Collage of different traditional dances in Botswana on paper, 2014, 210 x 297.

Photographer: Donlisha Moahi.

In this way, education becomes self-reflexive, as learners become aware of their role as cultural interpreters and the ethical and social responsibilities accompanying that role. It assists either in facing and changing reality or in acknowledging practices ingrained in a society dealing with social, cultural and political issues.

## Conclusion

Art has tremendous potential to develop learners' intellectual competencies and offers opportunities for perceiving alternative ways to critically consider assumptions on issues of race, difference and

discrimination. Through art-making, learners can gain experiences, contexts and tools through which to learn about difference, broaden their worldview, form bridges that cross racial and ethnic lines, create a special learning space, and tap into multiple ways of learning and knowing. The study revealed that understanding differences in culture and language and how these differences affect children's learning can help teachers understand or establish effective strategies to improve the social and academic achievement of their learners.

In summary, it seems that through thoughtfully designed authentic learning experiences:

- Learners can develop the understanding, skills and beliefs needed for success in school and beyond. Art practices can be used as a platform for the negotiation and construction of meaning and to lobby for the removal of the historic inequalities and injustices created in the stratified, neocolonial society.
- Visual thinking in art education can facilitate exploration of emotional associations and can influence the way individuals feel and think about an issue. The learning experience discussed in this paper illustrates how art can be used as a tool to negotiate one's ideology and way of life.
- Learning opportunities can be afforded through participation in dialogue and meaning negotiation to bring out common themes among diverse groups.
- Learners can develop their own vision and personal voice in a visual language that allows for more creative responses. This demonstrates how the making of art can be a powerful way to engender understanding and intercultural dialogue and engage learners in critical thinking about cultural assumptions and diversity (Moahi 2015).

It is essential for educational institutions to recognise that feelings and emotions are important aspects of education. An educational system, especially the individual classroom, must provide space for learners to understand both their privileges and their oppression and to develop effective oppositional resistance to such domination. As such, teachers' understanding of learners' cultural context and the explicit teaching of classroom rules, such as respect for other cultures and people, allow learners who are culturally diverse a successful transition from home to school culture, and beyond. It encourages negotiation within education that helps shape the way learners and teachers discuss these fundamental issues in pedagogy.

Educators have a responsibility to provide opportunities for learners to experience and develop commitment to more critical understandings of diversity. Art, as an alternative way of knowing, allows learners to move out of their 'comfort zones' and learn to view the world through multiple frames of reference. Educational institutions need to overcome issues relevant to handling multicultural, diverse classes. Education, in such an instance, must become self-reflexive and should help learners become aware of their role as cultural interpreters and the ethical and social responsibilities that accompany that role. In order to prevent learners from being discriminated against due to their background, educational institutions need to develop methods through which teachers and learners open up the critical consciousness of learners – both those discriminated against and those who would discriminate.

## References

- Allan, B. 2006. Remembering, resisting: Casting an anti-colonial gaze upon the education of diverse students in social work education. In Dei, GJS. (ed.) *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: multiple readings of our world*. London: University of Toronto Press, 257–269.
- Banks, J. 2004. *Multicultural Education: issues and perspectives*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Barone, T & Eisner, EW. 2012. *Arts-based research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Basu, R. 2004. The rationalization of neoliberalism in Ontario's public education system, 1995-2000. *Geoforum* 35(5): 621-634.
- Basu, R. 2011. Multiculturalism through multilingualism in schools: Emerging places of "integration" in Toronto. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101(6): 1307-1330.
- Battiste, M. 2000. Maintaining Aboriginal identity, languages, and culture in modern society. In Battiste, E. M. (ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 192-208.
- Bennett, C. 1990. *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Berman, G & Paradies, Y. 2010. Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racist praxis. *Ethnic and racial studies*: 1-19.
- Christodoulou, N. 2010. In Kridel, C. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*. California: SAGE, 598-599.
- Creswell, JW. 2009. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. London: Sage.
- Dei, GJS. 2006. Introduction: mapping the terrain – towards a new politics of resistance. In Dei, G. J. S. & Kempf, A. (eds.) *Anti-colonialism and education: the politics of resistance*. Rotterdam: Sense, 1-24.
- Dei, GJS. 2008. African development: the relevance and implications of 'indigenesness'. In Dei, GJS. (ed.) *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: multiple readings of our world*. London: University of Toronto Press, 70-86.
- Dei, GJS & Asgharzadeh, A. 2001. The power of social theory: the anti-colonial discursive framework. *Journal of educational thought* 35(3): 297-323.
- Dei, GJS & Kempf, A. (eds.) 2006. *Anti-colonialism and education: the politics of resistance*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Dewhurst, M. 2011. Where is the action? Three lenses to analyze social justice art education. *Equity & excellence in education* 44(3): 364-378.

- Eidoo, S, Ingram, LA, MacDonald, A, Nabavi, M, Pashby, K & Stille, S. 2011. "Through the kaleidoscope": Intersections between theoretical perspectives and classroom implications in critical global citizenship education. *Canadian Journal of Education* 34(4): 59-85.
- Fraser, N. 2008. Reframing justice in a globalising world. In Olson, K (ed.) *Adding insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser debates her critics*. London: Verso, 273-294
- Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Goffman, E. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Graham, MA. 2009. The power of art in multicultural education. *The International Stories Project, Multicultural Perspectives* 11(3): 155-161.
- Greene, M. 1995. *Releasing the Imagination*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, L & Morris, P. 2010. Towards a framework for critical citizenship education. *The Curriculum Journal* 21(1): 77-96.
- Keddie, A. 2012. Schooling and social justice through the lenses of Nancy Fraser. *Critical Studies in Education* 53(3): 263-27.
- Kempf, A. 2006. Anti-colonial historiography: Interrogating colonial education. In Dei, GJS & Kempf, A. (eds.) *Anti-colonialism and education: the politics of resistance*. Rotterdam: Sense, 129-158.
- Kling, J. 2001. Songs in a strange land: dual consciousness and the narrative of African American identity in the United States. In Cornwell, GH. *Global multiculturalism. Comparative perspectives on ethnicity, race and nation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield: 143-168.
- Knight, WB. 2006. Using contemporary art to challenge cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions. *Art Education* 59(4): 39-45.
- Kridel, C. 2010. *Encyclopaedia of Curriculum Studies*. California: SAGE.
- Loury, GC. 2003. Racial stigma: Toward a new paradigm for discrimination theory. *The American Economic Review* 93(2): 334-337.
- Moahi, D. 2015. When art informs: a case study to negotiate social stereotypes and stigmas through Art at Taung Junior Secondary School. Master in Visual Arts (Art Education). Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University. Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Moore, JR. 2006. Shattering stereotypes: a lesson plan for improving student attitudes and behaviour toward minority groups. *The Social Studies*, January/February: 35-39.
- Nyamnjoh, FB. 2002. Local attitudes towards citizenship and foreigners in Botswana: an appraisal of recent press stories. *Journal of Southern African studies* 28(4): 755-775.
- Schoem, D, Frankel, L, Zuniga, X & Lewis, EA. (eds.) 1993. *Multicultural teaching in the university*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Stroud, C. 2001. African mother-tongue programmes and the politics of language. *Journal of multilingual and multicultural development* 22(4): 339-355.
- Vang, C. 2006. Minority parents should know more about school culture and its impact on their children's education. *Multicultural Education* 14(1): 20-26.
- Waghid, Y. 2009. Patriotism and democratic citizenship education in South Africa: On the (im) possibility of reconciliation and nation building. In Haynes, B. (ed.) *Patriotism and citizenship Education*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 21-30.
- Wane, NN. 2006. Is decolonization possible? In Dei, GJS & Kempf, A. (eds.) *Anti-colonialism and education: the politics of resistance*. Rotterdam: Sense, 87-106.
- Wane, NN. 2008. Indigenous knowledge: lessons from the elders – a Kenyan case study. In Dei, GJS. (ed.) *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: multiple readings of our World*. London: University of Toronto Press, 54-69.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>