

Contested Spaces–Shared Places: Negotiating the Contours of Democratic Citizenship

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Abstract

Utilising the theoretical framework of pedagogy of compassion, a single embedded case study, and narrative inquiry, this paper explores how a teacher negotiates the contours of migration and social transformation to promote education for democratic citizenship. Data capture comprised a mix of semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes. Data was analysed by means of the content analysis method. The teacher anticipated and fulfilled requirements not only to raise the critical consciousness of learners but to espouse an ‘epistemology of compassion’ and to implement a ‘pedagogy of compassion’ which enabled learners to become active, critical, and democratic citizens, imbued with a sense of common humanity and compassion.

German Synopsis

Unter Benutzung des theoretischen Rahmens der sogenannten Pädagogik der Anteilnahme sowie einer einzelnen eingebetteten Fallstudie und narrativer Untersuchungen, erforscht dieser Beitrag, wie eine Lehrerin die Umriss von Wanderungsbewegungen und sozialem Wandel erstellt, um die Entwicklung demokratischer Bürger zu unterstützen. Daten wurden durch teilstrukturierte Interviews, Beobachtung und Aufzeichnungen im Feld erfasst und durch die Methode der Inhaltsanalyse ausgewertet. Die Lehrerin war auf die Erfüllung der Anforderung eingestellt, das kritische Bewusstsein der Lerner zu erhöhen sowie die Erkenntnistheorie der Anteilnahme zu unterstützen und die Pädagogik der Anteilnahme umzusetzen. Dieser Ansatz ermöglichte es den Lernern, sich zu aktiven, kritischen und demokratisch orientierten Bürgern zu entwickeln, die von einem Empfinden der geteilten Menschlichkeit und Anteilnahme durchdrungen sind.

Introduction

Only when a nation state is unified around a set of democratic values such as human rights, justice, and equality can it secure the liberties of cultural, ethnic, language, and religious groups and enable them to experience freedom, justice, and peace. Citizens who understand this unity-diversity tension and act accordingly do not materialize from thin air; they are educated for it. (Banks et al., 2005, p. 7).

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how citizens can be ‘educated for it’. The inception of democracy in South Africa brought with it a change in the hues and contours that once defined the educational landscape. The South African education system has been reformed to become ‘a key allocator of life chances as an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens’ (South African Schools Act, 1996, p. 1). Prior to 1994, an apartheid ideology regulated the South African education system. In an attempt to dismantle this system, a barrage of educational reform efforts, driven by legislative policies that promoted democracy and human rights for all citizens, was introduced in South African schools.

Contested spaces between Black and White¹ South African students were a defining feature of the early years of democracy. However, over the past two decades, the South African schooling system, while unravelling its shape and form, has witnessed the mass entry of ‘Black immigrant students’², which added a new, complicated dynamic to this already contested space in shared places. Given the changing historical, political, social and educational context of South Africa, this study asks, how can teachers negotiate the contours of migration and social transformation to promote education for democratic citizenship?

The paper begins by briefly sketching out the background context. I then present a review of the literature on education for democratic citizenship, followed by a brief outline of the theoretical framework. The paper concludes by critically engaging findings of this study with the literature review and the theoretical framework in order to unpack how an exemplary teacher negotiates the contours of migration and social transformation to promote education for democratic citizenship.

¹ The terms Black, White, Indian and Coloured derive from the apartheid racial classifications of the different peoples of South Africa. The use of these terms, although problematic, has continued through the post-apartheid era in the country. In this paper, these terms are used grudgingly for clarification of the context.

² Black immigrant students: Referencing the apartheid era solidarity of all non-whites as ‘black’, *Black immigrant students* refers to both non-white immigrants who come from African countries, to descendants of any of the people of Africa, and to Indian immigrants who hail from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Exploring the Terrain: Education for Democratic Citizenship

A review of the voluminous literature reveals six key contextual factors that help explain the considerable growth in interest in citizenship education over the past decade. *Global injustice and inequality* (Banks et.al 2005; Moellendorf, 2009; Reese, et.al, 2014). *Globalisation and migration* (Petersen & Schramm, 2017; Rapoport, 2016; Czaika & deHaas, 2014). *Concerns about civic and political engagement* (Galston, 2001; Xenus et.al, 2014). *Youth deficit tendency* (Griffin, 1993; Osler & Vincent, 2003). Citizenship education is often seen as a means of addressing a perceived deficit among the young (Osler & Starkey, 2003), whether this deficit relates to low levels of voting (usually interpreted as political apathy), violence, or anti-social behaviour. *The end of the Cold War* was an enormous boost for democracy and, consequently, education for democracy in Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America and Africa (Giddens, 2013) and the *growth of anti-democratic movements with racist agendas* (Fekete, 2018).

The focus of this paper is on globalisation and migration. Globalisation can perhaps best be defined as the widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life (Held et.al, 1999, p. 2). Globalisation should be simultaneously seen as a technological and political process (Czaika & de Haas, 2014). Migration patterns have also become more complex. Globalisation and migration present new and encompassing challenges to the imagination and representation as well as challenging the creation of images, which is so essential to both individual and collective world-making (Petersen & Schramm, 2017).

The processes of globalisation and the migration movements resulting from globalisation are having a direct impact on communities and schools and are increasing levels of diversity in local communities. Within multicultural democracies, there are perceived tensions between the need to promote national unity or cohesion and the need to accommodate, and indeed support, a diverse range of cultural communities within the nation state (Taylor, 1994). These tensions demand an educational response. Citizenship education in schools is recognised as a means of addressing both unity and diversity. There is a need to rethink the aims and processes of citizenship education in schools; increased diversity and increased recognition of diversity require a vigorous re-examination of the ends and means of citizenship education.

Some key themes have been identified in education for democratic citizenship, namely: diversity and unity; global and cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2003); children as

citizens; democratic schooling; students’ understanding of citizenship; and democracy and the complementary roles of schools and communities (Figueroa, 2000).

Education for citizenship in schools does not take place in a vacuum. Learners bring their experiences of daily life into the classroom; experiences which are often strongly influenced by their families and experiences in their communities. Figueroa (2000, p. 54) does not see diversity as ‘disintegrative or a fault to be overcome’. Instead, he draws our attention to the fact that ‘all present-day societies are plural’ to some degree and that difference is a primary and rich resource. Arguing that the encounter with the different other is at the heart of human experience, he presents cultural pluralism as an ideal, and one which sets equity as a central goal. For Figueroa, citizenship involves commitment to society in all its diversity; openness to, solidarity with, and respect for the different other; acceptance of the basic worth of all people; and rejection of any form of exploitation, inequitable treatment or racism. (Figueroa, 2000, p. 57). Acknowledging the power relations between groups is, for Figueroa, an essential task in addressing the tensions between unity and diversity.

Theoretical Moorings: Pedagogy of Compassion

The concept of a pedagogy of compassion³ builds on the work of Jansen (2009) and Freire (1998) and proposes the following tenets (Vandeyar & Swart, 2018):

1. Dismantling polarised thinking and questioning one’s ingrained belief system.

Educational settings are almost genetically stereotyped (Keet, Zinn & Porteurs 2009, p. 110). The lingering legacies of apartheid have ensured that educational spaces in South Africa are still stereotyped according to racial or genetic compositions. For this reason, Jansen (2009, p. 153) calls for the disruption of knowledge so that all South Africans can confront each other with their respective memories of trauma, tragedies, and triumph in the classroom. According to Jansen (2009), polite silences and hidden resentments should be exposed, indirect knowledge should be made explicit, and its potential and real harm discussed openly. Dialogue between ‘opposing parties’ should be encouraged because conflict not only promotes engagement but also harbours the inherent potential to dismantle polarised thinking. Vandeyar and Swart (2018) expand on this tenet by arguing that it should go beyond simply unsettling or dismantling polarised thinking to questioning one’s ingrained belief system.

³ This theoretical framework was first published in Vandeyar, S & Swart, R. (2018). Shattering the silence: dialogic engagement about education protest actions in South African university classrooms. *Teaching in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1502170>

2. Changing mindsets: compassionately engaging with diversity in educational spaces.

Jansen (2009, p. 154) claims that pedagogic dissonance happens when one’s stereotypes are shattered. This does not happen overnight. ‘One incident of pedagogic dissonance does not, of course, lead to personal change, but it can begin to erode sure knowledge’ (Jansen 2009, p. 154). Linked to the notion of pedagogic dissonance as argued by Jansen is the work of Zembylas (2010; 2017), who emphasises the proactive and transformative potential of discomfort. Zembylas (2010, p. 703) argues that teachers experience immense discomfort when having to confront diversity and multiculturalism. Drawing on Foucault (1994) who introduced an ethic of discomfort, he claims,

An ethic of discomfort, therefore, invites teachers and students to critique their deeply held assumptions about themselves and others by positioning themselves as witnesses (as opposed to spectators) to social injustices and structurally limiting practices such that they see and act as ambiguous rather than dualistic subjects (e.g., ‘us’ and ‘them’). (Boler & Zembylas, 2003)

Freire (1992, p. 95) claims that teachers should have a critical democratic outlook on the prescribed teaching content and never allow themselves to succumb to the naive temptation to look on content as something magical. If teachers treat content as neutral, thereby ignoring what Jansen calls pedagogic dissonance, then the content has power of its own accord, and the teacher can only ‘deposit’ it in learners, which means that the content loses its power to effect the desired change. All of the above plays out in educational spaces which, according to Postma (2016, p. 5),

...are political spaces of a particular kind. They are spaces of reflection, of relative safety and reduced risks; courage is not assumed, but fostered; opportunities are provided to experiment with new beginnings and imaginations, and to develop judgement; forgiveness could be cultivated and hope fostered.

‘Fusing a set of different horizons’ or views, namely those of ‘pedagogic dissonance’ (Jansen, 2009); ‘ethic of discomfort’ (Foucault, 1994; Zembylas, 2003); critical democratic outlook and ‘knowledge of living experience’ (Freire 1992, 57); and ‘educational spaces’ (Postma, 2016), Vandeyar and Swart (2018) propose a proactive commitment to engage compassionately with diversity in educational spaces. Educational spaces have to be opened up to the multitude of student voices. Compassionately responding to student voices entails not only warmth and care, but also a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another individual, who may be stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

3. Instilling hope and sustainable peace.

‘A post-conflict pedagogy is founded on hope’ (Jansen 2009, p. 154). Freire (1992, p. 77) claims that there is no change without a dream, and that there is no dream without hope. The hope that Jansen and Freire refer to is achievable in practice. It is insufficient to simply pronounce hope; hope should be acted upon. There is no room for utopia in post-conflict pedagogy. In a post-conflict society, the former oppressor and the oppressed do not get caught up in a blaming game. Jansen (2009, p. 154) refers to post-conflict pedagogy as follows: ‘This kind of critical pedagogy recognizes the power and the pain at play in school and society and their effects on young people, and then asks “how things could be better”’. Similarly, Freire argues that as an individual and as a class, the oppressor can neither liberate nor be liberated. This is why, through self-liberation and through the required, just struggle, the oppressed— as an individual and as a class—liberate the oppressor through the simple act of forbidding him or her to keep on oppressing. ‘The liberation of individuals acquires profound meaning only when the transformation of society is achieved’ (Freire 1992, 85). Vandeyar and Swart (2018) argue that such transformation not only instils hope but also holds the promise of sustainable peace.

Research Strategy

Social constructivism and a qualitative case study approach (Silverman, 2006) were utilised in this study. The aim of this study was to gain in-depth, thick descriptions and understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon, and to identify teachers who were negotiating the contours of migration and social transformation to promote education for democratic citizenship. Snowball sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Rubin & Babbie, 1993) fulfilled this requirement, as headteachers were asked to recommend teachers who were bringing about change in their schools.

While capturing data for the broader study, I came across Rina, an exceptional female Indian teacher who espoused an ‘epistemology of compassion’ (Vandeyar, 2010, 2016). Classroom observations of this teacher revealed some criteria that made her exceptional. She seemed to have extensive knowledge about each of her learners; she knew and understood each of their lives; she incorporated their life-worlds in her teaching; and she enabled learners to attach meaning to real life experiences. I acknowledge that, in my role as a reactive observer, I was part of the social setting being studied. Reactive observations are contexts in which participants are mindful of being observed and are ‘amenable to interacting with the researcher’

(Angrosino, 2005, p. 732). I purposefully chose this role because of the useful source of data that this approach could provide during observations.

Semi-structured interviews with Rina designed to determine her perspectives about the way in which the process of desegregation was unfolding in her classroom yielded a set of criteria used in observations. These interviews coincided with the three-week period of observations. Field notes were written based on informal classroom observations. Attention was also given to the physical environment of the classroom, which included observations of artefacts such as paintings, decor, photographs, portraits and school magazines. As in the broader study, observation was the main data gathering technique used in this study. Observed lessons were videotaped, and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data garnered from the broader study supported a sub-analysis that focused on how a teacher brought about meaningful change in her classroom. Using content analysis methods (Mayring, 2000; Sandelowski, 2000), data was re-coded a priori (Charmaz, 2005) to accommodate ‘new insights’ (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). The data was coded to make sense of emergent categories that expressed the experiential knowledge of the participant, and presented as rich and thick analysis.

To ensure research rigour, the following quality criteria were considered: transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Transferability refers to the scope and the restrictions to which findings of this research can be applied. Credibility of the research findings included the purposeful sampling of the research participant, the sampling of the research site, and the application of appropriate data-gathering strategies (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Dependability was achieved through a process known as auditing. The audit trail procedure can also be valuable when verifying confirmability (Seale, 2002). The authenticity of this study rests in the ‘faithful reconstruction of the participant’s multiple perceptions’ (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 415).

I obtained ethical approval to conduct this study from the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education. The ethics application went through a rigorous blind peer review process. Pseudonyms were assigned to the research site and participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings: The Context

Rina was an Indian English-speaking female in her late thirties and held a Bachelor in Education degree. She taught at Broadacres Primary School, a former ‘white’ school. Because of the repeal of the Group Areas Act in 1991 and the desegregation of schools in 1995, there had been a strong influx of Black South African learners into this school since the inception of democracy, as well as Black immigrant learners over the past decade. The catchment area of the school thus comprised a diverse community. The White learners came from the suburb of Broadacres. The majority of Black (indigenous and immigrant) learners commuted to the school from the surrounding black townships and informal settlements.

Rina taught the subjects English and Life Orientation to learners in Year 7. Her classes comprised 40 learners per class and were gender- and race-sensitive. Learners were arranged in groups of five across gender and race. Learners in her classes, on average, comprised a mix of approximately ten White learners, four Indian learners, and one Coloured learner; the rest were African and some Black immigrant learners (SADC region, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

Rina had proactively set out to attend to first and second order changes in terms of diversity by applying what I term the metaphors of the mirror and windows⁴. She attempted to create an educational space that would give all learners a sense of belonging and a feeling at home. Projects and posters that reflected the diverse backgrounds and cultures of all learners adorned the classroom walls. The physical appearance, classroom climate, and atmosphere were conducive to teaching a class of diverse learners. I observed lessons delivered by Rina over a three-week period. All her lessons were unique and exceptional, indicative of her passion and her commitment to her calling. In delivering the curriculum, Rina choose an inclusive teaching strategy. Although she was unaware of the concept of pedagogy of compassion, she nevertheless unknowingly implemented this pedagogy in her classroom.

⁴ The metaphor of the *mirror* is about validating the identity of every student in the class. The student should see him/herself reflected in the classroom. In this way, his/her identity is affirmed. The metaphor of *windows* relates to the fact that even if you do not have a particular cultural group represented in the classroom, you need to open the ‘window’ and allow your students to look out and learn about other cultures.

Dismantling polarised thinking and questioning one’s ingrained beliefs

During one of her Life Orientation lessons about valued citizenship, Rina was confronted with an incident of racial stereotyping. Some students expressed strong opinions about ‘Black immigrants’ in South Africa. The climate was ripe for this discussion as, during the preceding weekend, the stalls and small shops of some Black immigrant hawkers in the township had been burnt and looted. Some South African students expressed strong nationalist sentiments:

Sipho: This is our country’ ma’am, we suffered during apartheid, and they were not here then. Now they come to take everything from us.

Rina: Who is this ‘they’ that you are talking about, Sipho?

Sipho: The immigrants, Ma’am, the ones with all the funny names like Omidire, Elufisan and Adebajji. They are not South African, we are! They just come and take everything. They must go back to where they came from.

Kevin (Coloured male) joined in: And, Ma’am, the Nigerians, they are everywhere. They are the criminals, and they are killing our people. They do bad crimes.

Annelise (White female): These Black immigrants are also very shrewd. They are taking jobs off our people. Now South Africans are jobless. They are also the ones who do drugs.

Kola (a Nigerian student) came to the defence of immigrants: We don’t take jobs. We are businessmen. We can’t help it if we are cleverer than South Africans. If we see an opportunity, we take it.

Priya: But, Ma’am, also where I live, we suffer with all these Paki’s and people who come from India. They are doing the same thing in the Indian suburbs. Why can’t they just go back to their countries?

Rina allowed for a multitude of her student voices to be heard. Then she said:

To have a different viewpoint or opinion is not wrong. Let us discuss this and come to some understanding of whether what you are saying is the only truth.

Robust discussion and debate ensued in the class. As an observer in this class, I was awestruck by the opinions of learners, who were not even born during the apartheid era. What was the source of all this prejudice and discrimination? We are currently experiencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution in terms of technology; the world has become a global village. One would have thought that this generation of students would have been more tolerant. Rina, on the other hand, calmly set about challenging each of these viewpoints, allowing for the multitude of learner voices to contribute to the discussion and effectively illustrating that there should be no

‘our’, ‘them’, ‘they’ and ‘us’. The ‘other’ is as much a global citizen of the world as he or she is any one of us.

She also tried to impress upon her students that we are not born into an identity, but that identity is fluid and context-based. She asked some Black immigrant students with what cultural background they identified. Responses included: ‘Rwandan’; Congolese-South African; Indian–South African; African; South African-Nigerian. She then used these responses to validate her argument. She also outlined the value and benefits of having Black immigrants in South Africa. By the end of the lesson, some learners expressed some misgivings, others were still a bit dubious. Understandably so: it could not be expected that after only one lesson, all students’ thinking would have changed. However, Rina certainly planted the seed of doubt and created the opportunity for students to question their beliefs. What was admirable was that Rina presented her students with many truths and also challenged them to think critically. She did not impose her views on the students but created an educational space that set out to disrupt their received knowledge. She consolidated the lesson by reinforcing what they had learnt with the following task:

The President of South Africa announced today that all Black immigrants who came to South Africa since the advent of democracy will be deported to their countries of origin.

Write a letter to the President in which you respond to this announcement. Justify your standpoint.

The due date for this task was a week later, which gave her students time for introspection and self-reflection.

Changing mindsets: compassionately engaging with diversity in educational spaces

Rina opted for a system of discipline that requested silence before commencing the lesson. She would stand in front of the class and would only greet the learners once they were silent. Then the lesson would proceed. During group activity, she moved from group to group. Learners were involved in the lesson, and noise was related to discussion and activities. In order to make the learners feel part of the group, Rina ensured that no learner was excluded from group discussions. She moved around the group to ensure that all members of the group participated.

If we do activities they won’t, like, leave you out and let other children do it, they make everybody do it together (Mpumi, female African learner).

If a learner became unruly, Rina immediately raised the tone of her voice and requested that the learner continue with the task. All learners would immediately settle down and continue working.

Ms R, when you make her angry, she does not shout, keep quiet or anything, she tells you properly, do this, and do not do this, and you understand what to do (Jafta, male Black immigrant learner).

If you do something wrong, she talks to you nicely (Liesel, female White learner).

If you make a mistake, she will not scream at you, she just tells you stop that. She is not rude to you (Moosa, male Indian learner).

It would seem that Rina opted for a rational and reasonable approach to discipline. She spoke to her learners about their misdemeanours and refrained from becoming hysterical or shouting at them.

Rina knew all her learners and called upon them by name to respond to questions. The fact that she called on them using their names was indicative of her respect for her learners. She also integrated everyone and fostered a sense of working together. She randomly asked learners of different races and genders to read out aloud to the class. In this way, all learners were valued and made to feel a sense of belonging. Learners related well to each other and to Rina. There was a sense of mutual respect between learners and between the teacher and learners. ‘The teacher respects you and the way you are’ (Nelson, Male Black learner).

They do not push you away from the group. You feel a part of the class, and you are encouraged to participate. They [teacher and other students] actually make you part of the class (Funke, female Black immigrant learner).

When she asks, you put up your hand, and she will not just leave you and ask someone else. She always gives you a chance (Zama, female Black learner).

The teacher is not racist. Just because I am White, it does not mean that I have to get away with everything (Johan, male White learner).

Rina promoted active participation and allowed learners to ‘do stuff’ to learn from each other. She initially made use of external motivation to invite learner participation. For example, ‘the group with the best idea will win a prize.’ However, she mentioned that as lessons progressed, she hoped that learners would become internally motivated. The supportive manner in which she provided feedback to learners also served to motivate them.

If you have corrections and you say, ‘but I wrote the word correctly’, she would say, ‘look closely, you made a mistake over there’ (Neha, female Indian learner).

When you do not understand, you ask her, and then she explains it to you properly (Tawanda, male Black learner).

She also allowed learners to learn about the backgrounds and cultures of other learners, thus exposing them to differences as well as similarities. One such practice was allowing learners to take turns to lead prayers from their cultural backgrounds on a rotational basis. This observance of prayer in the classroom created an atmosphere in which diverse learners felt a sense of acceptance. It also created an opportunity for learners to learn about other religions.

Rina also tried to relate diverse, cultural and socio-economic issues to learners’ backgrounds; for example, in one of her lessons, she drew the learners’ attention to the fact that ‘pocket money’ differs according to learners’ home backgrounds. She also posed questions such as: ‘Is there something that we can do about it?’ In all her lessons, she attempted to promote a community of enquiry by providing a stimulus that required learners to pose questions, to engage critically in discussions, and to solve problems. Rina posed many ‘why’ questions and counteracted the negativity she encountered with positive thoughts and actions. She intentionally set out to find ways to instil a sense of hope in her learners.

Voting for the class representative was another example. Learners elected their class representative. In a class of diverse learners, the class representative was bound to be of a different race than some of the other class members. Thus, it was of crucial importance to teach learners about the importance of respect regardless of race and gender. This would ensure that students would respect the class representative irrespective of his or her race or gender. Rina instilled a sense of democratic values and responsibility in her learners.

Ma’am makes me give points because I am class representative (Simphiwe, female Black learner).

She shares out the duties; one child will close the windows and one child pushes the chairs (Jane, female White learner).

Rina’s compassion as a teacher and her acute awareness of the socioeconomic status of her learners came through, as is evident from the comments of her learners:

She has concern for others, like, if one person does not have lunch, she asks the others to share with that person (Bheki, male Black learner).

Ms R is always fair, and she always asks the learner if she/he is okay and equally important, she will not neglect you (Annuarite, female Black immigrant learner).

She does not shout, she really cares about us (Vani, female Indian learner).

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

It comes as no surprise that South Africa has become a magnetic force in ‘widening, deepening and speeding up worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life’ (Held et.al, 1999, p. 2). On the one hand, the political, social, educational and economic viability of South Africa makes it an attractive destination for Black immigrants, especially from Third World countries. South Africa is seen to offer opportunities for better life chances. On the other hand, globalisation and migration present new and encompassing challenges to imagination and representation. These allow individuals to challenge the creation of images, which is so essential for collective world-making (Petersen & Schramm, 2017). The processes of globalisation and consequent migration, enacted on the classroom floor and in the school playground, demand an educational response.

In an attempt to diffuse tensions between the need to promote national unity and the need to accommodate, and indeed support, a diverse range of cultural communities within the nation state, Rina provided an admirable educational response. She attempted to inculcate critical thinking skills in her learners, created opportunities for them to engage compassionately with diversity in educational spaces, and effectively illustrated that difference is a primary and a rich resource and resides at the heart of human experience (Figueroa, 2000).

Education does not occur in a vacuum. Each learner enters an educational space with an invisible knapsack that contains his or her entire lifeworld. It is the duty of the teacher to build scaffolds between the lifeworld of the learner and new knowledge. The daily life experiences of learners are strongly influenced by their families and their experiences in the community. This was evident in the incident that learners shared about Black immigrants. It would seem that learners in Rina’s class were merely echoing and reflecting the social mirror of South African society. What they had heard from their families and their respective communities seemed to be imbibed as ‘the truth’ and seemed to run as deep as knowledge in the blood (Jansen, 2009). It is therefore imperative that teachers disrupt such received knowledge and expose learners to opportunities for pedagogic dissonance, so that their stereotypical views are shattered, they experience a sense of discomfort and they begin to question their ingrained beliefs.

In attempting to negotiate the contours of democratic citizenship, Rina, in her capacity as the agent of curriculum delivery, educated her students in a manner that prepared them for the type of citizenship espoused by Figueroa (2000, p. 57),

Citizenship involves commitment to the society in its diversity; openness to, solidarity with, and respect for the different other; acceptance of the basic worth of all people and rejection of any form of exploitation, inequitable treatment or racism.

Learning was not only about the content but also about the relationship that Rina forged between herself, the learner(s), and the learning experience. She was open to the idea that she might not have all the answers all of the time, as was evident from her comment: ‘To have a different viewpoint or opinion is not wrong.’ Sanzerbacher (1991) interprets Freire’s view on knowledge construction to mean that all knowledge is mediated and that no one has the truth. Learners in Rina’s class were actively involved in learning and developing their own knowledge with the guidance of the teacher. The teacher should not only be an expert on the subject knowledge that is taught in the classroom, but the teacher and the learners should also share each other’s knowledge and this, in turn, shifts power in the classroom. Rina tried to diffuse tensions between groups in her class by addressing power relations. Learners were empowered to take responsibility for their own learning by applying critical thought. Critical thinking skills that learners develop become life skills. These skills will be crucial in enabling learners to transform their world after they have left school. By focusing on positive aspects and nurturing critical thinking skills, Rina not only instilled a sense of hope in her learners but also mapped the route for sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The increasing diversity in South African schools requires an increased recognition of, and engagement with, diversity, and robust and critical re-examination of the role of education in negotiating the contours for a democratic citizenship. Effective citizenship education in schools as a means for addressing both unity and diversity could be achieved through the implementation of a ‘pedagogy of compassion’. Pedagogy of compassion as implemented by a teacher who is a ‘transformative intellectual’ (Freire, 1992) brings with it the potential to dismantle polarised thinking; to shatter the polite silence of post-apartheid South African society; and to foster citizenship education. Teachers not only need to be able to raise the critical consciousness of learners, but they need to adopt an ‘epistemology of compassion’ (Vandeyar, 2016) and to implement a ‘pedagogy of compassion’ in order to enable learners to become active critical and democratic

citizens, imbued with a sense of common humanity and compassion. Becoming an agent of transformative change may challenge the very premise of teachers’ identities and practices, but by empowering learners to exert influence on their world, contested spaces in schools and broader society can become shared places of hope and peace.

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