

Critical Citizenship Education and Community Interaction: A Reflection on Practice

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Abstract

The social transformation required in a democratic South Africa can only be achieved through the transformation of perceptions and attitudes. This article argues that community interaction can play an important role not only in raising the level of societal awareness of students, but also in the development of a symbiotic relationship between an academic institution and its surrounding society. Although this process has become a common feature in many universities, evidence suggests that engagement which leads to true social transformation, including a change in deep-seated attitudes, is rare. Consequently, community engagement risks remaining unprogressive, and has the potential to reinforce the very discriminatory attitudes and practices which it aims to overcome, while serving as a superficial response to institutional social responsibility imperatives. Through an analysis of a case study from the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University, the article engages with the problems that emerge as barriers to social transformation in the relation-

ship between the academic institution and the community, and argues that, in order that its emancipatory potential be realised, the politics surrounding community engagement, particularly its relation to social transformation, need to be identified and challenged.

Keywords

transformation, community interaction, community engagement, higher education, South Africa, critical citizenship

Introduction

This article argues that community interaction can play an important role not only in raising the level of societal awareness of students, but also in the development of a symbiotic relationship between an academic institution and its surrounding society. Although this process has become a common feature in many universities, evidence suggests that engagement which leads to true social transformation including a change in deep-seated attitudes is rare. Consequently, community engagement risks remaining unprogressive, and has the potential to reinforce the very discriminatory attitudes and practices which it aims to overcome. Through an analysis of a case study from the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University, the article engages with the problems that emerge as barriers to social transformation within the relationship between the academic institution and the community.

The Critical Citizenship module is a teaching module that was developed and implemented in the Visual Communication Design curriculum at Stellenbosch University. It was aimed at shifting the perceptions and attitudes regarding identity, history and social justice of participants, through the development of a teaching and learning partnership with a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) in Kayamandi, a suburb (township [1]) of Stellenbosch. It sought to do this primarily through involving students in experiential learning and community engagement. The project was successful to some extent in shifting some of the participants' cultural and historical prejudices.

However, the possibility of establishing meaningful and sustainable socially transformative practices was hampered by issues deriving from material and structural hierarchies. Several critical issues that emerged during the Critical Citizenship module will be discussed.

Theoretical perspectives

Transformation in higher education and community interaction

Incumbent problems of cultural intolerance and social conflict are increasingly seen to emerge

on an unprecedented scale within heterogeneous societies and the fostering of values and social practices which support culturally diverse democratic structures has become an urgent agenda. South Africa as a country is still in the process of reversing the negative results of its recent history of racial domination and discrimination. Consequently, various arguments that have emerged in higher education call for the development of a critical citizenry which understands both globally influenced social heterogeneity, and emergent manifestations that can be traced to past social injustice. Institutions of higher education (HEIs) in South Africa are under pressure to prepare students to function in a diverse society and actively to contribute to the building of a multicultural democracy. Current South African policy has embedded the imperative of critical citizenship to be provided for in an educational system. The White Paper on Higher Education (1999 in Albertyn & Daniels 2009, 414) emphasises the need to foster 'social responsibility and awareness amongst students' and equip students with 'skills to deal with change, diversity and tolerance to opposing views'. These aims should be viewed as a section of the broader project of transformation of social institutions and social practices associated with the transition to democracy.

Due to the country's racialised history, the relationship between racial and cultural difference in South Africa requires particular attention. Various scholars have pointed out that South Africa's high levels of social and economic inequality remain closely tied to racial difference (Erasmus 2009; Reddy 2004; Seekings 2008; Vale & Jacklin 2009). Although the democratic era has enabled a partial reconfiguration of social and economic power, scales of wealth and poverty remain aligned with established racial hierarchies. Seekings (2008, 1) argues that racial categories remain relevant, 'in part because these categories have become the basis for post-apartheid redress, in part because they retain cultural meaning in everyday life'. Erasmus (2009, 42) points out that race has been recoded in a post-colonial era as a

signifier of cultural meaning, and traces its growing power 'as a dominant concept in contemporary forms of social and political organisation in a post-colonial and post-modern era'.

The 1995 UNESCO report on diversity serves to highlight the significance of culture. The report delineates culture as "constructive, constitutive and creative" of all aspects of life' (Erasmus 2009, 44). Whereas the UNESCO report made a case for the preservation, in all societies, of cultural distinctiveness which would be protected by a code of global ethics, Erasmus (2009, 44) reveals the report's contradictory nature, in that the distinctive practices allowed by the code were themselves circumscribed by culture-specific value judgments about what could be considered as 'tolerant', and so on. In this instance, one culture was covertly presented as a neutral standard by which other cultures could be judged. Erasmus (2009, 44) contends that calls for multiculturalism can possibly be employed as means of protecting cultural elitism; culture, as such, can function as a concept that validates contemporary forms of social discrimination.

If cultural difference is accepted and encouraged over cultural assimilation, how do we practise tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference and find a means of creating shared values and practices? Oloyede (2009, 426) suggests that, within the context of this predicament, social practice has the ability to act as a conceptual anchor. He states that questions about the possibility of, or conditions, for social cohesion and the respect and acceptance of difference within an institution of higher education 'invariably [are] those of social practices in the sense in which the reference is to the outcome of co-ordinated interaction between the diverse groups "being mutually susceptible and accountable to a common cause" in the quest for knowledge'.

Various enquiries into the nature and interpretation of transformation have been prompted by the knowledge that many South African universities are struggling to meet these requirements deemed necessary by

governmental systems. The notion that racism and discrimination can be practised in an educational context under the guise of promoting social transformation and encouraging diversity, albeit in different ways, is suggested by Erasmus (2009), Oloyede (2009) and McLellan & Pillay (2010). Such discourses and discursive practices can mask or displace real acceptance of diversity, both through the covert assumption that one culture remains authoritative and through the treatment of distinctiveness as a means to protect discriminatory and elitist social practices.

Multiculturalism is identified by Van der Waal (2002, 87 in Erasmus 2009, 46), as a 'politicked' reaction against monoculturism and assimilationist approaches in public policies, especially with regard to education. Within this reaction, Van der Waal identifies 'critical multiculturalism' as being affirmative and democratic, as opposed to a 'difference-based multiculturalism' that highlights difference and separatism. The former interprets cultural and racial differences as possible points of contention while accepting that diversity enriches social experience. Additionally, critical multi-culturalism, grounded by democratic practice, allocates a space for the fostering of shared values and practices. It is this understanding of multiculturalism that we believed should be advocated as the basis for socially transformative educational practices within the Critical Citizenship module.

Community interaction as a strategy for social transformation

In developing the Critical Citizenship module, we proposed two strategies which we believed might support the facilitation of social transformation, as outlined above. The first focused on changing internal institutional structures so that they would provide culturally diverse and dynamic intellectual spaces. This entailed moving beyond state mandates to ensure a more accurate demographic reflection of South African society, and develop within students a critical social conscience and a capacity for self-reflection. The second was to integrate the core functions of the university (teaching,

research and community engagement) with relevant social concerns.

We believe that community engagement holds the potential to facilitate the implementation of both of these strategies, though this potential often is not realised and remains stunted on account of various political issues. Hartley *et al.* (2010, 391) consider a recent report by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU 2002, 13) which concludes that 'there is considerable evidence that deep engagement is rare – there is more smoke than fire, more rhetoric than reality . . . Most [campuses] have some form of community interaction, but in the main it is piecemeal, not systematic, and reflects individual interest rather than institutional commitment' (Hartley *et al.* 2010, 392).

A fundamental issue pertaining to the effectiveness and integrity of community development is the lack of conceptual clarity about the term 'community'. The vagueness and circularity with which the term is treated generates conflicting interpretations of community engagement. The Higher Education Quality Committee (2006, 12 in Albertyn & Daniels 2009, 410) describes community engagement as 'initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community'. Community seems to be interpreted here as social context, and does not specify geographical constraints or sociological characteristics. Bhattacharyya (2004, 12) argues that a community should be understood as any group that displays solidarity and is constituted by shared norms and shared identity 'derived from place, ideology or interest'. The concept of solidarity can be used both to guide the identification of groups with whom institutions can engage, and as a guide to meaningful and relevant forms of engagement. Community engagement initiated by institutions of higher education, and the Critical Citizenship module as such, can be understood as different from community development in as far as 'issues relevant to its community' are addressed expressly 'in the

areas of teaching and research' (Higher Education Quality Committee 2006, 12 in Albertyn & Daniels 2009, 410). Consequently, if community development is understood as 'the fostering of social relations that are increasingly characterised by solidarity and agency' (Bhattacharyya 2004, 15), the aforementioned community engagement should be understood as working towards these goals 'in the areas of teaching and research'.

Community engagement has been criticised for its lack of an over-arching theoretical framework that could guide the variety of processes and initiatives which operate in its name. Albertyn & Daniels (2009, 413) argue that 'definitions of community within the South African context have been limiting and prescriptive', particularly those focusing on service, which often are reliant on unequal and even parasitic relations between community and university. Bhattacharyya offers a useful framework which resists the production of relations of dependency. If the promotion of agency is the goal of development and, by implication, engagement, the emphasis lies on working *with* and not *for* the community. Boyer's framework (1997, 92 in Albertyn & Daniels 2009, 413) concerns the 'scholarship of engagement' rather than a 'service learning' framework. The aims of the former are to 'connect . . . the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social problems' and to 'creat[e] a special climate in which academic and civil cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other'. The importance of integrating community engagement with the other core roles of the academy is emphasised by Albertyn & Daniels (2009, 411), who argue that the development of a symbiotic relationship between institutions of higher education and the communities in which they are situated could 'ensure the relevance, stature and sustainability of HEIs in South Africa'.

However, internal and external pressures placed on institutions of higher education simultaneously promote and sideline community engagement. This creates tension around community engagement and affects the ways in which projects are conceptualised, managed

and interpreted within the institutional context. External pressure to pledge greater allegiance to community engagement is embedded in South African national policy on higher education and has become part of the official criteria for institutional audits. This push towards incorporating community engagement as a core practice in higher education is countered by what Reddy (2004, 5) points out as the imperative placed on universities to 'perform as viable "corporate enterprises" producing graduates to help steer South Africa into a competitive global economy'. This often overrides 'softer' imperatives to foster solidarity and agency; concerns associated with community engagement and the humanities. Internally, the conflict between social responsiveness and global competitiveness plays out in terms of knowledge production. Albertyn & Daniels (2009, 412) argue that the conflict 'is found at the level of discussion regarding academic freedom versus responsiveness to the context of the university and it lies at the heart of issues of the structure of knowledge, power discourses and the definitions of communities'. Their argument alerts us to the ideological dimension of the debates about community and transformation which are underwritten by ongoing power struggles.

The Critical Citizenship module

The Critical Citizenship module implemented in the Visual Communication Design curriculum at Stellenbosch University in 2010 was not aimed directly at transforming the institution in terms of its student population, but rather at changing the perceptions and attitudes of the students by developing interactive experiential learning practices that would engage them in local social issues and concepts of racial and cultural difference. In addition, the module aimed to develop a sustainable and long-term partnership with the youth-based community NGO that would be mutually enriching in terms of teaching, learning, research and social development possibilities. The module was centred on Martha Nussbaum's (2002) criteria for critical citizenship education. These criteria are, in short, the ability to criticise one's own traditions, have mutual respect for

other opinions, think as a citizen of the world and be able to imagine oneself in the shoes of others. The structure of the module was informed by three facets of learning: namely theoretical, experiential and imaginative learning.

The Critical Citizenship module brought together a class of predominantly white Design students from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, and a group of predominantly black high school students from working-class backgrounds. Both groups had rarely, if ever, shared similar urban living spaces and effectively occupied different social and geographical worlds. Design and high school students were paired together and worked to resolve design briefs which aimed to capture relevant issues and problems in the high school students' communities. A range of topics were discussed in the process, including blackness/whiteness, stereotyping, power relations, cultural tolerance, discrimination, helping behaviour, risk, family, social memory, health and community. These discussions were based on the Socratic method of enquiry, and were also related to readings that students were to engage in as part of the theoretical learning component. Data gathered by students were then used in typographical layouts, which were assembled and published in a book. High school students contributed drawings and writing.

Using an Action Learning and Action Research framework (Zuber-Skerrit 2001), students would conduct field research in the streets and homes around the high school situated in the township of Kayamandi. After the community interactions, both groups of students wrote self-reflections about their experiences in the community, including discussions they had with community members. The reflections written by high school and university students were used extensively to investigate and evaluate the project, along with in-depth interviews and class and community observations.

Research methodology

An interpretative and inductive research approach was implemented for the purposes of

this study. The aim of an interpretative approach is to understand the context and qualities of a specific phenomenon. The concept interpretative makes it clear that the researcher interprets the data: describing the person/s and setting, analysing data for themes and 'drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically' (Creswell 2005, 182). Creswell states that the data pass through the personal lens of the researcher who is situated in a certain socio-political and historical context. Because of the personal nature of the process of interpretation, reflection on what and how one goes about doing the research is crucial.

A case study was chosen as a method of investigation within the qualitative research approach. This research design was used for the empirical part of the study. Hancock & Algozzine (2006, 11) describe case studies as 'intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time'. Stake (1995, xi) describes case study design as 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances'. The case study was situated in two physical locations which clearly reflected extreme opposites of the South African socio-economic reality: an affluent area (the campus of Stellenbosch University) and an economically deprived area (the Kayamandi Township, Stellenbosch).

Purposive sampling was used to generate the research sample. Students were selected from the first- to third-year groups who participated in the Critical Citizenship module in 2010 and 2011. Learners in Grade 10 at Kayamandi High School were selected by the NGO Vision Afrika. The sample consisted of 36 students and 22 learners.

Qualitative data were collected from reflective writings by students and learners, as well as via focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews with students and learners. Data capturing was achieved by means of written notes and voice recorders. Inductive content analysis was used to guide the analysis of the qualitative data collected. The objective of the content analysis was to identify pertinent

features of the participants' views and understanding of certain issues through a careful examination of the interviews and reflections.

Validity and reliability

Quantitative research is often criticised for its lack of objectivity and therefore is not regarded as trustworthy. Lincoln & Guba (1985, 294–301), however, describe four criteria that should guide the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research: namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. The scope of this article does not allow detailed analysis of how the research conformed to the aforementioned criteria; suffice to note that measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

Findings and discussion of the empirical explorations

The Critical Citizenship module aimed to align the broader educational aims of the university curricula and the particular imperatives of the local youth-focused NGO, in programmes in which the high school students participated. The hope was that the university students would gain exposure to social/economic realities in their environment, conduct problem-driven research and interact with race-related issues in order to gain deeper insight into issues of difference, diversity and tolerance. The broader educational aims of the NGO were to bridge cultural, educational and economic divides between different racial groups in the greater Stellenbosch area and in South Africa. The aim envisaged for the Critical Citizenship module was to establish a partnership between the two groups that would enable each to pursue their own educational aims. The extent to which the projects could facilitate this overlap would determine their transformative potential.

During the data analysis, written reflections collected from participants formed an important part of the process of critical engagement, and often led to participants expressing emotions indicating anxiety or unease. Dewey argues that deep reflection that could enable the changing of perceptions and attitudes is

often initiated by discomfort (Dewey 1910, 13). The use of art and design as a medium furthermore facilitated the exploration of the imagination as an important tool in moral education. Goethe (in Ilyenkov 2007, 81) wrote that the imagination is the basis of interaction between people, but that the most difficult action is to 'see with one's own eyes what lies before them'. By imagining life as seen through another person's eyes, the imagination pictures what we cannot see or experience, which could, for example, positively stimulate appreciation of cultural diversity.

Social learning and community engagement were expected to provide 'structured opportunities for students to reflect on and discuss their concerns, questions and confusions regarding the challenges that relate to race, culture and other differences. Such reflection and dialogue provide keys to actual changing of long-term attitudes and behaviour' (Weah *et al.* 2000, 674). The results from the first year of the module were ambiguous – some reactions confirmed that 'because they have authentic experiences [students] can break down barriers as opposed to artificial experiences that are often brief in duration and lack intensity and personal contact' (Morgan & Streb 2001, 167), while others served to contest this assertion. In an example of this, one student observed that only after the project was he able to:

understand the profundity in the simple research conducted at Kayamandi; it allows for an internal inspection of your own situation through others, the people you thought were so different from you. The knowledge shared and gained goes beyond the simple bounds of a project or a mark.

Another student commented:

It was after these meetings that I changed my outlook on life. I realized that we lived in a country that had faults, and that South Africa was still recovering from the awful period of Apartheid. But it was also evident that there was a desire to overcome these hardships and aspire to a future where everyone was equal.

There were problems that needed to be addressed, however; an investigation revealed that, while the project served to challenge racial prejudices held by the participating students, additional barriers that emerged made it difficult to establish relations of equality between participants. The structure of the project seemed to enable the reinforcement of these barriers and, at the same time, provide students with tools to identify and challenge them. The identification of issues that emerge through such projects can be a means to resolve, rather than perpetuate, them.

The perpetuation of perceptions and attitudes and the hidden curriculum

The students' reflections revealed that participating in the project presented a risk of perpetuating deep-seated negative or stereotyped perceptions and attitudes. Deeply ingrained and skewed binary oppositions which inform ordinary understandings of hierarchies were not necessarily challenged by the Critical Citizenship module. One student remarked that '[i]t felt as if we were tourists exploring a foreign country ... it was as if we were looking in from the outside, observing and judging their lifestyle, without the adequate knowledge to do so', while another expressed fear about visiting a township: 'How would we manage to come out again with only our lecturers to guide us?' Yet another expressed surprise that the Kayamandi students 'were all dressed in school-uniforms' and that 'nobody looked sloppy or un-neat [*sic*]'. Comments such as '[w]e arrived and played soccer against the foreign people' by a student referring to the first afternoon in Kayamandi illustrated the strategy of 'othering' used by students and highlights the extent to which their own background and culture had been naturalised and made invisible. A prominent reaction from students, evoking Steve Biko's (2004, 23) insights, was their awareness of a tendency to conflate being white with being knowledgeable, whereas being black is seen to imply being needy.

These perceptions could also be implicitly endorsed through the unchallenged power of

tacit knowledge taught through the informal or 'hidden' curriculum. An additional aim of the Critical Citizenship module was to gain better understanding of how academics and lecturers interact with society, and reveal their need to acknowledge their own implicit understandings which might be imparted to students. Michael Apple (1979, 63) asserts that, because educational institutions are "'naturally" generated out of many of educators' common-sense assumptions and practices', educational institutions could unknowingly create, 'conditions and forms of interaction [that reproduce structures of inequality]'

Projects aimed at transformation are often grounded in the practice of critical thinking, which, in addition, is connected with critical reflection. This type of thinking brings to light hidden discourses that are often taken for granted. Critical education, or what Freire (1983, 17) refers to as 'consciousness-raising' (*conscientizacao*), entails learning 'to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality'. However, a literature review on community engagement reveals that very few self-reflections or critical analyses of service learning modules have been published by lecturers who facilitate these. If self-reflection is valuable for students, this should surely be deemed just as important for lecturers.

Because categorising, being ingrained in the subconscious, is often subtle, examining the colonial and apartheid past and how that has informed our perceptions and attitudes remains essential. The academic or lecturer additionally holds a position of power, which makes their own preconceptions doubly significant. A remark by Santas (2000, 349–50) serves to elaborate. The author states that teaching anti-racism is doubly prone to failure due to the fact that the internalised superiority of the teacher, as an 'all-knowing teacher', is most often coupled with that of 'well-meaning white person'. Some students seemed to sense the significance of a community engagement project in the course, one remarking that 'I never thought I would visit Kayamandi with the art

department . . . which says a lot about the current focus of the arts, and about conventional perceptions of the arts'.

Structural inequality

The Critical Citizenship module was initially conceptualised within a service learning framework, and comprised art lessons given to the Vision K group by the design students. After one year, this structure was reviewed and found to have a minimal impact in terms of social transformation. Instead, these interactions reinforced a relationship of dependency between the university and the community and did little to engage the consciousness of participants.

Our study suggests that this inbuilt hierarchy arises from the concept of service, which is treated in the service-learning literature as self-evident and of inherent moral value. As a result, the structural origins of the problems that service learning attempts to address remain unexamined and, consequently, are easily reinforced. Community engagement and service learning do not necessarily yield long-term benefits for all participants and, in reality, often better addresses the goals of the university, rather than that of the community. In addition to self-reflection and critical examination in community engagement, there is a need to advocate understanding of 'community development', as described by Bhattacharyya (2004, 13), which seeks to challenge the patronising and unequal relations assumed in its conventional meaning. Bhattacharyya argues that the traditional 'community development' paradigm fosters chronic dependency from which it is difficult to break free. Within this paradigm, communities are constructed as passive recipients of well-meaning providers. Thus, they are prohibited from developing 'critical consciousness', which is explained briefly by Bhattacharyya (2004, 13), considering Freire's definition, as 'not accepting an undesirable condition as fate or unchangeable, understanding the structure of causes that brought it about, and then evolving strategies to mitigate them'. Critical awareness of structural relations enables the development of agency, a central tenet of social transformation and

community development. For this reason, the notion of 'consciousness-raising' among participants should be considered as a central aim of community engagement.

Annette (2005, 335) notes that 'despite the increasing influence of the pedagogy of service learning', the development of a critical citizenry has been minimal and 'only a limited number of universities and colleges in the USA provide a full range of learning opportunities for active citizenship'. In an effort to provide such opportunities, the Critical Citizenship module was restructured to enable the collaborative production of knowledge rather than hierarchical knowledge 'transfer' from 'knowing' design student to 'unknowing' high school student. Despite the reconfiguration, student reflections suggested that interactions did not necessarily impart skills of negotiation, compromise and tolerance. Research indicated that, given the existence of underlying structural problems which prevent equality, it cannot be assumed that transformation in perceptions and attitudes will take place. Comments such as 'As soon as they [the learners] got off the bus I saw difference. They have different cultural values and issues [that] we might not necessarily understand' serve to illustrate an apprehensive approach to dealing with issues of inequality. Consequently, educators should aim for more than a deep and direct learning approach, and try to identify the visible and invisible hierarchies of power implicated in the process of knowledge production. The Critical Citizenship module is based on conversations about critical issues, and symmetry is therefore crucial. Santos (2000, 358) argues that 'real dialogue requires radical equality, a breaking down of barriers in such a way that painful truth will invariably come out. Yet truth rarely flows freely in settings in which a single power controls the discourse.'

Out of necessity, the university often defines and frames community engagement projects (Donaldson & Daughtery 2011, 85). Foucault (1979, 62) argues that 'Every point in the exercise of power is a site where knowledge is formed. Conversely every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of

power.' Knowledge production is always already determined by human interests, which, in turn, 'have an ideological function' and carry the potential of 'reinforcing and perpetuating the societal status quo' (Habermas in Palmer 2001, 217). Representatives of the university operate within powerful and often hegemonic discourses, and even well-meaning efforts to produce knowledge in the service of communities may exclude and marginalise those who do not have access to dominant discourses. Structural inequality between participants was also notable in the Critical Citizenship module. One student seemed particularly conscious of this, stating that 'To me the fact that we were wealthy Stellenbosch students trying to talk about an academic concept based on different theories to a girl who just [tries] to get by each day was painstakingly obvious.' Another student added, 'I personally felt that we have done more damage than good in this community during these sessions and I feel terrible about that.'

The status quo of contemporary social organisation is characterised by neo-liberalism and capitalist production, which have become naturalised and now appear as 'the way things are'. An awareness and challenging of dominant discourses may allow possibilities to develop empowering social practices and a space for dialogue based on tolerance and respect. Habermas argues that, to a certain extent, 'What counts as worthwhile educational knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge, i.e. communities of scholars' (Palmer 2001, 217). Consequently, the ideological and political orientations of educators cannot rely on the universality of rationality and other Western conceptions of legitimate knowledge. This is particularly important within community engagements which might comprise the meeting and interaction of different kinds and modes of knowledge production. Hartman refers to Hooks (1997, 225 in Donaldson & Daughtery 2011, 85), who argues that 'if we interpret the experiences, the narratives of oppressed people through our own lenses and biases, if we privilege our truths, we colonise the other'. One

student illustrated this aptly in stating that they should not 'view the project as an trophy of our ability to extract information from Kayamandi locals, but rather as a chance to network and partner with Kayamandi students to achieve a sensitive and yet thorough understanding of each others' cultures'.

Such insight could not only inform the way in which knowledge is produced and disseminated within community engagement projects, but could also guard against the tendency of the university to control and structure knowledge generated through engagement in ways that maintain its position as the active partner, while discouraging entrepreneurship and independence within communities.

Lack of active local support from both the Stellenbosch and the Kayamandi communities has been among the most pressing challenges to the success of the Critical Citizenship module. This may be related to an observation by Fernando (2003, 54), who views the growing resistance from communities to the academy as stemming from the perception that 'development' is essentially parasitic regarding communities and their knowledge. Viewing a community as representative of solidarity guards against imperialist practices because such a view does not claim to understand a group based on location, ethnicity or level of industrialisation. Bawa (2003, 47–59) refers to a community which is not understood within an 'us/them' paradigm, but one which could locate the university in its local community, and determine its relevance on a broader scale. In this conception, engagement would entail a shared striving for particular ends rather than one group assisting another.

On asking the high school learners whether they felt 'used' through participating in the project, one remarked: 'The feeling of knowing that you're helping someone was a great feeling ... Helping them [students] is helping myself.' In our view, this comment, even on this small scale, illustrates that projects such as this do have the ability to foster the shared striving for a unified goal mentioned above. Critical theory needs to be adopted as a self-critical theory in

order to move to what Bhabha (cited in Ashcroft *et al.* 2003, 209) describes as a 'third space', in which 'we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others'.

The charity paradigm as limiting transformative practice

Interviews and reflections from the Critical Citizenship module suggested that participants engaged in the project for very different reasons, which can largely be understood as manifestations of the material or socio-economic differences between them. University students participated for primarily 'intellectual' reasons (to gain insight into South African society, to conduct social research) and high school students primarily participated for 'material' and social reasons (to be provided with a lunch and a safe place to socialise after school). The traditional 'community development' paradigm outlined by Bhattacharyya (2004, 10) relies on a giving/receiving or charity dynamic, which reinforces patterns of dependency. The discursive dominance of this paradigm made it difficult for participants to interpret the project and the fact of material inequality in an alternative way. University students struggled to move beyond a 'charity' paradigm; high school students sometimes struggled to see the point of participating in something that did not necessarily promise any material or visible change in their life context and prospects. A design student pointed out that it was difficult to avoid 'viewing the white person as the "saviour" figure and the black students as those in need of saving'.

The charity paradigm is problematic, not only regarding its fostering of chronic dependency on the part of the community, but also in that it affirms white superiority as it veils 'complicity with racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression' (Britzman in Kumashiro 2000, 43). One design student became conscious of this tendency and observed that, given another opportunity to participate in community engagement, she would not 'waltz in there with an inflated savior-mentality, but rather with the intention of sharing: culture knowledge, respect and humanity'. Another student remarked, 'I just

wanted to make myself feel less guilty for being wealthy and keeping that wealth to myself.' This reaction suggests that community engagement can soothe feelings of guilt and, consequently, allow the sense of responsibility towards addressing problems on a structural level to be relinquished. Bruckner (in Kaufmann 2010) remarks that whites face the danger of remaining prisoners of a white guilt, yet this guilt actually is a means for whites to retain superiority over the non-white world.

Emotional resistance to confronting uncomfortable and destabilising truths could become a barrier to effective engagement and, consequently, to social transformation (Jarvis 2006, 183). Processes that enable the emergence of discomfort and destabilisation require both institutional and community support. However, statements such as '[I] . . . walk[ed] away from this experience with a renewed understanding of my position in society as a white person . . . my feelings regarding this project are now feelings of deep appreciation and respect, and no longer fear and uncertainty' indicate that the module did, to some extent, allow students to reflect critically on their racial identity, despite barriers encountered through obvious inequalities. Another student added: 'The insight and knowledge I have gained from the Kayamandi students [learners] have been a means of understanding their culture and my own.'

Conclusion

This article through presenting an analysis of the Critical Citizenship module implemented in the Visual Design curriculum at Stellenbosch University, has argued that a more critical approach to transformation is required, as well-intentioned community interaction can obstruct rather than foster the social manifestation of transformation. Without proper understanding and implementation, there is a risk that community engagement presents a double standard for social responsibility imperatives, and could be used to delay, or deflect the attention from, necessary transformation within the university, and also from the attitudes and behaviour of its students and staff. Given the established hierar-

chies which inform knowledge production, maintaining the social relevance of institutions of higher education furthermore requires an institutional commitment to challenge the established and dominant discourses and to encourage self-reflective practices amongst all involved in the academy.

Social transformation through community engagement requires the development of a critical consciousness amongst all participants, in addition to the development of a symbiotic relationship – based on an inclusive conception of 'community' – between the academy and its society. The data collected through this research suggest that there is still some way to go before realising transformative aims. This poses the question whether, within such an institutional framework, power hierarchies can be sufficiently broken down at all. Suffice to say, without Freire's conception of *conscientizacao* as an imperative, the emancipatory potential of community engagement will remain repressed, and the activity will continue to be a means of reproducing the status quo.

For now, the Critical Citizenship module continues to be a part of the Visual Design Curriculum at Stellenbosch University and we, supported by the university and Vision K, continue to strive to improve its structure, presentation and implementation.

Note

1. Within a South African context, a township usually refers to living areas which were reserved for non-whites from the early nineteenth century until the end of Apartheid. These are usually underdeveloped and built on the periphery of urban areas. (Bond 2008, 406).

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