**When art informs: Challenging stereotypes in a world of differences**

**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 within a context that has 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”. As such, aside from the educational mandate of schools, they are places where neighbourhood integration is exercised and civil society is fostered, and where social and cultural differences are explored, negotiated and compromised in multiple ways (Basu 2004). 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 negotiations. 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 the very macro level and on an immediate and daily basis.

To free learners from being discriminated against due to their background, there is a need to illuminate how art processes can facilitate an open, safe space where, through dialogue, stereotypes and stigmas can be negotiated to provide 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 as justification for all forms of socio-economic and political inequality among groups. According to Moore (2006:36), stereotypes,

the tendency to categorize individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardized image and attribute certain characteristics to all members of the group – are central to the formation of bias and the pervasive acts of violence, segregation, and discrimination directed against minority groups

Schools seem to contribute to inequality in that they are tacitly organised to differentially distribute specific kinds of knowledge. From this perspective, ways of knowing are limited and constrained by the dominant culture and the primary educational ways maintain and become a way through which social inequality is reproduced. As countries become increasingly multicultural, it can be argued that the authentic teaching and learning of multicultural education in educational settings are essential to avoid the creation of a negative image of the ‘other’ and an ever-strengthened fear of the ‘other’. As far as can be ascertained, not many studies have explored ways on how to open up learning spaces through art to negotiate social issues such as stereotypes, stigma and labelling in the classroom.

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. Visual art as a learning platform was explored in the study on which this article reports to negotiate social and cultural meanings and inform understandings of self. The study sought to explore ways to encourage learners to connect meaningfully to unfamiliar topics and visual thinking strategies for expressing understandings of complex issues such as stereotypes, culture and citizenship through art making.

# **Methodology**

The study explored 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 the research. This approach allows for valuing the interpretation of the human response, gaining detailed information about the complex phenomenon of how learners negotiate social stereotypes and identifying themes and theoretical structures that describe this process (Wilson 2011). An interpretive analysis was used to gain insight into how learners made sense of their experiences and the significance of art as a platform to discuss stigmas and stereotypes in class and at school.

## **Sample selection**

This study involved an intimate relationship between the researcher and what was studied, focusing on signs of cross-cultural contact that hold the potential to explore issues of cultural hybridisation. The interaction of the unit of study within its context became a significant part of the investigation. The case was used to explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten those situations in which the intervention being evaluated had no clear single set of outcomes (see Table 1 for actives during the data-collection process).

A purposeful sample of 12 Form 1 and 3 (Grade 8 and 10) junior secondary school art students in Botswana’s South East District was used in this study (see Table 1). Their age group ranged between 13 and 16 years old. The learners were selected by consulting identified ethnic groups represented in the school and were from a varied social and economic background. The sample consisted of one representative from the Batlokwa tribe, one from the Bangwatho tribe, two from the Balete tribe, three foreign learners from Zimbabwe, four Bazezuru and one from the Bakalaka tribe. The study ran from February 2014 to October 2014.

**Table 1: Data-collection techniques, participants and timeframe**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Technique** | **Participants** | **Timeframe** |
| 1 | Written reflections | Form 3 and Form 1 learners:  20 Batswana  3 foreign | February 2014  Onset of research |
| 2 | Semi-structured interviews | 9 Batswana (Form 3)  3 foreign (Form 1 and Form 3) | February–March 2014  Before introducing the projects |
| 3 | Craft project | Form 1 and Form 3 learners:  9 Batswana  3 foreign | April–June 2014 |
| 4 | Written reflections | Form 3 and Form 1 learners:  9 Batswana  3 foreign | August–October 2014  End of research |

As seen in Table 1, the various methods used included written reflections before and after the art project and semi-structured interviews. These are further discussed below.

## **Written reflections**

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

## **Semi-structured interviews**

The 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 interview 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. I started each interview with the following phenomenological question: “Can you tell me about your experience at school?” Interviews lasted between 10 and 20 minutes and were digitally recorded.

## **Craft project**

Arts-based approaches to research have recently been introduced into the qualitative paradigm of research to elicit private and personal data from participants in an alternative, unobtrusive way through artistic creations, which would otherwise not have been obtainable 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. Upon completing the project, the learners discussed the project. The main purpose was to explore the participants’ experiences and subjective views of each topic.

**Data analysis**

From the reflections written by the participants and the transcribed recordings made during the interviews, I searched for emerging themes across all the participants’ responses. By processing and organising the data into themes identified from the interviews, the data were reduced to fewer categories through the process of coding. Coding is the process of “organising the material into chunks or segments of text in order to develop a general meaning of each segment” (Creswell 2009:227). In this study, data were coded using open coding to identify and develop categories. These may then become a topic for further analysis. The combination of data collected through the interviews, artworks and especially the reflections was useful. This form of research makes it possible to deal with the many complexities, such as the social, cultural and political imbalances within spaces of learning, which exist within a study.

## **Ethical clearance**

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

## **Validity and trustworthiness**

All reflections were scrutinised for themes and the recordings of interviews were transcribed by me to ensure that the data were a true representation of what was written and said, respectively. The interviews were played and listened to repetitively to ensure that what was said was heard correctly and understood completely. The reflections were read repeatedly to ensure that there were no misinterpretation of data. It is important to note, however, that it is difficult to remain objective with regard to the data-analysis process. The analysis does not only reflect the participants’ original words and thoughts, but also my interpretation of the data. The validity of the research was also ensured through the utilisation of learners from varying backgrounds. Efforts were made to view what was being said from the participants’ point of view during the analysis.

**Theoretical framework**

Multicultural education was the overarching theoretical framework explored in reference to the role of art education in a multicultural curriculum. Aspects of post-colonial theory, colonialism and anti-colonialism were also employed here with education for social justice elaborated to further understand the study.

**Multicultural education theory and art**

Multiculturalism in society is taking on new dimensions of complexities and practicalities as demographics, social conditions and political circumstances change. Increasing diversity in classrooms imply the need for teachers to be prepared to work effectively with learners from different backgrounds, such as cultural, linguistic or national origin. Nyati-Saleshando (2011:567) asserts that it is “founded on the belief that a school curriculum which promotes the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity is most likely to result in high academic achievement and quality education”. Proponents of multicultural education (such as Banks 2004; Bennett 1990) explicitly state that the inclusion of multicultural education in the curriculum of schools creates an atmosphere where racial attitudes and academic achievement are improved. It respects cultural differences and affirms pluralism that learners, their communities and teachers bring to the learning process.

Art has the potential to develop the intercultural competence and experience of learners, and their assumptions, values and beliefs can be revealed clearly. It is an influential medium to press the claims and consolidate a lexicon of national symbols instructing 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.

**Colonialism, post-colonialism and anti-colonialism**

This study used the postcolonial lens to highlight that mainstream postcolonial societies still ignore, marginalise and suppress other knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Colonialism has been from the very beginning a contest over the mind and the intellect (Dei 2006; Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001).Under the colonial influence, the biological and intellectual heritage of non-Western societies was devalued(Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001). According to Dei (2006), Kempf (2006), Allan (2006) and Wane (2006), colonisation did not seize only land, but the minds of the colonised as well. Given that the colonial project was not a charity undertaking, the use of foreign languages, especially English, in neo-colonial societies, has become 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 schools (Wane 2006). As Kempf 2006:132 asserts, “the uni-focal history of dominant/colonial education serves to amputate marginalized people from their past and consequently from their present”. As a result of failure to teach and value, accurate and 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 erodes modern learners’ abilities to value their own culture for many people 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.

In post-colonial African states, tensions among ethnic groups about purity, belonging and entitlements have been ongoing. The post-colonial ideas largely focus on the interconnections between colonial cultures, the colonised cultural practices and the constructions of hybridity and alterity. It demonstrates the shift of anti-colonial thought from the focus on agency and nationalist practice towards a discursive analysis and approach that directs our attention to the intersection between “Western knowledge production and the ‘other’ and Western colonial power” (Shahjahn 2003, cited in Dei 2006:13). Anti-colonialism is about the colonial struggle to resist the neo-colonial governing procedures that reside within everyday lived experiences. It calls for a 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(Allen 2006). The line between an anti-colonial and a postcolonial frame of reference as defined above perhaps becomes slightly blurred in that while working towards liberation, one is involved in discursive negotiation between the authoritative and the other voices present in current society. The school, particularly the classroom, can provide the space for each learner to understand both privileges and oppression.

## **Education for social justice theory**

The research focused on foundations of social justice as a way to find effective ways to challenge oppressive systems and promote social justice through education. The study examined the ever-changing aspects in which “common sense knowledge and assumptions make it difficult to see oppression clearly” (Bell 2007:1). This critical pedagogy describes the body of literature that aims to provide a means by which the oppressed may begin to reflect more upon their social circumstances and take action to improve the status quo. The roots of critical pedagogy lie in the critical theories of the Frankfurt School and it is most directly associated with the teachings of Paulo Freire (1970). Freire’s pedagogy was directed to breaking the cycle of psychological oppression by engaging learners in confronting their own lives; to engage in a dialogue with their own fears as the representation within themselves of the power of the oppressor. Social issues hinder the active participation of learners as citizens in politics and civic life. Because the concept of a community is a flexible one that allows for a range of meanings, critical and meaningful discussions among learners increase the ability to recognise and view issues of social formation or concern from multiple perspectives, as community is a learned understanding. The challenge for a critical educator is to introduce new literacies in a manner that empowers individuals (learners, teachers) and that simultaneously creates platforms for the critique of existing power and knowledge structures. Advocacy for such initiatives comes internationally from critical theorists such as Henry Giroux (1992, cited in Narayanan 2006:373), who has urged educators to take up roles as “critically engaged public intellectuals”.

**Findings**

Findings from this show not only that all societies are different, but also that they vary considerably in the ways these differences play out. 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.

**Difference**

The discourse on difference is about power, racial and social oppression as well as the 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 them, to dispel the uncertainty, especially when deep-seated, historical prejudices exist. Difference was identified as the first theme, with sub-themes race, ethnicity and nationality, and language, which are discussed below.

**Race, ethnicity and nationality**

The study revealed that most learners experienced exclusion. In the school, racism is not about black versus white, but a social system involving ethno-racial categories and some form of hierarchy that produces disparities in life changes between different tribes as a result of their skin complexion. Examples of study 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’*”. The growing intolerance and ignorance of cultural differences, coupled with increases in racism and xenophobia, have created climates of desolation and antagonism among the learners. In such context, increasing prejudice constructs a 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’, 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.*

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). The point is that 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, 2002, cited in Waghid 2009:22).

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 cognitively manageable numbers of subgroups. Loury (2003) further contends that race is why people take note of and assign significance to the skin colour, hair texture and bone structure of human beings. The research showed that the school needs to recognise the power of other tribes and foreigners as not just passive recipients, but as active agents of school community building and that language played an important role in their spaces of learning.

**Language**

Language is a set of social practices constructed, contingent and contested. It is used as a marker of socio-cultural belonging in minority language communities; as such, embracing 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 in our class discussion during the art projects 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. Education, in this 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 echoed Freire’s theory that in such instances, education is used by the dominant groups to validate their own privileges while certifying the inferiority of learners marginalised by social factors.

During the conversations, the learners assigned social values to different cultures, for example Bazezuru; especially 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 I 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 the use of 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 a great deal 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 via their use of language onto the social world. 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 where sparked by the projects on which the learners were working. 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 issues on a collective platform. They talked about experiences with less fear or vulnerability and shared their thoughts as they worked on their project. The projects 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 wisdom suggests and that it is important for the school to take this reality into account. The artwork in Figure 1 represents the cultures and languages within the school that are not considered as important.



Figure 1: Learner M1. Mosaic of different languages and cultures within the school

The mosaic piece shown in Figure 1 opened up a discussion on what languages people must speak and why. The learners addressed the issues of language, race, citizenship and belonging as the artist, Learner M1, described what the different colours stood for. Language issues where tied with culture and heritage, and these were discussed in the process of producing artworks. Because learners cannot be sensitised to the existence of people who are not like them by merely being told to like others, the silencing of these languages aids the denial of minority tribes within the spaces of learning. Therefore, teachers should attempt to even the playing field so that the languages and cultures of individual learners are perceived as equally valued and powerful.

Through art, this study tried to open up a safe space in which common patterns of talk and argumentative strategies used by majority group members to construct various minority groups negatively were identified and discussed. 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 arts are culturally appropriate because they are universal, inherent to every culture in the world.

Although the discussion happened, I cannot with certainty say whether the attitudes of the learners changed or not, because attitudes are hard to change overnight. 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 humanization 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 21st 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 20th century.*

Her work tackled stigmas and stereotypes that challenge how Mashona are viewed (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Learner S3. Lino printing of a learner’s interpretation of the stigmatisation suffered by the minority learners of a specific tribe

The art process assisted the learners to engage in self-reflections about their own biases, and to develop respect for the differences and the willingness to approach schooling from a multicultural perspective. This process can be a powerful tool to enhance their ability to embrace and affirm the diversity of other learners. 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 other words, the act of education worked as a practice of 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.

Overt racist beliefs are likely to arise at some point during classroom interactions. Challenging stereotypical statements and prejudiced or racist ideology will 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 the conditions leading to stereotype threat. Some of the participants felt that the teachers made the situation worse, especially when they endorsed some of these words or name calling towards the minority learners. Understanding the differences in culture and language and how these differences affect children’s learning could help teachers understand or establish effective strategies to improve the social and academic achievement of their learners. Therefore, combating stereotypes and stigmas requires the empowerment of learners and teachers to contribute to constructing a school environment that is culturally more inclusive and socially accepting.

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. Attention is also paid to shades of skin colour. The idea that foreigners, Bazezuru and Bakalaka, are ‘too dark’ or ‘too black’ is part of the collective Botswana fantastic imagination. So is the idea that they ‘dress funny’ or are ‘very bright’ or ‘ugly’ (Figure 2). Learners such as N1, as mentioned by the participants, endure the constant labelling or stigma due to their physical appearance and the teachers do not make it any easier for them. It is therefore the function of art to disturb, in the productive sense, to provide a counter story to the dominant story, to gnaw away at the foundations of the status quo. In this context I am aware that 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.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination was identified as the second theme and the sub-themes stereotyping and stigma, and othering/marginalisation are now discussed. Identity construction by dominant cultural orders is a complex set of historical processes which works to devalue and marginalise the minorities. This study explored ways to open up a space to negotiate such orders as marginalisation, stereotypes and stigmas within the spaces of learning art. It aimed at helping the learners to develop an understanding and acceptance of others who are different from them. Through the verbal utterances from the learners, the study highlighted that a major part of identity formation occurs through the institutionalisation, formal and informal, of essential functions. As Kling (2001:146) asserts, “this serves as sites both of group affirmation and of resistance against the impress of hegemonic orders and values”.

**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 upon 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 Bazezuru 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 to learners, 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. (K1)*

**Othering/Marginalisation**

Art in this case 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. Marginalisation is a process of becoming or being made marginal to centres of power, social standings or dominant discourses (Kridel 2010:557). 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 of their art project. The themes of difference and discrimination were discussed. 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 block print on paper (Figure 2), art can develop understandings by depicting experiences that are common to all, by reflecting things that make each cultural group special. As noted by the learners, they felt left out as a result of their racial status. The belief that differences between skin colours are ethnically driven implies that such inconsistency is essentially fixed. These essentialist beliefs lead to the categorisation of people (learners, in this case) into groups based on assumptions that surface characteristics reflect deeper essential features. Existing definitions of racism focus on a mix of prejudice, power, ideology, stereotypes, domination, disparities and/or unequal treatment. Learners physically fight because of careless and derogatory remarks that are made towards one another because there is a lack of understanding that they are citizens of multiple communities: local, national and global.

Education can therefore be viewed as “a political act … transforming schools towards pursuing social justice … [and] using education to engender social change” (Johnson 2010:80). This kind of education can help learners to build their 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 project generated space for learners with different backgrounds to tell their stories and a context for other learners to hear their stories. In the process, both the learners and I were changed, becoming more knowledgeable about the complexities of culture and hybrid culture, more culturally competent and sensitive, more willing to consider another person’s viewpoint, and more appreciative of the richness of their community.

Education in this instance 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 acknowledging practices ingrained in a society dealing with social, cultural and political issues.

**Conclusion**

Through art-making processes 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 and almost sacred learning space, and tap into multiple ways of learning and knowing. The study revealed that understanding the 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 therefore become a platform for the negotiation and construction of meaning and lobby for removing the historic inequalities and injustices created by a stratified society.
* Visual thinking in art education can facilitate the exploration of emotional associations and can influence the way individuals feel and think about an issue. This learning experience 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 from the diverse groups.
* Learners can develop their own vision and personal voice in a visual language that allows for enormous departure and creative responses. This demonstrates how the making of art could be a powerful way to engender understanding and intercultural dialogue and engage learners in critical thinking about cultural assumptions and diversity.

It is essential for schools to recognise that feelings, emotions and morals are important aspects of education. I share a philosophy that a school system, especially the classroom, must provide the space for each learner to understand both his/her privileges and oppression and to develop effective oppositional resistance to domination. As such, teachers’ understanding of the cultural context of children’s behaviour 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. It encourages a negotiation within education that helps shape the way learners and teachers discuss some of the fundamental issues in pedagogy.

It is our responsibility to provide ample opportunities for learners to experience and develop commitment to more critical understandings of diversity. Art as another way of knowing allowed the learners to move out of their comfort zone and learn to view the world through multiple frames of reference. Training institutions need to address educational issues relevant to handle multicultural diverse classes. Education in this instance becomes self-reflexive as learners become aware of their role as cultural interpreters and the ethical and social responsibilities accompanying that role. In order to free learners from being discriminated against due to their background, schools need to develop methods through which teachers and learners open up the critical consciousness of the affected learners – both those discriminated against and those discriminating.

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