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Creating Experiences of Dignity for the Other in the Classroom

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Abstract

In 2023, we had a 110 million people living as forcibly displaced persons in the world (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2023). Of these, 43.3 million were children under the age of 18 years. Migration (both forced and other) has resulted in an influx of “foreign” children into school classrooms across the globe, presenting many educators with a new task—that of teaching the Other. Now, more than ever before, there is a need to assist people to cultivate an understanding of the self in relation to the Other in a manner that upholds the values of dignity, equality, and freedom for all people (Republic of South Africa, 1996; United Nations, 1973).

This article presents a living theory for educators. It constructs a new lens through which educators can view the world, analyse their own teaching practice, and take individual action towards dismantling the canon of inequality that exists within their classrooms. The new lens beckons a deep and meaningful engagement with the question: “How can I create experiences of dignity for the Other in my classroom?”

Keywords: dignity, equality, education, intercultural education, decolonising education

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Introduction

In 2023, we had a 110 million people living as forcibly displaced persons in the world, of whom 43.3 million were children under the age of 18 (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2023). Migration (both forced and other) has resulted in an influx of “foreign” children into school classrooms across the globe, presenting many educators with a new task—that of teaching the Other. Now, more than ever before, there is a need to assist people to cultivate an understanding of the self in relation to the Other in a manner that upholds the values of dignity, equality, and freedom for all people (Republic of South Africa, 1996; United Nations, 1973).

Educators are in a unique position to guide people through negotiations of self in relation to Other. More so, teacher educators can create awareness of the injustice of inequalities that persist, and induce perspective transformations amongst future teachers in order to be proactive regarding dismantling the canon of inequality and hegemony hidden in curricula, content, and our teaching practice (Zembylas, 2018).

This study presents a living theory for educators across the globe to assist us to analyse our own teaching practice and take individual action towards dismantling the canon of inequality that exists within our classrooms. It presents educators with a new lens through which to view the world, one that magnifies experiences of dignity and feelings of inferiority within society. This new lens beckons a deep and meaningful continuous engagement with the question: “How can I create experiences of dignity for the Other in my classroom?”

This article starts with a short description of recent activities that prompted me to write this paper. Thereafter, it offers the construction of a new lens through which educators can view the world.

Orientation and Positionality

I am a White South African woman, affiliated with the Afrikaner culture previously associated with the oppressors during apartheid. My doctoral dissertation (Marx, 2015) dealt, *inter alia*, with conceptualising social cohesion for the South African context and investigated a teaching method to foster experiences of social cohesion in a multicultural classroom. During this journey, a trusted scholar from New Zealand pointed out that African philosophy was entirely excluded from my conceptualisation of social cohesion, even though I was living on the continent of Africa. Ironically (and shamefully), the existence and validity of knowledge of the Other was completely omitted and excluded from a study that was all about inclusion. This raised important issues regarding the lens through which I viewed the world, and the knowledge I considered valid. Committed to adjusting this lens, I started the journey of reading, studying, researching, and engaging in conversations with my students to make sense of African philosophy. I remember reading Praeg (2014), who argued that an outsider cannot attempt to understand African philosophy by making

comparisons to what they know; it requires the outsider to step away from such comparisons and make a conscious effort to learn the philosophy from within. In other words, it required me to somehow put aside my own lens of viewing the world, and attempt to see without those glasses. Note, I did not attempt to replace my lens with that of the Other because I do not think that is entirely possible (Edles, 2002). Eventually, I managed to incorporate the African philosophy of Ubuntu into my conceptualisation of social cohesion for South Africa as an integral part of my doctoral thesis (Marx, 2015).

The following year, the call for decolonising curricula in South Africa came from our university students during a nationwide #FeesMustFall protest (Adefila et al., 2022). Their manifesto highlighted the reality that South African higher education ignored Africans as valuable producers of knowledge. The capacity of indigenous people to be creative and innovative in aesthetic, artistic, and critical thought was completely ignored. African Indigenous knowledge was also completely missing from our curricula. Our students argued that this act of non-recognition in higher education continued the cycle of inequality because it painted the African as inferior to the West (or the Caucasian). Our students also emphasised the disjuncture between Western knowledge and the reality of African life, and demanded an education that would speak directly to their contexts and environments. Thus, in South Africa we did not have time to ponder whether we should decolonise, as was the case in many other contexts; it was time. The South African Council on Higher Education (2017) commissioned educators to redesign curricula to promote a decolonised agenda (Sathorar & Geduld, 2019). Supporting this agenda, I ventured into finding ways to decolonise arts education, specifically music and dance education, in a manner that would resonate with our South African classrooms (van Heerden, 2021, 2022).

In 2022, I prepared to present a workshop, Decolonising Arts Education, during a winter school for teacher educators funded by the German Academic Exchange Service, in Germany. A German scholar was baffled by my topic, and asked why I felt the need to go backwards in history to the origins of a knowledge rather than applying my mind to moving forward to generate new knowledge: a valid question. Even though that interpretation of decolonisation was somewhat distorted, I realised that the term “decolonisation” evokes emotional responses of offence, defence, blame, guilt, anger, confrontation, and hurt (Adefila et al., 2022) that, indeed, would limit the openness with which people would receive my contribution. I had to find a different language to transfer the lessons I had learnt as a White South African during the process of decolonising our curricula if I wanted to add value to other contexts. I found the heart of the call for decolonising education to be in its rationale. If we are serious about changing the way inequality persists in education across the globe, it may be time to steer the decolonisation debate away from blame and towards a set of positive actions that could foster recognition—recognition of the worth of the Other and recognition of the knowledge of the Other.

This is not to ignore the complex debates regarding discrimination, inequality, and the damage done by colonial education, or to ignore the complex structures and nuances of inequality that now permeate the educational sphere (Adefila et al., 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Zembylas, 2018). It is rather, to shift the focus from the larger structures to the personal, that is, the experiences of the learner and the responsibility of the educator.

It is with this in mind, that I argue that creating experiences of dignity for the Other can indeed be a response to the call for decolonising education. Framing this paper as “dignity for the Other” and not “dignity for all” is intentional so that educators can become aware that they are culture-bearing people who interpret the world through a specific lens. Indeed, they too are the Other for another. The word “create” is also specifically chosen to imply that a proactive action is required from the educator, rather than continuing the status quo.

Methodology

From the above one might assume this to be a self-study (Pithouse-Morgan, 2022) that answers the research question: “How can I create experiences of dignity for the Other?” However, I am deeply uncomfortable with placing myself at the centre of this study because it is indeed the decentralising of myself that created space for this way of viewing the world to emerge. Adopting the ontology of decolonisation requires me, as a White culture-bearing person (or, a person belonging to the dominant culture) to step aside. Hence, centring this study on my own experiences causes an ontological tension that I struggle to endorse. The very purpose of this article is to shift the focus away from the dominant culture towards a new way of viewing the world—one that proactively focuses on creating experiences of dignity for those who are considered Others. In this regard, interactions with local and international critical friends (White & Jarvis, 2019) compelled me to evolve these ideas to produce a living theory (Whitehead, 2018).

A living educational theory is a value-driven theory that emerges from one’s own experiences and engagements with literature and practice to, not only improve one’s own teaching practice but also to add value to the teaching practices of others. This occurs, by a reconceptualisation of that which constitutes good practice in a manner that ultimately “contributes to a world in which humanity can flourish” (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2014, p. 209). This living theory is underpinned by the values of dignity and equality. The processes followed to produce this theory involved Whitehead’s (2018, p. 75) “action–reflection cycles,” which promote continuous reflection on practice, literature, interactions with local and international students and critical friends, implementations, and refining the theory (White & Jarvis, 2019; Whitehead, 2018). This occurred in a cyclical manner over a period of 15 years. As the new living theory emerged, I recognised a need for deconstructing the lenses through which people view the world, by going back to the basics of culture. This living theory then re-constructs a new lens that could assist teachers and

teacher educators to view their world differently, analyse their teaching practice, and discover their role as active agents of change to disrupt the canon of inequality that exists within society.

Constructing this lens commences with a short overview of culture as a meaning-making system, followed by a brief description of the challenges that might arise when more than one cultural group coexists. The concepts of Other and difference lead to a discussion on the need for recognition of sameness and difference to create experiences of dignity and equality for people. This funnels into a focus on education to explore what is required to create experiences of dignity, specifically as it relates to the educator's role in the classroom and different classroom contexts. This article concludes with lessons learnt from decolonising educational curricula in South Africa, and offers a few practical suggestions for educators to navigate the answer to the question: "How can I create experiences of dignity for the Other in the classroom?"

Culture and Measurements of Worth

All people, including educators, are culture-bearing people. Culture is considered a meaning-making system, that is, a lens through which a person views the world. It influences a person's interpretation of the world, a person's view of self in relation to the world, and a person's reactions to the world (Giessen 2011; Inglis, 2005; Smith & Riley, 2009). Culture in this context also refers to a group of people sharing communal norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and symbols (Bauman, 2010; Griswold, 2013; Inglis, 2005; Smith & Riley, 2009). Culture is not static but evolves over time and through interactions with other cultures, the world, and modernity (Bauman, 2010; Bekerman, 2020). Distinctions between different cultural groups are based on notions of sameness and difference because these create imaginary boundaries that both include and exclude people as they are identified as insiders or outsiders (Andrews, 2007; Jenkins, 2004). Thus, identification of cultural groups can both serve as a connection and sense of solidarity for those who belong, and as a sense of separation for those who do not belong (Inglis, 2005). Culture thus simultaneously includes and excludes people. Broadly speaking, those who do not belong to one's culture can be considered the Other (Derrida, 2002, as cited in Genovesi, 2016).

Cohen (1982, as quoted in Jenkins, 2004, p. 111) explained that when people "stand at [the] boundaries" of their cultural group, "a sense of difference manifests itself." Encounters with the Other make distinctions between the self and the Other visible. This can result in a redefining of the Other but also, a redefining of self in relation to the Other, and a clarification of the self in terms of cultural identity (Genovesi, 2016). A person's cultural affiliation is thus closely linked to the person's cultural identity and notion of self, which, like culture, is always in a state of becoming (Bauman, 2010; Bekerman, 2020). Because culture is a meaning-making system that influences our interpretation of the world, difference manifests itself when more than one cultural group coexists in the same space. Differences may include different ways of doing life, views of appropriate behaviours, interpretations of and reactions to the world,

reasonings behind decision-making, perceptions of morality, and subsequent evaluation of people and behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2004). These differences often generate incorrect interpretations of the behaviour of the Other, offence, miscommunication, and conflict. Coupled with a person's natural tendency to inflate the value of their affiliated cultural group and diminish the value of the Other, the in-between space becomes volatile as a sense of inequality and measuring of the value of each other's opinions, morals, and lifestyles, manifests itself.

History is filled with examples of attempts to organise society that directly relate to associations and assumptions of worth assigned to people because of their cultural affiliation. For example, in South Africa certain cultural groups were indoctrinated to believe that they were inferior or superior to others (Marx & Delpont, 2017). Indigenous cultures across the world (for example, in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Finland, Canada) have a history of being ignored and considered to be of less value than those of the West (United Nations, 2009). Roma cultures (in, for example, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Spain, Portugal) have been labelled Other, and devalued regarding their worth to exist (Matras, n.d.). People who take refuge in the countries of the Other face similar accusations of being less worthy to exist as they navigate misinterpretation, discrimination, and survival (Esses et al., 2017; Funk, 2016; Landmann et al., 2019). Let us not forget that the cause of World War II stemmed from ideas of creating a superior race. It is time to critically question these assumptions of worth that exist within society and declare them unacceptable.

Continued discriminatory practices impact the way in which people view themselves. Public generalisations and stereotypes of one's own collective identity result in a person having a "double consciousness" of the self (Du Bois, 1903, p. 9) that renders people vulnerable in terms of becoming. Received hatred, for example, can be internalised as "self-disgust" (Smith & Riley, 2009, p. 24) anger, inferiority, guilt, or shame (Adams et al., 2014; Soudien, 2012). Discriminatory practices can thus directly impact a person's sense of worth in terms of belief in themselves, capacity to cultivate agency, self-determination, potential to imagine a better future, and capacity to succeed in life (Bell, 2007; Soudien, 2008). In fact, Soudien (2008) held that the knowledge of a label of worth assigned to a culture remains "in the blood" of those people many years after the discrimination has been addressed. Ideas of inferiority and superiority are passed down by means of life stories, history, and heritage in a manner that impacts the next generation's way of being, who will have to continue to negotiate measurements of worth during their everyday interactions with the Other. In this regard, Bourdieu (as cited by Edles, 2002) argued that societies tend to reproduce inequality. Reproduction does not only occur within cultural groups and families but also, through the way in which we teach our children. As educators, we need to ask ourselves: "How can we dismantle the canon of inequality that exists in society today?" It beckons us to identify the assumptions of worth reproduced in our educational systems and curricula, to look inwards to investigate

our own assumptions and then identify the hegemony that exists within our own teaching practices, and to take up agency to find practical ways to act to counteract the cycle of inequality.

There is an urgency for educators (and everyone else) to change their tendencies to measure the worth of the Other based on their cultural affiliation. This prompts an immediate response. Nelson Mandela (1990, 9:18) said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” If we change the Other’s experiences in our classroom, and we change our learners’ perspectives towards the Other in the classroom, these changes could culminate in perspective changes that overflow into society. This article aims to empower educators to be proactive in this regard as we consider the question: “How can we create experiences of dignity for the Other in the classroom?”

Who is My Other?

The Other refers to a person who does not belong to one’s own collective identity (Genovesi, 2016; Landau, 2021). In this article, we focus on the collective identity of culture. Given that culture is a meaning-making system, one could argue that the Other is a person who does not share the same meaning-making system as one’s own. There are however, scholars who do not view the Other in this way. Staszak (2020), for example, argued that the notion of Other only exists for the benefit of White people to render those who do not fit their norm as Other. It is used for the negative categorisation of people to further diminish, marginalise, and oppress them to the extent where alienation and dehumanisation can occur (Staszak, 2020). Derrida (2002, as cited in Genovesi, 2016), however, did not agree with that stance, arguing that the concept itself is not intended to inflict negativity or violence. The existence of Other merely recognises that there is indeed an Other, who thinks differently to me (or to you). It recognises the existence of other meaning-making systems and philosophies that govern different kinds of lives (Landau, 2021). Derrida argued that without recognition of the existence of Other, there can be no space for the Other and no respect for the Other (Genovesi, 2016). That being said, the Other remains a stranger because one can never experience the experiences of the Other from their perspective (Bauman, 1997, as cited in Marotta, 2000).

When we encounter an Other, a sense of difference manifests itself. People may experience unusual behaviour, norms, and values that fall outside their meaning-making system, and which can cause discomfort and a sense of unpredictability, which often results in fear of the Other. This fear stems from a fear of the unknown (Barolsky, 2012; Struwig et al., 2012). Esses et al. (2017), Funk (2016), and Landmann et al. (2019) presented such an example—they found that the influx of refugees into foreign countries caused many people from the host countries to fear the cultural distinctiveness of the Other. These authors argued that this fear is what results in negative stereotyping of the Other, discrimination, and feelings of distrust that feed into experiences of intergroup anxiety.

People have a tendency to stereotype others because of their collective identity—even though a cultural group does not consist of a homogenous group of people (Bekerman, 2020; Soudien, 2012). People also tend to reduce their view of a culture to a single or essential characteristic. Such essentialism limits our openness to imagine that people belonging to a different culture may be more than that characteristic, or, may not hold that characteristic (Soudien, 2012). We need to cultivate an openness towards the Other and let go of our beliefs and assumptions of what we think the Other should be. Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (2009) expanded on this idea and cautioned people to not accept a single story as the whole story of a culture or person. She challenged us to gain many stories of the Other, so that we can create a space where people can regain a sense of dignity.

Recognition

To Be Seen, or not To Be Seen—That Is the Question!

Taylor (1994), Lash and Featherstone (2001), Apple (2012), and Luong and Nieke (2014) argued that cultural groups (and people) require recognition to experience dignity and equality. These authors unpacked the type of recognition required by presenting it as a recognition continuum—one that includes both recognition of sameness and recognition of difference. Recognition of sameness is closely linked to ideas of dignity because it emphasises the common humanity of diverse cultural groups. In this context, it refers to the right to be treated in a dignified manner and the right to participate equally within society (Bauman, 2001). Recognition of difference, on the other hand, relates to being recognised as a unique, authentic, and valuable contributor to society (Bauman, 2001; Lash & Featherstone, 2001). All cultural groups (and people) have the need to experience both. We need to be recognised as a person who has equal worth to other human beings, and we need to be recognised and identified as a somewhat unique and authentic person, and valuable contributor to society.

This living theory calls for a shift from assimilation thinking to a conscious focus on recognising difference as a positive attribute in our teaching practice as we cultivate experiences of sameness and difference for the Other in the classroom. This means that the Other needs to be recognised as having worth because of who they are, and not because of their ability to become someone else (or to learn someone else's language and speak it without an accent). Who they are should be considered enough; their people should be recognised as valid people who have something of worth to offer. The Other is worthy to be here and worthy to exist. We do not have the right to diminish the value and validity of an entire group of people and their ways of doing, living, speaking, and thinking simply because they are not the same as us. This kind of thinking stems from the hegemony that exists in our own socialisation and education, and it is not only arrogant but dehumanising.

In this regard, some readers might argue that they were told to not see difference. The reality is that perhaps from a place of privilege, one can say that one is blind to difference but from a place of underprivilege, differences are so apparent and experienced in a lived and real manner in the every-day that they cannot be ignored. Difference is entangled with experiences of inequality, injustice, disgust, fear, and separation. Those who fit into the “regular” culture are not affected by differences, because they themselves are not experiencing being treated differently. However, there are also cases when people may prefer to not be associated with their culture for fear of being stigmatised or judged by it (Blum, 2014). In this regard, Foucault (1994) cautioned us to not tie a person to their identity in a manner that might imprison them.

In the following section, further descriptions of dignity that reach beyond ideas of a common humanity, are explored.

Recognition of Worth

Dignity, according to the Oxford Languages (n.d.), is defined in two ways: The first is being “worthy of honour and respect,” and the second relates to “a sense of pride in oneself” or “self-respect.” The South African Constitution holds that everyone “has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected” (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6). This implies both an internal and an external component to dignity. The way in which we view ourselves is an internal component, and the way in which we are viewed by others suggests an external component. These two are intertwined when shaping our experiences of dignity. Although we can hold on to our dignity within, our experiences of dignity are often determined by how other people treat us. This means that other people have the power to affirm (or destroy) our experiences of feeling worthy, valid, and belonging. They also have the power to make us feel “lesser than” another. Thus, if a person claims that it is important to uphold the value of dignity, that person has a responsibility to act in a manner that upholds this value for others (National Planning Commission, n.d.). It is through the action of another (or the Other), that a person can experience dignity in its fullness, both internally and externally. All people have the power to affirm the dignity and sense of worth for another. Hence, the guiding question: “How can we create experiences of dignity for the Other?”

The reciprocal nature of dignity is also evident in the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Obioha & Okaneme, 2017), albeit nuanced quite differently—a person can only become fully human, if they have a reputation of good and kind deeds towards fellow community members. It is only because of such a reputation that a person can attain Ubuntu (Mokgoro, 2011). Hence, the saying: “I am because we are, and because we are, I am” (Mbiti, 1969). Although it resonates with the previous point, there still remains a dissonance because Ubuntu additionally suggests that there is also a gain when investing in the dignity of another, which somehow complicates the pure intentions of the matter. Off course, whether or not pure intentions are relevant here is debatable. A further dissonance relates to the ontology of being, which Western

thought may find concerning given that it postpones the very moment that a person is considered human (Ikuenobe, 2017). That being said, Ubuntu emphasises a person's desire to be connected and dependent on others as a basic human need. This is something that Western thought often overlooks. Thus, the concept of dignity existed in Indigenous knowledge systems long before the existence of Western thought, which was also a participant's view in Kane et al.'s (2024) study.

Scholarly literature on dignity more often relates to the fields of law and human rights than to education (Kane et al., 2024). Although there are some educational studies such as Espinoza et al.'s (2020, p. 326) who recently constructed a new term, educational dignity, which refers to the "the multifaceted sense of a person's value generated via substantive intra- and inter-personal learning experiences that recognise and cultivate one's mind, humanity, and potential." Educational dignity thus recognises the complexity and layered nature of a person's sense of worth. It alludes to a reciprocity that exists between the internal and external, and presents these as learning experiences through which one could grow and mature potential. This description is useful because it emphasises the components that contribute to an emerging sense of dignity within the person.

Other educational research regards diverse interpretations of dignity as a topic for human rights or citizenship education curricula. Kane et al. (2024), for example, investigated the plurality of meanings associated with dignity amongst diverse citizens in Cambodia with the aim of designing a human rights curriculum. A specific focus of this study was to determine the plurality of meanings that exist within the same society, that stem from different religions and Indigenous orientations. Kleindienst (2024) also explored interpretations of dignity amongst learners in California and Slovenia to investigate how a curriculum on dignity might counteract violence and foster peace. Both these examples relate to designing content for a separate curriculum that teaches the importance of upholding the value of dignity to learners as a matter of human rights. In this living theory, I do not argue for a separate, stand-alone subject to teach learners about dignity. I argue that experiences of dignity should permeate throughout the learners' school experience.

Experiences of equality are closely linked to experiences of dignity. People need to experience dignity before they can experience the kind of equality that is intended in human rights policies (United Nations, 1973). This is not the same kind of intra-group equality that might be experienced through equal suffering but rather, an inter-group experience of equality due to their experiences of dignity. In this regard, experiences of equality can also only occur in the context of a reciprocal relationship between self and Other. One aspect of equality depends on how we view ourselves and another, on how others treat us. Thus, if we are to uphold the value of equality, we have a responsibility to be proactive in realising this experience of equality for the Other (National Planning Commission, n.d.). This means that, as educators,

we can cultivate experiences of equality for the Other in our classrooms. Once a learner has been recognised for their worth, they may indeed stand a chance to also experience equality.

Experiences of equality should not be confused with equity. Equity refers to the structural mechanisms that organisations/universities may implement to offer people with a disadvantage an “equal” chance to succeed. In such cases, learners should not be reminded of the equity measures that got them into the classroom. Besides reminders being offensive and patronising, it paints the people as lesser than, less capable than the person sitting next to them and less worthy to be there. Although equity measures are important, people are likely to take offense if they feel the equity. What should be felt is equality.

In this regard, it is further necessary to address the heart of this proactive action. Creating experiences of dignity does not stem from a White desire to save those who cannot save themselves—that would be arrogant, patronising, and continue diminishing the worth and capacity of the Other. The new lens aspires to counteract such dispositions because the essence of its ontology assumes that every person has equal worth. The act of creating experiences of dignity in the classroom should thus discontinue the view that some people may be lesser than another.

Thus, all educators have an individual responsibility to be proactive in their actions towards creating experiences of dignity and equality for the Other in their classrooms. It is no longer useful to wait for the macro-structures of society to change (although they should)—as educators we must take up our individual responsibilities to think about what we can do tomorrow. The preamble of the United Nations Charter (1973, para. 1) stated that a core purpose of the charter was “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, [and] in the dignity and worth of the human person” and so should we. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, para. 1) held that “recognition of the inherent dignity . . . of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.” In this article, I suggest that educators should critically engage with finding ways to create authentic experiences of dignity for the Other in their classrooms as a reaction to the call to decolonise education. But classrooms look different across the globe. As this is a potential universal idea that might prompt educators all over the world to individual action, it is also necessary to consider the diverse classroom environments where teaching and learning occur.

Readers familiar with multicultural and intercultural education might expect inclusion of this literature here (see Busse & Kraus, 2015; Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Rapanta & Trovao, 2021). That, however, would take us down a different path to what is intended with this article. Instead, the next section presents a brief overview of different compositions of classrooms across the globe, as a factor that may impact the manner in which different educators might respond to this call to create experiences of dignity for the Other.

Multicultural, Monocultural, and Mono-Plus1 Classrooms

In the context of this study, there is a need to distinguish between different types of classrooms according to their cultural composition. The multicultural, monocultural, and what I call the mono-plus1 classroom are discussed below.

The multicultural classroom is a classroom where a strong sense of cultural diversity is present. Learners may be diverse in terms of race, culture (values and norms/meaning-making systems/philosophies), language, religion, home environments, socio-economic standing, class, history (also of trauma), political views, quality of prior education, or privilege. In this regard, the educator will almost certainly be responsible for the growth, development, and education of an Other. Here, the teacher is required to create experiences of dignity for all cultural groups present.

The monocultural classroom is a classroom where all the learners are of the same culture. Here, the teacher's task is to create experiences of dignity for the Other even though the Other may not be present. If one teaches in a way that ignores the existence or relevance of other cultures, one continues hegemonic practices that promote one's own culture as being superior and the only group of people who matter. A conscious effort should be made to include the content of the Other in a manner that offers experiences of dignity to them even if they are not present. In this regard, Bekerman (2020) cautioned teachers to not make comparisons of differences to normative behaviour because these continue teaching hegemonic principles regarding those who fit the norm (one could also argue, those who belong) and those who do not. Elias and Mansouri (2023) also cautioned educators against tokenism, that is, including a small item (i.e. a poster or brief reference to the Other) in order to tick a box rather than fostering an environment where there is a continuous meaningful engagement with the knowledge of the Other. In the monocultural classroom, it is also the teacher's responsibility to decide who indeed, the Other (or Others) is. In this regard, it may be wise to choose a cultural group that is in the vicinity of the community, and to choose a cultural group that is frowned on (or feared) by the community.

The mono-plus1 classroom refers to a monocultural majority where one or two people from different cultural groups are present. Here, attempts to create experiences of dignity require a more nuanced approach because people can easily feel embarrassed or victimised during poor attempts to recognise difference. Risner and Stinson (2010, p. 9) argued that educators need to be careful of arranging a gawking of the "exotic Other" in the classroom. Placing the Other in a proverbial cage and staring at or studying "it" as an intriguing phenomenon, devalues the person to become an object considered less than human. Insensitive attempts to include the Other can thus emphasise that the Other is so different that they do not belong in the classroom. Here, the teacher's attitude towards that person plays a significant part in whether the learner experiences dignity or not. An open-minded "I am still learning" attitude that values the Other as worthy can create spaces for innovative, sensitive, and nuanced ways of making them feel

valued. Indeed, in this kind of classroom, the task is to make the outsider feel like they belong, that they are indeed an insider in the classroom—without them having to compromise who they are, their family values, or their language. The aim is therefore not to teach that learner to become like the other learners in order to fit in but rather, to recognise that the learner, as is, already has value and an equal right to belong and feel welcome in the classroom. In this regard, Espinoza et al. (2020, p. 326) argued that an experience of dignity can only occur when a person has an opportunity to demonstrate their value-adding capacities during meaningful participation and interaction. Although this statement stands in contrast to what was raised in monocultural classrooms, it provides valuable insight into how educators of multicultural and mono-plus1 classrooms might organise their teaching and learning in the classroom.

Bekerman (2020) argued that there are also people who may not want to be recognised for their culture. In this regard, he suggested that educators should instil in learners the knowledge that they have the right to choose who they want to be. Learners should thus also feel free to reject certain attributes of their culture, or adopt attributes from a different culture so that their culture does not become a prison to themselves (Bekerman, 2020; Foucault, 1994). Ultimately, “it is about seeing the learner in the classroom” (Becker, 2018, p. 211).

Indeed, how then should we as educators go about this? How can we teach in a manner that disrupts the current assumptions of worth associated with culture, and create experiences of dignity for the Other? This article offers a starting point that may sound simple to some but indeed forms the groundwork of finding new ways to think and act. Talk to the Other. Find an Other to talk to, start a conversation with humility and build an honest relationship. It is necessary to gain knowledge about the Other, learn about their perspectives, their ways of viewing the world, and their experiences. This cannot be learnt from a quick Google search. It requires meaningful interaction with the Other.

Interacting With the Other

Symbolic interactionism teaches us that human beings make sense of the self, the Other, and the world through interaction (Blumer, 1969; Schwalbe, 2020; Stryker & Stryker, 2016). During interaction, individuals have inner conversations with the self to evaluate and refine their sense-making of the specific human interaction. From such inner conversations, meanings are created, refined, and altered as people construct a conscious action or reaction to the world, rather than responding through mere automation (Blumer, 1969).

This is also applicable to the educator who interacts with a community member of the Other. After each interaction, both parties adjust their meaning of the self in relation to the Other and the world. Interactions with the Other are essential to get to know the Other, diminish fear of the Other, find the value within the Other, and find respectful ways to recognise the Other (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Rapanta & Trovao, 2021;

Tropp, 2011). It is only when individuals are empowered and encouraged to engage in “uninhibited dialogue with difference,” that fear of the Other can be eliminated (Marotta, 2000, p. 123).

It is imperative to approach the Other with humility and with an openness to learn, rather than with haste to make judgements. Keet et al. (2009) argued that interactions with the Other often require a mutual vulnerability because it requires courage and honesty to enquire about difference and the views of the Other. Conversations where this mutual vulnerability exists also open up new spaces to talk about experiences of inequality and offense as the two parties learn about each Other.

Educators who would like to become an agent of change should thus make it priority to have meaningful interactions with a community member of the Other. It is therefore not enough to merely Google a fact sheet or a song belonging to the Other. Interactions with the Other will facilitate learning from the Other, getting to know the Other, and adjusting assumptions of the Other. Once such relationships are formed, one can also learn about experiences of the Other, which may provide insight into sensitive topics and potentially offensive statements or behaviours that are essential to learn in the context of creating experiences of dignity for the Other. From this relationship, one can also find trustworthy and meaningful resources to use in the classroom as one learns how and what to teach to create experiences of dignity for the Other in the classroom.

In this regard, it is important to remember that the above principle also applies to the way in which the learner makes sense of the world. The learner interacts with the teacher and then adjusts their meanings of self and Other after each interaction. What we do, what we teach, and how we act determine the learner’s experiences of dignity and their measurement of the self in relation to the Other. It is with this in mind, that the following section returns to the d-word, to guide educators to a deeper investigation of the inequalities that exists in their own teaching praxis, and to offer some practical examples of what educators can do to take individual action towards creating experiences of dignity for the Other in the classroom.

What Can We Learn From the D-Word?

Exactly what decolonising curricula means is debatable (Adefila et al., 2022). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) held that radical decolonisation regards placing Indigenous knowledge at the centre of the learning experience, with the aim to decentralise Western knowledge systems. Higgs’ (2012, p. 37) view was slightly more nuanced; he promoted recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems as valuable and relevant meaning-making systems in educational curricula with the intent to attain “power-sharing” epistemologies. Zembylas (2018) expanded on the latter and suggested that educators deconstruct specific concepts to the extent where they can be reconstructed in a manner that recognises the value and contribution of non-Western knowledge systems. Zembylas (2018) also argued that decolonising education does not only relate to the content and curriculum design but also, to our teaching methods.

The decolonisation debate has taught us to question: “Whose knowledge do we teach?” And also to consider: “Whose knowledge is excluded?” (Zembylas, 2018). In the context of creating experiences of dignity for the Other, these questions are integral to every classroom. Thereafter, educators should find meaningful ways to include the knowledge and philosophies of the Other in their classrooms as a conscious effort to validate the existence of other ways of being. This may require some investigation, some vulnerable conversations, and some interactions with the Other in order to find resources and perhaps even community members who may be willing to share their knowledge in the classroom. Recognising the Other’s knowledge as valid requires us to respect, learn, and teach, *inter alia*, about language, food, family, traditions, celebrations, gifts, cultural artefacts, art, poetry, aesthetics, norms, and contributions to new knowledge within that cultural domain. In this regard, decolonisation discourse also raised awareness regarding the absence of academic resources authored by the Other in our classrooms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Recognising the knowledge production of the Other can be done by means of referencing the scholarly works, educational books, compositions, poetry, and art of the Other. Decolonising curricula further included conscious efforts to represent the Other—in images, media, photos, films, children’s books, and other literature we use in our classrooms. If these are difficult to find, it may be necessary to generate your own.

This then stands in contrast to the complex discussion surrounding who has the right to teach whose knowledge (Kerr-Berry, 2004). For example, Durkheim (1972) and Doumbia (2013) argued that sharing the cultural artefacts, such as a dance or music, of the Other may indeed render what is sacred for a particular cultural group, profane. Educators who are outsiders to a knowledge should take seriously the consequences of sharing that knowledge (Rowe, 2008). It is necessary to investigate which knowledge is sacred and may not be shared, as opposed to which knowledge would be commonly accepted by the community for sharing. As educators, we also need to consider and care about the consequences of what might happen within that community because we shared that knowledge. Would it, for example, cause disruption and tension within the community, or would it indeed foster experiences of recognition? More so, is it acceptable for an outsider to learn and teach the philosophy of an Other as I have done? In the context of decolonisation, it is imperative that we do. Exclusion of this knowledge would paint Western thought as the only knowledge worth mentioning, and continue the discrimination that implies that Western thought is superior and other philosophies are inferior. As an outsider, it may not be possible to understand the philosophy in its fullness (Mokgoro, 2011; Praeg, 2014), but it can still be shared with respect as a living evolving philosophy relevant to life today. It is imperative that we teach the knowledge of the Other in a manner that recognises the development of that knowledge. For example, Rowe (2008) warned teachers who teach cultural knowledge in its pure “preserved” form, that such teaching methods may also cause misrecognition because they might unjustly portray the people of the associated cultural

group as static and incapable of creativity to evolve and generate their own new artefacts (Rowe, 2008). Thus, the manner in which certain aspects of a culture of the Other are shared could indeed create experiences of dignity or they could evoke the opposite experience—that of feeling lesser than another.

South African students called for an education that is relevant to their own lived experiences of the world. They felt that most curriculum content and examples related to circumstances different to theirs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Educators had to find ways to alter some content, or the explanations of content, in a manner that would resonate with their students' lived environments. In this regard, the examples educators use to explain concepts should also resonate with the experiences of the Other. This is no easy task because one has not lived the experiences of the Other. But with time and intention, one may discover examples that would work.

Disrupting experiences of inequality also requires a deeper engagement with one's own practice, to identify the hidden notions of power that may continue to promote ideologies of superiority and inferiority in the classroom. Thus, educators should take the time to critically interrogate their own practice to identify potential moments of hegemony that exist within their classrooms (Rowe, 2008). This hegemony may occur unintentionally through educators who mean no harm (Bell, 2007). For example, in the context of dance education, certain dance styles such as ballet are often taught as being "proper" dance, high art, and a more elite dance form than traditional dance. This idea stems from Western thought and, when taught as such to a multicultural group of learners, devalues the dance practices of entire cultural groups (Rowe, 2008; Rowe et al., 2014; van Heerden, 2021). Thus, hegemony exists in the content that we teach and also in the vocabulary that we use when we teach.

Hegemony may also exist in the philosophy from which we design our teaching methods. For example, I had to interrogate whose aesthetics I am teaching in the multicultural classroom (van Heerden, 2021). In this regard, it is necessary that educators identify and unpack whose normal they are teaching. It requires educators to make a conscious effort to create spaces for the existence of other ways of normal in a manner that offers equal worth to both ways of doing and living. This may require finding a more balanced terminology to describe concepts or content in the classroom that would also create experiences of dignity and equality for the Other "for, to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others" (Mandela, 1995, p. 385).

In an era where society has grown accustomed to measure the worth of a person according to their cultural association, it is time for educators to act as agents of change. Educators are in a unique position to create experiences of dignity and equality for the Other in a manner that makes the Other feel valued, welcome, and that they belong. Educators can teach learners in the classroom about different ways of doing and living, and that all people and their ways of doing and living are equally worthy of existing in society.

Educators can create spaces for the cultural knowledge of the Other through a conscious effort to adjust content, interrogate the hegemony that exists in the classroom, and alter existing terminologies and explanations to validate the existence of the knowledge and lives of the Other. Educators can also facilitate learner-to-learner interactions with the Other in the classroom so that they can get to know the Other, and so that it can prompt learners to adjust their views of self in relation to the Other and the world. Educators can facilitate interactive spaces where the Other has opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to add value in order to cultivate inherent dignity within that person. Educators can also, by example, teach their learners how to interact with the Other in a manner that fosters dignity and respect. That which is learnt within the classroom can spill into society in a manner that could disrupt the cycle of inequality that exists today.

This living theory thus challenges educators to take action to become agents of change, as we ask ourselves: “How can I create experiences of dignity for the Other in my classroom?”

Conclusion

In this article, I presented “creating experiences of dignity for the Other” as a living theory through which educators can critically interrogate and adjust their own teaching practice as a conscious effort to disrupt the cycle of inequality that exists in education and society. I constructed a new lens through which people can view the world—one that is based on culture as a meaning-making system associated measurements of worth and the concepts of Other and difference. Recognition of sameness and difference was presented as a requirement for experiences of dignity and equality, which was then related to the educator’s role in the classroom to bring these into being. This was followed by a discussion that included the value of interaction with the Other, and some lessons learnt from the discourse surrounding decolonising education. Together, these form a living theory that might empower educators to disrupt the hegemony and inequality that exist in their classrooms across the globe, in a manner that could ultimately promote experiences of dignity for all.

In this article, I intended to break open important issues of decolonisation and communicate these in a manner that does not accuse or anger people but rather, encourage them to take appropriate action to dismantle experiences of inequality in society. It aimed to empower all educators (both those who have experiences of marginalisation or oppression and those who have not) to respond to the call for decolonisation in their own contexts by offering a set of positive actions that can create experiences of dignity for the Other in the classroom.

I do not offer this framework as complete but rather, as a starting point for further interrogation and expansion. Scholars are invited to critically engage with the living theory to find the gaps and perhaps contribute to it in a manner that might foster yet deeper understanding of what is further required to

address experiences of inequality in classrooms and societies across the world. Future studies could unpack the experiences of educators as they apply this living theory in their own contexts. Potential challenges for the educator, the learners, the community of the Other, or the broader community when applying this living theory would also contribute to deepening our understanding of the steps required to further break the cycle of inequality in society. Studies that investigate the impact of adopting this living theory might look at specific learner outcomes that could relate to well-being, belonging, empowerment, capacity development, or personal transformation. In this regard, I also advise educators who find themselves encouraged by this living theory, to document their own journey of discovery, challenges, mistakes, and perspective transformations in order to generate new knowledge regarding the different personal journeys of educators across the globe.

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