CHAPTER 3

Reflecting on critical citizenship in critical times

Elmarie Costandius

The context

After the first democratic elections in South Africa 22 years ago, people were in general optimistic and could imagine a better future for all. This hope slowly faded over time for many young people. Only 15% of undergraduate students and 21% of master's students in South Africa at higher education institutions complete their studies (Mtshali 2013). According to Ramphele (in John, 2013), students are accepted into universities, but the adjustment and demands of higher education are unattainable for most students because of differences in primary and secondary school educational standards. This is one of the most fundamental issues with which higher education in South Africa is dealing. The year 2015 was a time of turmoil with the student uprisings at universities in South Africa. The previous time that so many learners protested was 1976 in Soweto to demand accessible education. With the FeesMustFall protest, the students were successful with their demand of a 0% increase in university fees. The issues with which students are struggling are complex and do not only involve financial struggles but an insufficient school system. The protests continued and students also demanded decolonisation and transformation of higher education institutions. Some of the critique is aimed at how education is presented: in a Eurocentric manner that marginalises the African voice, with students often being taught in their second and third language. It is a complex situation that touches on various aspects that also have roots in the colonial and apartheid past. We are all entangled in our problems in South Africa. Braidotti (2013:122, 150), however, argues that this is not a time for nostalgia, but a time for finding sustainable alternatives and for extending "social horizons of hope".

The critical citizenship module

I introduced a critical citizenship module into my undergraduate course in 2010 and in 2012 developed a Master's in Art Education that focuses on critical citizenship and art education. I started to read about multicultural education, indigenous knowledge and *ubuntu*. After I read the article 'Drawing on indigenous knowledge: Students' learning in and from a rural community' by Bitzer and Menkveld (2004), I decided to approach Eli Bitzer as a supervisor for my Ph.D., investigating the Critical Citizenship module that I had introduced. This was the start of a collaborative learning journey that made a lasting impression on me. The aim of the Critical Citizenship module is to change personal and internal perceptions and attitudes to enhance social transformation. I came to the conclusion that deep and direct learning is necessary to shift perceptions and attitudes. The Critical Citizenship module consists of strategies, readings, conversations with community members outside the university environment, structured reflections and the use of the content of conversations as inspiration for artistic layouts. The community interactions aim to reverse the power hierarchy of the knowledgeable and needy, as stated by Biko (2004).

Gitterman (1988:33) makes a distinction between students "knowing that" and "knowing how", and also emphasises encouraging students to find the fleeting connections between the abstract and the real world. The value of the process of self-reflection is described extensively in educational research, but the relationship between a person's conscious/unconscious or body/mind relationship is still being explored, especially in affective theories. Using art as a medium for learning could be valuable because it also develops the imagination. The imagination is necessary to imagine what we cannot see or experience. We could, for instance, imagine life through another person's eyes. The value of such an exercise could positively stimulate appreciation of diversity and complexity.

Critical responsible citizenship

The critical citizenship definition that I used in the module was formulated as follows: Critical citizenship is based on the promotion of a common set of shared values such as tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy. As an educational pedagogy, it encourages critical reflection on the past and the imagining of a

possible future shaped by social justice, in order to prepare people to live together in harmony in diverse societies (based on Johnson and Morris 2010). One can argue that the terms 'tolerance', 'diversity', 'human rights' and 'social justice' are concepts that we understand, but one can also ask whether we are practising them. Tolerance refers to a fair and objective attitude towards those who differ from oneself. Diversity means respect for and appreciation of differences. Human rights aim for people to be equally entitled to their rights without discrimination and exclusion, and promote the idea that all people should be openly accommodated without restrictions. The importance of relating theory to practice is one of the main stumbling blocks in facilitating critical citizenship education. Waghid argues that the concept of 'responsible citizenship education' can be considered as an extension of critical citizenship education to encourage theory made into practice. Waghid (2015:128) further argues that "[r]esponsible citizenship education encourages students to take risks to do the improbable and to critique the taken-for-granted and to counteract societal injustices".

Social justice

One can also further unpack social justice pedagogies. It could refer to promoting a just society by challenging injustice. The three-dimensional approach to social justice of Nancy Fraser (2001) is used as a guideline. She refers to the importance of redistribution firstly in an economic sense and secondly in a cultural sense that reflects the ways in which students' attributes and beliefs are respected or disrespected, recognised or misrecognised by the lecturer and institution in terms of the particular dominant culture. Fraser (2007:259) uses the phrase "no redistribution or recognition without representation". The third aspect is the political sense, where the extent of representation and voice is made possible to be able to have access and opportunity to influence university processes and decision making, such as the Students' Representative Council student body. Teaching for social justice begins with the idea that every human being is of equal value, entitled to decent standards of justice, and that violation of the standards must be acknowledged and fought against (Ayers 2004).

Ubuntu and critical citizenship

In a recent study with a colleague from Nigeria we investigated how students reacted to critical citizenship education at Benin University, Dar es Salaam University and Stellenbosch University. Our results showed that some students felt that critical citizenship relates to the concepts of *omoluabi* among the Yoruba in Nigeria and *umuntu* in Tanzania. They felt that critical citizenship is a Eurocentric concept and that they would better relate to a concept such as *omoluabi* or *umuntu*. This leaves us with a question of how to interlink *omoluabi/umuntu/ubuntu* and critical citizenship to accommodate various cultural and racial groups in one educational curriculum. The inclusion of African educational practices could be considered as a way of decolonising the curriculum.

Decolonising the curriculum

Subreenduth (2012) elaborates on the importance of student-centred learning to link theory and practice. She argues that some students have theories with which they can associate or that speak to their own culture, while others do not have that privilege. Creary (2012:2) argues that "[d]ecolonizing the mind is thus the dual task of first, placing African discourses at the centre of scholarship on Africa; and second, of dislocating African humanity from this human-inhuman binary". Apart from decolonising the curriculum, decolonising the mind is also stressed by Biko and Fanon in terms of recognising the dignity of others but also the dignity of oneself. Biko (n.d.) argues that "whites must be made to realise that they are only human, not superior. Same with blacks. They must be made to realise that they are also human, not inferior". Freire (1975), who also drew on Fanon, warned against false decolonisation in which a native elite simply replaces the settler elite as the oppressive rulers of the still exploited masses. In the article "Decolonization is not a metaphor" by Tuck and Yang (2012:21), the authors state that they do not want to discourage people to reflect on settler colonialism and racism, but maintain that this pursuit of critical enlightenment and social justice can be "moves to innocence – diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege". In reflecting on this statement, I realised that my own pursuit of critical citizenship education is both a need for seeing social justice being realised and a product of

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my feelings of guilt, but also a way to work through ways of giving up power and privilege. It is a complex position where one is drawn to the issues but also pulled away from them. Braidotti (n.d.) argues that we can "both acknowledge and disengage from this complex and multi-layered ecology of belonging and make a difference, a positive difference". We are "immanent to the conditions that we are very often opposed to" (Braidotti, n.d.).

The posthuman perspective

This brings me to posthumanism, which is a reaction against the Eurocentric humanist thinking that stresses the rational and clear binaries in comparison with thinking in more relational and multi-layered ways. The humanistic subjective view of what the ideal human being should represent excluded the 'other' in a dualistic way, where one can supposedly justify one more worthy than the other, and this still has an effect on how we think and act today. The posthumanist perspectives help us make sense of our flexible and multiple identities. One can ask whether gender, race and cultural differences can be understood and encouraged outside the restrictions of hierarchy and binary opposition. The strong binaries between black/white and African/Western do not allow, for instance, me to think beyond my own white Western identity, even though I have been living in Africa my whole life. These socially constructed binaries could prevent us from relating and coming to terms with our reality. Braidotti (n.d.) argues that these socially constructed oppositions are a "mechanism of capture, a mode of governance" and we struggle to imagine a more monistic existence. Monism, as inspired by Spinoza (Della Rocca 2008), promotes a vision of no fundamental divisions that sets I/other, human/non-human, body/mind, subject/object, nature/culture apart – a symbiotic interdependence (Braidotti 2013). Posthumanism brings in question the perception that the human is the superior, rational and independent source of knowing about the world, but instead the human should be considered as a product of evolution and to a great extent socially constructed.

Research and posthumanism

Humanism has structured our thoughts and because of that, our way of producing knowledge. Deleuze and Guattari (1993) use the terms 'rhizome' and 'rhizomatic'

to describe theory and research that acknowledge multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. Barad (2007:381) argues that the world and its boundaries are "enacted through agential cuts". The agential cuts the researcher makes when collecting data, which then become matter, will lead to exclusions, also matter. Snaza and Weaver (2014:9) argue that researchers could hide behind data that speak so-called objective truths. MacLure (2013:661) talks about data that 'glow' when we select concepts and themes, but in fact only 'glow' because of our subjective perspective and own interests or issues with which we are struggling ourselves. I agree that a move away from a self-centred individualism to a more interdependent perspective could produce knowledge that would be more socially relevant.

An affective perspective

Regarding the division between mind and body, Spinoza (in Della Rocca 2008) argues that even though the mind and body are autonomous, they develop in parallel, and the greater our power to be affected, the greater our power to act. Hardt (2007:x) argues that affects refer equally to the body and the mind because they involve both reason and passions. Our actions and our passions, and our reason and our emotions, are interlinked. Snaza and Weaver (2014:5) even propose embodiment as more important than consciousness and embodied learning as effective as cognitive learning. Consciousness that was associated with primarily the brain is now considered as embodied or distributed (Nayar 2013). The focus of the posthumanist perspective of embodiment and materiality is on opening up new avenues for rethinking and enhancing critical citizenship teaching and learning.

Thinking by doing laboratories

Braidotti (2013) argues for people in the humanities to create places and laboratories to experiment with new conceptual schemes and pedagogies instead of getting stuck and rehashing past concepts. Conceptualising is a creative endeavour. Hofstadter (1985) argues that making variations on a theme is the crux of creativity. When concepts enter a new domain, they start migrating and developing in unexpected ways. Hofstadter (1985:237) also talks about 'slippability', where concepts slip

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into one another, with often unpredictable results. Massumi and Manning created the SenseLab (n.d.), a place where thinking or producing theory is done through an artmaking process. Serious playing, experimenting and exploring are part of the theory-developing process where the mind, body and material interact. The process then becomes important and not the final artwork. The art process could be a way to develop new alternatives.

A concluding remark

Critical citizenship, social justice, decolonisation and posthumanism are some of the many perspectives that make up the tapestry of social theories that are constructed to enable us to decipher and understand our human, or not only human, but interdependent, existence. In relation to the critical times that we are experiencing in education in South Africa, we have to realise that we are immanent to the problems around us and we cannot escape them (Braidotti n.d.). We have to learn to live with the complexities. Braidotti (2013:150) argues against the "idealization of philosophical meta-discourse" and for a more "pragmatic task of self-transformation through humble experimentation". My journey with critical citizenship, interlinked with other theories, beings and objects, is an endless but enriching experience.

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