


Exploring shame and pedagogies of discomfort in critical citizenship education

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Background: Social transformation in South Africa is a sensitive issue because of the historical realities of segregation and past injustices.

Aim: To address transformation, Visual Communication Design students were asked to design an exhibition, event, sculpture or garden to memorialise the forced removals that took place on the site of the current Arts and Social Sciences Building of Stellenbosch University and to thereby contribute with their own 'voices' to an event or exhibition.

Setting: The focus of the project was to memorialise the forced removals that occurred on the place known then as Die Vlakte. The aim was to investigate the reactions of students and community members to explore how a visual communication project prepared them or failed to prepare them for dealing with social injustice.

Methods: A case study research design was applied, and inductive qualitative content analysis was used in processing and organising data. The theoretical framework included critical citizenship education, social justice, pedagogy of discomfort, shame and white shame.

Results: Critical citizenship education may form part of pedagogies of discomfort, and shame may be used positively as we ask students to negotiate emotionally charged subjects through visual communication.

Conclusion: As the case studies have shown, students are capable of identifying sources of discomfort and growing from them to perceive a local historic event in a more sensitive and inclusive way.

Keywords: critical citizenship education; shame; pedagogies of discomfort; community engagement; group work.

Introduction and context

In South Africa, policies for higher education institutions show tremendous progress towards transformation. In 2013, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) stated that mandatory and credit-bearing anti-racism and citizenship education programmes should be developed in all public colleges and state-supported universities in the future (DHET 2014). However, despite the policies that advocate social justice and transformation, personal transformation within people, including lecturers and students, has proved to be slow.

Social transformation in South Africa is a sensitive issue because of the historical realities of segregation and past injustices. South Africans still struggle to find closure on issues relating to the past because of what Ramphele (2008:355) calls the 'difficulty acknowledging the depth of our trauma'. Current issues in the South African society include injustices that are underpinned by factors such as class, poverty, racism and gender discrimination. These inequalities affect the teaching and learning environment where unequal opportunities further contribute to injustice. The Stellenbosch University Transformation Strategy and Plan (SU 2013:6) emphasises that progressive policies, guidelines, approaches and objectives do not ensure a transformational impact unless they facilitate integrated and active processes. Attempts at promoting transformation and social justice therefore require moving beyond policy to practical projects within higher education contexts.

The struggle within higher education is a complex one that touches on various emotional aspects that often have their roots in the colonial and apartheid past. One such emotional aspect is the possibility of experiencing feelings of shame by those who have benefited and continue to benefit from non-transformative practices. Shame has long been viewed as destructive by politics and pedagogy and has been avoided or even erased, but now the potential for challenging the

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opposition between self and other is being explored (Zembylas 2008:265). Particularly, a 'pedagogy of discomfort', which uses feelings of shame to teach social justice, may be used to encourage active engagement with it by its students and teachers (Zembylas & McGlynn 2012:41).

The research was led by the following question:

How can a project memorialising the forced removals of Die Vlakte be used to investigate the reactions of students and community members and to explore how this project prepared them or failed to prepare them for dealing with social injustice?

Using critical citizenship education and pedagogies of discomfort, we found that shame may be used positively as we ask students to negotiate emotionally charged subjects through visual communication. Students were capable of identifying sources of discomfort and growing from them to perceive a local historic event in a more sensitive and inclusive way.

Theoretical perspectives

Incorporating critical citizenship and social justice into teaching and learning is challenging when writing policies and curricula. This challenge is further increased when confronting everyday experiences and interactions between students, lecturers or community members in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa. Critical citizenship and social justice pedagogies are, however, useful guidelines in understanding these issues in a teaching and learning environment. Five theoretical perspectives – critical citizenship education, social justice, pedagogy of discomfort, shame and white shame – are discussed below.

The working definition of critical citizenship is formulated from Johnson and Morris (2010): 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, to prepare people in diverse societies to live together in harmony. This definition was used as a guide when developing critical citizenship projects for students.

Critical pedagogy is a concept that links particularly well to critical citizenship. The term 'critical pedagogy' refers to a set of education principles and practices closely related to critical thinking, which was a main concern for the Frankfurt School of thought that started practising critical thinking, and resonates strongly with Freire's (2015) pedagogy of the oppressed. Critical pedagogy encourages educators to develop context-specific educational strategies where both staff and students use dialogue to open up a critical consciousness that involves citizenship issues (Johnson & Morris 2010). Critical citizenship education in South African higher education is aimed at working against the perpetuation of existing perceptions and attitudes that stem from a colonial and apartheid past.

When past traumatic events are remembered in such a way that they gain hegemonic power, it creates great challenges for educators to critically evaluate narratives of historical trauma and suffering (Zembylas 2007). Understanding citizenship through the lens of emotion can provide educators with critical tools for deconstructing the affective meanings embedded in citizenship discourses and the structures of feelings that are produced, reproduced and circulated (Zembylas 2009). Re-claiming forgotten connections with others involves acts of compassion, self-criticality, resistance to the status quo and a desire for social justice (Zembylas 2009).

Fraser (2009) defines social justice in three dimensions: distribution of resources, the politics of recognition and the politics of representation and belonging. According to Fraser (2009), all three dimensions should be included to enhance social justice. Fraser (2009:165) uses the phrase 'no redistribution or recognition without representation'. 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 these standards must be acknowledged and fought against (Ayers 2004). Social justice education incorporates that which is included in the curriculum as well as the manner in which the lecturer practises social justice. Importance lies not only in what is taught, but also how it is taught and the results of teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, pedagogies of discomfort may be utilised to bring home the concept of social justice to students, by using feelings of shame.

A pedagogy of discomfort invites educators and students to think critically about their deeply held assumptions of themselves and others by positioning themselves as witnesses to social injustice (Zembylas 2010; Zembylas & McGlynn 2012):

A pedagogy of discomfort, as an educational approach, emphasises the need for educators and students alike to move outside their 'comfort zones'. Pedagogically, this approach assumes that discomforting emotions play a constitutive role in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and in creating possibilities for individual and social transformation. (Zembylas & McGlynn 2012:41)

This practice remains appropriate as long as it generates 'critical self-reflection' and is implemented alongside debriefing sessions in which students may engage with any difficult emotions they may have experienced (Zembylas & McGlynn 2012:56). Zembylas (2010) concludes that pedagogies of discomfort may transform the emotional lives of educators and students and that this process should be marked by compassion, tolerance, caring, empathy and criticality.

Jennifer Biddle (1997) notes the physical effects of shame:

Hot blush on the skin, dropping of the eyes, drooping of the eyelids, withdrawing to avoid the naked, exposed, alienated feelings of shame—these are effects tangible, evident, witnessable. (p. 227)

Shame represents an impossible and compelling ambivalence – it both seeks to be hidden and to be recognised/confessed (Biddle 1997). Shame usually involves the exposure of a vulnerability and sense of inadequacy (Madianou 2011). A working definition of shame within this research includes shame as humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of having or being wrong, that is being implicit in wrongdoing both as an individual and as part of a group, particularly with regard to past injustices in South Africa. People tend to feel ashamed about shame, and it is seen as offensive, but shame has an everyday function in life (Scheff 2003). In Sedgwick and Frank's (1995:500) reading of Silvan Tomkins, shame is positioned as part of our basic set of affects, and is further placed at one end of the affect polarity of 'shame-interest'. Affect is often loosely defined as emotion, but it entails more. According to Massumi (1995), affect is a matter of autonomic responses that occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition, which are rooted in the body. The affective influence of shame is very powerful and while it can be viewed as negative, it also holds potential for transformation.

Shame is understandably associated with negative outcomes, which is a powerful motivator for avoidance. According to Waghid (2011), shame may stigmatise students and cause them to become disillusioned with the education process. He argues that the promotion of democratic citizenship in students requires caring engagement and humane learning – not shame. Shame can traditionally be seen as paralysing, negative and destructive (Zembylas 2008). However, a rehabilitation of the political and ethical value of shame challenges the opposition between self and other, and this can be beneficial in educational settings (Zembylas 2008).

Shame has the potential to drive transformative action, but must be understood in terms of its meaning and implications in education. If we can consider shame to be more complex than its initial discomfort, we may begin to see the potential of using shame for reflection. Through identification, awareness may develop, and from awareness, criticality in the form of empathy and reconciliation (Zembylas 2007:214). Shaming creates an opening that is necessary for self-criticism, self-reflection and ethical, political and educational deliberation (Tarnopolsky 2004, as cited in Zembylas 2008:265). Shame is therefore an important part of dealing with shameful histories.

Probyn (2004) identifies two angles of white shame. The one is emotional, cognitive, to do with morality and easily shifted onto different things depending on the context. This emotional shame is based on the facts and asks for absolution. The other angle is much more difficult to name; the shame that is in the habitus: affective, ancestral shame. This shame cannot be relieved by an apology because it forms part of the white body/identity. Emotional shame and ancestral shame overlap (Probyn 2004). Managing a shameful identity can result in either acknowledging a sense of shame or denying it (Leeming & Boyle 2013). White shame is reflected in settler perspectives.

Tuck and Yang (2012:9) describe some settler perspectives that relate to white shame. Settlers are disturbed by their own settler status and try to escape the complicity of 'having harmed others just by being oneself' (Tuck & Yang 2012:9). This shame is accompanied by a strong desire to 'disappear the Native' (Tuck & Yang 2012:9). The disappearance of the native is seen in the execution and past records of the Die Vlakte removals. The new records seek to remember the removals, but may also be a strategy to relieve white shame. Settler 'moves to innocence' are popular because of the uncomfortable reality settlers experience when they realise that they are directly and indirectly benefiting from colonial structures and systems (Tuck & Yang 2012:9). These moves to innocence are strategies that attempt to relieve the settler from guilt and responsibility without making any great sacrifices such as giving up land, power or privilege. Ignorance and indifference could also be used as coping mechanisms for white shame.

In summary, the theoretical perspectives of critical citizenship, social justice, pedagogies of discomfort, shame and white shame are used to form a theoretical platform for this inquiry. Critical citizenship is useful for encouraging critical reflection on the past and for imagining a possible future shaped by social justice. Social justice is an integral guiding principle when planning and executing education for transformation. It also helps to guide researchers when analysing the way research is conducted and the possible effects research has on participants. Pedagogies of discomfort can be used to highlight social justice issues to students, by using feelings of shame. Shame has the potential to drive transformative action and it creates an opening that is necessary for self-criticism, self-reflection and ethical, political and educational deliberation. Shame should be considered when shameful histories are examined, such as in the case of this research. Managing a shameful identity can result in either acknowledgement or denial (Leeming & Boyle 2013). White shame is reflected in settler perspectives such as moves to innocence and these should be critically addressed when investigating transformation in South Africa.

The history of Die Vlakte

During the 20th century Die Vlakte was home to a mixed but mostly mixed race community in Stellenbosch. 'Die Vlakte' referred to an area that was geographically demarcated by Muller Street, Van Ryneveld Street, Banghoek Road, Smuts Street, Merriman Avenue and Bird Street. Over the weekend of 27 and 28 July 1940, clashes between students of Stellenbosch University (SU) and members of Die Vlakte led to violent fights that subsequently become known as The Battle of Andringa Street. More than 20 years later, on 25 September 1964, 3700 members of the community were forcefully removed from their homes because of the declaration of Die Vlakte as a white group area. The removal took place under the *Group Areas Act* of 1950 and six schools, four churches, a mosque, a cinema and 10 businesses were affected. Many buildings on the current SU campus

are built where Die Vlakte used to be (Grundlingh 2015). One of these buildings is the Arts and Social Sciences Building in Merriman Street. Over several decades, the official history of Stellenbosch has, however, failed to include any of the happenings surrounding the Battle of Andringa Street or the removals from Die Vlakte. The events were only transcribed in 2006 and 2007 with the publishing of *In ons bloed* (Biscombe 2006) and *Nog altyd hier gewees: Die storie van 'n Stellenbosse gemeenskap* (Giliomee 2007).

However, in recent years various steps have been taken by SU to restore its relationship with the previous inhabitants of Die Vlakte. The most recent of this is an exhibition installed in the Arts and Social Sciences Building in 2015, which showcases the history of Die Vlakte, student projects and personal experiences of the remaining people of Die Vlakte. Other efforts by SU include the publishing of *In ons bloed* (Biscombe 2006), the rededication of the old Lückhoff school to the people of Die Vlakte and the installation of an onsite permanent photo exhibition. The meeting at the late Prof. Russel Botman's house between students and members of the affected communities, the apology given by student leaders of Dagbreek residence and the opening of The Memory Room in the Wilcocks Building can also be seen as important steps taken by SU to promote reconciliation and inclusivity (SU n.d.).

The project

Critical citizenship education was incorporated into the Visual Communication Design (VCD) course from 2010. Critical citizenship education aims to promote tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy. The dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the time, Prof. Johan Hattingh, appointed a committee to look into creating a permanent exhibition that would memorialise the forced removals that took place on the site of the current Arts and Social Sciences Building. It was then decided that this project should become part of the VCD curriculum because it links very well with previous critical citizenship projects. The honours students from the Department of English joined the project. Students were to participate in the memorialising of the forced removal process to contribute with their own 'voices' to the event or exhibition.

The brief to the VCD and English students was to design an exhibition, event, sculpture or garden to memorialise the forced removals that took place on the site of the current Arts and Social Sciences Building. The aim was to make students and lecturers aware of and allow them to reflect on the history of the building and the current consequences of that history. The exhibition, event, sculpture or garden could have included an occasion, happening, manifestation or festival. A complex range of aspects were involved, such as interdisciplinary interaction, community interaction, group work, research, interviews with students from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, reflective writing, conceptualising the memorial, and visual and oral presentations. The project

was called 'Memorialising forced removals in the Arts and Social Sciences Building'.

Methodology

For this research project, an interpretative approach (cf. Klein & Meyers 1999) was followed. This requires reflection on how data are socially constructed and a sensitivity to contradictions, interpretations, distortions and biases of the narratives generated (Klein & Meyers 1999). A case study research design (Creswell 2003) was applied, as this explored the value of the project in terms of the negotiation of social transformation.

Reflections from community members and students were the main source of data – at the start of the project, during and at its completion. Students' memorial proposal documents and observation through the course of the project were complementary data sources. Dialogue opened up the process of dealing with negative emotions for students and served as a debriefing technique. This dialogue also served to validate the data as a member-check and participants could, during the duration of the project, return to and revise their reflections. It allowed them to engage with difficult topics, and encouraged growth from previous perceptions. Some students also appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions and reflections in an educational setting. This may also encourage greater ease in channels of communication among students and lecturers, not to mention among surrounding communities. Group interviews were conducted with a research sample of community members, students and one of the lecturers involved. Because of the type of project and the risk of uncontained emotion, a psychologist was available for further discussions outside the class. The authors of this article do not have any information on whether such discussions took place, as it was meant to be confidential. Ethical clearance for this research project was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) of SU.

Five community members and 26 students participated in the project and research. The coding used is as follows: CM1–5 = community members and numbers and S1–26 = students and numbers. Data were collected in English and Afrikaans and Afrikaans data were translated into English by the researchers, who are bilingual. Inductive qualitative content analysis was used in processing and organising the data while using the theoretical framework as a guide. The purpose of inductive content analysis is to arrive at features of meaning by scrutinising the data qualitatively, to look at how the participants see and understand certain issues. This involved repeated reviewing of themes as we moved back and forth between coded data, the complementary data sources and the developing themes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance has been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University, reference number 493/2011.

Findings and discussion

The findings presented below are centred on the community members' and students' emotional experiences and resulting reflections during and at the end of the 'Memorialising forced removals in the Arts and Social Sciences Building' project. Students were sensitive to the project's potential for inducing shame, and many resorted to strategies of avoidance or showcased reluctance, as is expected of negative emotions (Zembylas 2008:265). Themes relating to affect, ignorance and disinterest, desensitisation and indifference, as well as growth and reconciliation, and forgiveness surfaced from the data.

Affective responses

Affective responses are autonomic, visceral, powerful and felt in the body (Massumi 1995). The affective responses of community members (CM) affected by the removals could be expected, but the students also encountered strong affective experiences. The responses of students (S) may be linked to the shame they felt.

Community members spoke of the pain and anger that surfaced when the removals were discussed as well as the deep hurt that remains.

'There are not many people who want to talk about it because it is just too painful and people become angry when they have to think about it again.' (CM2, male, 62 years old)

'It hurts, no doubt about it. I am 77 and it still hurts. It requires swallowing hard to keep it [*the sadness*] back. ... It has left a wound that one cannot heal with medication.' (CM3, male, 77 years old)

Many students described the affective experience of the project:

'As a whole I have found this project to be very emotionally and physically draining.' (S7, male, 21 years old)

'This news and background of the 'Battle of Andringa Street' probably made more of an impact upon my emotions about Stellenbosch than any other history that I have learnt.' (S13, female, 20 years old)

'It made a huge impact on me. Of course it is difficult to relate to them and to understand what each of them had to go through. Yet it brought strong emotions to the fore.' (S26, male, 21 years old)

Students also felt something of white shame (Probyn 2004) and guilt as well as confusion. These affective responses form a key part of practising pedagogies of discomfort. Participants mourned for the tragedy of apartheid. Some students felt sympathy for and even empathy towards the community members' experiences.

'I felt tragically privileged to have not had to go through what they did, based on something as futile as race. I felt ashamed for the way that my neighbours, essentially, had been treated and the circumstances that the unjust allegations were based upon, and the lingering discontent that still hangs in the air. ... My day was filled with a lot of sadness and mourning for what had happened.' (S12, male, 20 years old)

If I had to put myself in their shoes and have had all that I had worked for and the name I had built up for myself disregarded, merely to classify me on nothing but my racial status, my spirit and heart too would be broken. (S9, female, 21 years old)

Ignorance and disinterest

This project helped to expose more people in Stellenbosch to their local history, with the hope that it would facilitate awareness and possibly even growth in perceptions of the past events. This exposure is in line with the goals of critical citizenship education to foster values such as tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy. We hoped that this exposure and resulting dialogue would encourage critical reflection on the past and the imagining of a possible future shaped by social justice. However, most students were ignorant of the forced removals and when they were informed, many were disinterested.

'I frequently attended lectures last year in the Wilcocks building and passed by the Memory Room completely oblivious to it. This sense of obliviousness can also be aptly used to describe the way in which I have often walked in the vicinity of Van Ryneveld Street, Banghoek Road and Merrimen Avenue without knowledge of the tragic effect.' (S11, female, 20 years old)

'[A] vast majority of SU students interviewed on both their knowledge and opinion on that matter were very much uninformed on the matter and not too bothered to learn about it, as they deemed it "past and forgotten".' (S4, male, 20 years old)

A community member also pointed out that we cannot assume awareness, and must tell the story to others:

'A remark [*from a student*] such as "now I truly know what it's all about" ... convinced me once again that exposure is very important ... we may not take for granted that everyone knows what this is all about.' (CM1, female, 67 years old)

Disinterest was evident among many students. When conducting their own interviews for their proposals, students frequently mentioned coming across a reluctance to engage with local history, as it was perceived as having no relevance to the present and being of no consequence to those not living in times of apartheid. Students are quoted as saying:

'Why do we want to memorialise these kinds of events? What will we benefit from making people aware of these events, why would we want to do this? Why do we always tend to end up stuck in South Africa's past, over and over again?' (S12, male, 20 years old)

'[W]hen someone of my peer and social group is confronted with the word apartheid: dread. With a sigh I think, "Here we go around the same block again".' (S23, male, 20 years old)

Feelings of disinterest may be a natural reaction to feelings of shame, possibly as a way of protecting the psyche from negative emotions. Student 8 noted:

'Sometimes we distance ourselves from situations that are even slightly emotional and call for self-reflection or sympathy or digging deeper in order to feel a sense of what the victims of the forced removals must have felt.' (S8, female, 20 years old)

Desensitisation and indifference

Using social justice theories to guide the project, there was an awareness by participants of the social injustice created by the forced removals. When we encounter injustice, emotions such as anger, outrage and sadness are usually evoked. Yet, our emotional response to injustice and our response to justice are different (Zembylas & McGlynn 2012). Students felt desensitised towards South Africa's history and many students felt indifferent towards the forced removals of the people of *Die Vlakke*.

'This is a feeling that is shared with most other people my age, "What has it got to do with me?" being the exasperated question we all ask (myself included) when confronted with anything apartheid-themed. In the defence of my generation, we have had South Africa's tragic past drilled into us repeatedly throughout our school education to the point where we are desensitised and disinterested. I often wonder how South Africans are supposed to move forward into a brighter future when we are constantly reminded of our dark past.' (S11, female, 20 years old)

This may be the answer as to why the topic of local history was not favourably received. Awareness cannot be undervalued, and the importance of teaching local history is not disputed, but the term S11 used to describe the experience of it is problematic. To be 'desensitised' may not be conducive to learning, and even less so to engaging with complex issues such as social justice. Desensitisation leads to indifference. South Africa's past is one that does not inspire pride. However, shame may not be accessed completely by young people born after the end of apartheid. The feeling of absolution is prevalent, as apartheid had no direct connection with them (or so it is felt), as one student explained:

'Most students interviewed didn't really care about the removals, because it was in the past. ... Students felt that they struggled to feel bad about what happened because they are not informed about it and because they were not part of it.' (S20, female, 20 years old)

There was a sense of avoidance, shame and insensitivity regarding South Africa's past. White shame and settler perspectives were evident. Ideas such as 'I don't want to be reminded', 'move on' and 'fight against more important things' devalue the traumatic experiences of those who suffered from the forced removals. It may also be an avoidance tactic and a 'move to innocence' (Tuck & Yang 2012:9), since students do not want to be reminded of the violent past because they directly benefit from it.

'There were students who reacted differently than how I'd hoped. [They said], "I don't want to be reminded every day of what a bad person I am". And "If this event was important, we would have already heard about it".' (S10, female, 21 years old)

'I understand the generations' pain and fury that [are] passed on, but is it not time for change? Isn't it time for us as a nation to unite and fight against more important things like crime, violence, poverty, etc.? The past is not something you just shake off and forget, but in order to move on you have to forgive the past and move toward the future with hope in your heart.' (S19, male, 20 years old)

'[The forced removals] contributed greatly to the formation of apartheid. Would I choose to change the past? My personal opinion – No! These specific choices shaped the university into the success that it is today.' (S26, male, 21 years old)

Contrary to the above, some students felt that it is necessary to continue to engage with aspects of painful history because they have not been adequately dealt with. Pedagogies of discomfort resulted in these students reflecting critically both about their positionality and the feelings that emerged as a result of the project. Student 2 noted the difficulty of being white and trying to work with community members and students regarding the sensitive topic of the past. Student 11 reflected on how his or her own disinterest moved towards sympathy (and hopefully empathy) through engaging with the issue of the forced removals from *Die Vlakke*.

'I felt extremely self-conscious, especially because of the fact that I am white. I was also very focused on the people I interviewed and realised that some of them were a bit uncomfortable because of the topic of conversation. For me this was when I realised why we have to commemorate, why we still 'stagnate' on these events why we can't move forward without working through the past, we might think that we have worked through it all, but in fact, as clearly illustrated, we still have a lot to do.' (S2, female, 20 years old)

'[W]hat shocked me was that the majority of people, when I asked how they felt about these unjust evictions, said that it did not bother them, as it was "not [their] people". These words were terrible for me to hear but at the same time I could understand their disinterest, which I too had felt at the beginning of this project. Only after a period of serious reflection and repositioning of myself in a similar context could I fully sympathise with their past.' (S11, female, 20 years old)

Growth and reconciliation

Students showed growth after engaging with the project and they also spoke of reconciliation. This may be because of the effects of shame. It is argued earlier that shame has the potential to induce self-critical thought that may also change previous thought patterns. Students are quoted as being positively influenced by the project, and as having a more sensitive perception of local history.

'As the project grew, so did I, in terms of humility, opinion and hopefulness, coming from a starting point of feeling primarily sad or negative feelings from the roots of this project, sprung a shining hope and determination. ... I felt myself becoming more and more attached and rooted with this lost community.' (S4, male, 20 years old)

'I personally struggled a lot with engaging in conversation with people about the history of *Die Vlakke*, for it made me extremely uncomfortable and self-conscious, but after conversation, interviews, presentations, and a lot of writing, I now acknowledge and realise the power of confronting and really dealing with an uncomfortable situation.' (S2, female, 20 years old)

As the project progressed, students generally became more positive about the influence of history and the effectiveness of such projects.

'My view of the past has been changed drastically because of this project. It was a privilege to speak to some of the victims of the

attacks on Die Vlakte. Even though I do not have first-hand experience, I now find it easier to relate to the past.' (S18, female, 20 years old)

'I never knew about the battle of Adringa Street and the history behind the forced removals of the coloured community. It is incredible to learn this new information. It gives us as students of [Stellenbosch University] an understanding not only of this town, but of the town's communities and social standings.' (S17, female, 21 years old)

Students mentioned reconciliation and noted that it is a difficult task, but that the past should be acknowledged. Student 4 felt that doing something about socially unjust ways in which histories are recorded can make people feel as though they are working towards reconciliation.

'I am ashamed of how little I know about the history that played out on the very campus I now call my own. Our reactions to reconciliation are often negative, I find that this is because reconciliation is facilitated not only through apologising for wrongs of the past but also through a sincere admission of guilt that is not always easy to give.' (S19, male, 20 years old)

'The true path to reconciliation is not to bury the past, nor to blame one another for it, but rather to acknowledge it, learn from it, to be thankful for being past it and by doing everything in one's power to prevent it from being repeated.' (S6, female, 20 years old)

'[The project] made me realise that informing fellow students of our history is an important part of the reconciliation process.' (S9, female, 21 years old)

A community member had the following to say regarding reconciliation:

'See, I want to tell this story as widely as possible, not so much because of being in a revenge mode, but more because it is enriching ... it cheers the spirit ... I do not believe in breaking down, but in building up!' (CM5, male, 70 years old)

New identity in historical memory and the redefinition of previously devalued identities were suggested as methods for promoting reconciliation. These suggestions echo the values of critical citizenship and social justice. Student 13 felt that young South Africans should take up the responsibility for reconciliation even though they were born after the end of apartheid. This responsibility, however, comes with pressure and challenges. Pedagogies of discomfort and feelings of shame, when used in visual art education, can therefore lead to new understandings of promoting social justice and transformation.

'A theme that struck me ... is one of finding a new identity in historical memory. There lies a great sense of hope for reconciliation and for truth in the notion that identities can be redefined, loss can be memorialised, healing can be facilitated through sincere connection.' (S19, male, 20 years old)

'It is also not fair for us, as the born free generations, to have to be punished for the mistakes of the past, we did not participate in the horrible occurrences of the past, and I do not believe that we hold any responsibility for them. However, that being said, we as a young generation do need to take responsibility for the way in which we reconcile those occurrences, and avoid reoccurrences at all costs. I believe that this reconciliation starts with education; without this we are simply unaware of what it is that we are reconciling. This [reconciliation] is our responsibility, and doing projects such as this one forces us to

take this kind of responsibility on, but with responsibility comes pressure, and feeling the pressure of transforming the ideologies of the past, and correcting the mistakes that sprouted from them [are] challenging, and at [it] times feels almost unfair.' (S13, female, 20 years old)

Forgiveness

Community members and students felt that forgiveness is a relevant issue when one engages with these past events. The term 'to forgive and forget' is not something that can be done. How can the descendants of Die Vlakte residents forget the traumatic events? It was the purpose of this project to seek to remember those hidden histories in socially just ways and to try to find a way to bring forgiveness without forgetting.

Many of the houses were sold for next to nothing and many of the people had to use that money to build new houses in Idas Valley or Cloeteville. Your life savings and your plans for the future had come to nothing. ... We are still struggling to get it right and we are still being told to forgive and forget and that everything was not to be blamed on apartheid.

— Benno Langeveldt, Borchard Street (*In Ons Bloed*)

'I believe that the struggles of the past continue to plague many members of the coloured Stellenbosch community, and that to a large extent will make them weary to forgive and forget.' (S14, female, 20 years old)

Students felt that this project opened up spaces to deal with issues such as compassion, caring and forgiveness:

'I feel that what we have tried to do in this project has definitely brought a bit more peace and forgiveness to the situation. Definitely for those people who volunteered to come and chat to us about their sufferings. I feel that it must have been a massive thing for them to do this but I also feel that it benefited them because they now realise that there are many people out there who are willing to listen and who do care about the incident.' (S5, female, 20 years old)

Two community members described this particular part of history as an opportunity for forgiveness and moving forward, and touched on a positive outcome for changing perspectives:

'After having resided at 47 Merriman Avenue for 28 years, we had to move to Idas Valley. Very sad, no choice. Our beloved home since our birth had to be deserted. Never again would we play as happily, having everything in town so conveniently close. So Stellenbosch where I grew up became a student town. At that specific place something good happened: education of students for a better society.' (CM4, male, 72 years old)

'To me, it is no accident that these events of the past took place ... it is all part of a greater plan ... we as the human species must recreate our world/perspective because it is the nature of evolution and language ... the story of the Vlakte creates such an opportunity.' (CM1, female, 67 years old)

Conclusion

As South African students are faced with continual social readjustments, the ability to think critically and fully engage with complex topics is very important. Critical citizenship education may form part of pedagogies of discomfort, and

shame may be used positively, such as when we asked students to negotiate emotionally charged subjects in visual communication. As the case studies have shown, students are capable of identifying sources of discomfort and growing from them to perceive a local historic event in a more sensitive and inclusive way. This was achieved through dialogue and exposure to group work.

Pedagogies of discomfort may have potentially caused some students to avoid emotional aspects of the project, making them reluctant to engage with the subject matter. Others also experienced more difficulty with the group aspect of the project, and failed to achieve the desired outcomes. Differing opinions, communication difficulties, time constraints and reluctance to explore uncomfortable feelings of shame may have made the task more problematic for some. Students experienced dialogue as the site of the most extensive development.

The desire to be 'forgiven' underlies most responses from students, and this may have morphed into aggression and even reluctance when faced with emotionally charged topics. This desire for absolution is showcased in protestations of their own involvement. Many students want to feel they have been 'forgiven' so as to absolve their shame. However, if pedagogies of discomfort are used in group settings, this desire may be used as a driving force for conceptual learning of social justice, as dialogue and intergroup dynamics shape and direct creative thought.

The future may remain uncertain, and social unrest may continue to disrupt educational practices in South Africa, but through pedagogies of discomfort, especially those relating to the past, and continued work on creating awareness throughout communities, students and community members may develop the skills necessary to overcome social injustice through the promotion of tolerance, diversity, human rights and democracy.

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Authors' contributions

E.C. conducted the research and facilitated the project, while N.A. helped her to analyse the data and write the article.

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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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